ISAIAH BERLIN

A Life

Michael Ignatieff

a dipper p49
who were the women in his life
where did he live
an atheist
epilogue p291

wittgenstein - Deaths - p83
fear of dying 295
Specimen

METROPOLITAN BOOKS
Henry Holt and Company • New York

501. Michael Ignatieff
Isaiah Berlin: A Life
Taped: 11/11/98
Aired: 1/24/99
Tape #: 89661

The meaning of life P 279

Riga - Livonia - 1st 6 years

read his father's memoir

He sought out a married woman

P257 with children to be his wife

What was Romanticism

a Jew

Russian

Englishman

What did he think of the bo

Herbert Marcuse / Hannah Aren

Berlin's - diction - rapid fire

a Zionist

P193 His closest friends

the Frankfurters / Alsops / Feldsing

McCarthy / Hiss / anti Communist

Ignatieff

weakened left arm. b. Jan 6, 1907 Wed Nov 11
Jewish self-consciousness d. Nov 5, 1997

Two Concepts of Liberty p225 a lecture
Negative liberty - leading individuals alone to do what they want
Portnoi. as long as they don't interfere with others
In practice politics he was a "new deal liberal"
p228 - core of his beliefs
not interested in cultivating political influence
a liberal who was a cold warrior
views on JFK. p240 Jackie on after Presidency

p66 Founding of Wolfson College - spent 1 semester in 6 in New York

Visit with Akhmatova - most important event in his life
1945 - p154 Randolph Churchill - Posternak etc

"In convictions he was a liberal social democrat, but he was more comfortable socially among conservatives" p197
Churchill
Einsteen

His motto in politics "surtout pas trop de zèle." (198)
CIA funding of European mag.
"Isaiah was Voltairian to the core"
"Human dividedness" - competing impulses (203)
Maquette company (203)

Wittgenstein Where of one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent p82
Cambridge
"Death is not an event in life"

Marx appeared at beginning of WWII 1939
still in Paris

Why do authors use Spanish / German and French without translation (218) (p78)

1940-1941 - U.S.
working for British Press Service.
His job was to get America into the war.

"He became famous ~~for~~ in America by being - Harold Ross
misunderstood" 163 his rapid fire semi - Mortimer
vernacular"

the word Jew banned for Fifty years?
"intellectual acrobat in the society circus"
from Clarissa Churchill.

Fox or Hedgehog - p173
Goethe and Pushkin - foxes
Dostoyevsky and Tolstoy - hedgehogs

Berlin hated writing - spoken words vanish - 175
and no responsibility lingers
"one of his periodic collapses - he had to go into
a nursing home
People pleaded with him to leave Oxford and come to Israel

Pasternak - 1945 - returns of Berlin to Russia

---

p95 Guy Burgess - homosexual - had joined ~~a~~ neo fascist group
Trip to Soviet Union via U.S. West Coast - 1950 leaves
with FB for Montreal.

"I never told anybody my troubles. I never had many troubles to tell, and not having them to tell, they evaporated." P 38

Talking was an end in itself —

At Oxford – Corpus college – p46
after one year – famous for talking
He was "a dipper"
1931 Communism became fashionable (52)
Soviet Union – a beacon of hope
Spender – in 1936 joined (briefly) Communist party
loved music – didn't read / play
Bach / Beethoven / Schubert / Mozart

Toscanini –
All Souls fellowship – age 23 (1932) 1ST Jew

Berlin's affair with a married woman – wife of a don – he confessed – lasted several years.
Mother alarmed at Patricia Douglas (a Heinz)
Alice – married to Hans Hallon — (p216)
once a week – detectives – Paris
married 1956 – another woman he had loved
was shocked – cry child cry

Also by Michael Ignatieff

The Warrior's Honor:
Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience

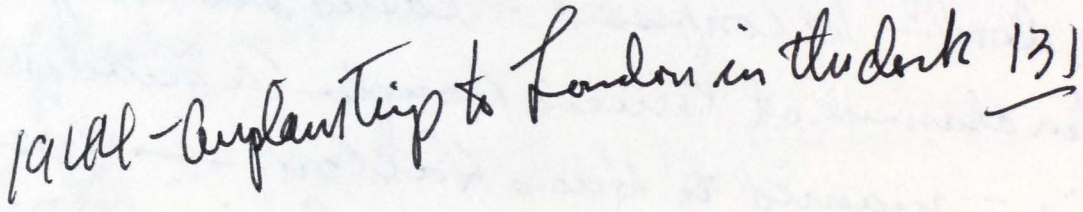
Scar Tissue

Blood and Belonging:
Journeys into the New Nationalism

The Russian Album

The Needs of Strangers

A Just Measure of Pain



Shaya

ISAIAH BERLIN

p62 all Souls – Happiest time of his life 1933 – 1938
What made him tick – p63

He loved gossip
He thought of himself as impossibly ugly
white oily fat white skinned and deformed p65

Rachel Walker – he was 26 she 21 –
eventually a lobotomy
By 1935 he began to write the Marx biography

Washington – Weissman – "regular whispering gallery" p109
Patricia – he fell in love
Dictations – overcame his aversion to the written word
"boot leg letters" he sent back to Britain and Allied

Irving Berlin goes to lunch with W. Churchill
Feb 9, 1944 (p125)

John Maynard Keynes – "niggers" quote (128)
Donald MacLean – Kay Graham's dinner –
like Guy Burgess – a Soviet agent

BOOKNOTES
1999-01-24

Metropolitan Books
Henry Holt and Company, Inc.
Publishers since 1866
115 West 18th Street
New York, New York, 10011

Metropolitan Books™ is an imprint of
Henry Holt and Company, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Ignatieff, Michael.
Isaiah Berlin : a life / Michael Ignatieff. — 1st American ed.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-8050-5520-7 (alk. paper)
1. Berlin, Isaiah, Sir. 2. Philosophers—Great Britain—Biography. I. Title
B1618.B454I45 1998
192—dc21 98-39691
[B] CIP

Henry Holt books are available for special promotions
and premiums. For details contact: Director, Special Markets.

First American Edition 1998

Printed in the United States of America
All first editions printed on acid-free paper. ∞
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

For S. Z.

fear of dying – 295

1ST STORY of Level 1 printed in FULL format.

March 13, 1998

SECTION: No. 2, Vol. 30; Pg. 52; ISSN: 0009-1383

IAC-ACC-NO: 20520581

LENGTH: 1178 words

HEADLINE: Death comes for the archintellectual; death of write
Obituary

BYLINE: Keller, George

BODY:

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., called him "possibly the most brilliant and engaging intellect of our time." The New York Times said he was "one of the great thinkers and writers of our age." On a gray Friday morning last November, they lowered his body into a grave in the Jewish section of the Wolvercote cemetery at Oxford, England. He was 88 years old.

Isaiah Berlin was always surprised that people considered him "a peculiar kind of genius," as one admirer put it, and was amazed by his late-life fame as one of the most original thinkers of the 20th century. After all, he wrote only one book - in 1939 - and had no clear disciplinary home. He spent most of his mature life at Oxford University, starting as a fellow in philosophy, but his earliest articles were about music. Berlin was later named the Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory (1957-67), but he wrote about historical, sociological, biographical, philosophical, and artistic subjects.

Though regarded as a consummate Oxford don, he served as a cultural attache during World War II in New York, Washington, and Moscow, was the founding president of Oxford's Wolfson College (1966-75), and served on the boards of the Royal Opera House and Covent Garden. Berlin, who spent summers with his French wife on the Ligurian coast of Italy, was born in 1909 in Riga, Latvia, and spent his preadolescent years in Petrograd during the Leninist revolution of 1917-19.

Unlike most current academics, he was playful and full of joyful exuberance, reticent about criticizing others, and spent an extraordinary number of hours talking with and guiding undergraduates, graduate students, and visiting scholars. In fact, he was regarded as one of the most brilliant lecturers, speakers, and conversationalists in Great Britain and loved few things more than meeting people and learning about their views. He relished gossip.

The one time I met him was at Columbia University, where he had just lectured to a standing-room-only crowd for two hours without a note. In his blue suit-cum-vest, looking like a portly London banker, he spoke mellifluously about 18th-century France, 19th-century Germany, the details of Johann von Herder's life and ideas, romanticism, the philosophy of Giovanni Battista Vico, Charles Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, and Herder, and contemporary fascism.

Brian —
Here is the Berlin story different date than you suggested
let me know if you need anything else —

Change March 13, 1998

He was startlingly erudite but not at all pedantic or even academic. Instead of the arid quantifications of contemporary social science, Berlin seemed to be telling us a passionate and fascinating story, full of rich details, about some ways of looking at human nature, social life, the nature of reality, and the human sources of novel ideas.

Berlin's metier was the scholarly essay, usually written fluidly as if it were a transcription of a superb talk. He wrote dozens of them - about notable people, Zionism, political ideas, views of history, opera, and Russian thinkers. They seldom contained footnotes, textual analyses, or bibliographies. His portraits of some famous people he knew, from Winston Churchill and Felix Frankfurter to Chaim Weizmann and philosopher J. L. Austin, collected in the book Personal Impressions, are possibly the finest of the 20th century. It was after his Oxford colleague, Henry Hardy, collected his numerous essays into five volumes in the 1960s and 1970s that scholars around the world came to regard him, as the Washington Post did, as "the ultimate model of intellectual excellence." (Hardy more recently edited Berlin's The Sense of Reality, published by Farrar, Straus, & Giroux in May 1997.)

Isaiah Berlin was probably the most subversive thinker of the last half century. Without ever intending so, he exposed what was fundamentally wrong with much of the current world of social studies with its feudal academic departments, its lust for models, theories, and "scientific" evidence, and its growing distance in the humanities and social studies from the vibrancy and complexity of actual life.

To Berlin, ideas, philosophies, and political ideologies were largely the orderly expressions of passionate feelings and insights of individual men and women who were intricately tied to their family, religion, social class, country, biological makeup, line of work, and the culture and historical conditions of their time. Ideas were not disembodied; they were embedded in people, and in their culture and age. His technique was to get inside other people's spirits and deepest longings through a huge effort of sympathetic imagination that helped reveal the propellants of creative ideas and ways of thinking.

To Berlin, there was an unbridgeable ravine between the physical and natural sciences and human studies. He denounced the modern attempt to find "scientific" laws of history and human behavior, believing people and their cultures were infinitely variable and creative. "History has no libretto," he said. He poked fun at determinists, and thought the founding of Israel refuted all the theories about classes, technological imperatives, the laws of historical development, and the absolutes of international relations. He united social studies, humanities, and the arts in one vast pursuit, and reinserted complexity, mystery, and wonder into intellectual history.

One other way in which he was subversive was in his view of truth. Against the Enlightenment faith that the ragged edges of life could be smoothed out by reason, money, and science, and that all human values could be compatible, Berlin contended that values inevitably clash. Liberty and justice collide. Peace and the need to stop butchers like Hitler and Stalin cannot be brought into harmony. Truth is not whole; rather there are many truths. Life is always pluralistic. People's values inevitably conflict.

All we can do is make each decision as reasonably and humanely as possible. There is no escape from hard choices. "The concrete situation is almost everything," he wrote. Like Sophocles and Shakespeare, Berlin found that life, politics, and morality were unavoidably tragic, replete with difficulties and dilemmas. Yet he was able to be witty and merry and to love life in all its variety and fullness.

Because of his sense of the astonishing pluralism of the earth's peoples, Isaiah Berlin disliked all system-builders, whether socialists or religious zealots, and he distrusted abstractions and their pitchmen. He once quoted Alexander Herzen, the 19th-century Russian emigre who was one of his heroes: "One of the deepest of modern disasters is to be caught up in abstractions instead of realities."

To him, the essence of wisdom is to make decisions as best one can, from a firm grounding in and an informed awareness of the realities and possibilities of each situation. This view is not irrelevant to our time of change in higher education, to which this magazine is dedicated.

George Keller is an award-winning higher education planner and editor and former chair of higher education studies at the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education.

GRAPHIC: Photograph; Illustration

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

IAC-CREATE-DATE: May 4, 1998

LOAD-DATE: May 05, 1998

BPL COPY

12TH STORY of Level 2 printed in FULL format.

The New York Times

November 7, 1997, Friday, Late Edition - Final

NAME: Sir Isaiah Berlin

SECTION: Section A; Page 1; Column 2; The Arts/Cultural Desk

LENGTH: 4233 words

HEADLINE: Isaiah Berlin, Philosopher And Pluralist, Is Dead at 88

BYLINE: By MARILYN BERGER

BODY:

Sir Isaiah Berlin, the philosopher and historian of ideas, revered for his intellect and cherished for his wit and his gift for friendship, died of a heart attack following a long illness Wednesday evening in Oxford, England. He was 88.

A staunch advocate of pluralism in a century in which totalitarians and utopians claimed title to the one, single truth, Sir Isaiah considered the very notion that there could be one final answer to organizing human society a dangerous illusion that would lead to nothing but bloodshed, coercion and the deprivation of liberty.

Sir Isaiah defied classification. A renowned scholar, he was also a bon vivant, a sought-after conversationalist, a serious opera buff and an ardent Zionist. He shattered the popular concept of the Oxford don surrounded by dusty books and dry tutorials. His was an exuberant life crowded with joys -- the joy of thought, the joy of music, the joy of good friends. Sir Isaiah (pronounced eye-ZIE-uh) seemed to know almost everyone worth knowing in the 20th century, among them Freud, Nehru, Stravinsky, Boris Pasternak, T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, Chaim Weizmann, Virginia Woolf, Edmund Wilson, Aldous Huxley, Bertrand Russell and Felix Frankfurter.

Sir Isaiah liked to say that his reputation was built on a systematic overestimation of his abilities. In fact, his reputation rests securely on his lectures and essays -- a cornucopia of Western philosophical and political thought involving inquiries into the nature of liberty, the search for utopia, the misconceptions of the Enlightenment, the innate human yearning for a homeland, the roots of nationalism, the underpinnings of Fascism.

"The Hedgehog and the Fox," the essay perhaps best known to American students of philosophy, is a study of Tolstoy's view of history as embodied in "War and Peace." Written in 1953, it is regarded as a classic of political inquiry and literary criticism. Taking his title from the Greek poet Archilochus ("The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing"), Sir Isaiah's essay was a study of the mind and the work of Tolstoy but went beyond that to become an exploration of his own central themes about the place of the individual in the historical process and the struggle between monism and pluralism.

In this essay, which became part of a great body of work by Sir Isaiah on Russian thinkers of the 19th century, he drew a distinction between two human types: those, like the fox, who pursue many ends, often unrelated, even contradictory, and those, like the hedgehog, who relate everything to a single universal organizing principle. He saw Tolstoy as a fox who wanted to be a hedgehog. He considered Aristotle, Goethe, Pushkin, Balzac, Joyce and Turgenev foxes. Plato, Dante, Pascal, Proust and Dostoyevsky were counted among the hedgehogs.

Sir Isaiah's 1959 essay, "Two Concepts of Liberty," is considered a major contribution to political theory. In it, he made a distinction between negative liberty, that which the individual must be allowed to enjoy without state interference, and positive liberty, that which the state permits by imposing regulations that, by necessity, limit some freedoms in the name of greater liberty for all. He argued that both kinds of liberty were required for a just society.

Investing Philosophy With Personality

To his philosophical and historical work, Sir Isaiah added elegant profiles of great figures. For him, ideas could not be divorced from people and their psychological and cultural milieu. If thinking thoughts was his chosen line of work, people were what he called his "scenery."

Sir Noel Annan, who wrote the introduction to his 1980 book, "Personal Impressions," observed: "Nobody in our time has invested ideas with such personality, given them a corporeal shape and breathed life into them more than Isaiah Berlin; and he succeeds in doing so because ideas for him are not mere abstractions. They live. . . in the minds of men and women, inspiring them, shaping their lives, influencing their actions and changing the course of history."

At each stage of his life, whether young or old, acquaintances remember him as having the look of "indeterminate middle age," bespectacled, baldish, of medium height. In his conversation as in his writing -- which he mainly dictated so it carried the full flavor of his voice -- Sir Isaiah's sentences were constructs of dazzling erudition, built clause upon clause, wisdom intermixed with anecdote, quotations, historical parallels and flashes of wit. Sir Isaiah was so beguiling a conversationalist that when Prime Minister Harold Macmillan nominated him in 1957 for the Queen's list he noted that the knighthood should be bestowed "for talking."

Not everyone understood what he was talking about, for he spoke with extraordinary rapidity, his tongue barely able to keep up with his thoughts. His English bore the traces of his native Russian, and, in his later years, he suffered from a paralyzed vocal cord that never slowed the flow of his words but rendered some of them indistinct.

But even before this affliction, when he met Harold Ross of The New Yorker, Mr. Ross told him, "I don't understand a word you've said, but if you have something to publish, I'll publish it."

Gathering Writings Left in a Basement

As for his writing, much of it might have been left lying in the basement of Headington House, his elegant Queen Anne residence in Oxford, had an enterprising young graduate student not come along to gather it together.

Sir Isaiah's lectures were often not published and his essays were scattered in so many magazines and journals that his body of work was inaccessible to most people. Henry Hardy, the graduate student, set out to collect it in four volumes that became five: "Russian Thinkers" (1978); "Concepts and Categories" (1978); "Against the Current" (1979); "Personal Impressions" (1980) and "The Crooked Timber of Humanity" (1990). In addition, Sir Isaiah was the author of five other books: "Karl Marx" (1939); "The Age of Enlightenment" (1956), "Four Essays on Liberty" (1969); "Vico and Herder" (1976) and "The Magus of the North: J. G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism" (1993). This year, another collection edited by Mr. Hardy, "The Sense of Reality," was published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux in the United States. It will soon be followed by another book, "The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays."

Until the publication of the Hardy collections, Sir Isaiah had been known as a man who talked much but wrote little and had, in fact, been taken to task for not producing a major opus, a failing attributed to his reluctance to sit at a desk in front of a blank piece of paper. But Sir Isaiah said he gave no thought to leaving a legacy and insisted that he had no interest whatsoever either in his reputation or in what people would say about him after he died. Sitting in his London flat for an interview last year, he said: "I really am very unambitious. I'm underambitious, if anything. I've never, never aimed at anything. I didn't shape my life. I did simply one thing after another. When opportunities arose I took them. It's an unplanned life essentially." When it was suggested that he was known as a man who took great pleasure in intellectual life, he said, "I take pleasure in pleasure."

A Deep Commitment To Ideas' Importance

Among the opportunities he grasped that afforded him many pleasures were assignments in Washington during World War II, Moscow just after the war, and a long association with Oxford. But underlying whatever he did was his belief in the overriding importance of ideas. "When ideas are neglected by those who ought to attend to them -- that is to say, those who have been trained to think critically about ideas -- they often acquire an unchecked momentum and an irresistible power over multitudes of men that may grow too violent to be affected by rational criticism," he wrote in "Two Concepts of Liberty."

He added, "Over a hundred years ago, the German poet Heine warned the French not to underestimate the power of ideas: philosophical concepts nurtured in the stillness of a professor's study could destroy a civilization. . . . if professors can truly wield this fatal power, may it not be that only other professors, or, at least, other thinkers (and not governments or congressional committees) can alone disarm them? Our philosophers seem oddly unaware of these devastating effects of their activities."

Isaiah Berlin was born in Riga, Latvia, on June 6, 1909. His father was a successful timber merchant and landowner and his grandfather on his mother's side was a Hasidic rabbi of the ecstatic Lubavitch tradition. His family moved to St. Petersburg where he was a witness to the two Russian revolutions of 1917. The family then immigrated in 1921 to London, where it had business interests.

As a boy, Isaiah, then known as Shaya, had some religious education, although he said he found the Talmud a "very, very boring book. I could never figure out why I should care why the bull gored the cow." Nevertheless, he continued his religious education in London, where he had his bar mitzvah.

Although he said he never felt the sting of anti-Semitism himself, he said he gave up the thought of going to Westminster School when a teacher suggested to him that with a name like Isaiah he wouldn't "be comfortable" there. He dealt with it simply by attending St. Paul's instead.

A Second-Rate Student, And a Very Happy One

"I never was at the head of a single class," he remembered. "I was fourth, fifth, seventh or eighth. But this didn't bother me. Once, when I tried very, very hard, in my last year at St. Paul's, I was second. My parents thought I could do a little better, but they didn't bully me either. I was a very happy child." When he tried to get into Balliol at Oxford he was told he wasn't up to its level, but he managed to get a scholarship to Corpus Christi. He said he was not a top student at first, but found his strength in philosophy.

He said he had no idea what to do with himself when he finished school. He said he couldn't be a doctor because he knew no science. He couldn't be a civil servant because he wasn't born in England. He was turned down when he applied for a job at The Guardian of Manchester because he told the editor that he thought he wasn't much of a writer. His father wanted him to join him in the timber business, but he said that after one luncheon with him and his associates he decided he couldn't. "I couldn't laugh at their jokes and I thought, this is *no good, this is a world I could never belong to,*" he said. "My father was very disappointed."

After that he considered law. He dined at the law temples, as he said he was supposed to, but "I never did the exam; I never opened a law book, because then I was offered a job in Oxford to teach philosophy. That's the end of my story."

It was, of course, the beginning of his story. He became a lecturer in philosophy at New College in 1932, and, a few years later, it was in his rooms at All Souls College that a circle of the leading analytic philosophers of the day gathered to hold regular meetings. They included J. L. Austin, A. J. Ayer, Stuart Hampshire, Donald MacKinnon and Donald Macnabb.

Wartime Dispatches Win Churchill's Notice

World War II pulled him out of the ivory tower. He was sent first to New York, where he worked for the British Information Service, and then to Washington, where his assignment was to report back weekly to London on the mood of wartime America. His brilliant dispatches soon came to the attention of Prime Minister Churchill, who instructed that he be invited to lunch one spring day in 1944.

As Sir Isaiah was fond of recounting, the invitation found its way to the wrong person. The conversation took an awkward turn that day at 10 Downing Street when Churchill asked his guest, "Berlin, what do you think is your most important piece you've done for us lately?" His guest replied hesitantly, "White

Christmas." The invitation had been sent to Irving, not Isaiah, Berlin.

Sir Isaiah was sent to the British Embassy in Moscow just after the war. It was his first visit to Russia since he left with his family and it was to be a visit, he remembered, that "permanently changed my outlook." Warned that he would not be able to speak with anyone but officials assigned to him by the Communist regime, he wrote that he was able to meet a number of Russian writers, "at least two among them persons of outstanding genius."

They were Boris Pasternak and Anna Akhmatova. To each of them he brought news of the outside world. He later wrote in his essay "Meetings With Russian Writers" that "it was like speaking to the victims of a shipwreck on a desert island, cut off for decades from civilization."

Fifty years later he explained that what had so deeply moved him was "the fact that these people preserved their integrity, completely unflawed, through a miserable regime." He recalled them as people of great personal sweetness, moral integrity, even nobility. "I was struck," he said, "by the possibility of heroic behavior on the part of highly civilized, highly intelligent people of great sensibility."

A Move to Politics And Human Connection

Anna Akhmatova was under constant surveillance and paid heavily for her meeting with Isaiah Berlin. The very next day the Soviet authorities stepped up their harassment of her, so much so that some years later, when she visited Sir Isaiah in Oxford, she solemnly informed him of a terrible secret that had taken hold of her.

He wrote that Akhmatova told him that "she and I -- inadvertently, by the mere fact of our meeting -- had started the cold war and thereby changed the history of mankind. She meant this quite literally."

By the time he returned to Oxford after the war, Sir Isaiah had lost interest in the kind of analytic philosophy that had preoccupied him during the 1930's. To him, philosophy had come to seem sterile, disconnected from history and human lives. He said it was the work of the Russian philosopher and revolutionary Alexander Herzen that set him off on a new direction, the study of the history of social and political ideas. He said that when he picked up Herzen's autobiography, "My Past and Thoughts" he thought of him as "some kind of boring writer with a beard of the mid-19th century." But, he said, "it was one of the best books ever written by a human being. I was hooked."

Once set on a new course, his life became tremendously productive. From 1947 to 1958 he wrote and lectured at Oxford, in London and Washington, and at such American universities as Harvard, Princeton, Bryn Mawr and Chicago. Some of those lectures and essays were later included in his collections. He also published translations of Turgenev's "First Love" and "A Month in the Country."

Evaluating Trade-Offs Inherent to Liberty

The theme that runs throughout his work is his concern with liberty and the dignity of human beings, and he sought to emphasize that at all times, difficult, even tragic trade-offs had to be made. It was his view that man must

forever choose among incommensurable and often incompatible values, that equality, for example, must at times be sacrificed to liberty. He told the philosopher Ramin Jahanbegloo in a conversation that was published as a book, "Conversations with Isaiah Berlin" (1992), "if you have maximum liberty, then the strong can destroy the weak, and if you have absolute equality, you cannot have absolute liberty, because you have to coerce the powerful. . . if they are not to devour the poor and the meek. . . . Total liberty can be dreadful, total equality can be equally frightful."

In "Two Concepts of Liberty," Sir Isaiah said that it is the question of who establishes the rules of positive liberty that is of crucial importance. "Paternalism is despotic," he wrote. "I may, in my bitter longing for status, prefer to be bullied and misgoverned by some member of my own race or social class, by whom I am, nevertheless, recognized as a man and a rival -- that is as an equal -- to being well and tolerantly treated by someone from some higher and remoter group." He added, "Although I may not get 'negative' liberty at the hands of the members of my own society, yet they are members of my own group; they understand me, as I understand them; and this understanding creates within me the sense of being somebody in the world."

Sir Isaiah insisted that there could be no single all-embracing solution to the central problems of society . He wrote, "any study of society shows that every solution creates a new situation which breeds its own new needs and problems, new demands." In "The Pursuit of the Ideal," he suggested that "Utopias have their value -- nothing so wonderfully expands the imaginative horizons of human potentialities -- but as guides to conduct they can prove literally fatal."

He wrote that the idea of a single solution "turns out to be an illusion; and a very dangerous one. For if one really believes that such a solution is possible, then surely no cost would be too high to obtain it: to make mankind just and happy and creative and harmonious forever -- what could be too high a price to pay for that? To make such an omelet, there is surely no limit to the number of eggs that should be broken -- that was the fate of Lenin, of Trotsky, of Mao, and for all I know of Pol Pot."

Prolific Writing, But No Masterpiece

Although Sir Isaiah had the gift for saying in 90 pages what it took others 900 pages to say less well, colleagues remembered that it took some time for him to come to grips with a nagging feeling that he was a fraud because he had not produced a weighty book-length philosophical work. "I never had it in me to do a great masterpiece on some big subject," Sir Isaiah said without apparent regret as he looked back over his life.

"There was a subject on which I had views. Romanticism. The Romantics made a greater difference to us than anything else since the Renaissance, more than Marx, more than Freud. Until the Romantics came along there was only one answer to any question. Truth was one; error was many. You might not know it, you may be too benighted to find it, but there must be one answer. The Romantics said the same question can have more than one answer. The Romantics were the first to say the answer was not something built into the universe."

Sir Isaiah did write and lecture extensively on Romanticism. He was also preoccupied with cultural nationalism, a concept that he felt was deeply

misunderstood and overlooked during the 19th century with its appeal to universalism as a legacy of the Enlightenment. Hegel, he said, once wrote that "freedom consists in being at home." Everyone, he believed, needed to belong to a group. He wrote about Johann Gottfried Herder, the German philosopher and poet, who convinced him of the basic need of man to be part of a particular human community with its own traditions, language, art and imagination to shape his emotional and physical development.

Yet he said that Herder believed that if people were allowed to fulfill their yearning to belong, nations could live peacefully, side by side. "I'm afraid not," he concluded. "Perhaps in the 18th century you could believe that." Although he believed in the power of ideas, he said he had no solution for the excesses of nationalism. "I have no idea," he said, "how one stops one group, one race, from hating another. The hatred between human groups has never been cured, except by time."

From Schiller he borrowed the metaphor of the "bent twig," that was bound to snap if a society is oppressed or humiliated. And from Kant he took the title of his 1990 collection "The Crooked Timber of Humanity" ("Out of the crooked timber of humanity no straight thing was ever made"), to suggest that the utopian notion of one big answer that is knowable and self-contained must always be fallacious because it does not take into account the cultural pluralism and conflicting values that are part of "the crooked timber of humanity."

A Zionist Perspective Rooted in Pluralism

Sir Isaiah's fervent Zionism derived from his experience as much as from his philosophy. "I can tell you why I'm a Zionist," he said in a conversation in the year before his death. "Not because the Lord offered us the Holy Land as some people, religious Jews, believe. My reason for being a Zionist has nothing to do with preserving Jewish culture, Jewish values, wonderful things done by Jews. But the price is too high, the martyrdom too long. And if I were asked, 'Do you want to preserve this culture at all costs?' I'm not sure that I would say yes, because you can't condemn people to permanent persecution. Of course assimilation might be a quite good thing, but it doesn't work. Never has worked, never will. There isn't a Jew in the world known to me who somewhere inside him does not have a tiny drop of uneasiness vis-a-vis them, the majority among whom they live. They may be very friendly, they may be entirely happy, but one has to behave particularly well, because if they don't behave well they won't like us."

When it was suggested to him during that conversation in 1996 that he was surely the exception, that he had been knighted; awarded the Order of Merit, Britain's highest honor for intellectual achievement; that he was a renowned and beloved Oxford scholar, a president of the British Academy; that he had been saluted, cherished and accepted with pride in England, the recipient of innumerable honorary degrees, he had an immediate response: "Nevertheless, I'm not an Englishman, and if I behave badly. . . ."

In his scholarly work, Sir Isaiah had traced the origins of Zionism in a profile of the 19th-century German-Jewish revolutionary Moses Hess, one of his many portraits of political philosophers. Often, though, he was drawn to his opposites, like Karl Marx, the subject of his first book in 1939, and Joseph de Maistre, a French philosopher of the Napoleonic age whom he regarded as a proto-fascist. Michael Ignatieff, Sir Isaiah's biographer, said, "He is liberalism's greatest elucidator of the antiliberal. . . He is always drawn to

his opponents. Here is a liberal, balanced, amusing, witty man drawn to lonely, eccentric, crazed characters. It is said he is a rationalist who visits the irrational by day and comes back to the rational stockade at night."

Faith in the 'Great Man' To Change History

A critic of the concept of historical inevitability, Sir Isaiah believed that the "great man" can bring about significant historical change. He saw Franklin D. Roosevelt as an example of such a man, and wrote of him: "He was absolutely fearless. . . one of the few statesmen in the 20th century or any other century who seemed to have no fear at all of the future." Another was Chaim Weizmann, the scientist and statesman who became the first President of Israel. Weizmann, he wrote, "committed none of those enormities for which men of action, and later their biographers, claim justification on the ground of what is called raison d'etat. . . Weizmann, despite his reputation as a master of realpolitik, forged no telegrams, massacred no minorities, executed and incarcerated no political opponents."

With the exception of his wartime diplomatic service and a number of visiting professorships, Sir Isaiah was associated with Oxford all his life. He began his career there in 1932 as a lecturer in philosophy at New College and spent seven years as a fellow of All Souls College. He was said to be very conscious that he was the first Jew to hold such a position at Oxford. From 1957 to 1967, Sir Isaiah held the prestigious Chichele Chair in Social and Political Theory. As the first president of Wolfson College from 1966 to 1975, he was instrumental in attracting a strong faculty to a new school at Oxford.

In the 1950's he fell in love with Aline de Gunzbourg, a Frenchwoman who is the descendant of a noble Russian family. They were married in 1956 and enjoyed more than 40 years of what friends say was a particularly felicitous life together. She and her three sons from previous marriages, Michel Strauss and Peter Halban of London and Dr. Philippe Halban of Geneva, survive him.

No one who knew Sir Isaiah could remember him without remarking on his love of music and the long distances he traveled to hear concerts. He was particularly devoted to opera, an affection he attributed to his mother, who he said was a very good amateur who sang arias from all the great operas. He wrote about Verdi, numbered among his friends some of the leading musicians, and served on the board of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

Sir Isaiah radiated well-being. "He gives everybody the unforgettable feeling of what it's like to be well in your own skin, of what a sense of health one derives from the intellectual life," his biographer, Mr. Ignatieff, said in 1996.

death

He was also a man of great equanimity, even when talking about his own death. "I don't mind death," he said, "I'm not afraid of it. I'm afraid of dying for it could be painful. But I find death a nuisance. I object to it. I'd rather it didn't happen. . . I'm terribly curious. I'd like to live forever."

GRAPHIC: Photos: Sir Isaiah Berlin (Sygma)(pg. A1); So beguiling a conversationalist was Isaiah Berlin that in 1957, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan of Britain nominated him to the Queen for knighthood "for talking." (Reuters)(pg. B14)