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BETWEEN LIBERALISM AND JEWISH NATIONALISM: YOUNG ISAIAH BERLIN ON THE ROAD TOWARDS DIASPORA ZIONISM*

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This essay examines Isaiah Berlin's ambivalent relationship with the ideas and practices of Jewish nationalism and the ways in which this ambivalence shaped some of the key premises of his political thought. Drawing upon extensive archival research in his unpublished letters from the mid-1930s to the late 1950s, this essay reconstructs Berlin's attempt to reconcile himself with the national idea. This attempt forced him to enrich his liberalism, and pushed him to develop "Diaspora Zionism" and adopt the Jewish normalization discourse. In the course of those intra-Jewish debates Berlin also began to conceptualize freedom as an opportunity concept, an idea that would later become central both in Berlin's famous negative concept of freedom and in his pluralism. Adopting a dual perspective, which considers Berlin as both a British liberal and a Russian-Jewish émigré intellectual, I therefore offer to see the Jewish Zionist writings as complementary rather than secondary to Berlin's "liberal" enterprise.

> The agony [of choice] comes in, and with it the tragedy (for that is what tragedy is about), when both values pull strongly at you; you are deeply committed to both, you want to realise them both, they are both values under which your life is lived; and when they clash you have to sacrifice one to the other, unless you can find a compromise which is not a complete satisfaction of your desires, but prevents acute pain, in short, prevents tragedy. That is the value of compromise.
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> Berlin to Beata Polanowska-Sygulska, 28 June 1997

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All central beliefs on human matters spring from a personal predicament.

Berlin to Jean Floud, 5 July 1968

Having gained much of his reputation from his celebrated inaugural lecture "Two Concepts of Liberty", Isaiah Berlin was regarded by many as a Liberal whose ardent support of Zionism and East European origins were of no real significance to his intellectual development. This view betrays a failure of historical contextualization, apparent in the contemporary debates concerning value pluralism, which stand at the heart of the latest Berlin studies,[1] and also to be found in the studies which focus on his famous distinction between negative and positive liberty. Berlin preferred negative liberty, defined as the absence of obstacles, barriers or constraints on the individual, to positive liberty, which refers to the possibility of acting in such a way as to take control of one's life and realize one's fundamental purposes.[2] Associating negative liberty with the classical liberal tradition and positive liberty with modern totalitarian regimes, Berlin did not hide the fact that he believed this distinction was central to the ideological struggles of his day.[3]

Berlin conceived of the two notions of liberty not only as distinct, but also as almost rival and incompatible interpretations of a single political ideal. In his famous semi-analytical and semi-historical dichotomy, nationalism and the nationalist *Weltschaunung*—like any other theoretical conceptualizations about autonomy and the capacity of self-rule—were almost automatically linked to the unfavourable notion of positive liberty. Having in mind the anti-Napoleonic rhetoric of German nationalists and especially Fichte and Kant's German disciples,[4] Berlin described not only the way in which *völkisch* thinkers used "freedom" as an adjective for collective rather than individual entities, but also

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1 George Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism* (Cambridge, 2004). John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton, NJ, 1996). The reader is advised to consult the comprehensive bibliographical list at Henry Hardy, ed., *The Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library*, available at http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/.

2 Berlin, "Introduction" and "Two Concepts of Liberty", in *idem*, *Four Essays on Liberty* (London, 1969) (hereafter *FEL*). One of the fundamental problems with Berlin's distinction is that while he defined negative liberty (*freedom from*, the absence of constraints on the agent imposed by other people) fairly simply, he gave positive liberty more than one definition, from which still more distinct conceptions would branch out. Positive liberty he defined as *freedom to*, the ability (not just the opportunity) to pursue and achieve willed goals, but it also refers to autonomy or self-rule, as opposed to dependence on others.

3 *FEL*, xlvii.

4 Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment", in *idem*, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York, 1980), 1–24; Berlin, "Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Nationalism", in *idem*, *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and their History*, ed. Henry Hardy (London, 1996), 232–48.

how the concept was entangled in a larger vision which justified overcoming the flawed and false "empirical" self in the name of realizing one's "true", "real" or "noumenal" self.[5] If we follow Berlin's analysis, we find the crucial and destructive metamorphosis of a noble ideal into a dark form of authoritarianism. Nationalism fell under the same category: Berlin's hostility to nationalism sprang largely from the centrality he placed on choice. Even a tragic choice between conflicting values was regarded by him as the crux of one's identity and dignity as a moral agent. "If I am deprived of choice", explained Berlin to one of his disciples, "then I become a robot, hypnotised, to that extent not free, therefore not human".[6]

It is natural, therefore, that Berlin saw the negative type of freedom he cherished as an "opportunity concept", for it described freedom as a condition in which one is hindered by the minimum possible constraints able to limit the range of choices available.[7] "The more avenues man can enter, the broader those avenues, the more avenues that each opens into, the *freer* they are", argued Berlin.[8] Coupled with the opportunity concept, Berlin replaced Kantian autonomy with the individual's existential choice as a basic feature of moral agency. This ultimately made negative freedom the cornerstone of his vision of pluralism: those who adopt positive notions of liberty were the ones threatened by variety of forms of life each person could choose from, and searched for a single "real" form of life which they felt impelled to realize. They regarded questions of choice to be superficial. Nationalism, in that sense, was no different; it was not about multiplying but about reducing the range of choices available, in the name of some metaphysical notion of freedom and for the sake of realizing one's true—and single—self. Nationalists and totalitarianists alike used positive liberty when they claimed to liberate people by subjecting them to larger groups or principles. Nationalism, in short, followed the same twisted logic that was championed by the inhumane adherents of positive liberty.

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5 These ideas appear both in Berlin's "Two Concepts" and in Berlin, "Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power", in *idem*, *Against the Current*, 333–55.

6 Beata Polanowska-Sygulska and Isaiah Berlin, *Unfinished Dialogue* (Amherst, 2006), 87

7 I use the term "opportunity concept" as defined by Charles Taylor, "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty?" in Alan Ryan, ed., *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin* (Oxford, 1979), 175–94. In certain cases Berlin referred to the absence of obstacles as guaranteeing the free exercise of choice (*FEL*, xxxix), and sometimes he even used the terms as synonymous: "political choice . . . [is a condition in which] there are as many doors open for me to walk through as can be opened—freedom from interference, Negative Freedom". (Polanowska-Sygulska and Berlin, *Unfinished Dialogue*, 87).

8 Berlin, *Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, ed. Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (New York, 1998), 111–12 (emphasis mine).

But it is exactly here that we encounter what one author identified as an "unhealthy tension" in Berlin's thought.[9] For in fact Berlin did not reject nationalism and particularism *en tout*. On the contrary, Berlin stands out today as an exception exactly because he never undermined the importance of belonging, cultural affiliations and historical continuity. For him these were all meaningful modes of human existence. As much as he cherished liberalism, which he saw as springing from the Enlightenment, he did not hesitate to attack the Enlightenment belief in unitary human nature and translated his dislike of rational monism into reverence for particularism and cultural nationalism. In his writings as a historian of ideas he presented Herder as the forerunner of a non-aggressive and legitimate form of cultural nationalism, and in interviews he admitted that his Jewish background also stood behind his strong belief that cultural belonging is a virtue worth defending. He was never ashamed to be identified as a Zionist precisely because he did not wish to "abandon the belief that a world that is a reasonably peaceful coat of many colors . . . is not a utopian dream",[10] and never concealed the fact that this belief was connected to his feeling that "there must be somewhere . . . [a place] where Jews were not forced to be self-conscious—where they did not feel the need for total integration . . . where they simply could live normal, unobserved lives".[11]

Nationalism becomes, then, a significant obstacle for interpreters who seek to find a systematic, coherent and consistent Berlinian legacy. The ever-growing literature on the subject only strengthens the impression that there were in fact two Berlins. The first was a traditional and even conservative Cold War liberal who emphasized the sacredness of the private sphere, an "area of inviolability"[12] which served as the *loci* of a very thin, individualistic and negative concept of freedom. At the same time there was a second Berlin who not only coined the term counter-Enlightenment, but also, following Vico and Herder, required us to enrich the old-fashioned liberalism by acknowledging humanity's need to belong to a community of faith, ethnicity or culture. Historical contextualization might help us appreciate that the two streams of thought, although often seen as separate and as belonging "to different layers in [Berlin's] soul",[13] were at times entwined. This does not mean that contextualization reveals a systematic

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9 Axel Honneth, "Negative Freedom and Cultural Belonging: an Unhealthy Tension in the Political Philosophy of Isaiah Berlin", *Social Research* 66 (Winter, 1999), 1063–77.

10 Isaiah Berlin, "Return of the *Volksgeist*: Nationalism, Good and Bad", in Nathan Gardels, ed., *At Century's End: Great Minds Reflect on Our Times* (La Jolla, CA, 1995), 84–98, 94.

11 Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (New York, 1991), 86

12 Berlin, "Two Concepts", 126, 165

13 Avishai Margalit, "The Crooked Timber of Nationalism", in Mark Lilla, Ronald Dworkin, Robert B. Silvers, and Aileen Kelly, eds., *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin* (New York, 2001), 147–60, 157.

Berlinian legacy that solves this "unhealthy tension". Berlin's case is much more complex: dilemmas, tensions, ambivalence and inner contradictions stand at the heart of his ambivalent love affair with Zionism. Reconstructing this complex relationship might not be very useful in solving contemporary quandaries about multiculturalism and pluralism, but it may be able to offer an alternative to the impression that there are two separate Berlins.

One of the prime reasons nationalism gained such a privileged status in Berlin's thought was the fact that he also felt bound, as a Jewish intellectual émigré, to assert his position on Jewish nationalism. The personal–existential search coincided, then, with the philosophical enterprise. The gradual development of Berlin's liberal thought accorded with the process in which he defined his ideological commitments vis-à-vis the Jewish national movement. But this was not only a chronological coincidence but also a conceptual one: Berlin's opportunity concept crystallized and took shape out of the personal dilemmas, existential doubts and ideological queries he experienced in the 1940s and 1950s. By uncovering the particular historical situations and challenges Berlin confronted in his formative years, and by explaining his reaction to them, we can put this "unhealthy tension" in a new light.

I

It is hard to pinpoint a specific moment or event that pushed Berlin closer to Zionism. Berlin was brought up in a family of Zionist sympathizers[14] and always assumed there was an obvious connection between his Russian-Jewish background and his decision to support this form of nationalism. However, it was not until the mid-1930s that he became fully engaged with Zionism, largely due to the charismatic personality of Chaim Weizmann, who urged the young don to make a greater commitment. With the publication of essays such as "The Life and Opinions of Moses Hess"[15] or "Benjamin Disraeli, Karl Marx, and the Search for Identity",[16] it became evident that Berlin was no less enthusiastic in trying to investigate questions of modern Jewish identity than in trying to formulate two contradicting definitions of freedom. These essays, however, present a difficulty in studying Berlin's view of Zionism, for it seems that virtually all of his known essays on the subject were written in retrospect, after his vision of Zionism had

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14 Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York, 1998); as well as the family trees in Berlin, *Flourishing: Letters 1928–1946*, ed. Henry Hardy, vol. 1 (London, 2004), xlix–xlx (hereafter *Letters*).

15 Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (New York, 1980), 213–51.

16 Ibid., 252–86.

already taken form.[17] In other words, while almost all of his published essays and lectures dealing with Jewish figures and Zionist leaders were published during and after the 1950s, Berlin's personal approach towards Zionism crystallized during the 1930s and 1940s. We need therefore to relocate the focal point and change the periodization of any research that deals with this question. Moreover, it would be hard to present a narrative of linear progress when dealing with this subject. Berlin's unique brand of pro-Zionism developed gradually, and was based as much on hesitation and skepticism as it was on passionate and sentimental support. Even when he was reconciled to the idea of a Jewish nation state, Berlin never became a zealous devotee and always maintained his doubts about (Israel's) policies and norms. His Zionism was never grounded in unquestioning enthusiasm.

It was empathy, rather than a clear-cut ideological conviction, that initially pushed Berlin towards Zionism. For Berlin, like many other well-to-do British Jews, confident in their anglicized identity and already attaining a considerable degree of affluence, it was the rise of the Nazis to power, the influx of Jewish refugees from Germany, the intimidating effect of Mosley's fascist slogans and to some extent the British colonial policy in Palestine that drew him closer to Zionism.[18] Berlin of the 1930s regarded this sort of Zionism as a just, fair and humane practical solution to the refugee crisis rather than a nationalistic creed. His newly acclaimed reputation as the first Jewish Fellow to enter the prestigious All Souls College also contributed to his Zionism. Young Isaiah became a Jewish celebrity and was now invited to the dinner parties of the Jewish Grand Duke families such as the Rothschilds and the Sieffs. It was at one of these dinner parties, sometime during the winter of 1937–8, that Berlin met the aged, but still legendary, Chaim Weizmann. At the time of the debates over the Palestine partition plan, Weizmann was looking for new energy to revitalize the Zionist movement and for effective individuals to serve as mediators, help change public opinion in Britain and even work as informal ambassadors who could inform him of friends and foes in Britain's elite academic circles.

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17 The very few studies which attempted to analyze Berlin's attitudes towards Zionism relied exclusively on these sources: see Joan Cocks, *Passion and Paradox: Intellectuals Confront the National Question* (Princeton, NJ, 2002); Avishai Margalit, "Isaiah Berlin: Prince of the Exiles", in *idem*, *Views in Review: Politics and Culture in the State of the Jews* (New York, 1998), 323–36. See also the very unflattering description in Edward W. Said, "Isaiah Berlin: An Afterthought", in *idem*, *The End of the Peace Process: Oslo and after* (New York, 2000), 216–22.

18 Gideon Shimoni, "From Anti-Zionism to Non-Zionism in Anglo-Jewry 1917–1937", *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 28 (June, 1986), 19–47. Todd M. Endelman, "The Englishness of Jewish Modernity in England", in Jacob Katz, ed., *Toward Modernity: The European Jewish Model* (New Brunswick, 1987), 225–46.

In this sense Berlin was not very different from the South African-born Aubrey (later Abba) Eban (1915–2002), a research fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge, who was to become Israel's most notable diplomat, or even from Lewis B. Namier (1888–1960), who was the political secretary of the Zionist executive and was also very close to Weizmann in these years. Berlin, who quickly became Weizmann's friend thanks to their similar Russian-Jewish background, suddenly had a role. "Inside information" such as reports about the highly anti-Zionist views expressed at Chatham House,[19] or a "who's who" of Lord Peel's Royal Commission of Inquiry to Palestine,[20] were very valuable to Weizmann, and people like Berlin were capable of providing this information. Nonetheless, unlike Namier or Eban, who translated their support into active participation and involvement in Zionist politics, Berlin remained hesitant, and preferred to maintain a critical distance between ardent Zionists and himself.

Berlin's hesitancy had various causes. First, he was highly skeptical of the idea that, by creating a modernized Jewish political body on the shores of the Middle East, Jews would be able to rid themselves of the mental shackles of their old ghetto life. Second, he regarded Zionism primarily as a solution for refugees, not as a universal plan for all Jews (for example, those living in secure and liberal states). This was an important distinction since it automatically turned Berlin into a bystander in the sense that he rendered this ideology irrelevant for Jews such as himself. Third, long before he formulated philosophically the idea of individualism, and included it as a core value of his political thought, Berlin was equipped with a strong sense of individuality and felt ill at ease with the idea of being a member of a community or a "tribe of Jews". Fourth, Berlin paradoxically rejected the pioneering ethos of the *Yishuv* (the Jewish population of Palestine) with its aim of creating a new Jew, as opposed to the old Jew of the *Galut* (exile). Moreover, these notions were based upon socialist and semi-utopian ideas with which he was uncomfortable. Finally, the political circumstances of Mandatory Palestine added another dimension to his inner conflicts, as it intensified the potential internal clash between Berlin's English loyalty and his Jewish identity. Complexity, inner struggle and hesitation, rather than ideological devotion and clear-cut intellectual engagement, were the products of this multilayered ambivalence.

Berlin's humorous letters from the 1930s wittingly and ironically exemplify some of these misgivings. "The Jewish officials are the rudest people on earth. A mixture of *Chutzpa* [rudeness] & inferiority complex", was how he described them

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19 Berlin to Weizmann, 24 Nov. 1939, The Chaim Weizmann Archive (hereafter WA), Weizmann Institute of Science, Rehovot, Israel.

20 See e.g. Berlin to Felix Frankfurter, 23 Aug. 1937, in *Letters*, 246–7.

to his parents in one letter.[21] In a different letter to the Frankfurters, Berlin used the English public school as a metaphor for Palestine, and described the Jewish house as "abler & richer than other boys, allowed too much pocket money by their parents, rude, conceited, ugly, ostentatious, suspected of swapping stamps unfairly with the other boys, always saying they know better, liable to work too hard & not play games with the rest".[22] Berlin even understood the lack of an aesthetic sense as a consequence of exile Jewish mentality, which did not disappear upon arrival in the sunny new land of Palestine. He described Tel Aviv (as well as Hadar Hacarmel, the Jewish neighborhood of Haifa) as an ugly city of "Jewish gold-diggers", a Jewish Klondyke filled with "noisy, dirty, streets too narrow because of dearth of room".[23] "Jews have no taste", concluded Berlin in his observation to his parents.

Humorous and witty as they were, Berlin's 1930s observations gave voice to his strong belief in the almost unchangeable (and unflattering) mentality of the Jew. Moreover, they exemplify the extent to which he internalized the traditional stereotypes and metaphors that were also part of the intra-Jewish discourse. This oriental and sentimental journey to Palestine evoked a contradictory mix of attraction and repulsion. To his Jewish and Zionist friends he emphasized that he was fascinated and charmed,[24] while to his parents and closer friends, such as the Frankfurters, he confessed that these feelings of solidarity were often checked by doubts. Berlin saw the creation of a so-called new and free Hebraic man as an artificial and utopian attempt to discard the not-so-easily eliminated psychological shackles by which the *Ostjude* (that is, the East European Jew) and the *Westjude* (his Western counterpart) had been bound for decades. The East European Jew was shackled by limited exposure to modernity, and behaved as though he still lived in a ghetto in the Pale of Settlement. Conversely the West European Jew suffered from his continual attempts to assimilate and present himself as a European, downplaying his particular and distinctive ethnic traits.[25]

These ideal types (or rather stereotypes) surface in Berlin's letters time and again. They offer a caricature of the *Yekkes*, the Jews of German descent, who represented the failed attempt to assimilate into European culture, and, on the other hand, present a very unflattering description of East European Jews who, like characters of a Sholem Aleichem story, are unable to discard their *Shtetl*

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21 To Marie and Mendel Berlin, 6 Sept. 34, *Letters*, 95

22 To Marion and Felix Frankfurter, 7–8 Dec. 1934, *Letters*, 106.

23 To Marie and Mendel Berlin, 24 Sept. 1934, *Letters*, 101.

24 See letters from 1935 to Walter G. Ettinghausen at the Sir Isaiah Berlin Papers Archive, Bodleian Library, Oxford (hereafter BPA), MS. Berlin 104, fols. 125 and 147.

25 Steven E. Aschheim, *Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923* (Madison, 1982).

mentality. When walking down the noisy, sunny streets of Tel Aviv dressed in their heavy European suits and mumbling in German, the *Yekkes* were mocked for their alienation and unwillingness to accept the cruel realities of the Levant.[26] Berlin also did not believe that East European Jews would be able to start behaving as proper citizens and discard their ghetto mentality: "the law is regarded by the majority of Jews from Poland & Russia – so still by some of my relations – as something created only to be circumvented"[27] . Berlin used both stereotypes to show not only that there was a slim chance that the Zionist project would be able to take off, but also to bless his own good fortune in falling into neither category. His fear of this "ghetto mentality" was clearly demonstrated when, after the presentation of the partition plan by the Peel Commission in summer 1937, Berlin wrote ironically,

> Can you conceive the consequences [of the Peel Report]? One enormous cylindrical town from Haifa to Tel Aviv of Talith-sellers, with a fashion for Bar Mitzvah boys to be "confirmed" in the Holy Land, & a nation of Jewish hotel keepers & souvenir-venders to receive them? That is what a nation of 1,500,000 will certainly become. I expect I am quite wrong & it will really be as soundly Blut & Boden [blood and soil], as, say, Luxemburg.[28]

II

Berlin's complex and multifaceted conflict regarding Zionism resonated with a similar inner duality that can also be found in Chaim Weizmann, the president of the World Zionist Organization. This may have even helped the two East European Jews grow close. The fact that Weizmann's Zionism was based less on chauvinistic and extreme nationalist creeds than upon the idea that a Jewish homeland in Palestine was a practical, inevitable, and humane solution made it easier for Berlin to support a form of Zionism which did not necessarily contradict British imperial policy.[29] Weizmann's Zionism was diplomatic rather than utopian, gradual rather than revolutionary; it downplayed the utopian rhetoric of *Nationbildung* and was based on collaboration and cooperation with English Mandatory policy and the British imperial interest. All these fit with Berlin's own beliefs and values, and were compounded by the fact that Weizmann, like Berlin himself, was a proud

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26 *Letters*, 107.

27 To Marion and Felix Frankfurter, 7–8 Dec. 1934, *Letters*, 106.

28 To Felix Frankfurter, 23 Aug. 1937, *Letters*, 248.

29 Joseph Gorny, *Partnership and Conflict: Chaim Weizmann and the Jewish Labour Movement in Palestine* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1976); Jehuda Reinharz, *Chaim Weizmann: The Making of a Statesman*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1993). See Berlin's own analysis of Weizmann in *Personal Impressions* (London, 1980); as well as "The Biographical Facts", in Meyer W. Weisgal and Joel Carmichael, eds., *Chaim Weizmann: Statesman of the Jewish Renaissance*, (Jerusalem, 1974), 17–56.

Russian Jew, yet highly suspicious of the East European mentality and skeptical of socialist ideas. Utterly unimpressed by the socialist Zionism of the "efficient demagogue"[30] David Ben-Gurion and the Zionist Labour Movement, Berlin of the late 1930s began to move closer to Weizmann's circle and became, especially during the war, a close personal friend. With all his doubts and hesitations about Zionism as an ideology and a political movement, Berlin remained a true admirer of Dr Chaim Weizmann until the end of his life.[31] Weizmann was the embodiment of a new ideal: "the first totally free Jew of the modern world".[32]

During the first half of the 1940s it became evident that Berlin's "Weizmannite" Zionism not only was an alternative to left-wing Zionism but also contradicted the growing militaristic and extreme right-wing Zionism which Jabotinsky's revisionist heirs began to develop. The attempts to rescue Jewish refugees from occupied Europe, and to fight against the British White Paper, created a strong opposition to Weizmann's gradual and moderate Zionism, both in the *Yishuv* and in the US. These circumstances played into the hands of Ben-Gurion, who was now able to gain power outside the *Yishuv* and to collaborate with the new rising leader of American Zionists, Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, thus creating a bond that would eventually lead to Weizmann's fall.[33] Weizmann's tactics and vision now appeared outdated, politically unfertile and unrealistic. Berlin (to paraphrase his own terminology) saw the two brands of Zionism as mutually incompatible or even incommensurable.

During his years in Washington and New York as an official in the British ministry of information, and especially as rumors about the systematic extermination of the Jews of Europe multiplied after the spring of 1942, Berlin looked unfavorably upon the growth of a Zionist activist current.[34] Some of Berlin's weekly reports collected in the *Washington Despatches* and especially those from the end of the summer of 1943 also show Berlin worried about Zionist campaigning.[35] Berlin made his dislike of the new activist Zionism known, and condemned what he saw as dangerous agitation. Like many other Foreign

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30 To Felix Frankfurter, 20 March 1935, *Letters*, 121.

31 *Letters*, 248; and especially Berlin, "Weizmann, Chaim" [Hebrew entry], *Encyclopedia Hebraica*, vol. 16 (1988).

32 See Berlin's essay on Weizmann in *Personal Impressions*. Delivered originally 19 Nov. 1957.

33 Peter Grose, *Israel in the Mind of America* (New York, 1983); David Hillel Shpiro, *From Philanthropy to Activism: The Political Transformation of American Zionism in Holocaust Years, 1933–1945* (New York, 1994).

34 Berlin, "Jewish Slavery and Emancipation", in Norman Bentwich, ed., *Hebrew University Garland: A Silver Jubilee Symposium* (London, 1952), 18–24. Reprinted in Berlin, *The Power of Ideas* (London, 2001), 162–85.

35 H. G. Nicholas, ed., *Washington Despatches, 1941–1945: Weekly Political Reports from the British Embassy* (Chicago, 1981). See reports of 28 Aug. 1943 and 5 Sept. 1943.

Office diplomats, Berlin saw the American Zionists as a vocal minority among the deeply divided public of American Jewry, a group of propagandists and demagogues who were willing to risk the Anglo-American alliance for the sake of their own narrow particularistic cause. "In my view the Zionists' tactic . . . is very dangerous . . . [T]hey must have irritated the State Department to a degree; I should imagine the President is really displeased and they are bound to pay for this sooner or later . . . [T]he State Department hates them worse than communists now", wrote Berlin to Angus Malcolm.[36] Similar assessments can be found in his letters to the Frankfurters and to his parents. Still trusting in Weizmann's magical power and his ability to moderate the new American Zionist advocates, he concluded in the same letter that there "really was value in Weizmann's presence here . . . [since] the Zionists with their 92 percent majority and no Weizmann may really do something silly."

Paradoxical as it may seem, it was the war and the rumors of the extermination of Jews which pushed Berlin further away from Zionism. In January 1944 he explicitly wrote to his parents that "the Jewish issue is certainly about to boil up seriously here and I try as much as possible to have nothing to do with it" and that on "the very first day after even the European war is over, I shall probably make a frantic attempt to return to Oxford".[37] From that time on, the attempts by Weizmann and his followers to bring Berlin back into the fold were rejected. Upset, and fed up with Zionist lobbying and intrigues, Berlin wanted to take a step back. Weizmann himself was very disappointed with the behavior of the young intellectual he had groomed. From his perspective Berlin withdrew at the most crucial moment in modern Jewish history. But there was nothing he could do apart from remarking sarcastically that, with his return to the secure status of a don,

> Isaiah should write a book in four volumes with footnotes longer than the text, and in such style that no more than twenty people in the world would be able to understand it. "Once you get that out of your system, you can go on writing brilliant articles without being considered superficial," said Weizmann.[38]

It seemed the gap was unbridgeable. The whole episode haunted Berlin for years, and he later hinted that he carried a considerable amount of guilt.

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36 To Angus Malcolm, 9 Aug. 1943, *Letters*, 441. See also Berlin's retrospective account of the period: Berlin, *Zionist Politics in Wartime Washington: A Fragment of Personal Reminiscence* (the Yaacov Herzog memorial lecture) (Jerusalem, 1972), reprinted in *Letters*, 663–93.

37 To Marie and Mendel Berlin, 31 Jan. 1944, *Letters*, 474–5.

38 The description of Berlin and Weizmann's meeting in Geneva in mid-September 1948 in given in *Abba Eban: An Autobiography* (New York, 1977), 129.

Berlin's postwar letters—especially in light of the discovery of the Holocaust's horrendous dimensions—reveal some of his feelings of regret, perhaps even self-flagellation. The regret ensued from his not considering seriously enough the news about slaughters and organized annihilation of the Jews and for discrediting them as vehement Zionist propaganda. In his defense he wrote "that the [H]olocaust—the real, unspeakable disaster . . . was not known, at least, in my world, until 1945".[39] The dozens of reports about massacres that regularly reached England by early 1942 and made the headlines in America during the summer of that year make it somehow problematic to accept Berlin's confession. Berlin was only half right in claiming that he did not know about the Holocaust; he was not the only one to disbelieve these reports, but, nonetheless, there is no doubt he was exposed to them and probably read many as part of his wartime job. Berlin's retrospective self-justification can explain what Yehuda Bauer meant when he distinguished between information and knowledge of the Holocaust: "knowing usually came in a number of stages: first the information had to be disseminated; then, it had to be believed; then it had to be internalized".[40] Like many others, Berlin internalized the news only in 1945.

But another new aspect of Zionism became apparent during the war and its immediate aftermath: its turn to more militant tactics and its transformation into an anti-colonial national liberation movement. The deterioration in the relations with British Mandate forces seriously reinforced Berlin's ambivalence, and showed him that Weizmann's diplomatic and careful Zionism had reached a dead end. He detested the terrorist activities of *Lehi* (also known as the Stern Gang) and *Etzel* (Irgun Zvai Leumi), the two Jewish underground groups who attacked British troops and facilities in Palestine. Even worse, these two extreme right-wing groups began cooperating militarily with the Haganah, thus forming a joint Jewish resistance movement. The wave of violence reached new heights in late 1944, especially after Lord Moyne's assassination (6 November 1944), even causing Churchill, a lifelong supporter of Zionism, to doubt his conviction.[41] From the British perspective, Zionist brutality reached its climax with the bombing of the King David Hotel, the seat of the British military command and the government secretariat, in July 1946. The devastating effects of the bombing added another dimension of discomfort to Berlin's already shaky view of Zionism,

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39 To Sarah Groll, 17 Nov. 1972; quoted in Michael Hughes, "The Papers of Sir Isaiah Berlin at the Bodleian Library", *Twentieth Century British History* 16 (2005), 193–20.

40 Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (Seattle, 1978), 18.

41 See Nicholas W. Bethell, *The Palestine Triangle: The Struggle for the Holy Land, 1935–48* (New York, 1979). See also Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life*. chap. 9.

and even convinced him to withdraw a letter he was about to send to *The Times* in defense of Zionism.[42]

Nevertheless, Berlin had the opportunity to influence, albeit indirectly, Zionist public opinion. This opportunity arose in 1946, soon after he returned from Moscow and Leningrad, as he was asked by Weizmann to comment on the draft of his Presidential Statement for the 22nd Zionist Congress. A comparison of the draft and the final version of the speech clearly shows that Weizmann accepted Berlin's comments.[43] Berlin's commentary pushed the Zionist leader to add a very clear and decisive paragraph-long condemnation of terrorism. By doing so Weizmann risked his own reputation. In these tumultuous times Weizmann refused to regard anti-British terrorism as a legitimate tactic of the struggle for political independence. The addition was of great importance: terrorism should be rejected, argued Weizmann in his initial speech, simply because it is counterproductive and impractical as a tactic of struggle, certainly in comparison with his own gradualist and pragmatic diplomacy. But Berlin's additions were crucial: terrorism should be condemned because it stood in contrast with what he saw as the essence of the Zionist claim. Zionism was to be a national movement that had no dark chauvinistic side. The newly added paragraph to Weizmann's speech already contained new arguments against terror:

> It is futile to invoke the national struggles of other nations as examples for ourselves. Not only are the circumstances different, but our purposes, too, are unique . . . We are left with the task of weighing our actions in the scales of Jewish tradition. Nor must our judgment be dazzled by the glare of self-conscious heroism. Massada, for all its heroism, was a disaster in our history.[44]

Ironically, it was this speech, considered too anglophile and too moderate by the new Zionist hawks, which precipitated the downfall of Weizmann and

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42 Berlin to Chaim Weizmann: "I have written a long letter to the Times about Palestine . . . there are moments when the silent [*sic*] is shameful—"не могу молчать" [Russian: I cannot keep quiet]" (Berlin to Weizmann, WA, no date). Such a letter was never published. According to Vera Weizmann (see Vera Weizmann and David Tutaev, *The Impossible Takes Longer: The Memoirs of Vera Weizmann, Wife of Israel's First President* (London, 1967), 209) Berlin showed Weizmann the draft of the letter he proposed to send to *The Times* on 18 July 1946, and Weizmann made a number of suggestions which Isaiah incorporated into the letter. It seems that Berlin never sent the letter due to the bombing of the King David Hotel on 22 July. For drafts of the letter see BPA, MS. Berlin 114, fols. 15–18, 27–37 and 272–5.

43 See draft of speech, dated 12 Sept. 1946, with Berlin's handwritten comments, and Chaim Weizmann's letter of request for comments to Berlin, dated 12 Sept. 1946 (WA). See also *Letters*, 687; and Eban's *Autobiography*, 68–9.

44 *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann*, ed. Barnet Litvinoff, vol. 2, series B (Jerusalem 1979), 636–7.

his group of doves. Blanche Dugdale, Lord Balfour's niece and a close friend of the Weizmanns, wrote in her diary that Weizmann's address was "the greatest speech of his life. Perhaps the greatest I have ever heard. Perhaps the last he will ever make to a Zionist congress".[45] Baffy's observation was correct: Weizmann was not re-elected as president of the World Zionist Organization. Partly as a bystander and partly as an active participant, Berlin witnessed the fall of his hero. He regarded Weizmann's failure as more than a political defeat; it signified a crucial shift and the beginning of what could lead to a dangerous escalation of crude nationalism that would threaten basic Zionist premises and sources of legitimacy. "Would Ben-Gurion then have played the part of de Valera to Weizmann's Griffith, Mazzini to Weizmann's Cavour, only with greater success?" asked Berlin in a lecture he delivered in Jerusalem in 1972. "Must a Moses always be followed by a Joshua? I do not know".[46]

It might be claimed that close acquaintance with Zionist politics in the mid-1940s helped Berlin grasp intuitively what he systematically developed in subsequent years: a suspicion of nationalistic rhetoric and, at the same time, great respect for the human need for community. Berlin used his personal acquaintance with Zionist politics as an example of the way in which noble ideas can easily be transformed into extremist ones. Soon enough this fear of idealist utopianism gave Berlin much of his unique characteristics as a Cold Warrior who described the totalitarian menace as an almost inevitable product of Russia's overzealous idealistic experiment. Zionism, therefore, contributed to Berlin's sensitivity to delicate value conversions. The extraordinary mutation of what he would later call positive liberty into authoritarian and totalitarian doctrines was highly related to his personal experience with Zionism. This sensitivity marked not only his philosophical writings, but also his historical ones. Focusing on crucial transition points, which he saw as ideological watersheds, Berlin searched for transformations such as the one he witnessed in the case of wartime Zionism. Was the difference between Ben Gurion and Weizmann parallel to the one Berlin found in his account of Bakunin, the revolutionist who went too far, and Herzen, Berlin's beloved Russian thinker who refused to sacrifice individuals in the name of utopian ideals?[47] Perhaps. In both cases Berlin recognized similar breaking points in which one thinker refused to make a crucial additional step and to radicalize the noble theory of his predecessor.

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45 See entry of 16 Dec. 1946 in Blanche Elizabeth Campbel Dugdale, *Baffy: The Diaries of Blanche Dugdale, 1936–1947*, ed. Norman A. Rose (London, 1973).

46 *Letters*, 691. Originally published as Berlin, *Zionist Politics*.

47 Isaiah Berlin, "Herzen and Bakunin on Individual Liberty", in Ernest J. Simmons, ed., *Continuity and Change in Russian and Soviet Thought* (Cambridge, MA, 1955), 473–99.

III

As the years passed, and also after the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948, Berlin's misgivings about Zionism grew stronger. Nonetheless, he never ceased to believe that it constituted a justifiable and even noble cause. His doubts and concerns did not lead him to abandon Zionism or to regard it as an erroneous theory, and although he did not immigrate to Israel,[48] he still used his writings to promote essential Zionist ideas. First and foremost, Zionism, as Berlin understood it, stemmed from the simple but unfortunate fact that Jews felt insecure and unwelcome in too many countries. The persistence of prejudice, discrimination and intolerance maintained Zionism's "relevance". But beyond that, Berlin never abandoned an even more far-reaching core Zionist aspiration—to render the Jews, as a collective entity, into a nation among nations, and by doing so to "normalize" the state of each and every Jewish individual. In that sense, Berlin was using the vocabulary, metaphors and discourse of canonical Zionism, which not only sought to promote a limited political agenda, but also attempted to defeat the Jewish sense of inferiority and alienation.

The aspiration for normalization, however, was entangled with another layer of Berlin's ambivalence and stemmed from his conflicting feelings regarding the feasibility and moral implications of transforming the Jewish soul. The experience of persecution and homelessness were not the sole motivations pushing Berlin to support Zionism. Berlin was also participating in the modernist aspiration of the Zionist intelligentsia to heal the tormented soul of the Jew. The basic assumption behind the Zionist normalization discourse was that the nationalist postulate offered a remedy to the anxiety, neurosis and existential malaise of the modern Jew. We do not need to go as far as Ahad-Ha'am's Zionist circle in Odessa or Max Nordau's obsession with the idea of degeneration to excavate the remnant elements of this discourse. For a passionate British Zionist like Namier, for example, it was very clear that only when the Jew was "firmly rooted in the soil" would he heal his malaise and "feel . . . perfectly at ease". Using a blend of psychologist terminology and sociopolitical analysis, Namier insisted that all Jews living in non-Jewish environments (even those living in tolerant and liberal states) are stricken by "uncertainty [which] breeds anxiety, and anxiety provokes critical attention".[49]

Berlin's writings on Zionism clearly demonstrate that he had internalized the normalization discourse. It is manifested most clearly in "Jewish Slavery and

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48 Although numerous documents, including architectural plans to a three-floor house on Ben-Maymon Street in Jerusalem, provide evidence that the Berlins purchased land in Israel. See BPA, MS. Berlin 292, fols. 83, 87, 89, 91; MS. 104, fols. 1–2; MS. 806, fols. 64–6, 112–13v, 117–24, 127.

49 Lewis Bernstein Namier, *Conflicts: Studies in Contemporary History* (London, 1942), 128–9

Emancipation" (1951),[50] in which Berlin argues that the Jews need a state of their own so that they can truly have their own society, thus ending their perpetually confused and *sui generis* status. From this essay and later writings on Zionism it becomes evident that despite all his misgivings, skepticism and hesitation, he adopted the idea that Zionism would also succeed in normalizing the existential plight of the modern Jew. But, contrary to Namier, Weizmann and so many other Zionists, Berlin did not believe that soil is the cure for the Jewish soul. Instead, he regarded normality as the result of greater freedom. What made the Jew "normal", in other words, was that he enjoyed more freedom and not some sort of mystical attachment to a specific territory. By promoting this idea Berlin was doing two things: first, he altered the original meaning of the Zionist normalization discourse, making it a cornerstone of Diaspora Zionism rather than Palestino-centric Zionism; second, in order to show how the establishment of a Jewish state led to greater freedom for Jews as a whole, he was forced to conceptualize his notion of freedom. It is not coincidental, therefore, that the first appearances of freedom as an opportunity concept are to be found in Berlin's "Zionist" writings. It was especially during the late 1940s and early 1950s that the conjunction between Isaiah the Zionist and Isaiah the liberal became so intellectually fruitful. It was Diaspora Zionism that was able to provide him with the meeting ground between his liberalism and Zionism.

Berlin, of course, never used the term Diaspora Zionism.[51] What made his Zionism so different from traditional (that is, Palestino-centric) Zionism was the fact that he neither idealized the biblical Land of Israel nor demanded a mass voluntary migration of all Jewish communities in the Diaspora to accompany the establishment of a Jewish state. He supported the *Yishuv* and later the state of Israel, but did not give primacy to this type of Jewish communal existence and certainly opposed what Zionist thinkers called "the negation of *Galut*". The strong anti-utopian element which was a dominant feature of Berlin's rhetoric as a public moralist was very clear in this context as well: instead of aspiring to, and envisioning, an enchanted condition in which all Jews live in Israel and go through

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50 Berlin, "Jewish Slavery and Emancipation." Page references will be based on the reprint of this essay in *Power of Ideas*.

51 Although a similar Diaspora nationalism concept appears in Gellner and Smith's writings, I use the term slightly differently to distinguish Berlin's position from the non-Zionist approach of Simon Dubnow or the Bundist party. See Shmuel Almog, "*Galut* Nationalism", in *idem*, *The Jewish Point: Jews as Seen by Themselves and by Others* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 2002), 33–40. Berlin's theory did not contradict the core ideas of political Zionism. See Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1976), chap. 7; and Anthony D. Smith, "Introduction: The Formation of Nationalist Movements", in *idem*, ed., *Nationalist Movements* (London, 1976), 1–30. Anthony D. Smith, "Zionism and Diaspora Nationalism", *Israel Affairs* 2 (Winter, 1995), 1–19.

a process of total mental transformation, Berlin believed that the establishment of an independent state was enough, and detested the concept of negating the *Galut*. Fulfillment of the Zionist dream, in other words, did not contradict the continual existence of Jewish life outside the sovereign Jewish state. He never saw Diaspora communities as inferior types of Jewish existence or thought that they should disappear sooner or later. Nevertheless, unlike the Diaspora nationalism of Simon Dubnow, or even the Bundist blend of Marxism and nationalism, Berlin's idea was compatible with traditional Zionism and was not its ideological competitor. In fact, it clearly mirrored Berlin's pluralistic worldview for it was based on the idea that a non-hierarchical network of various Jewish communities, Israel being only one of them, can create a new situation in which the modern Jew has more options to choose from, and hence enjoys greater freedom.

Berlin never systematically developed the idea of Diaspora Zionism but "Jewish Slavery and Emancipation" remains the best manifestation of this view. Initially Berlin had no intention of writing a whole essay on the subject, but he felt the need to reply to what he saw as an illiberal, coercive and inhumane justification of Zionism. What particularly enraged Berlin were the arguments made by Jewish-Hungarian author Arthur Koestler in writings such as *Promise and Fulfillment*, *Thieves in the Night* and several interviews he gave to the *Jewish Chronicle* about the "millennial Jewish question".[52] Rejecting the idea that one can define Judaism as a universal form of humanism and preferring to see it as an ethnic and even segregating tribal religion, Koestler argued that with the foundation of the state of Israel a moment of truth had been created, and that from that point onwards those who still wished to define themselves as Jews should take the particularistic consequences of their identity definition and immigrate to Israel. "The existence of the Hebrew state", wrote Koestler in his epilogue to *Promise and Fulfilment*, "puts every Jew outside Israel in a dilemma which will become increasingly acute. It is the choice between becoming a citizen of the Hebrew nation and renouncing any conscious or implicit claim to separate nationhood".[53] During the early 1950s the doctrine of choice was even more drastically reformulated when Koestler bluntly argued that Jews must decide either to go to Israel or to abandon their Jewishness altogether.[54]

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52 Arthur Koestler, *Promise and Fulfilment: Palestine, 1917–1949* (New York, 1949); *idem*, *Thieves in the Night* (London, 1946). See Koestler's reply to Berlin in Arthur Koestler, "Judah at the Crossroads", in *idem*, *The Trail of the Dinosaur and Other Essays* (London, 1955), 106–39. Berlin's reply was published as a series of four articles in the *Jewish Chronicle* between September and October 1951.

53 Koestler, *Promise and Fulfilment*, 332–3.

54 Koestler, "Judah at the Crossroads." The debate between the two continued into the 1970s in Douglas Villiers, ed., *Next Year in Jerusalem: Portraits of the Jew in the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1976), 98–106.

Koestler was not the first or the only one to present such an absolute and rigid "either–or" formula. Ironically, a similar line of thought can be found in Theodor Herzl's diary,[55] Ben-Gurion's speeches[56] and even Weizmann writings.[57] In Berlin's eyes, this doctrine created a strange alignment between the assimilationist imperative of extreme Zionism and the goals of anti-Semitism: all maintained a vision of a Europe cleansed of Jews, and the same totalitarian impulse to reject variety or diversity. Berlin refused to see homogenous and monolithic societies as the only possible manifestation of nationalism.

It is unsurprising that Berlin found in Koestler what he recognized to be the all-too-familiar totalitarian zeal. Koestler, deeply offended by Berlin's use of the term totalitarianism, accused Berlin "of being the sort of liberal who labeled an opponent totalitarian if he forced him to make hard decisions".[58] Nonetheless, Berlin's use of the term is not coincidental; in his view totalitarian ideologies were based on a similar mixture of positive notions of liberty and rigid "either–or" formulas. Totalitarianism was the limitation of choices, and liberalism the complete opposite. In order to refute Koestler's argument Berlin needed to attach notions of plurality and diversity to traditional liberalism. Hence, in order to prop up his argument, Berlin had to develop his understanding of freedom as an opportunity concept. Only in this way could he provide the contours of an alternative view of Zionism compatible with Diaspora existence.

Berlin was actually defending moderate forms of Zionism in very similar terms to those he would later use to defend Cold War liberalism: the creation of a Jewish national home, in his view, removed external and internal obstacles which previously restricted a Jew's ability to make choices. Choices, and the fact that they were made by individuals and not by a collective, were the crucial elements in this argument:

The creation of the State of Israel has rendered the greatest service that any human institution can perform for individuals—has restored to Jews not merely their personal

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55 Theodor Herzel, *The Diaries of Theodor Herzel* (Hebrew), vol. 2, 1897–1901 (Jerusalem, 1960), 79. The success of building an *Alteneuland* would eliminate European xenophobia and thus encourage Jews who did not wish to emigrate to quietly assimilate into gentile society.

56 This view became particularly apparent after 1948, when Ben-Gurion added a Messianic flavor to his vision. David Ohana, *Messianism and "Mamlachtiut": Ben-Gurion and the Intellectuals between Political Vision and Political Theology* (Hebrew) (Beer Sheva, 2003).

57 Weizmann himself was accused once by Sir Leon Simon of yielding such a position. In his attempts to persuade the British to support his project, Weizmann had the tendency to present Zionism as the solution of the *Judenfrage* so that Jew-haters would also find their interest met when supporting him. See Reinharz, *Chaim Weizmann*, afterword.

58 Koestler to Berlin, 16 Nov. 1954, quoted in David Cesarani, *Arthur Koestler: Homeless Mind* (London 1998), 429, n. 78.

dignity and status as human beings, but what is vastly more important, their right to choose as individuals how they shall live—the basic freedom of choice, the right to live or perish, go to the good or to the bad in one's own way, without which life is a form of slavery, as it has been, indeed, for the Jewish community for almost two thousand years.[59]

We see, therefore, that seven years before he coined the term "negative freedom" Berlin had already developed the idea that any definition of freedom should put a strong emphasis on the possibility and multiplicity of choices—actual as well as potential. In a letter he sent to George Kennan in the same year, Berlin returned to an identification of freedom with the number and range of opportunities open to an individual: "the denial to human beings of the possibility of choice . . . is what cannot be borne at all."[60] This, in essence, was the first step towards the formulation of the negative concept of liberty. Diaspora Zionism rested on this Berlinian opportunity concept—even if they do not migrate to Israel, the fact that Jews have more choices increases their freedom:

The creation of the State of Israel has genuinely transformed the individual problem of the Jews in the dispersion. The old problem was national in type . . . The problem of the Jews [before 1948] was not individual but communal: individual Jews might disappear or establish themselves comfortably somewhere; communities could not do this of their own will . . . This situation is now at an end. Most of those who feel the discomfort of their situation to be too great . . . have today reasonable hope of reaching Israel and living its life.[61]

Against Koestler, who argued that Israel constituted the only opportunity for Jews, Berlin argued that Israel created another opportunity. This was an elegant way to solve the ambivalence Zionism evoked in his soul and provided the best liberal-pluralist justification to the dilemma it posed. Interestingly enough, this view of freedom as an opportunity concept made its first appearance when Berlin replaced Weizmann, the hero of his earlier years, with Winston Churchill. In fact, Berlin's letters from 1949, and especially his descriptions of a dinner party which he attended with Churchill, contain the germ of this idea:

How bold [Churchill] is and how unselfconscious. I heard him the other day at a dinner orate in tremendous fashion about the need to multiply the number of human choices which the present government in his view is trying to shut off; "Never mind whether the choices are good or bad; what we must have is a great multiplicity of them and not a miserable grey on grey."[62]

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59 "Jewish Slavery and Emancipation", 182.

60 Berlin, "A Letter to George Kennan", in *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford, 2002), 336–44, 342.

61 "Jewish Slavery and Emancipation", 178–9.

62 Berlin to Vera Weizmann, 30 Dec. 1949, WA.

It was Churchill, then, Berlin's newly appointed hero, who planted in him the idea of freedom as multiplicity of choices.[63] But brilliant eclecticist that he was, Berlin's truly remarkable gift was the blend of liberal terminology with Zionist discourse. This enabled him to check extreme versions of Palestino-centric Zionism and anti-Semitism alike. It was essential for him to reject the vision of the entire world, excluding Israel, as *Galut*—that is, "the land of Exile". Diaspora Zionism was defended negatively. As he saw it, by overemphasizing Zionist ideology, and arguing that citizenship in Israel is the single legitimate way for Jews to live after 1948, one not only creates a "petty tyranny" but also forces Jews to serve as members in Jewish communal life. Here Berlin's liberalism and Zionism reached their common denominator. The reduction of multiple possible courses of action to a single legitimate life pattern was similar to forcing Jews to live in medieval segregated ghettos. It was in complete opposition to the Zionist passion to eradicate exile, end all Jewish existence outside the Promised Land and use the *Galut*, a clear term of abuse, to signify non-Israeli Jewish lives.

The power of Berlin's argument rested on the fact that it was based on claims which were both political and philosophical. Berlin's Zionist contemporaries embraced the struggle for a Jewish homeland because (like later modern political thinkers such as Quentin Skinner[64]) they found it likely that living in a state of social or political dependence would automatically restrict one's options and thereby limit one's freedom. Berlin's remodeling of Zionism was based exactly on this principle: the creation of a Jewish national home is a noble cause worth fighting for because it enables every individual Jew to choose freely, for the first time in modern history, whether he wants to continue to live among non-Jews—as Berlin himself chose to do—or to live as a member of a Jewish community and take part in its communal life. Diaspora Zionism, a term never explicitly used by Berlin, can be seen as the outgrowth of Berlin's particular interpretation of Weizmannite Zionism and is often alluded to in his writings on Weizmannism. These writings continued to promote the idea that the creation of a Jewish state guarantees the emancipation of non-Zionist Jews. Koestler's rigid "either–or" formulation, Berlin maintained, took Jews back to square one, since it refused to acknowledge Zionism's real new substantial contribution to all world Jewry: the possibility of every individual to choose

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63 Although they met during the war, Berlin became personally acquainted with Churchill when helping him to recollect his memories for the first volume of his grand opus *The Second World War*. See Winston Churchill, *The Second World War, Volume 1: The Gathering Storm* (Boston, 1948). See David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (London, 2004).

64 Quentin Skinner, "A Third Concept of Liberty", *Proceedings of the British Academy* 117 (2001), 237–68.

how and where to live. After 1948 Jews could choose to live under the rule of an enlightened or non-enlightened non-Jewish sovereign, especially if this absolute ruler would never in fact interfere with Jewish autonomous life and thus would not make the state of political and juridical dependence into a constraint of one's freedom: "at last, [Jews] *can freely choose to live* – freely, because they are physically as well as morally free to leave them, and their choice whether to go or to stay, being no longer forced upon them, is a *genuine choice*".[65] What makes a Jew free is not his membership in a Jewish community or citizenship in an independent sovereign Jewish republic, but the fact he has chosen—either actively or by an act of silent consent—between several alternative life choices.

IV

After reconciling himself with Zionism as a political program, Berlin remained ambivalent about this vision of normalization. On the one hand, he accepted the analogy of exile to a disease or some sort of abnormal condition. On the other hand, he refused to collectively force Jews to "cure" themselves and become members of the new Hebraic community and sovereignty. A paradox lies at the heart of this view. For if feelings of being unwelcome, rootless and a continual outsider are the inevitable diseases exile life carries why should a Jew, like Berlin himself, insist on living in the Diaspora, outside a sovereign Jewish community? If we compare Jewishness to some sort of physical deformation, as Berlin did when he compared Jews to hunchbacks in his debate with Koestler,[66] and prescribe Zionism as the surgical operation which would once and for all remove this bodily defect, why should a Jew with healthy common sense resist the operation?

Soon after the publication of "Jewish Slavery and Emancipation" Berlin understood that the hunchback metaphor was too shocking. Consequently, in later writings about Israel and Zionism this metaphor is replaced with the allegorical analogy of the oyster and the pearl.[67] The new allegory proved that Berlin, deeply attached to his Jewish heritage, actually feared that some sort of Jewish uniqueness would disappear if all Jews simply became Israelis. In fact, Berlin was describing his own existential dilemma: Jewish exceptionality, which Berlin cherished, was, in his view, a tragic result of the abnormal existence of Jews in exile. The Jewish genius was, Berlin began to argue in the 1970s, a gift

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65 "Jewish Slavery and Emancipation", 183 (my emphasis).

66 Ibid., 174–6.

67 Berlin, "The Cost of Curing an Oyster", *Jerusalem Post*, 10 Feb. 1986, 8; Berlin, "A Nation Among Nations", *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 May 1973, 28–34.

to humanity by a suffering people, living in abnormal conditions. "Jews . . . with their rich and extraordinary history, miraculous survivors from the classical age of our common civilisation—that this fascinating people should choose to give up its unique status, and for what? To become Albania! How could they want this?" Alexandre Kojève asked Berlin. Berlin's reply to the Russian-French philosopher was sharp:

> however it might look to the world in general, to condemn the oyster for wishing to avoid the sufferings that led to the disease that might, in some cases, result in a pearl, was neither reasonable nor just. The oyster wished to live an oyster's life, to realize itself as an oyster, not solely to serve as the unhappy means of enriching the world with masterpieces of art or philosophy or religion that sprang from its sufferings.[68]

The oyster analogy demonstrates once more that Berlin actually agreed with a basic premise of the Zionist ideology: that existence in exile is itself a disease, an abnormal and unhealthy situation. All the same, it corresponded with Berlin's long years of ambiguity. Afraid as he was of the Jewish *Luftmensch* of the exile, after 1948 Berlin feared that the *Sabra* Israelis, although cured from the *Galut*, would lose this precious gift. He adored the Israelis for being "not racked by self-consciousness, by wondering uneasily what they look like to 'the other', by over-anxiety to please suspicious fellow citizens".[69] At the same time he feared that Jews, all Jews, would become like them.

Diaspora Zionism, therefore, was also an attempt to restore some of this Jewish uniqueness, but after 1948 there were two very different, even conflicting, views of Jewish pride. Along with the pride of being a pearl, a gift to humanity, there was also a very patriotic sense of the pride in the Jew who belongs to a sovereign and independent state. Berlin was actually reproducing the postwar Jewish stereotypes: the Israeli *Sabra* was normal, virile, courageous and proud, but spiritually poor and not very sophisticated, while the Diaspora Jew, though steeped in a world of culture, was now under an even greater threat of assimilation and extinction. Several segments of the introductory remarks Berlin gave to his Israeli audience in broken Hebrew a short time after the Six Day War reveal this other sense of pride:

> Please accept my apologies for not speaking in Hebrew; People hardly understand me [when I speak] English, and I did not want to torment you [by speaking Hebrew] too much, especially in the united city of Jerusalem. I love the [Hebrew] language; but it did not return my love. Nonetheless, I am ashamed: but I find comfort in the fact that from

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68 Berlin, "A Nation Among Nations", 28.

69 Ibid., 31.

this kind of shame Zionism was conceived, and such shame and regret are signs of our spiritual unity.[70]

In many senses Berlin's story is the narrative of an intellectual who discovered that nationalism is a Janus-faced phenomenon. But what did Berlin learn from his acquaintance with Zionism? We can fully answer this question only by reading his later essays, in which he epitomized the human need to belong to a community, but at the same time stressed the dangers of nationalism. The study of Herder helped him to articulate ideas he sensed intuitively much earlier:

[Quoting J. G. Herder's lecture from 1765:] "To brag of one's country is the stupidest form of boastfulness . . . What is a nation? A great wild garden full of bad plants and good" . . . patriotism was one thing, nationalism another: an innocent attachment to family, language, one's own city, one's own country, its traditions, is not to be condemned . . . [Herder believed that] True human relations are those of father and son, husband and wife, sons, brothers, friends, men; these terms express natural relations which make people happy. All that the State has given us is contradictions and conquests, and, perhaps, worst of all, dehumanization . . . For him *die Nation* is not a political entity . . .[71]

What Berlin learned from Zionism is to distinguish patriotism from nationalism. This distinction was the intellectual fruit of Berlin's ambivalent feelings towards Zionism, an attempt to solve the inherent contradiction he found in this national movement and later attributed to nationalism *en tout*. Berlin's pluralism grew from the same soil. He defended nationalism as a form of cultural self-expression, which gave opportunity to celebrate diversity in life, but rejected it if it became chauvinistic and homogenous. Here again Herder had a very important role:

Nationality for him [i.e. Herder] is purely and strictly a cultural attribute; he believes that people can and should defend their cultural heritage: they need never give in. He almost blames the Jews . . . for not preserving a sufficient sense of collective honour and making no effort to return to Palestine, which is the sole place where they can blossom again into a *Nation* . . . Men, according to Herder, truly flourish only in congenial circumstances, that is, where the group to which they belong has achieved a fruitful relationship with the environment by which it is shaped and which in turn it shapes. There the individual

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70 My translation. See BPA, MS. Berlin 704 fol. 364. The folio consists of a handwritten note Berlin wrote in Hebrew before giving the speech that later was published as "Weizmann as Exilarch", in Israel Kolatt, ed., *Chaim Weizmann as Leader* (Jerusalem, 1970) 13–21 on 25 Dec. 1967, less than six months after the Six Day War, at the Hebrew University.

71 Isaiah Berlin, "Herder and the Enlightenment", in *idem, Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, NJ, 2000), 181–2 and 206–7. The quote from (and the paraphrasing of) Herder are taken from Herder's *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Bernard Suphan, 33 vols. (Berlin, 1877–1913), 17: 211 and 13: 341.

is happily integrated into the "natural community", which grows spontaneously, like a plant . . .[72]

Pluralism was a festival of human diversity. Nationalism could be either an expression of this cultural diversity or its biggest enemy. The criteria used to distinguish between the two were the individual and negative freedom. In his controversy with Arthur Koestler, which Berlin saw as part of an internal Jewish debate rather than a more general philosophical debate, one can recognize key elements that would later shape Berlin's well-known concept of negative liberty. Only by applying a dual perspective, which enriches our understanding of Berlin's liberalism by adding the Jewish and Zionist context to our interpretation of his thought, can we fully grasp this crucial stage of Berlin's intellectual formation. The new philosophical formulation of the concept of freedom helped Berlin finally to locate the essential value he found in Zionism after long years of hesitation and internal conflict. At last, Berlin could argue that Zionism was a vital and legitimate ideology, for it enabled all Jews, and not only those living in Israel, to enjoy, for the first time in modern history, the possibility of choosing between several potential life paths. And so the controversy with Koestler did two things simultaneously: it resolved Berlin's inner struggle and at the same time pushed him one step further towards crystallizing his view of liberty. Nonetheless ambivalent feelings towards the state of Israel and the modern Jewish condition remained.

After 1952 the formula became clear: the existence of Israel guaranteed the political emancipation of Jews and perhaps even offered them a "normative focal point", Berlin would have claimed, but it could not safeguard Jewish uniqueness and genius.[73] The genius itself was a symptom of the disease which the establishment of the state of Israel tried to cure. To paraphrase Kojève, as much as Berlin wanted Israel to become a normal down-to-earth state like Albania, he feared the idea that all Jews would become nothing but Albanians. Berlin could not see himself abandoning European culture for a Levantine life. Being appointed to the Order of Merit and holding prestigious positions such as the founding president of Wolfson College and president of the British Academy did not extinguish Berlin's perception of himself as an outsider, almost a pariah. The dilemmas and paradoxes were never resolved; as much as he was adored and honored by the British establishment he kept insisting on having "a sense of social unease" due to the fact that "nowhere do Jews feel entirely at home".[74] This social unease and Jewish sense of homelessness were, for Berlin, at once symptoms of illness and preconditions for prodigy.

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72 Berlin, "Herder and the Enlightenment", in *Three Critics of Enlightenment*, 231–2.

73 For similarities and dissimilarities between Berlin's view of the subject and that of Israeli and American-Jewish intellectuals see Joseph Gorny, *The Quest for Collective Identity* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv, 1990).

74 Berlin quoted in Margalit, "The Crooked Timber of Nationalism", 149.