

**THE INTELLECTUAL AS WARRIOR**  
**ISAIAH BERLIN'S COLD WAR**

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## Introduction

### Ideas at stake

At some point in the late autumn or early winter of 1945, two junior diplomats began a lifelong friendship within Moscow's insulated embassy district. One was a budding expert on Russian affairs, an American among the most knowledgeable and perceptive of the personnel in the United States' thinly staffed Moscow embassy, and perhaps even the entire State Department.<sup>1</sup> The other was a new arrival in the British complex, an Oxford academic trained in analytical philosophy who had made a bit of a name for himself in the British Foreign Office by writing especially witty and penetrating dispatches about the state of American public opinion 5,000 miles away in Washington and New York.<sup>2</sup> The American was George Kennan; the Englishman was Isaiah Berlin.

The two came to know each other during the interim period between Nazi Germany's surrender and the beginning of the Cold War, at a time when the United States and her Western European allies were still unsure whether the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was an old wartime friend or newly found foe.<sup>3</sup> As the Russian winter descended on Moscow in 1945, neither man could have known the eventual magnitude of his own role, let alone the other's, in the coming Cold War. While Kennan's impact on American policy toward the Soviet Union has since become a familiar aspect of Cold War scholarship, the Cold War implications of Berlin's many works have been frequently overlooked. Instead, Berlin's works are often taken out of their Cold War context and read as independent pieces of intellectual history or political theory.

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<sup>1</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 172-3.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 114.

<sup>3</sup> Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Public Policy Papers, John Lewis Gaddis Papers on George F. Kennan, Box 1, Folder 2, Interview with Sir Isaiah Berlin and Lady Berlin, Oxford, England, November 29, 1992, 1.

While Berlin did not seek to influence Cold War policy the way Kennan did, to regard him as merely a Cold War observer, and not a participant, is to the detriment of the historical understanding of the conflict. By examining Berlin as an involved Cold War figure and his writing as Cold War artifact, this thesis hopes to understand the American-Soviet conflict from an intellectual and moral perspective that is currently incomplete.

From early on in his life, Berlin had admired the works of writers and social thinkers in nineteenth century Russia, foremost among them Leo Tolstoy. Indeed, Berlin's characterization of their approach as "essentially moral" paralleled his own intellectual concerns, which were similarly moral.<sup>4</sup> As Mark Lilla points out in his foreword to a volume of Berlin's essays, Berlin cared to know more about things such as "the foundation of morality, the concept of justice, the conflicting claims of citizenship and community, the meaning of history."<sup>5</sup> As if trying to live up to his mental image of Tolstoy, Berlin showed a desire to discover what he could about the human condition, asking questions that had occupied political philosophers since Plato and Aristotle. This is not to say, however, that Berlin's works belong only on a shelf as one example of the many twentieth century contributions to political philosophy.

The fundamentally intellectual and deeply moral questions that concerned Berlin were also central to the Cold War. To understand Berlin's mindset is to understand a prominent set of interests, fears, and motivations that occupied the conscience of Western thinkers concerned with the growing power of Communism and the Soviet Union. Berlin's works articulated a frame of mind shared by more policy-oriented Cold War intellectuals such as Kennan. In his Long Telegram and "X Article," Kennan proposed a set of actionable strategies and procedures

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<sup>4</sup> Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Lilla, Foreword to Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), xi.

relevant to both policymakers and the public in negotiating and coping with a rising Soviet threat. Kennan cared that Cold War threats existed and worried about how to manage them without stopping to explain the nature of the threat itself.

Though Berlin does not explicitly claim to explain the logic of more policy minded Cold War intellectuals, his works were evidence of the kinds of concerns that occupied the mind of a Cold War liberal. Through his essays and lectures, Berlin articulated an intellectual framework behind why an antagonism to counteract the Soviet Union, such as that proposed by Kennan, was morally justified and necessary. Thus Berlin and Kennan can be thought of as complementary figures in Cold War thought. By examining Berlin's moral and political thinking as a necessary accompaniment to Western actions during the Cold War, we gain a fuller understanding of the moral discourse that inspired the West's perceived antagonism toward the Soviet Union.

Any student of the Cold War familiar with the Long Telegram would be familiar with the atmosphere of antagonism during the time. Indeed, Kennan's 1946 Long Telegram and 1947 "X Article" have become part of a standard Cold War narrative. The catalyst for a series of sweeping changes in American foreign policy, the Long Telegram is regarded as a jolt to the senses of the Truman administration, which in Kennan's mind had been lulled into complacency. Trying to alert Washington of the rising Soviet threat was, as Kennan described in his memoirs, "to all intents and purposes like talking to a stone. The Russian desk in the State Department had understood; and beyond it all had been an unechoing silence."<sup>6</sup> In foreign policy terms, the Long Telegram alerted American leaders of the need to prepare for increasingly antagonistic relations that would follow the post-war hangover. Kennan was alarmed by the rise of a Soviet Union whose leadership, he claimed, understood global political relations to be defined by "the innate

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<sup>6</sup> George Kennan, *Memoirs, vol 1, 1925-1950* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 293.

antagonism between capitalism and Socialism,” despite the years of co-operation between nations of both economic systems during the Second World War.<sup>7</sup>

Reading into Soviet interpretations of Marxist ideology as put forth by its official propaganda machine, Kennan warned that the Soviets would treat capitalism as an injustice and were determined to seek its destruction.<sup>8</sup> In this context, the Long Telegram was Kennan’s anticipatory response to a coming era of Soviet Policy that was to be preoccupied with advancing its own relative strength while simultaneously diminishing the West’s. Against such a regime, Kennan argued, the capitalist world had to not only prevent communist encroachment, but also actively look for opportunities to weaken the Soviet state.<sup>9</sup>

In the “X Article,” Kennan famously warned: “it is clear that the United States cannot expect in the foreseeable future to enjoy political intimacy with the Soviet régime. It must continue to regard the Soviet Union as a rival, not a partner, in the political arena,” emphasizing the nature of the American-Soviet relationship as chiefly political.<sup>10</sup> In seeking political solutions to what he perceived as a political problem, Kennan did not clearly spell out exactly why Soviet communism was so awful, dangerous, and above all, hostile to the West. To reiterate, Kennan’s concern was for the presence of the fear and how to deal with it, not whether it was merited or rational. In more detail and with greater nuance, Kennan recognized the existence of fear and anxiety in the West and prescribed a solution of vigilance and self-assured strength. However, he failed to properly explain either the cause of the fear or the motivations behind the need for

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<sup>7</sup> George Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* 25 no. 4 (Jul. 1947), 572.  
George Kennan, “The Kennan ‘Long Telegram,’” in Kenneth Jensen, ed., *Origins of the Cold War: The Novikov, Kennan, and Roberts ‘Long Telegrams’ of 1946* (Washington: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1993), 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> Kennan, “Long Telegram,” in *Origins of the Cold War*, 17.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>10</sup> George Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* 25 no. 4 (Jul. 1947), 580.

resistance. For an explanation of the origins of Cold War fear and the rationale behind the moral imperative to stand up to the Soviet Union, Isaiah Berlin's work is of much greater relevance.

Berlin's political thinking revealed the interests and motivations behind Western policies from an ideological perspective that delved deeper than a dispute over methods of economic production—of capitalism and socialism—as Kennan's Long Telegram alone might have suggested. Berlin was critical of the Soviet tendency to treat history as a science with objective laws and to disregard the desires and interests of individuals.<sup>11</sup> Berlin's Cold War anxieties were moral in nature and were shared by Kennan in correspondence between the two, though Kennan did not acknowledge as much in his Long Telegram.<sup>12</sup> Berlin was instrumental in defining and articulating the scope and nature of the "cold war" that characterized American-Soviet relations as a moral tension within the relationship of political unease defined by Kennan. To understand Berlin's moral critique of the Soviet Union adds an intellectual perspective to the Cold War and explains how particular intellectual currents played important roles in shaping the antagonism in the American-Soviet relationship.

This thesis is not the first to regard the Cold War as an unusual human conflict or original in arguing that its antagonists did not primarily engage in material warfare. It seeks to argue that though proxy wars did exist, at the heart of the conflict was not a dispute over life, property, wealth, the right to rule, or any other manner of material objectives, but a fundamental rift in the understanding of political theory and its epistemology. The basic rationale for the Cold War that this thesis argues is not immediately obvious to the casual historian accustomed to understanding

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<sup>11</sup> Berlin, "Marxist Versus Non-Marxist Ideas in Soviet Policy," 6, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 569, fol. 103.

<sup>12</sup> In a letter to Berlin, Kennan took issue with the Soviet "undertaking to manipulate human nature," showing moral concern similar to Berlin's. Quoted from Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Public Policy Papers, George F. Kennan Papers, Letter from Kennan to Berlin, 19 Jun 1951, 2.

political conflicts in material terms. However, it was not possible for the Western world to perceive of the USSR as an enemy in the traditional, material sense alone, especially given that the two sides had been recent allies in the bloodiest war the world had witnessed. The initial uncertainty, even at the highest levels of the US government, regarding what was to become of the United States and Western Europe's relationship to the Soviet Union showed that antagonism was not inevitable or immediately obvious to Western political leaders. For the liberal West, the conflict with the Soviets, the "war" which makes the "Cold War," was informed by, among other factors, the intellectual and moral perceptions of the Soviet Union fashioned by thinkers such as Isaiah Berlin. This is not to say that Cold War intellectuals began or caused it, but rather that they articulated the underlying sentiment beneath the political and diplomatic tensions. In doing so, the same intellectuals helped to shape and define the Cold War, and became participants in it.

Thus the Cold War was about ideas in the most basic sense, such that capitalism and communism as opposing political theories only represented the very surface of the conflict. The Cold War was not merely fought over modes of production, or of social organization, it was a dispute over the very way truth and human purpose were understood to affect morality. While the material threat of a growing Soviet state was real, it was complemented by intellectual and moral challenges of the Soviet system. Soviet political philosophy offered an epistemological framework threatening intellectual foundations that thinkers in a long tradition of Anglo-American and liberal European political theory held dear.

Berlin, who felt himself part of a tradition of liberal political thought, felt obliged to respond, and in doing so he aligned intellectual patterns along nationalist lines, reconciling the ideological and political aspects of the Cold War that were not immediately related. However, the Cold War was more than a nationalist conflict, where the West simply saw the Soviets as a



threat because they were foreign. The Cold War cannot be simply understood in the conventional wisdom of “us” versus “them,” because that is not why intellectuals like Berlin viewed the Soviet Union as such a danger. The Soviet Union was dangerous because its political theories, and its basic moral philosophy stemmed out of an understanding of human history that intellectuals of the liberal Western tradition found to be indefensibly false and corrupt.

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This thesis challenges the notion of the academic as a neutral observer by regarding Isaiah Berlin as an active Cold War participant. In reformulating the intellectual’s role, this paper looks to add a new perspective to the Cold War and another element in how it is defined and conceived as a conflict. The objective of such a project is to understand why the West came to perceive the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics as a serious threat following World War II from an intellectual’s perspective. While recognizing the relevance and reality of the Cold War as a material conflict, this paper assigns vital importance to the epistemological and moral aspects of the Cold War to show that many of its stakes were in ideas. By looking into the life and works of one of the twentieth century’s most influential Western intellectuals, this thesis hopes to uncover the underlying moral rationale behind one of the most peculiar conflicts in modern history from the perspective of one of its actors.

Berlin did not explicitly articulate his conception of the Cold War as an intellectual conflict, as this paper suggests. However, it would be an injustice to his works to treat them as mere abstract theories of ideas or political philosophy. Rather, they reflect the fears, interests, and mood of a specific time and place. Berlin, more than anyone, was aware that ideas, especially political and moral ones, had material consequences and potential bearing on historical events. To understand Berlin is to grasp the mindset of a Cold War liberal, who in

trying to explain and warn against the dangers of Soviet Communism also underwent a thorough self-examination.

Chapter one examines Berlin's engagement with nineteenth century Russian literature and ideas, setting up Berlin's approach to the Cold War in order to ultimately understand his critique of Soviet political theory. Chapter two discusses Berlin's understanding of national culture to argue that he severed his opposition to the Soviet Union from a broader civilizational conflict with Russia. Specifically, chapter two argues that Berlin made his challenge to Soviet epistemology in his famous defense of value pluralism, which demanded a revision to twentieth century liberalism. Chapter three focuses on the Cold War consequences for the intellectual, asserting that the redefined battlefields of an intellectual conflict entailed that intellectuals themselves participate as warriors.

## Historiography

Central to this project is the concept of the Cold War, what it is and how historians have understood it. Though the Cold War is a term universally familiar in today's historical parlance, its use was not similarly universal contemporaneous to the events which the term describes, however they might be defined. The specific term is attributed to George Orwell who used it in an October 1945 article "You and the Atomic Bomb" to describe a potential state of world affairs where there exists "two or three monstrous super-states, each possessed of a weapon by which millions of people can be wiped out in a few seconds, dividing the world between them."<sup>13</sup>

Orwell's primary concern in the article was to analyze the potential impact of the atomic bomb on the world's geopolitical landscape following the Second World War. When Orwell's article was first published, the atomic bomb had only been introduced to the public imagination only a few weeks prior when its destructive power was unleashed on Imperial Japan in wartime. While Orwell may have overstated the importance of the development of weapons in world affairs—he argued "it is a commonplace that the history of civilisation is largely the history of weapons"—his vision of a world of superpower relations was enormously prescient.<sup>14</sup>

Orwell's use of the term "Cold War" apparently went largely unnoticed at the time.<sup>15</sup> The term came into widespread use at a later stage and only on the American side, to signal a "concept of warfare against the Soviet Union."<sup>16</sup> In the Soviet Union, on the other hand, the term was not in formal parlance before the Gorbachev era.<sup>17</sup> Since Orwell's article, both before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the term has often been adopted in the academic

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<sup>13</sup> George Orwell, "You and the Atomic Bomb," in *The Complete Works of George Orwell, vol. 17, I Belong to the Left* (London: Random House, 1986), 320.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

<sup>15</sup> Anders Stephanson, "Fourteen Notes on the Very Concept of the Cold War," *H-Diplo* (2005), 4.

<sup>16</sup> Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

community, at least in the English-speaking world, to describe the state of global political affairs dominated by relations between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The view of the Cold War as a primarily political and diplomatic conflict is shared among historians of many persuasions. One proponent of this Orwell-inspired definition of the term “Cold War” is Odd Arne Westad, who in his book *The Global Cold War* gives the definition as “the period in which the global conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union dominated international affairs, roughly between 1945 and 1991.”<sup>18</sup> This definition, or some very similar derivative, is also used by John Lewis Gaddis in his book *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War*. For Gaddis, the American perception of the Soviet threat was a material one, concerned with the upsetting of traditional balances of power in global affairs and the rising danger of military conflict, atomic or otherwise.<sup>19</sup> In another of Gaddis’ books, *The Cold War: A New History*, he merely adds that “the Cold War was fought at different levels in dissimilar ways in multiple places over a very long time” acknowledging complexities but not altering the Cold War’s defining features.<sup>20</sup> While Westad and Gaddis offer vastly different interpretations of the Cold War, its origins, and geopolitical centers, they agree on the basic premise of the Cold War as a geopolitical conflict.

Though helpful as a means of situating the Cold War into a concise and bounded historical timeframe, the notion of the Cold War as merely describing a historical period marked by political conflict between the two great powers is insufficient. It does not adequately answer major questions of motivations and interests. Neither does it make clear when either side came to perceive the other as a threat or whether the feeling was mutual, let alone how and why the state

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Long Peace: Inquiries into the History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 20-48.

<sup>20</sup> John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), xi.

of antagonism came to be. By conceiving of the conflict in political or diplomatic terms, histories of the Cold War such as those by Gaddis or Westad attribute Cold War fears as a mutually shared sense of existential threat, without delving further into either side's psychology and thinking. As was the case beginning with Orwell, potential atomic destruction occupied a significant portion of the imagination of scholars such as Gaddis or Westad, and though their analysis of the Cold War was far more complex, they do not delve deeply enough into the conflict's intellectual history to involve a figure such as Berlin as a participant in the conflict.

A more deliberate definition of the "Cold War" is required to understand Berlin in its context and more importantly to understand the Cold War as a concept through Berlin's lens. Anders Stephanson provides such an examination of the idea and definition of the Cold War in his essay "Fourteen Notes on the Very Concept of the Cold War." Stephanson's essay is a compilation of provisional notes in which the author attempts to discuss the problems with the "conception" and "periodization" of what historians mean when they refer to the "Cold War."<sup>21</sup>

Though inspired by a series of debates on the "periodization" of the Cold War, Stephanson's essay focuses more importantly on the problem of the Cold War's "conception." By "periodization," Stephanson refers to historians' ability to define a conceptual beginning and end to the Cold War, to put dates on the matter. To answer the question of periodization is impossible, Stephanson notes, because upon doing so we quickly reveal "the extent to which the concept of the cold war is radically 'under-determined.'"<sup>22</sup> As such, Stephanson embarks on an attempt to determine the conception of the notion of "war" itself; that is to say, what it actually was, how it could be defined against peace, and how it begins and ends.

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<sup>21</sup> Stephanson, "Fourteen Notes," 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

The fourteen points that make up the body of Stephanson's essay begin with a tongue in cheek analysis of the Cold War in the fictional eyes of Ian Fleming's James Bond and John le Carre's Alec Leamas, whose caricatured views are of a clear battle between the good liberals and evil communists. Stephanson subsequently turns from the localized Cold War itself to broader and more ancient notions of war and peace as understood by thinkers as early as Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas before turning back to Franklin Roosevelt and Kennan among other primary actors in the Cold War era. Stephanson's conclusion is twofold "(i) the cold war was a US project, and (ii) its nature or logic was laid out (unintentionally) by Franklin D. Roosevelt during the 1939-1941 [sic] and epitomized later in the notion of 'unconditional surrender.'"<sup>23</sup>

Roosevelt's definition of war, Stephanson argues, borrowed from Augustine who defined and derived war in terms of its goal of peace.<sup>24</sup> Whatever was not a true peace, a *pax vera*, was war. So long as a true enemy existed, a *pax vera* was impossible.

Once, on closer inspection, it turned out that the Soviet Union did not fit positively the bill of a true friend, it could logically only be a true enemy, not an equal enemy of the duellist kind but an absolute enemy with whom there could be no real peace, only a peace, in Augustinian terms, "not worthy even of the name of peace."<sup>25</sup>

Roosevelt's conception of the United States' relationship with the Soviet Union thus introduces a problem with the term "Cold War" that as Stephanson points out, is "both a metaphor and not a metaphor," because its meaning "hovers uncertainly between war and war-like. Absolute hostility, the antithesis of peace, is coupled with the absence of a real war."<sup>26</sup> The lack of combat makes the adjective "cold" an appropriate modifier for the noun "war."

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 19.

Stephanson's "Fourteen Notes" sets up a useful framework for thinking about the Cold War as a conflict, or equally as a non-conflict. Specifically, his conception of the Cold War sets up a significantly broader definition by stating that:

the cold war is war-like in every sense except the military. Its truth is 'war for unconditional surrender' but the reality is the kind of war one has when war itself is impossible. It is war as an ideological, political and economic claim to universality, taking place not in the two-dimensional space of traditional battles but mediated through other realms when not, as universality, actually eliminating space altogether.<sup>27</sup>

By accounting for how the Cold War could still be conceived of as a war without military conflict, Stephanson not only makes up for the shortcomings of defining the Cold War only in political or diplomatic terms, but provides a useful schematic for looking at it in a new historical light. Using Stephanson's conception of the Cold War, this thesis will examine the intellectual's role in fashioning the conflict. Building on Stephanson's analysis, this thesis will explain how it was that intellectuals, such as Isaiah Berlin, came to be positioned at the heart of the Cold War conflict and how they played a central role in it.

While political or diplomatic histories tend to overlook the importance of the intellectual's work as a central motivator of what came to be perceived as a conflict, few intellectual histories or biographies adequately explain the role of the academic—the ivory tower intellectual—in the context of the Cold War. The most famous example of the intellectual as Cold War participant, and a major focus of Cold War historians, is George Kennan. The literatures on Kennan and the policy ramifications of the Long Telegram are far too extensive to be summarized in a few sentences. However, the fascination with Kennan tends to stem out of the tendency to conceive of the Cold War in primarily political or diplomatic terms.<sup>28</sup> Thus

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>28</sup> I do not wish to imply that all studies of Kennan show this tendency to conceive of the Cold War as a political or diplomatic conflict. I simply wish to point out that the perception of Kennan as

Kennan is typically regarded as a Cold War actor through his contributions during his time and in his official capacity at the State Department.

A “pure” intellectual such as Isaiah Berlin is seldom studied specifically as participant of and a lens to Cold War history. Biographies of Berlin and analysis of his work in various fields exist to understand and examine his thought from many angles. However, their acknowledged purpose is typically to understand Berlin, his mind, and thoughts, not to make sense of the Cold War. Often, Berlin scholarship will use the Cold War as a backdrop to contextualize and situate Berlin’s work within specific historical circumstances. Michael Ignatieff’s biography of Isaiah Berlin is an especially strong example of such scholarship. While enormously informative in helping students and critics of Berlin understand his thinking and frame of mind, works such as Ignatieff’s biography are of little use in reverse: in trying to understand the Cold War from the perspective of the intellectual.<sup>29</sup>

One useful work of Berlin scholarship is George Crowder’s book *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism*. In that work, Crowder provides an interpretation of Berlin’s focus on the threat of Soviet Communism that sets up crucial concepts for the writing of this thesis. In the third chapter titled “The Betrayal of Freedom,” Crowder illustrates the extent to which Berlin was a “Cold Warrior” whose penetrating criticism of Soviet political theory came alongside an equally salient commentary on the limits of the dominant political theories of the West.<sup>30</sup> Using sources mostly from Berlin’s published essays and articles from the 1950s, Crowder links Berlin’s attack

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predominantly an influencer of policy is consistent with a view of the Cold War through a political or diplomatic lens.

<sup>29</sup> A similar critique can be made of Claude Galipeau’s *Isaiah Berlin’s Liberalism* and Joshua Cherniss’ *A Mind and Its Time: The Development of Isaiah Berlin’s Political Thought*. This view is also true of various volumes of essays dedicated to understanding Berlin’s work including Edna Margalit and Avishai Margalit’s *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration*, George Crowder and Henry Hardy’s *The One and the Many: Reading Isaiah Berlin*, and Mark Lilla, Ronald Dworkin and Robert Silvers’ *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*.

<sup>30</sup> George Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), 51.



on Soviet Communism with its view of history. Generally accommodating toward Berlin's work, Crowder's explicit purpose is to "provide an accessible introduction" to Berlin's thought that defends a particular interpretation of the same.<sup>31</sup> That particular interpretation is a faithful and sympathetic one, largely seeking to frame Berlin's work in a positive light, as Berlin himself saw it.

In his sympathy to Berlin, however, Crowder can be (and has been) criticized for allowing Berlin too much leeway and becoming too enamored and uncritical with his thought.<sup>32</sup> More importantly, Crowder sets his sights too narrowly. Though his analysis of Berlin's thought adds enormous insight into Berlin's state of mind and his motivations, Crowder does not extend his analysis far enough to spell out the Cold War implications of Berlin's ideas from that time. Crowder points out that Berlin was "a declared opponent of 'totalitarianism'"—an observation immediately obvious to anyone familiar with Berlin's work—but stops short of adequately articulating how exactly Berlin understood the Soviet Union in Cold War terms.<sup>33</sup> While Crowder's work is of enormous use in identifying Berlin's active role in the Cold War, his primary objective is to understand Berlin, not to gain an improved understanding of the Cold War.

This thesis builds on the notion of Berlin as a "Cold Warrior" insofar as it implies that he saw the Cold War as an intellectual conflict. By repositioning Berlin's role to that of an active Cold War participant, this thesis aims to explicitly articulate elements of Berlin's work obscure to even Berlin himself in order to understand the frame of mind that gripped the intellectual West during the Cold War.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., ix.

<sup>32</sup> Chad Cyrenne, review of *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism*, by George Crowder, *Ethics* 119, no. 1 (October 2008): 171.

<sup>33</sup> Crowder, 44.

## Chapter One: An Intellectual Conception of the Soviet Union

### Nineteenth Century Origins of a Twentieth Century Problem

Berlin was abundantly familiar with the world of nineteenth century Russian ideas. This was the world of Herzen, Bakunin, Chernyshevsky, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, writers and thinkers whom Berlin wrote about often and referenced widely. They also influenced Berlin greatly, and like them he understood the importance and relevance of ideas in the material world.<sup>34</sup> Recognizing their influence on him, Berlin defended and promoted nineteenth century Russian ideas in his role as one of the foremost academics reading and studying Russian literature and Russian thought in the English-speaking world.<sup>35</sup> He championed Russian writers and sought to introduce them into literary discourse, in some cases being directly responsible for the publication and translation of Russian works in English.<sup>36</sup> Many Russian thinkers and writers who were previously unknown to the English-speaking world owed their revived reputations to Berlin and many more—Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Turgenev among them—gained greater prominence because Berlin helped to keep them in the dominant intellectual and literary discourse.<sup>37</sup> Yet by choosing who belonged in that discourse, Berlin would also shape the way nineteenth century Russian thought was represented outside Russia.

In defending and promoting particular Russian ideas, Berlin represented Russia as the Russia of its literature. By identifying a specific set of thinkers and writers as representative of the character of mid-nineteenth century Russia, Berlin added to their prominence. Thus figures

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<sup>34</sup> Berlin, “The Pursuit of the Ideal,” in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> David Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America’s Soviet Experts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 157.

<sup>36</sup> Ignatieff, 209.

<sup>37</sup> Aileen Kelly, Introduction to Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), xiv. Mark Lilla also notes that Berlin “clearly enjoyed picking up the crumbling collected works of a half-forgotten thinker, or one considered beyond the pale, and finding high philosophical drama in them.” Quoted from Foreword to *Against the Current*, xii.

like Dostoevsky and Tolstoy were more than writers, they were also the gatekeepers of the Russian conscience, a way for the rest of the world to access the Russian mind. To be sure, the same figures claimed to represent Russian thought and the right to speak for Russia and its culture—one only needs to read Dostoevsky or Turgenev to recognize their self-conscious claims.<sup>38</sup> Yet right or wrong, Berlin fully sympathized with them and respected their authority to represent Russia as its intellectual elite. Berlin found great resonance in a paraphrased line he attributed to Korolenko, “My country is not Russia, my country is Russian literature.”<sup>39</sup> Berlin took Korolenko to mean that Russian literature “was the natural home of what might be called self-conscious critical Russian thought.”<sup>40</sup> It was out of sympathy to this predominantly view that Berlin helped to fashion a distinctly Russian identity that has since resonated with the English speaking-imagination.

This was the Russia diagnosed with an inferiority complex. This was the Russia that the West came to view as backward and out of sync with the rest of Europe; at the same time part of Metternich’s concert but also an oriental enigma. This was effectively an earlier version of the Russia that Kennan would write about in his “X Article,” as “frustrated, discontented, hopeless of finding self-expression.”<sup>41</sup>

In diagnosing Russia’s inferiority complex and projecting it to the English-speaking world, Berlin was well served by engaging with mid-nineteenth century Russian thought. He saw Russia’s role in defeating Napoleon at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a turning point in the history of Russia and of Europe. By successfully repelling Napoleon’s invasion, Berlin

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<sup>38</sup> Aileen Kelly, Introduction to *Russian Thinkers*, xiii.

<sup>39</sup> Berlin, “The Russian Preoccupation with History,” 5, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 597, fol. 152.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Kennan, “The Sources of Soviet Conduct,” *Foreign Affairs* 25 no. 4 (Jul. 1947), 567.

argued, Russia had unwittingly and perhaps unintentionally announced its previously subdued presence in the European concert.<sup>42</sup> In the ideas that occupied Russian intellectuals of the mid-nineteenth century, Berlin identified a new starting point for Russian thought. The importance of the mid-nineteenth century intellectuals, for Berlin, was emphasized by their articulation of a worldview that Berlin ascribed as characteristic of a particularly Russian psyche at a time when Russian thought began to sprout out from the intellectual currents of Western Europe. Whereas the rest of Europe experienced a wave of liberal revolutions in 1848, Berlin argued “that the Liberal Revolution in Russia, comparable to 1848, did not occur until 1905—and then under very different circumstances, and, as the world knows, with very different results.”<sup>43</sup> As such, another strand of Berlin’s work sought to identify a psychological state present in Russian thought from the mid-nineteenth century onward.

Russian intellectuals of the nineteenth century had, in Berlin’s view, a special preoccupation with history, unique among Western intellectual classes and unheard of in the other countries of Europe. In a number of works on the subject, the first of which surfaced at least as early as February 1952 at Haverford College in a lecture titled “Marxist Versus Non-Marxist Ideas in Soviet Policy,” Berlin identified a peculiar Russian view of history that would become immensely influential to Soviet political philosophy.<sup>44</sup> Subsequent to his February 1952 lecture at Haverford, Berlin gave a seminar at Harvard in December 1962 titled “The Addiction of Russian Intellectuals to Historicism” and presented a radio broadcast for the BBC in December 1973 titled “The Russian Preoccupation with History.” The three lectures were

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<sup>42</sup> Berlin, “The Russian Preoccupation with History,” 3, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 597, fol. 151.

<sup>43</sup> Berlin, “1848 in the History of Russian Thought,” 2, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 426, fol. 3.

<sup>44</sup> Berlin, “Marxist Versus Non-Marxist Ideas in Soviet Policy,” 4, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 569, fol. 101. Given how widely Berlin lectured and how scattered records of his speeches and notes are, it is difficult to pinpoint a specific date of origin for this idea.

different iterations of the same argument, with the ideas revised and refined as time progressed. As the timing of his lectures suggests, Berlin's interest in nineteenth century Russia thought stemmed from a desire to understand the origins of Soviet Policy.<sup>45</sup> As such, Berlin's various works on Russian intellectuals and their historicism were always composed as historical narratives. Yet history was not Berlin's main concern. Rather, the historical narrative was merely a means of illustrating the thinking behind the precursor to Soviet policy.

After the defeat of Napoleon in 1814, Berlin posited, Russia was an underdeveloped country of illiterate peasants and Cossacks with a small intellectual class that looked to Western Europe for ideas. Berlin traced few, if any, remarkable ideas, ideas of primary importance to European intellectual life, to Russia. Rather Berlin saw Russian thinkers as having a tendency to import ideas from the West and to adopt them with an unusual fervor that amounted to fanaticism. For Berlin, the eagerness with which Russian thinkers received Western ideas also led them to profoundly alter them.<sup>46</sup> Whether it was true that Russian intellectualism truly lacked originality was not certain even to Berlin who merely makes the claim based on a lack of evidence to prove otherwise. However, the narrative does, in Berlin's mind, adequately explain why so many Russian intellectuals took on imported ideas with an unprecedented fanaticism.

Ahistorical as Berlin's narrative may have been, his observations regarding Russians and historicism find evidence in prominent works of mid-nineteenth century Russian literature. The preoccupation with liberal reforms, the advancement of the Russian condition, status and freedom of the serfs, take a certain grip in the minds of prominent thinkers and writers of that period. Turgenev's famous character Barazov from his novel *Fathers and Children* is a nihilist

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<sup>45</sup> The Harvard lecture can be found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 581, fols. 1-22. The BBC Broadcast can be found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 597, fols. 150-158.

<sup>46</sup> Berlin, "The Addiction of Russian Intellectuals to Historicism," 2, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 581, fol. 4.

primarily occupied with the advancement of human civilization through science and objectivity.<sup>47</sup> Dostoevsky's discussion of the relationship between liberal secularism and religion in promoting or impeding historical progress comes to a head in his celebrated "Grand Inquisitor" scene from *Brothers Karamazov*.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps most famously, the issue of historical determination is an explicit theme in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, such that Tolstoy's epilogue can be read as a desperate attempt to make sense of events that no knowable historical law can fathom.<sup>49</sup>

Out of moments in Russian literature such as these, Berlin created, or at least identified and unearthed, an inferiority complex inherent to a supposedly Russian psyche. Regardless of how many Russians self-consciously occupied such a state of mind, it was this state of mind that scholars of Russian literature, Berlin chief among them, would lead much of the rest of the world to believe.

Though the aesthetic value of such famous moments in Russian literature is indisputable, Western intellectuals such as Berlin contributed to their authors' rise to prominence outside Russia by elevating them into a dominant ideological discourse as representatives of the Russian conscience. Literary though its origins might have been, the Russian state of mind that the West came to know nonetheless achieved broader prominence, as is evident in Kennan's Long Telegram and "X Article," materially affecting how the West came to perceive Russia politically. Thus the ideas that shaped the Russian mind in the mid-nineteenth century would play a central role in the later Cold War.

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<sup>47</sup> See Ivan Turgenev, *Fathers and Children*.

<sup>48</sup> See Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Brothers Karamazov*.

<sup>49</sup> See Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*.

## The Romantic Influence

Among the ideas that became popular among an influential portion of nineteenth century Russian intellectuals, Berlin argued, were those of the German Romantic movement prevalent in Western Europe at the time.<sup>50</sup> The exact details and nuances of the political theories originating in the German Romantic movement are beyond the scope and requirements of this thesis. For current purposes, it suffices to condense Berlin's already stripped down summary of the central concepts of the Romantic movement to the idea "that every man and every human group, had some kind of goal for which in some sense it was created, some kind of end or mission to fulfill which was its very essence."<sup>51</sup> Berlin argued Russian intellectuals were introduced to this core concept of the Romantic Movement while living in a still medieval nation of barbarians, causing them to develop a feeling of inferiority among the more advanced nations of Europe. From this sense of inferiority, they subsequently became obsessed with the future and Russia's destiny in it. This obsession, Berlin explained, led to the fanaticism that was to be characteristic of and unique among Russian intellectuals beginning in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>52</sup>

It was out of these unique intellectual conditions, according to Berlin, that Russian intellectuals developed a special preoccupation with the role of their nation and their people in history. Out of a feeling of national and cultural inferiority, there was an unusual urgency to understand what went wrong and what could explain Russia's backwardness. Their assumption was: "If we can only discover what the pattern of history is, then we shall understand ourselves,

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<sup>50</sup> Berlin, "The Addiction of Russian Intellectuals to Historicism," 4, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 581, fol. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Berlin, "The Russian Preoccupation with History," 2, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 597, fol. 151.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

we understand where we belong, we understand what the next move is.”<sup>53</sup> The group of intellectuals that came to take historicism seriously formed what Berlin called the “intelligentsia,” a term of Russian origin describing a Russian phenomenon of “a movement of educated, morally sensitive Russians stirred to indignation by an obscurantist Church; by a brutally oppressive State indifferent to the squalor, poverty and illiteracy in which the great majority of the population lived; by a governing class which they saw as trampling on human rights and impeding moral intellectual progress.”<sup>54</sup> This group of writers and thinkers, Berlin argued, sought to improve Russia’s condition through intellectual inquiry.

Thus, according to Berlin, the Russian intelligentsia’s desire to discover historical patterns took inspiration from the success of the natural sciences.<sup>55</sup> Trying to emulate Newton’s progress in physics, for example, a certain subset of historians and philosophers of history attempted to “extend historical knowledge to fill gaps in the past (and, at times, to build into the limitless gap of the future) by applying ‘scientific’ method.”<sup>56</sup> While Berlin did not claim this phenomenon of attempting to make history a science to be original to Russia, he did argue that it was in Russia where thinkers grasped it with such a special fervor that the prospect of understanding history as a science took on a life of its own.<sup>57</sup> It was this obsession with trying to understand history as a science, Berlin argued, which grew to inspire the main intellectual sentiments of the Russian Revolution and the creation of the USSR.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., fol. 153v.

<sup>54</sup> Berlin, “The Survival of the Russian Intelligentsia,” in *The Soviet Mind* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), 167.

<sup>55</sup> Berlin, “The Concept of Scientific History,” in *Concepts and Categories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 138.

<sup>56</sup> Berlin, “Historical Inevitability,” in *Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 96.

<sup>57</sup> Berlin, “The Addiction of Russian Intellectuals to Historicism,” 22, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 81, fol. 24.

<sup>58</sup> Berlin, “The Russian Preoccupation with History,” 16, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 597, fol. 157v.



The accuracy of Berlin's narrative of nineteenth century Russian addiction to historicism is not only uncertain but also impossible to prove. Berlin's account was thus less insightful for its historical accuracy than its description of a Russian state of mind. Berlin's explanation of the Russian thought diagnosed a psychological sentiment in the country's tradition and merely used historical narrative as a device to achieve that end.

Russia may have had thinkers who espoused original ideas. Likewise, the particular group of nineteenth century intellectuals in question may neither have felt culturally inferior to the rest of Europe nor intended to develop a preoccupation with historicism. However, these perceived moments in the history of Russian ideas helped Berlin to explain Russia's psychological state then and the Soviet Union's psychological state during the Cold War. Furthermore, these psychological states are merely what the West came to perceive through their own intellectuals, among them Berlin himself, who explained and defended them using analysis of Russia's literature from the nineteenth century onward.

### **The Soviet System**

If indeed Russia had an inferiority complex as Berlin suggested, then the success of the Bolshevik Revolution was, if not inevitable, at least highly probable. Given the psychological condition of Russian intellectualism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Berlin argued that Marxism provided what the Bolsheviks saw as a natural solution to their problems.<sup>59</sup> The Russian state of mind that grew out of the desire to find Russia's place in world history would eventually consume and digest Marxism, Berlin argued, with the same fanaticism that inspired the very desire to find historical laws in the first place. Berlin saw the fanatical adoption

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<sup>59</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "Soviet Russian Culture," in *The Soviet Mind*, 135.

of Hegelian conceptions of history governed by scientific laws as inspiring much self-absorbed questioning among the Russian intelligentsia. He also understood how subsequent generations of Russian intellectuals became attracted to Marxism as a remedy for their own insecurities. In a 1957 essay for *Foreign Affairs*,<sup>60</sup> Berlin wrote “Marxism contained all the elements which the young *révoltés* in Russia were looking for. It claimed to be able to demonstrate the proper goals of human existence in terms of a pattern of history of which there was 'scientific' proof.”<sup>61</sup> It was as if by extension that Marxism became the self-prescribed cure for Russia’s inferiority complex.

Thus Berlin’s logic regarding the psychological state of Russian intellectuals applied itself to explain the success of the Bolshevik Revolution. Russia was eager to find its place in the world and sought after a scientific explanation that would in turn provide solutions for a brighter future. Lenin, who Berlin claimed to have regarded Hegel “with the piety due to a direct ancestor,” leveraged Russia’s preexisting inferiority complex and took choice aspects of Marxist theory and distorted them for purposes specific to the Bolsheviks.<sup>62</sup>

On the one hand, a false idea took hold of a people whose imagination had been conditioned to be receptive to deceiving promises by almost a century of intellectual inquiry, as “the conditions of Russian life, which moulded both [Lenin] and it, in part created the need for religious certainty and messianic doctrine which Marxism provided.”<sup>63</sup> On the other, Lenin took an already pliable idea, already riddled with a falseness that defies comprehension of the empirical observer, twisted and reformulated it to give it a life of its own and claimed it as the solution that would settle centuries of Russian insecurities. Yet the promise of a scientific

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<sup>60</sup> This essay was originally published in two parts and has since been put together as it was originally written by Berlin’s editor Henry Hardy in a 2004 volume *The Soviet Mind* and given the title “Soviet Russian Culture.” I have chosen to use the edited version.

<sup>61</sup> Berlin, “Soviet Russian Culture,” in *The Soviet Mind*, 135.

<sup>62</sup> Berlin, “The Arts in Russia Under Stalin,” in *The Soviet Mind*, 13.

<sup>63</sup> Berlin, “Soviet Russian Culture,” in *The Soviet Mind*, 135.

solution to cure Russia's insecurities was not all that Lenin and his comrades brought to the table, Berlin argued. Rather, Berlin suggested that Lenin's original contribution was the authoritarian element, which differentiated Soviet Communism from its Marxist roots. Lenin's contribution was "the conception of the Party as a sect ruled ruthlessly by its elders and demanding from its members the total sacrifice upon its altar of all that they most cherished."<sup>64</sup>

The solution that Lenin and the Bolsheviks found for Russia's psychological anxieties of the previous century deeply unsettled Berlin, who was critical of historical inevitability and the notion of history as a science to begin with.<sup>65</sup> By standards acceptable to Western liberalism, Soviet thought was too attached to historicism and by extension to laws of historical determinism.<sup>66</sup> Taken to its logical endpoints, any view of history as governed by scientific laws—whether Hegelian, Marxist, or an ill-begotten Soviet derivative of some combination of both—deprived the individual of free will and moral agency. Thus Soviet Communism as it was experienced in the twentieth century more than just violated liberal values of individual freedom, but rather rejected the very foundations of liberal political thought.

The basic problem, for Berlin's liberal affinities, was not merely that the Soviet regime was totalitarian and oppressive—though he did see it as both.<sup>67</sup> Liberal political thought by definition opposed tyranny as working against freedom as a moral end. Yet, Berlin pointed out in "Two Concepts of Liberty" that autocracy may not inherently contradict traditional notions of freedom.<sup>68</sup> Dictatorship was not the root of the problem, for if Stalin afforded his subjects political freedoms—meaning civil liberties—as a benevolent dictator could conceivably do, the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Berlin, "The Concept of Scientific History," in *Concepts and Categories*, 171.

<sup>66</sup> Berlin, "Marxist Versus Non-Marxist Ideas in Soviet Policy," 5, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 569, fol. 102.

<sup>67</sup> Berlin, "Generalissimo Stalin and the Art of Government," *Foreign Affairs* 30, no. 2 (Jan. 1952), 199.

<sup>68</sup> Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," from *Liberty*, 176.

problems in the Soviet system would not have been solved. Heinous as the brutality and oppression of the Soviet regime were, totalitarianism and oppression were merely symptoms of a larger problem rooted in the fundamentals of the Soviet worldview, which misunderstood human purpose by altogether rejecting human agency.

Berlin's moral philosophy, and that of his variety of liberalism, presupposed agency in the sense of having free will, and required autonomous individuals acting as independent moral beings. This assumption of free will was necessary to explain Berlin's sympathy for Alexander Herzen's notion that "the ultimate goal of life was life itself; that the day and the hour were ends in themselves, not a means to another day or another experience."<sup>69</sup> Agency was an empirically observable state of being, important because it was factually obvious, not because it furthered some other end. Berlin rejected the Marxist notion—later to be adopted by the Soviets—that "the 'true' (or 'deeper') causes of human behaviour lie not in the specific circumstances of an individual life or in the individual's thoughts or volitions...but in a pervasive interrelationship between a vast variety of such lives with their natural and man-made environment."<sup>70</sup> By extension, morality, as it pertained to questions of political philosophy, became entirely predicated on the freedom of human beings to act as moral actors capable of bearing responsibility for their actions. For Berlin's moral system to make sense, human beings must possess free will and the ability to act independently, unhindered by laws of history or other metaphysical forces. Yet the Soviets, Berlin argued, had rejected this very basic premise of empirical observation in their efforts to "squeeze the facts into a preconceived fashion" of

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<sup>69</sup> Berlin, Introduction to Alexander Herzen, *My Life and Thoughts*, trans. Constance Garnett (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), xlii.

<sup>70</sup> Berlin, "Historical Inevitability," from *Liberty*, 99.

history.<sup>71</sup> Not sharing foundational assumptions, Soviet Communism and liberalism stood no chance of mutual compatibility.

Of human agency and free will, Berlin shared a similar position with Kennan. In an exchange of letters with his friend following the 1950 publication of his essay “Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century,” Berlin revealed just how his and Kennan’s ideas resonated together. Inspired by Kant’s assertion that men were “ends in themselves” and Kennan’s enthusiastic response to his essay, Berlin wrote that a fundamental premise of Western civilization according to liberal thought was the notion that,

every human being is assumed to possess the capacity to choose what to do, and what to be, however narrow the limits within which his choice may lie, however hemmed in by circumstances beyond his control; that all human love and respect rests upon the attribution of conscious motives in this sense; that all the categories, the concepts, in terms of which we think about and act towards one another... all this becomes meaningless unless we think of human beings as capable of pursuing ends for their own sakes by deliberate acts of choice—which alone makes nobility noble and sacrifices sacrifices.<sup>72</sup>

It follows from Berlin’s logic that arbitrary rule, limitations on speech, and the suppression of thought—all considered among the most heinous consequences of Stalin and his regime—were only manifestations of a more fundamental problem in the Soviet understanding of the mechanisms of history. These terrible consequences were merely the product of political theories corrupted, abused, and appropriated by the Soviet system beginning with Lenin. None of the dire consequences of the fanatical Soviet experiment with Marxism were the cause of its error. The cause, rather, lay in the way in which the Soviet system of thought believed history to work, which ruled out the very possibility of free will.

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<sup>71</sup> Berlin, “The Addiction of Russian Intellectuals to Historicism,” 22, from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 581, fol. 24.

<sup>72</sup> Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Public Policy Papers, George F. Kennan Papers, Letter from Berlin to Kennan, 13 Feb 1951, 2.

Berlin's problem with the Soviet regime and its way of thinking was thus not just that it deprived human beings of freedom through autocratic government. Rather Berlin objected to the Soviet rejection of human agency and moral responsibility along Marxist lines and its attempt to actualize the effects in the Soviet Union's political reality.<sup>73</sup> The root of the problem was in how the Soviet system, through its belief in the metaphysical laws of human history, deprived human beings—not just Soviet subjects, but all human beings—of an inherent dignity in their moral agency.

For Berlin, the horror of the Soviet distortion of Marxist morality extended even further than the fact that its political apparatus deprived human beings of agency. The Soviet worldview and its implicit political theory turned human beings from ends into means. Where historical laws were presupposed to exist, there could be no room for human beings as spontaneous, free, and independent moral agents. Rather human beings were reduced to being the raw material which history acted on in the same way that atoms were acted on by physics and chemistry. Fanatically enamored with the prestige of the sciences and their claim to natural truths, the Soviet regime restructured the concept of the society along scientific lines,

the values of which derive not from the desires or the moral sense of this or that individual's view of his ultimate ends but from some factual hypothesis or metaphysical dogma about history, or race, or national character in terms of which the answers to the question what is good, right, required, desirable, fitting can be 'scientifically' deduced, or intuited, or expressed in this or that kind of behavior.<sup>74</sup>

To Berlin, this pseudo-scientific element of Soviet political theory was not adequately described as morally reprehensible or aesthetically repugnant, it was utterly incoherent, it was false, it demeaned human beings and stripped away their status as autonomous moral agents, and it

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<sup>73</sup> Berlin, "Four Weeks in the Soviet Union," from *The Soviet Mind*, 123. Berlin further explains the tension between the governing class and the governed, whereby the latter treat the former's propaganda with an "amiable cynicism."

<sup>74</sup> Isaiah Berlin, "Political ideas in the Twentieth Century," *Foreign Affairs* 28, no. 3 (Apr. 1950), 379.

simply lacked a truth plainly evident in empirical experience. Consequently, this ideologically driven means of understanding global events translates into what both Berlin and Kennan identify as the Soviet regime's irresponsiveness to fact.<sup>75</sup>

Lacking moral agency, Berlin feared that human beings would merely become the base matter of history, useful not for their own ends but liable to be discarded into Marx's so called "rubbish heap of history" when they were no longer of use.<sup>76</sup> As such, Soviet political theory missed an essential observational truth of what Berlin understood to be human. This is what Berlin meant when he so frequently warned against Saint-Simon's prophesy about "replacing the government of people with the administration of things," an idea later abused by Stalin to term intellectuals as "engineers of human souls."<sup>77</sup> In rejecting the validity of the individual's moral agency, the Soviets' flawed view of history was offensive to the most elementary features of Berlin's liberal conception of the world. For the Soviet system, Hegel and Marx were icons because they articulated a scientific interpretation of history; for Berlin, the same reason made "Hegel and Marx such monstrous traitors to our civilization."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Kennan, "Long Telegram," 22, Berlin, "Marxist and Non-Marxist Ideas in Soviet Policy," 6, from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 569, fol. 103.

<sup>76</sup> Berlin, "European Union and its Vicissitudes," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 210.

<sup>77</sup> Berlin, "Soviet Russian Culture," in *The Soviet Mind*, 135.

<sup>78</sup> Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Public Policy Papers, George F. Kennan Papers, Letter from Berlin to Kennan, 13 Feb 1951, 2.

## Chapter Two: A Counter-Enlightenment Liberal's Response

### The Influence of Nationalism in the Cold War

Berlin was not a fervent nationalist given that he saw the nation as a modern creation and was not normatively attached to its existence. Nonetheless, he appreciated the extraordinary breadth and influence of nationalism in the world. “The need to belong to an easily identifiable group” was a natural human desire, Berlin argued, “as necessary to human existence as the need for food or shelter, security or procreation.”<sup>79</sup> Though the underlying desire to belong need not be expressed in the form of nationalism, for Berlin, as it was for Aristotle, some form of social group bounded by “common ancestry, common language, customs, traditions, memories, continuous occupancy of the same territory for long periods of time” had always been necessary throughout history—beginning with basic collective units such as families, clans, and tribes.<sup>80</sup> Modern nationalism, Berlin argued, had merely been elevated “into a conscious doctrine, at once the product, articulation and synthesis of states of consciousness that ha[d] been recognised by social observers as a force and a weapon.”<sup>81</sup>

However, the Cold War's intellectual conflict was not rooted in disputes traditionally associated with nationalistic warfare—security, sovereignty, and pride of a nation and its people, for example. However, Berlin's understanding of national culture, as created by a distinct way of thinking, necessarily, albeit probably unintentionally, aligned intellectual and nationalist concerns. Culture and nationalism were inseparable for Berlin, who argued “men are not self-created: they are born into a stream of tradition, above all of language, which shape[d] their

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<sup>79</sup> Berlin, “Nationalism and its Unforeseen Career,” in Columbia University Libraries, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Lionel Trilling Seminars, Manuscripts, 1976-1996, MS Coll Trilling Sem, Box 1, Berlin, 4/7/77 Manuscript, 11.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



thoughts and feelings, which they cannot shed or change, which form[ed] their inner life."<sup>82</sup>

Though not necessarily an essentialist view of national culture, Berlin's view implied at the very least that cultures maintained distinct and identifiable traditions, patterns, and characteristics.

Thus an impinging factor of Berlin's Cold War outlook was his national and cultural allegiance.

Though Berlin was born in Riga while it was still part of Imperial Russia to parents of Jewish ancestry, he showed an unmistakable self-consciousness of his political and cultural loyalty to England. "I confess to a pro-British bias," Berlin said in 1979, "I was educated in England, and have lived there for sixty years: all that I have been and done and thought is indelibly English. I cannot judge English values impartially, for they are part of me."<sup>83</sup> England to Berlin was the embodiment of an intellectual tradition, the homeland of thinkers who Berlin considered his intellectual predecessors — Hobbes, Hume, Locke, Smith, Bentham, Mill. Thus he was especially susceptible to embracing England's intellectual tradition of liberalism as part of its national myth. In claiming the liberal tradition as England's and his own, Berlin introduced a nationalist divide into a Cold War conflict that was primarily intellectual in origin. Of the English values that he saw as his own, Berlin said,

I count this as the greatest of intellectual and political good fortunes. They are the basis of what I believe: that decent respect for others and the toleration of dissent is better than pride and a sense of national mission; that liberty may be incompatible with, and better than, too much efficiency; that pluralism and untidiness are, to those who value freedom, better than the rigorous imposition of all embracing systems, no matter how rational and disinterested, better than the rule of majorities against which there is no appeal. All this is deeply and uniquely English, and I freely admit that I am steeped in it, and cannot breathe freely save in a society where these values are, for the most part, taken for granted.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Berlin, "The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 41.

<sup>83</sup> Berlin, "The Three Strands in My Life," 2-3, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 522, fol. 288-9.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, fol. 289.

In arguing that a common intellectual tradition was an essential binding force of twentieth century nationalism, Berlin implicitly identified a degree of unity between European nations by way of their common intellectual traditions.

Berlin had a tendency to discuss the “Western tradition” of political thought in “central concepts” beginning with the Greeks and in doing so, implied some kind of unity that the British intellectual tradition shared with the rest of Europe and even the United States by looking to Plato and Homer as its forefathers.<sup>85</sup> To distinguish individual cultures from within the bigger European whole, Berlin turned to his interpretation of Giambattista Vico, the father of “the modern concept of culture.”<sup>86</sup>

From Vico, Berlin understood that culture “lies in the past experience of the human race, which, from its earliest origins, may be read in its mythology, its language, its social and religious institutions,” and in doing so extracted particular strands of thought and attributed their origins and ownership to groups of intellectuals along particular national, linguistic, or cultural lines.<sup>87</sup> It was owing to this conception of ideas as the product of particular cultures that Berlin was able to attribute the Enlightenment to the French, Romanticism to the Germans, and Empiricism to the British. Russian thought from the mid-nineteenth century still vaguely belonged within European intellectual currents, Berlin argued, but had begun to branch out and take on a life of its own.<sup>88</sup> The division was not complete, however, until the Bolshevik Revolution severed Soviet political thought from the European mainstream entirely.

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<sup>85</sup> Berlin, “The Divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities,” in *Against the Current*, 127. Berlin, “The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will,” in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 221.

<sup>86</sup> Berlin, “Giambattista Vico and Cultural History,” in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 62.

<sup>87</sup> Berlin, “The Philosophical Ideas of Giambattista Vico,” in *Three Critics of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 55-6.

<sup>88</sup> Berlin, “The Russian Preoccupation with History,” 3, in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Berlin 597, fol. 151.

By identifying Lenin's ideas as the product of a fanatical interpretation of Marxist thought largely divorced from Marxism itself, Berlin distinguished Soviet thought after the Bolshevik Revolution from its Russian predecessor and established a clear break between the two. In part, Berlin managed to establish a break because he had a firm understanding of Russian ideas from the nineteenth century to begin with. His confidence in his interpretation of earlier Russian thought provided a yardstick with which to contrast the results of the Bolshevik Revolution. The 1917 revolution, Berlin argued, deviated from previous patterns of Russian thinking and "did not follow the lines that most of [the mid-nineteenth century] writers and talkers had anticipated."<sup>89</sup> While the Russian addiction to historicism began in the mid-nineteenth century, Bolshevik fanaticism was of a different scale and yielded a different kind of intellectual dialogue, entirely unattached to European ideas.

### **The Cleavage Between Russian and Soviet Ideas**

Berlin's distinction between Russian ideas of the nineteenth century and Soviet intellectualism following the Bolshevik revolution must be understood from his own position in relation to both. Berlin saw himself as an Englishman, albeit with roots in Russia, but most essentially as part of a long tradition of liberal minded British empiricism. From such a perspective, Russian ideas in the nineteenth century, although unique among European intellectual developments, were nonetheless attached to ideas that had originated in the European mainstream—from the French Enlightenment and German Romantic movement predominantly. Soviet Communism, with its racial Bolshevik innovations was altogether too different to be considered part of European intellectualism. More than simply having a falsely conceived

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<sup>89</sup> Berlin, "A Remarkable Decade," in *Russian Thinkers* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 115.

epistemology and a mistaken view of human agency, Soviet thought and its fanaticism spun off intellectual currents that belonged in a category of their own, not just distinct from Europe, but separate from its Russian roots as well.

For example, the origins of authoritarianism in the Soviet Union began, according to Berlin, with Lenin, whose authoritarian element was a novel addition not found in the Marxist or Hegelian theories of Europe. In its own fanatical way, Berlin argued, the Lenin-led Bolshevik revolution spun itself off from Marxism entirely, and in doing so severed its links to its European roots. “It was its own conception of itself that divided Bolshevism so sharply from its parent, Western Marxism—a conception which made it a set of political or social or economic beliefs or policies, but a way of life, all-penetrating and compulsory, controlled absolutely by the Party or the Central Committee in a way for which little authority can be found even in the most extreme pronouncements of Marx or Engels.”<sup>90</sup> Unlike Dostoevsky or Tolstoy’s ideas, which could still be considered part of the European dialogue, Soviet ideas were isolated from Europe entirely.

In portraying Soviet political ideology as separate from a previous culture of Russian thinking, Berlin differentiated the Cold War’s ideological conflict between Soviet Communism and liberalism from a deeper nationalist conflict between Russia and the nations of Western Europe. The implication of the distinction was that while the Cold War still occurred within a predominantly nationalist paradigm, the extent of the nationalist conflict only included recent developments in the Soviet Union and not deeply rooted and irreconcilable characteristics of Russian culture. In cleaving the Soviet Union away from its Russian roots, Berlin aligned the Cold War’s political and intellectual conflict within existing national divisions while avoiding a broader clash of cultures or civilizations.

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<sup>90</sup> Berlin, “Soviet Russian Culture,” in *The Soviet Mind*, 139.

### **A Liberal's Critique of Liberalism**

In response to the rise of Soviet political thought, Berlin turned his attention to developing a critique of what he called the Western utopian vision. This critique was his defense of value pluralism. Despite publishing most of work on pluralism toward the end of his career, Berlin had exhibited significant traces of his defense of value pluralism throughout his career. In the context of the Cold War, it can be seen as both an attempt to invalidate the political theory underpinning Soviet Communism and a twentieth century revision of liberalism made to sufficiently differentiate it from the Soviet thought he was opposing. The consequence of Berlin's critique of the utopian ideal was not only an assault on Soviet thought and Stalin's implementation of it in the USSR, but a self-conscious questioning of fundamental questions concerning the Western liberal tradition that Berlin saw as his own.

Berlin's system of value pluralism, as an alternative to the utopian ideal, has been one of the landmark achievements of twentieth century thinking, sparking, as the American philosopher Ronald Dworkin put it, "immediate, continuing, heated and mainly illuminating controversy."<sup>91</sup> To Berlin's liberal self-examination and its contribution to twentieth century political philosophy, this thesis has little to add, but it is nonetheless necessary to summarize it in relation to the Cold War for present purposes. Most germane to Berlin and the Cold War were the flawed fundamental assumptions that Western liberalism shared with Soviet Communism. First, an attachment to a kind of ideal known to Western thought since Plato.<sup>92</sup> Second, the common faith in French Enlightenment rationalism, the idea that reason would lead mankind to the Platonic

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<sup>91</sup> Ronald Dworkin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in Edna and Avishai Margalit, eds., *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration* (London: Hogarth Press, 1991), 100.

<sup>92</sup> Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 6.

ideal.<sup>93</sup> Berlin's critique of the utopian dream, as an aspiration of Soviets and liberals alike, and the rationalism that promised to lead mankind to it, can be summarized as follows:

Inspired by a very old dream of a perfect society, the Western utopian vision was a misguided hope prevalent in the core of Western political thinking.<sup>94</sup> The dream took on more than one form, and much ink—and blood—had been spilt endeavoring to discover which one was the true vision and just how to achieve it. Conceptions of the utopia varied wildly. For some it was a remnant of the ancient past—as in the biblical Garden of Eden in the Judeo-Christian tradition—for others, it was merely an optimistic view of the future—as Hegel might have conceived of the end of history—for many others, it was nothing more than a useful philosophical ideal created to make a point—as for Plato or Kant. Regardless of whether men could actually hope to realize the dream and reach utopia in the form of some earthly paradise, few thinkers of the Western tradition—and until Machiavelli, virtually no major thinker—were willing to let go of the possibility altogether.<sup>95</sup>

As it concerned Berlin during the Cold War, the utopian ideal was a shared dream both of the Soviets and the Western liberals. The Soviet view of historical determinism was a corruption of Marxist ideas and conceived of metaphysical laws with a teleological end—a utopia—and a vision of how to change men and society to arrive there.<sup>96</sup> As much as Western liberals disagreed with the path Soviet Communism proposed to take to reach that goal, they aspired to a common objective informing a better society.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Berlin, "The Divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities," in *Against the Current*, 112.

<sup>94</sup> Berlin, "The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 21.

<sup>95</sup> Berlin, "The Originality of Machiavelli," in *Against the Current*, 56.

<sup>96</sup> Berlin, "Soviet Russian Culture," in *The Soviet Mind*, 140.

<sup>97</sup> Berlin, "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century," 361-2.

Regardless of how vehemently the two sides disagreed about the means to improving society, the objective was the same and the technique and the means were those of rationalism.<sup>98</sup> Taking inspiration from the French Enlightenment, both Soviet Communism and Western democratic liberalism, as they had come to be understood in the twentieth century, became similarly attached to the belief that intelligent men who could apply reason had the means to solve all problems, especially ones of great moral or political significance.<sup>99</sup> Their difference was in means, not end goals; their concerns were technical—asking how to achieve the end goal—not moral—asking what the end goal entailed. While the Soviets may have interpreted that basic premise with more fanaticism and were more willing and enthusiastic to infringe upon and violate the “sacrosanctity of the person” to achieve their desired society, liberals themselves did not claim different ends.<sup>100</sup>

For Berlin, the danger to the conviction that in rationality lay the solution to all problems was not only the mistaken belief that utopia was achievable, but that mankind would know how to achieve it. “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 for ever—what could be too high a price to pay for that?”<sup>101</sup> Far from achieving a real earthly utopia, the utopian vision was far more likely to serve as justification for otherwise unthinkable things, Berlin argued. This was the rationale behind Berlin’s criticism of positive liberty, as it gave every “dictator, inquisitor, and bully” the justification for their brutality and authoritarianism. The utopian justification allowed the dictator to claim: “even though men suffer and die in the

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<sup>98</sup> Isaiah Berlin, “Democracy, Communism and the Individual,” notes from a 1949 talk at Mount Holyoke College, Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library, 1, <http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/nachlass/demcomind.pdf>.

<sup>99</sup> Berlin, “Political Ideas in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” 356.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 365.

<sup>101</sup> Berlin, “The Pursuit of the Ideal,” from *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 16.

process, they are lifted by it to a height to which they could never have risen without my coercive—but creative—violation of their lives.”<sup>102</sup>

Hitler’s excuse for the Holocaust came out of the pursuit of the utopian ideal—albeit a nasty, fascist one. Stalin, in Berlin’s mind, was no doubt capable of something similar. Yet, Berlin also recognized that the great liberal democracies of the West, in the most basic rationale of their liberalism, were in fact engaged in a similar pursuit. His worry was that to seek the ideal at all would hazard the danger of paying the price it claims to justify.

The fundamental fallacy Berlin found in the liberal project—the same fallacy as in the Soviet project—was the assumption that “men have a certain fixed, unfaltering nature, certain universal, common, immutable goals.”<sup>103</sup> Within such political projects, oriented toward realizing the utopian dream, was the misguided notion that all good values are not only universally good, but also mutually compatible. Berlin’s value pluralism rejected this fundamental assumption of Enlightenment rationalism as incoherent. Instead value pluralism was “the conception that there are many different ends that men may seek and still be fully rational, fully men, capable of understanding each other and sympathising and deriving light from each other.”<sup>104</sup>

The rejection of an ultimate good struck at what for Berlin had become a common premise among disputants of all twentieth century political theory—that correct solutions to social problems would push human progress toward a utopian *telos*.<sup>105</sup> In tenaciously but misguidedly clinging on to this assumption, the liberals were as guilty as Stalin, only they did not make a habit out of abusing it so brazenly for brutal and autocratic ends. For Berlin, the universal and eternal harmony of ultimate moral values was not just impossible but incoherent, whether

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<sup>102</sup> Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” from *Liberty*, 197.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>105</sup> Berlin, “Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century,” *Foreign Affairs* 28, no. 3 (Apr. 1950), 355.



that harmony was liberal or communist in nature. Two values might be equally true and good, but they might also clash.

Take the tension between liberty and equality for example. Both, Berlin argued, “are among the primary goals pursued by human beings through many centuries; but total liberty for wolves is death to the lambs, total liberty of the powerful, the gifted, is not compatible with the rights to a decent existence of the weak and the less gifted.”<sup>106</sup> Though liberty and equality have always been two of liberalism’s most cherished values, they did not necessarily co-exist in perfect harmony. Yet, the fact that they clash does totally unravel the premise of a liberal democracy. The two need only be recognized as distinct and a balance must be struck.

Equality may demand the restraint of the liberty of those who wish to dominate; liberty—without some modicum of which there is no choice and therefore no possibility of remaining human as we understand the word—may have to be curtailed in order to make room for social welfare, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to shelter the homeless, to leave room for the liberty of others, to allow justice or fairness to be exercised.<sup>107</sup>

In seeking to demonstrate the absurdity of Soviet Communism, Berlin simultaneously pointed out an inherent fallacy in the liberal project. As to which critique came first, that was irrelevant. The two critiques are conceptually one and the same.

Moreover, Berlin’s defense of value pluralism complemented his concern for recognizing the dignity and moral agency of the individual. In his defense of liberty as non-interference, the definition given by classical English political philosophers, Berlin is widely comparable to another Cold War intellectual in George Orwell.<sup>108</sup> There is a striking degree of similarity in their approach to understanding the Cold War and reacting against Soviet Totalitarianism. Orwell’s 1946 essay “Politics and the English language,” for example, was characteristic of his views on

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<sup>106</sup> Berlin, “The Pursuit of the Ideal,” in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 12-13.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>108</sup> Orwell’s death in 1950 makes him more a predecessor to Berlin than a contemporary.

the need for clarity in political speech.<sup>109</sup> Where Orwell attacked what he saw as an increasing tendency to distort the meaning of words such that their meaning became diluted to the point where their very meaning was lost, Berlin similarly railed against the confusion of concepts for what they are not.

In a representative moment of Berlin's approach to the Cold War, Berlin wrote: "Everything is what it is: liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or culture, or human happiness or a quiet conscience."<sup>110</sup> Unlike the utopian promise, Berlin did not make a vague mention of a future destination. The idea that values must be recognized at their present worth and not for their potential to realize some uncertain eventuality in the future was characteristic of Berlin's claim that "we cannot legislate for the unknown consequences of consequences of consequences."<sup>111</sup> Simultaneously there was a pluralist balancing of values that affords consideration for their clash, injecting doubt in utopian promise of universal harmony.

What Berlin sought to make absolutely clear was the absurdity of the idea that all which is considered good by rational people can be infinitely and invariably made to coalesce. Berlin did not want political theory to muddle real outcomes.

If the liberty of myself or my class or nation depends on the misery of a number of other human beings, the system which promotes this is unjust and immoral. But if I curtail or lose my freedom in order to lessen the shame of such inequality, and do not thereby materially increase the individual liberty of others, an absolute loss of liberty occurs. This may be compensated for by a gain in justice or in happiness or in peace, but the loss remains, and it is a confusion of values to say that although my 'liberal', individual freedom may go by the board, some other kind of freedom—'social' or 'economic'—is increased.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> George Orwell, "Politics and the English Language," in *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, vol. 17, 220.

<sup>110</sup> Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Liberty*, 172.

<sup>111</sup> Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 15.

<sup>112</sup> Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Liberty*, 172.

Such a distortion of political values was not unique to the Soviets, however. Liberals were just as likely to conceive of goodness as something akin to a unifying Platonic ideal. Berlin's critique of the tendency applied equally to both.

By using the same logic to both attack Soviet Communism and reform his own liberal beliefs, Berlin struck a delicate balance in the Cold War conflict. Having severed Soviet Communism from its roots in nineteenth century Russia, Berlin maintained sufficient distance from the Soviet state of mind with his defense of pluralism to justify a position of antagonistic intellectual tension. Though Berlin distanced Soviet intellectualism enough to justify an antagonistic ideological relationship, he did not distance it so far as to demean the Russian culture in the process. By keeping the roots of Russian thought within the European intellectual tradition, Berlin avoided ostracizing Russian culture as the product of an entirely foreign civilization bound to inevitable conflict with Europe.

By faulting the Soviet political elite with a fanatic perversion of Marxist theory and establishing it as a clean break from the past, Berlin managed to keep previous currents of Russian intellectualism within the familiar milieu of the Western intellectual tradition. Thus he managed to defend much of what made Russian culture before the Bolshevik Revolution, without relenting in his opposition to Lenin and Stalin.

## Chapter Three: The New Role of the Intellectual

### Who Fights a War of Ideas?

It was not until 1957 that Berlin began to compose what is considered by many to be his single most influential piece of work, “Two Concepts of Liberty.”<sup>113</sup> Delivered in Berlin’s inaugural address for his new post as the Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at Oxford’s All Souls College, it was in many ways a succinct, yet thoroughly well-conceived and comprehensive articulation of much of Berlin’s thought up to that point in his life. The lecture not only cohesively synthesized Berlin’s thoughts on liberty as a political end, but it was an early version of what was to later become Berlin’s defense of value pluralism. And so, it was surprising that for the most striking passage of his brief opening remarks, Berlin turned not to his familiar sources of intellectual inspiration—Vico, Herder, Tolstoy, Herzen, even Machiavelli—but Heinrich Heine, a German poet he rarely cited.

For the first few minutes, Berlin made no mention whatsoever of liberty or what two concepts of it were. Instead, he veered into a tangent entirely away from “social and political theory,” the subject that might have suited his new title. In something of an almost deliberate attempt at self-glorification, he referenced Heine to discuss ideas and intellectuals instead. “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,” Berlin began.<sup>114</sup> As if issuing a reminder aimed on the one hand at his former colleagues who had lost themselves in the minutiae of analytical philosophy, and on the other at

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<sup>113</sup> Ignatieff, 222.

<sup>114</sup> Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Liberty*, 167.

the rest of the world who thought that the twentieth century no longer had a place for academics, Berlin made a case as to why ideas mattered. And so, Berlin continued:

[Heine] spoke of Kant's Critique of Pure Reason as the sword with which German deism had been decapitated, and described the works of Rousseau as the blood-stained weapon which, in the hands of Robespierre, had destroyed the old regime; and prophesied that the romantic faith of Fichte and Schelling would one day be turned, with terrible effect, by their fanatical German followers, against the liberal culture of the West. The facts have not wholly belied this prediction; but 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?<sup>115</sup>

Though it was a deceptive opening to a lecture titled “Two Concepts of Liberty,” the tangent of the professor’s study was remarkable in its placement. Berlin’s message was clear. Ideas, especially of the kind that concerned him, had significant material consequences; the following contents of his lecture mattered outside the gates of All Souls. The reminder was of where the intellectual belonged and why ideas mattered.

Berlin’s argued that ideas mattered because intellectual currents had the power to influence political theory, which in turn could determine the fate of civilizations. Manipulated for misguided or sinister ends, ideas could be used to justify human tragedies on a grand scale, as the Nazis had proven in World War II.<sup>116</sup> In such a world, fraught with not only the dangers of evil-minded intentions, but also the pitfalls of genuine but misguided ones, the intellectual had the power to affect matters of eventual life and death of not only individuals but also entire civilizations. While Berlin was not the first to conceive of ideas as having material power, his body of works show a genuinely faith in this belief and a conscious awareness of his potential role as a Cold War intellectual.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Public Policy Papers, Geroge F. Kennan Papers, Letter from Berlin to Kennan, 13 Feb 1951, 3.

The timing of Berlin's Heine reference suggests that he saw the greatest dangers and most central motivations of the Cold War as intellectual concerns. Significant stakes of the Cold War were, as Berlin's opening implied, measured by the outcome of ideological battles. In an antagonistic environment of ideas the implication became clear: the intellectual became warrior.

For if the professor could, in the stillness of his study, dismantle the strongest of civilizations at the peak of their powers, then he was also required to bear the burden of combat in a conflict over the very product of his daily work. Intellectuals not only had to provide the motivations behind the need for antagonism between the liberal West and communist Soviets, but also became directly responsible for contesting what was right and what was wrong.

Given the expectation of objectivity in Western academia, the concept of the intellectual as warrior is an alarming one. The most salient work to discuss this expectation of objectivity in scholarly knowledge is Edward Said's *Orientalism*.<sup>117</sup> As Said points out: "the determining impingement on most knowledge produced in the contemporary West...is that it be nonpolitical, that is, scholarly, academic, impartial, above partisan or small-minded doctrinal belief."<sup>118</sup> A figure like Berlin was not only an intellectual in the sense that he dealt with ideas—the manipulation of which, as Heine suggested, was not in itself a historical anomaly—but he was also an academic—whose supposed profession was to seek after truth—and one of the finest English-speaking examples at that. To suggest that an academic of Berlin's caliber was not only partisan, but deeply invested in the outcome of the Cold War's political conflict, implies a blatant disregard to the belief—or as Said would argue, the myth—that academics and their works ought to be impartial, even indifferent to the objects of their focus. Yet Said also points

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<sup>117</sup> While it is anachronistic to apply Said's logic in events that occurred prior to *Orientalism's* publication, the logic of his argument holds true. The Orientalist scholar at the focus Said's book lived and worked decades if not centuries before Berlin and it is not unreasonable to adapt logic here.

<sup>118</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage, 1994), 9-10.

out that objectivity and impartiality are hardly possible in the most optimistic reality, given that “no one has ever devised a method for detaching the scholar from the circumstances of life.”<sup>119</sup> At best, Said argued, the intellectual finds himself unintentionally violating the myth of impartiality. Thus, even the best-intentioned scholar will find himself embroiled in one bias or another.

In any case, the myth of the disinterested intellectual working toward a unifying and objective truth was part of an Enlightenment project that Berlin vehemently opposed. While Berlin admired the achievements of natural scientists beginning in the seventeenth century, he was skeptical of thinkers such as Descartes, Bacon, or Voltaire who suggested that by using reason all manner of human knowledge could theoretically be unified so as to reveal “eternal, timeless truths, identical in all spheres of human activity—moral and political, social and economic, scientific and artistic.”<sup>120</sup> For Berlin, a major fallacy of French Enlightenment rationalism was the very notion that academics of all persuasions, whether of the natural sciences or humanities, could work toward the achievement of some objective truth.<sup>121</sup> Intellectuals, in Berlin’s mind, were not “engineers of human souls,” as Stalin had insisted. They were not tasked to “look on the human beings at their disposal as material which is infinitely malleable within the confines revealed by the sciences.”<sup>122</sup> Thus, Berlin argued that humanists could not plausibly approach their profession in the same way natural scientists approached their.

Berlin’s objective in the very conflict of the Cold War was thus far more than an unwitting entanglement with a distant subject of study. Berlin makes no pretension of being disinterested in the Cold War’s outcome; he picked his side and attacked the other. Berlin saw

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<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>120</sup> Berlin, “The Divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities,” in *Against the Current*, 106, 112.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>122</sup> Berlin, “Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century,” in *Liberty*, 82.

his own Cold War role in terms that far exceed those of Said's Orientalists. At the very least, Said leaves open the possibility that Flaubert and Chateaubriand spoke for and misrepresented the objectified Orient ignorant of their errors and innocent of malicious intentions.<sup>123</sup> For Said, there was no certainty of a "nefarious 'Western' imperialist plot to hold down the 'Oriental' world," though the consequence of Orientalist literature was invariably "a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts."<sup>124</sup> For Berlin, unlike Flaubert or Chateaubriand, there was little room to protest innocence of intention in his intellectual confrontation with Soviet ideology. Berlin's was a deliberately conceived assault on an intellectual system that he saw as a threat in its falsity and incompatibility with his own framework of ideas.

Throughout his analysis of Soviet political theory, Berlin was clear about his intent and his ambitions to reveal the misguided intentions of Soviet Communism. The Soviet Union, and its conception of man as merely the substance of history, presented an epistemological hazard with which Berlin was not prepared, or willing, to accept. Given that the very foundations not only of his political theory, but his understanding of truth were under attack, retaliation was the obvious response and it meant engaging Soviet thought directly.

As the Cold War intellectual became warrior, the terms and grounds of the conflict adjusted appropriately. Where the detached scholar might theoretically have been able to define a conflict's scope with some claim to impartiality, the scholar who became warrior also picked a

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<sup>123</sup> Said, *Orientalism*, 6. Specifically I am referring to where Said mentions the relationship of European writers and their Oriental subjects. He writes: "There is very little consent to be found, for example, in the fact that Flaubert's encounter with an Egyptian courtesan produced a widely influential model of the Oriental woman; she never spoke of herself, she never represented her emotions, presence, or history. *He* spoke for and represented her." Though Said is critical of the political consequences of Flaubert and Chateaubriand's practice, he does not assert that there was malice necessarily.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.



side. Thus the very definition of the conflict, its scope, and its stakes became part of the conflict itself. Moreover, the scholar no longer concerned himself purely with facts, as there could be no politically impartial search for truth. Instead the scholar becomes a fabricator of perceptions, fashioning and influencing conflicts through ideological dialogues.

With Cold War objectives in mind, it did not concern Berlin's objective to prove, at least with a great deal of historical rigor, that the Soviet Union's people or even sympathizers actually believed in the historicist notion of human events. So long as Soviet ideology saw history as governed by metaphysical laws and took its subsequent implications on individual agency to heart, the views of the people did not matter. As a Cold War intellectual participating in the conflict, Berlin's purpose was not to be a historian of Soviet society or of the people, especially given his view that "the Party and the state are engaged in sweeping away the smallest beginnings of independent thought."<sup>125</sup> Berlin's objective was to respond to Soviet ideas, the representation of which was monopolized by a small group of Communist Party leaders. Thus the actual pervasiveness of ideas in the Soviet population was significantly less relevant to Berlin's Cold War interests than the "general line" of the Soviet Communist Party.<sup>126</sup>

For a Cold War intellectual like Berlin, the relevant conflict was over the political theories prevalent among intellectual and political elites—two populations, which had become one and the same given the Soviet regime's suppression of public dissent.<sup>127</sup> Despite Berlin's status as a public intellectual—especially since he was given a platform on BBC radio—his work was not primarily prepared for consumption by the general public.<sup>128</sup> Aside from a critique of

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<sup>125</sup> Berlin, "Generalissimo Stalin and the Art of Government," *Foreign Affairs* 30, no. 2 (Jan. 1952), 207.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>127</sup> Berlin, "Four Weeks in the Soviet Union," in *The Soviet Mind*, 124.

<sup>128</sup> Ignatieff, 205.

certain ideas—such as historicism or the utopian ideal—as being particularly liable to abuse, Berlin’s work had a second purpose as a warning to the people who used and manipulated them. In this two-part role of the Cold War intellectual, influencing the public was at most a means of attracting the attention of the politically powerful.

### **The Dual Role of the Cold War Intellectual**

Thus while Berlin revealed the perception of the Soviet Union as a threat in the falsity of its political theory and epistemological scheme, the answer was not merely to point out its falsity and assert a liberal alternative. Berlin knew that ideas could be powerful—as the Heine reference would suggest. However, Berlin’s work also revealed that the power of ideas could not be purely realized through their logical integrity or their philosophical verifiability. A conflict of ideas though it was, the Cold War and its resolution was not just a debate, where Western and Soviet intellectuals sat on different sides of the table, with a judge whose decision both sides agreed to respect beforehand.

Berlin’s view of ideas implied that human actors had to play out the authenticity of the intellectual battles which history would then tell. Ideas alone did not have the power to shed blood, they needed people to act on them, to make them part of the tangible, material reality of human life.<sup>129</sup> For every Rousseau, there had to be a Robespierre or there would only have been swords with nobody to wield them. Yet, Berlin was skeptical that any promise of great advancement was worth the blood that a fanatic with dangerous ideas could shed with senseless

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<sup>129</sup> Berlin wrote “Some armed prophets seek to save mankind, and some only their own race because of its superior attributes, but whichever the motive, the millions slaughtered in wars or revolutions—gas chambers, gulag, genocide, all the monstrosities for which our century will be remembered—are the price men must pay for the felicity of future generations. If your desire to save mankind is serious, you must harden your heart, and not reckon the cost.” In “The Pursuit of the Ideal,” in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 16. There was a strong awareness of the role of human actors within this warning.

disregard to human life by glorifying extremism, conflict, and war as means to achieving utopian society.<sup>130</sup> His reasoning was that “few things have played a more fatal part in the history of human thought and action than great imaginative analogies from one sphere, in which a particular principle is applicable and valid, to other provinces, where its effect may be exciting and transforming, but where its consequences may be fallacious in theory and ruinous in practice.”<sup>131</sup> To avoid the senseless blood shedding in the name of ideas, it was necessary first to dull the blades of the double-edged sword and second to diminish the power and fanaticism of the people who would potentially wield the sword. Both parts of the project were aimed at minimizing the destructive potential inherent in world changing ideas.

What was most dangerous, for Berlin, was the perversion and manipulation of ideas by powerful people with a tendency to take them too seriously. The logic was that if a fanatic could misinterpret the Sermon on the Mount or Mill’s theory of Utilitarianism to justify lying to his father and killing his neighbor, the dictator who, armed with a vision of the road to utopia for his state, can similarly be inspired prepared to commit a genocide to reach paradise. The experience of fascism in Europe between the two World Wars, Berlin argued, was an example of the combination of political power and ideological fanaticism. In the fascist case, Joseph de Maistre was one such intellectual culprit behind Hitler’s crimes. European fascism was, according to Berlin, a situation where “totalitarian society, which Maistre, in the guide of historical analysis, had visualized, became actual; and thereby, at inestimable cost in human suffering, [vindicated] the depth and brilliance of a remarkable, and terrifying, prophet.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Berlin, “European Unity and Its Vicissitudes,” in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 209.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Berlin, “Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism,” in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 177.

Though fascism had been defeated, Berlin warned that the Soviet Union had an equally dangerous combination of authoritarian regime and ideological fanaticism.<sup>133</sup> In Lenin and then Stalin, Berlin implied, the Soviet Union had two leaders who were prepared to commit great atrocities to end history in the name of a classless utopia that may or may never be reached.

Thus the Cold War intellectual's role as warrior had two parts—both of which Berlin fulfilled.<sup>134</sup> First the Cold War intellectual needed to be critical of the dangerous potential of particular ideas circulating within the Soviet Union. To reiterate, for Berlin this was the suppression of a latent mentality for historicism that erupted during and after the Bolshevik Revolution. The intellectual's responsibility was to prevent the spreading of false and dangerous ideas. The motivation to counter such ideas explain Berlin's opposition to "the deliberate act of tampering with human beings so as to make them behave in a way which, if they knew what they were doing, or what its consequences were likely to be, would make them recoil with horror and disgust."<sup>135</sup> Though it was impossible to simply snuff out the ideas of Hegel, Marx, or Lenin, Berlin sought to diminish their appeal. Almost paradoxically, Berlin's critique implied that the intellectual's role in a conflict of ideas was to restrain the very power of ideas.

The second part of the intellectual's role as Cold War warrior was to be critical of the people who used and manipulated those same ideas, for potentially dangerous ideas require real political power to materialize into real political dangers. The Soviet pretension of knowing historical laws gave Lenin and Stalin the impression that they understood the mechanics of governance with scientific precision when they knew nothing of the sort. Berlin argued that this

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<sup>133</sup> Berlin, "Generalissimo Stalin and the Art of Government," *Foreign Affairs* 30, no. 2 (Jan. 1952), 198.

<sup>134</sup> I am indebted to Professor Mark Lilla for this idea, which originated a conversation we had on 13 March 2014.

<sup>135</sup> Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Public Policy Papers, George F. Kennan Papers, Letter from Berlin to Kennan, 13 Feb 1951, 1.

mistaken belief was what caused the Politburo to apprehend the outside world in terms of fundamental categories “from the cluster of theories put forward by Marx and Hegel, and adapted by Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Tito and others.”<sup>136</sup> Using such logic, for example, Stalin could promise social progress and write off significant negative consequences as merely the cost of advancement. Stalin’s rationale, which Berlin vehemently opposed, was akin to saying that to make an omelette, one has no choice but to break eggs.<sup>137</sup> Berlin objected to such a rationale as if out of a weariness and skepticism left over from World War II. His skepticism was that “the one thing that we may be sure of is the reality of the sacrifice, the dying of the dead. But the ideal for the sake of which they die remains unrealized. The eggs are broken, and the habit of breaking them grows, but the omelette remains invisible.”<sup>138</sup> The Cold War intellectual had to be critical of promised social progress at the cost of individuals, for the promise of social progress was uncertain to ever be delivered but the death or suffering of individuals was a guarantee.

The two-part role of the Cold War western intellectual was for Berlin bound inseparably. Just as ideas could give dictators inspiration and justification to commit absurd and unthinkable misdeeds, dictators could distort, misuse, and altogether create ideas for misguided goals. There was no pointing of fingers necessarily, for Berlin never quite indulged in the speculation that Lenin, Stalin, and their associates were necessarily evil and malicious people. Rather in Berlin’s claim that “the one thing which no utilitarian paradise, no promise of eternal harmony in the future within some vast organic whole will make us accept is the use of human beings as mere ends,” there was a more than stern skepticism with the promise of social progress when it asked

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<sup>136</sup> Berlin, “Generalissimo Stalin and the Art of Government,” *Foreign Affairs* 30, no. 2 (Jan. 1952), 198.

<sup>137</sup> Berlin, “The Pursuit of the Ideal,” in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 16.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

for individual sacrifice as a down payment.<sup>139</sup> Given his belief that certain ideas—of which Soviet Communism was a strong example—were especially liable to take on lives of their own, it follows that Berlin believed it was up to the intellectual to not only impose restraint on the ideas themselves, but also the people who had the power to use them.

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<sup>139</sup> Princeton University Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Public Policy Papers, George F. Kennan Papers, Letter from Berlin to Kennan, 13 Feb 1951, 3.

## Conclusion

This thesis reconsiders the notion of the academic as observer. Instead, it assumes that the intellectual engaged with the Cold War was an active participant. By revising Isaiah Berlin's role in the Cold War and reframing the perspective from which his work is understood, this thesis contributes a new understanding of Cold War dynamics. Works of Cold War scholarship such as Berlin's were expressions of fears, attitudes, states of mind, and perceptions of their authors as much as they were attempts to understand the Soviet enemy. By examining contemporaneous scholarship on the Cold War as evidence of intellectual currents of key actors, it becomes possible to understand the Cold War beyond the terms of material conflict.

As a conflict, the Cold War was not merely the sum of political tussles or diplomatic tit-for-tats between rival superpowers. In the intellectual sphere of the Cold War, the conflict was rooted in basic epistemological differences, which Berlin claimed to have started in the nineteenth century. By recognizing Russia's intelligentsia as representatives of its national conscience, Berlin—perhaps unwittingly—revealed the extent to which intellectuals would play a part in the Cold War. Bolshevik innovations would sever Soviet thought from its Russian predecessor, and out of this break came a radically unprecedented system of knowledge that epistemologically challenged the liberal paradigms of the West.

Thus the Soviet faith in historicism profoundly disturbed the moral basis of liberal elements of the European intellectual tradition. Recognizing himself to be a part of the liberal European tradition, Berlin fashioned a Cold War warrior in his own form, conscious that the stakes and scope of the conflict could no longer be contained in material considerations such as politics or diplomacy. To fully understand the Cold War, it is necessary to reformulate the way war and peace are considered.

The narrow conception of the Cold War through the materially oriented lens of conventional warfare—that is to say military combat—is as Anders Stephanson points out “radically ‘under-determined,’” but nonetheless it comprises a prominent part of today’s historical understanding of the Cold War.<sup>140</sup> Among the areas introduced into a broadened scope of the Cold War conflict is the intellectual arena. Thus to fully understand a conflict that expanded the very concept of war—and by the same token, peace—it was also necessary to revise fundamental assumptions about the function of intellectuals.

In a conventional war, where victory can be achieved through a limited set of material outcomes—by killing the opposition, forcing his armies into surrender, subjugating his populations, capturing his cities and fortresses, etc—the intellectual, by definition, can be nothing more than an observer uninvolved with the conflict’s happenings and powerless to change outcomes. For the intellectual to become warrior in settings of conventional warfare, he must literally pick up a sword or an assault rifle. By taking up arms, however, the intellectual leaves his intellectualism aside and adopts a second role as warrior. In a very simple way, it is possible to consider Mao Zedong or Che Guevara as examples of such an intellectual-warrior duality. On the one hand, they wrote; on the other, they fought. While simultaneously doing both, their two roles did not overlap.

The Cold War was different. The very nature of the conflict went beyond material considerations. Hostility existed as in a state of war, but there was ostensible peace as enemy soldiers were not necessarily engaged in combat. In such conditions of pseudo-conflict, as Stephanson points out, “the defining, decisive battle never comes.”<sup>141</sup> Instead the battlefield

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<sup>140</sup> Stephanson, “Fourteen Notes on the Very Concept of the Cold War,” 1.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.



extended further, to where bullets and bombs could no longer reach. A significant new site of conflict in the Cold War was the ideological realm among intellectual currents.

For the intellectual, the expansion of the battlefield meant that he could participate in the conflict in his own realm, in the professor's study as Berlin pointed out. Instead of having to adopt a new and separate persona as warrior, the intellectual became one seamlessly and without internal conflict. This is not to say that all intellectuals became warriors in the Cold War. It is only to say that the greatly expanded role of the warrior more obviously overlapped at certain places with the traditional role of the intellectual. For academics like Isaiah Berlin, whose work engaged with political thought and moral questioning, the expanded definition of warrior perhaps even meant the inevitable adoption of the responsibilities of warrior.

What is especially instructive about this exercise in treating the intellectual as participant in the conflict is its potential to impact the study of non-conventional conflicts beyond the Cold War. Moreover, it is potentially applicable to the understanding of a great number of intellectuals, not just Isaiah Berlin. However, here also are the limitations of this thesis. Its scope is simply not broad enough to encompass even a significant majority of Cold War thought. By limiting its scope to Isaiah Berlin, this project cannot claim to reveal a dominant Western intellectual discourse of the Cold War era. Berlin's impact on other Cold War actors is not clear from this project alone. Moreover this thesis acknowledges that Soviet motivations and conceptions of the Cold War are left entirely unaccounted for. This redefined conflict of the Cold War aligns with an existing scholarly view of the Cold War as a Western construct. Specifically, this project accounts for the Cold War as a conflict that took place in a state of mind within the Western liberal's unconscious. While the intellectual's perspective is only one among many in this complex conflict, it nonetheless adds to the historical understanding of the Cold War.

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