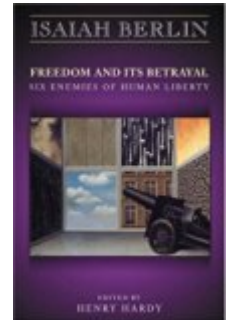


**Isaiah Berlin, Henry Hardy.** *Freedom and Its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. 182 pp. \$24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-691-09099-3.



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The attack on the Enlightenment and the Enlightenment's often contradictory character were the central topics of Isaiah Berlin's scholarship. It was this "puzzle at the heart of modern history," as Mark Lilla put it astutely, that brought Berlin to ask the severe and central question: "How did the optimistic and progressive spirit of eighteenth century Europe give way to the dark and terrifying world of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries? How did the Europe that produced Goethe and Kant, Voltaire and Rousseau, give way to the Lager and the Gulag?" Lilla, Mark, *Wolves and Lambs*, in: Dworkin, Ronald; Lilla, Mark; Silvers, Robert B. (Eds.), *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, New York 2001, p. 31-42, here p. 33. This "greatest single shift in the consciousness of the West" Berlin, Isaiah, *The Roots of Romanticism*, Mellon Lectures, ed. Henry Hardy, Princeton 1999, p. 1. in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, as Berlin called it, was repeatedly subject to his enquiry and exploration, mainly in lectures, Berlin's favourite way of compiling and shaping his thoughts. The 'Counter-Enlightenment', a phrase he coined See Jahanbegloo, Ramin, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, London 1992. , was treated ex-

tensively in the Woodward Lectures Berlin delivered at New York University, the Bryn Mawr Lectures, the Flexner Lectures, as well as in his famous essays on Vico, Herder and Hamann, with the highly versatile and thorough chapter on Joseph de Maistre. The two books *Vico and Herder* and *The Magus of the North* are now available in one collection, edited by Henry Hardy for Princeton University Press in 2002, entitled *Three Critics of Enlightenment* and *Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism* is contained in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*. Chapters in the *History of Ideas*, ed. by Henry Hardy, London 1990. forming the core of his assessment of modernity.

In the early 1990s Berlin prepared a separate chamber for collecting his notes and manuscripts at Headington House, his Oxford estate, and supposedly decided to take up the self-imposed task of writing a major book on Enlightenment and Romanticism. Initially this work was conceptualised as a comment on E.T.A. Hoffmann; later on it was supposed to become a monograph. But either no line of this work was written or no piece of it survived. The bulk of unedited writings Henry Hardy

inherited as literary trustee after Berlin's death in November 1997 contain several works closely interconnected with this topic – the intellectual shift of the turn of the century in 1800 – such as *The Political Ideas of the Romantic Age*, a paper to be edited in due course. Two outstanding collections contributing to this field, cornerstones marking Berlin's intellectual path as an historian of ideas and political thinker, have appeared in the last three years: *The Mellon Lectures* he gave in 1965 in Washington, entitled *The Roots of Romanticism* Sharing many quotations and topoi of interest in literature, in Tieck, Hoffmann and Wackenroder, with Berlin's essay *The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will. The Rejection of the Myth of a Perfect World*, in: *The Crooked Timber of Humanity. Essays in the History of Ideas*, London 1990. and, more recently, the radio extempores portraying six major Enemies of Human Liberty alive in an epoch of "extraordinary density of megalomaniac Messiahs:" the age of the attack on the Enlightenment. Entitled *Freedom and its Betrayal*, these lectures on Helvétius, Rousseau, Fichte, Hegel, Saint-Simon and de Maistre This piece bears striking resemblance to the above mentioned Joseph the Maistre and the Origins of Fascism being a preliminary draft to this essay reconstructed by Henry Hardy. have been, as always, meticulously edited and annotated by Henry Hardy.

The quality of this material is contested. The radio lectures offer the opportunity to grasp the ever flummoxing effervescence and lucidity of Berlin's associative voltes and lever main explications in a singular way. These lectures, broadcasted on BBC 3 under the encouraging supervision of producer Anna Kallin – to whom the fine volume is duly dedicated – were enthusiastically received. John Burrow, professor of European Thought in Oxford, recalls the captivating experience of the broadcasts: "I sat for every talk on the floor beside the wireless, taking notes" Burrows, John, *A Common Culture? Nationalist Ideas in Nineteenth Century European Thought*, unpublished lecture as Professor of European Thought, Oxford,

7 April 1996, p. 3, cited in Henry Hardy's introduction to the volume under review. . Ostensibly, as Michael Ignatieff's absorbing biography *Ignatieff, Michael, Isaiah Berlin. A Life*, London 1998. most sensitively demonstrates, this reputation as an abundantly witty and sharp-minded conversationalist and accelerating orator – "the only man who pronounces 'epistemological' as one syllable" as a contemporary account cited in Henry Hardy's introduction states – was indeed troublesome to Berlin, who remained a painstaking and highly scrupulous thinker, constantly facing fears of over-estimation. And, admittedly, there are many neat contradictions, oppositions and slippery assumptions – for example single-handedly refuting a deliberately simplified Hegel – which at times obscure the tribulations and conflicts of Enlightenment, Counter-Enlightenment, Revolution, and Counter-Revolution Berlin felt and described most intensely.

Nevertheless these lectures present an introduction to Berlin's most important conceptual achievements and they present enjoyable political theory at its best. Both Berlin's categories of negative and positive liberty, to be elaborated in his famous 1958 inaugural lecture as Chichele Professor of Political Theory in Oxford,"Two concepts of liberty" Now available in an augmented version with an unpublished essay by Berlin and a comment on Berlin and his Critics by Ian Harris, Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty*, ed. by Henry Hardy, Oxford 2002. , and his conception of Enlightenment are densely applied in these six essays. "In Berlin's narrative" Mark Lilla recently observed, "the Enlightenment was an extremist movement of hedgehogs, a Walpurgisnacht of philosophical monism that foreshadowed the rise of a new race of despots" Lilla, Mark, *Wolves and Lambs*, p. 34 . This truncated view is falsifying Berlin's structural interest in the articulation of free will, necessity and the controversial defining battles and knowledge claims connected with these questions in the late 18th and 19th centuries, when "everyone seemed to think that he at least had been gift-

ed with that unique power of penetration and imagination which was destined to solve all human evils.” This utopian propensity Berlin has never ceased to explore. This was a common field of interest for many historians of the in 1950s and 1960s especially. See Kosellecks, Reinhart, *Kritik und Krise. Eine Studie zur Pathogenese der bürgerlichen Welt*, München 1959.

Among the thinkers discussed, Helvétius is the advocate of social mechanics. In his vision, machine men become free to relinquish the powers of agency to rational planning, eventually succeeding in erecting a society as a pleasuredome of fulfilment and happiness. Rousseau appears as a militant lowbrow exaggerating the desire of infinite liberty, deteriorating social coexistence, and giving rise to quasi-totalitarian propensities. Both are, as Berlin will theorize some years later, thinkers demanding positive liberty as self-extinction or self-exaltation. Negative liberty is, as he points out in the chapter dealing with Fichte, a matter of non-interference and self-determination. Emphatically citing and paraphrasing one of the heroes whose influence on Berlin is seldom recognised, Benjamin Constant, Berlin concludes: “I cannot fly to the sky with wings; I cannot count beyond five million; I cannot understand the works of Hegel. There are all sorts of things which I say I cannot do. But because I cannot understand the works of Hegel, and because I cannot fly through the air at more than a certain velocity, I do not describe myself as a slave. To be a slave is not the same thing as to be unable to do something; to be a slave is to be prevented from doing something, not by the nature of things, but by other persons.” In fact, the Fichtean idea of absolute freedom, a freedom perceived as an inner state both of persons and nations, prevents the self-expression of conscious, rational individuals by hypostasising concrete liberty for abstract ultimate goals, unachievable by virtue of their postulation. This it is the case with all the thinkers Berlin is

discussing, with the exception of de Maistre, to whom I shall turn below.

Positive and negative liberty are irreconcilable. But what Berlin grasped was that the fissure separating these camps is not identical with the huge watersheds of the age. Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, Revolution and Counter-Revolution are essentially modern and dispose of the same essentially modern, means for carrying out the disputes using mutual conspirational claims and assertions. Recently Darrin McMahon paid tribute to Berlin’s valuable insight in his fine study *Enemies of the Enlightenment. The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity*, Oxford 2001. “There are two notions of liberty which were spread over Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century; to ask which of them is true, and which of them is false, is a shallow and unanswerable question. They represent two views of life [...] the liberal and authoritarian, open and closed, and the fact, that the word ‘freedom’ has been a genuinely central symbol” being “at once remarkable and sinister.” The most compelling and exciting chapters of the book are devoted to two seemingly marginal figures, whose enormous and prevailing impact on the intellectual history of the modern world Berlin elucidates, to Saint-Simon and de Maistre.

Berlin has often been accused of didactical exaggeration and simplification. “Saint-Simon is the greatest of all the prophets of the twentieth century” is, however, no shallow phrase. In Berlin’s account, Saint-Simon’s thought embodies the predicaments of the refutation of achievable liberty for the sake of a super-natural and technological plan, a libretto underlying historical development and unfolding in the age Saint-Simon lived and wrote in. The means to establish the organisation leading to the goals of Saint-Simon and Saint-Simonism, a highly variegated movement, are prophecy and hypocrisy. The exclusive insight discovering the plan of history is restricted to privileged elites and they need to conceal their en-

deavours in order to advance the state of society as a whole. A young Georg G. Iggers has described the assumptions of Saint-Simonism in his book *The Cult of Authority. The Political Philosophy of the Saint Simonians*, The Hague 1957.

The double-moral is, as Berlin surprisingly argues, driven by a genuine notion of the incompatibility of the values ascribed to 18th century thought. Saint-Simon was one of the most trenchant and fierce attackers of “such eighteenth century shibolles as civil liberty, human rights, natural rights, democracy, laissez faire, individualism, nationalism.” Whether this stance – his refutation of the eighteenth century – was inspired by this idea remains doubtful, but, as so often, Berlin cunningly uses certain positions to exemplify his own attitude. To him, Saint-Simon “was the first person to feel the logical consequences of the beliefs which seem to be held so comfortably together with their opposites in the far shallower and apparently far clearer thought of the great thinkers of the eighteenth century, both in France and Germany.” What is the consequence deriving from this feeling of incompatibility? Historicism? For Saint-Simon strength evolves from a correct understanding of history, differing sharply from the one “presented to us by the eighteenth-century dogmatists of the Enlightenment”. This account of the Enlightenment’s historicity is simply wrong, as we learned through path breaking books, for example Grossmann, *Lionel, Medievalism and the Ideologies of the Enlightenment*. The world and work of *La Cure de Sainte-Palate*, Baltimore 1968. More concretely, the consequences of the feeling of incompatibility are: Saint-Simon’s call for total planning, de Maistre’s picture of total violence, self-exposure and submission to authority, be it divine or secular, and Isaiah Berlin’s very own concept of value-pluralism.

Thus the ideas of Maistre and Saint-Simon appear as two forms of a multi-faced repudiation of the Enlightenment. In the last piece of the volume,

Berlin detects both the 20th century language of accusation and the language of denunciation with its specific set of enemies – *la secte* in Maistre’s definition, consisting of Jews, intellectuals, lawyers, metaphysicians, journalists, scientists, critics, Protestants, Jansenists and artists – in the work of de Maistre. And once again there is the structural and intentional analogy of Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment: The revolutionaries “wished to leave nothing standing, they wanted to destroy the entire evil system, root and branch, in order to build up something absolutely fresh, entirely pure. They wanted to make no compromise, they wanted to have no debt to that upon whose ruins their new cities would be raised. Maistre was the exact inverse of this. He attacked the eighteenth century with the intolerance and the passion and the power and the gusto of the great revolutionaries themselves. He wanted to destroy what has so well been called the ‘heavenly city of the eighteenth century philosophers’. He wanted to raze it to the ground, not leaving stone upon stone.” And again Berlin sympathetically approves of Maistre’s mordant irony rejecting the axiomatic reasoning and illusionary humanism of Enlightenment thinkers, “Maistre was one of the first to perceive that the whole eighteenth-century notion of that human institutions are constructed by rational men for limited and intelligible purposes is totally untrue to human nature.” Berlin’s final turn, trying to separate the valuable grain of de Maistre’s attack from its dangerous implications by calling him “a kind of precursor and early preacher of Fascism,” illustrates his own quandary: Rejecting certain aspects of Enlightenment thought – as he perceived it – rejecting bland optimism, over-schematised faiths and smooth ideals “which suffered such a crushing disaster in the French Revolution”, but transforming the libertarian substratum of Enlightenment into liberalism and pluralism.

Freedom and its Betrayal is a highly intriguing testimony Berlin’s early to intellectual formation. It’s central thesis can be articulated with the

words of the author Berlin felt the strongest elective affinity with and whom he might have regarded as an intellectual forbearer: Alexander Herzen. “History has no culmination”, Herzen proclaimed against Marx. “There is no libretto. We need wit and courage to make our way while our way is making us”.

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