

*Horst Klaus Lücke\**

## ISAIAH BERLIN AND ADOLF HITLER: REFLECTIONS AND PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS

### I INTRODUCTION

When the editors of the *Adelaide Law Review* asked me to contribute to ‘Reflections and Future Directions’ — the motto of this issue — I was honoured by the invitation. My association with the University of Adelaide and its Law School has lasted for almost 60 years. It has given me a life full of interest and of opportunities. I look back on it with a sense of affection and gratitude.

It is tempting to reflect upon past issues which contain many of my contributions, including one in the very first volume,<sup>1</sup> an article which has not very long ago been expanded and given a comparative dimension.<sup>2</sup> Judicial law-making is a fascinating topic,<sup>3</sup> but in our present age of political uncertainty there are issues which have a better claim to our attention.

Isaiah Berlin, one of the great intellectuals of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has spoken of the 200 or so meanings of the protean word ‘freedom’, and has helped us isolate and understand those which should be embraced and those which deserve rejection.<sup>4</sup> Berlin’s reflections have brought back personal memories, some of which take me back many decades. If those who govern the fortunes of the *Adelaide Law Review* are looking for inspiration, Isaiah Berlin’s commitment to individual liberty may be a worthwhile guide.

In a number of his lectures Berlin pondered the origin of fascism in Europe, and suggested that German Romantic philosophers, particularly Johann Gottlieb Fichte,

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<sup>1</sup> Horst K Lücke, ‘Striking a Bargain’ (1962) 1(3) *Adelaide Law Review* 293.

<sup>2</sup> Horst K Lücke, ‘Simultaneity and Successiveness in Contracting’ (2007) 15(1) *European Review of Private Law* 27.

<sup>3</sup> Horst K Lücke, ‘Ratio Decidendi: Adjudicative Rationale and Source of Law’ (1989) 1(1) *Bond Law Review* 36; Horst K Lücke, ‘Deciding Cases without the Guidance of Statute or Precedent’ in Jürgen Basedow et al (eds), *Aufbruch nach Europa: 75 Jahre Max-Planck-Institut für Privatrecht* (Mohr Siebeck, 2001) 871, 871–89.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered Before the University of Oxford on 31 October 1958* (Clarendon Press, 1958) (‘*Two Concepts of Liberty*’) 6.

might have provided some of the inspiration for it. Having grown up in Germany during the 1930s and '40s, the suggestion aroused my curiosity and caused me to undertake this study.

## II BERLIN'S LIFE

### A *Early Years*

Isaiah Berlin was born in 1909 in Riga, then a seaport in Livonia, a province of the Russian Empire.<sup>5</sup> His father, Mendel Berlin, was a successful Jewish timber merchant. In 1915 the family moved to Petrograd (now St Petersburg) where they witnessed the Bolshevik revolution. In 1920 they returned to Riga. Latvia had become an independent state with Riga its capital. Life was difficult there. Mendel, a fervent anglophile, had extended his timber business to the United Kingdom and had a substantial bank account in England. He managed to move his family there in 1921, thus escaping not only a life of adversity but also the fate of some of the family's relatives under German occupation.

Isaiah was 11 years old when he and his parents arrived in England. He completed his schooling at St Paul's School in Hammersmith and was then admitted as an undergraduate to Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He studied Greats and then politics, philosophy and economics with first-class results.

### B *Career at Oxford*

Berlin graduated and became a tutor in philosophy and a fellow of New College (1932–38). In 1932 he was elected to a prize fellowship at All Souls College, the first unconverted Jew to have achieved this distinction. The significant contribution he made to philosophical discourse, particularly during the 1930s, is reflected in his posthumously published work, *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays*.<sup>6</sup> As Bernhard Williams observed in the introduction to the book,

Isaiah Berlin is most widely known for his writings in political theory and the history of ideas, but he worked first in general philosophy, and contributed to the discussion of those issues in the theory of knowledge and the theory of meaning which preoccupied the more radical among the young philosophers at Oxford in the late 1930s.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> On Berlin's life, see Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (Chatto & Windus, 1998). In preparing this work, Ignatieff spent many hours interviewing Berlin. The reader is further directed to two new works on Berlin's life and his philosophy: Henry Hardy, *In Search of Isaiah Berlin: A Literary Adventure* (IB Tauris, 2019); Joshua L Cherniss and Steven B Smith (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah Berlin* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays*, ed Henry Hardy (Princeton University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 2016).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid* xxix.

The school of linguistic philosophy, also widely practised by members of the Philosophy Department of the University of Adelaide, was dominating philosophical discourse well into the 1950s and beyond. As Gilbert Ryle stated in 1957, '[p]reoccupation with the theory of meaning could be described as the occupational disease of twentieth-century Anglo-Saxon and Austrian philosophy'.<sup>8</sup> Berlin joined Oxford philosophers who practised this kind of philosophy; many of their debates took place in Berlin's rooms at All Souls. However, he was concurrently involved in work on the life and politics of Karl Marx which resulted in his first book, published in 1939.<sup>9</sup> His first publication had less to do with linguistic philosophy than with the impact of philosophical ideas on the lives of millions. It almost certainly caused him to become disillusioned with the narrowness of the preoccupation of his philosophical colleagues.

Berlin spent World War II as an emissary of the British Information Service in New York and then Washington, assisting first with the effort to persuade the United States to join the war and then reporting on the mood of the population in wartime America. His brilliant dispatches brought him to the attention of leading politicians, including Churchill. After the war he returned to Oxford. The year 1946 marked the start of Berlin's radio broadcasts, which attracted large audiences.<sup>10</sup>

In 1957 Berlin applied for the post of Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory. Some of the Oxford grandees were consulted and expressed doubt. Gilbert Ryle observed that Berlin was 'no ice-breaker' in philosophy. The appointment was made over such objections and his tenure of nearly a decade proved an outstanding success. As Ignatieff observes,

[t]he lectures he gave to packed halls of undergraduates between the autumn of 1957 and 1965 established him as one of the most exciting teachers in the Oxford of his day ... Listening was like an 'airborne adventure', in which Berlin took the audience on a swooping flight over the intellectual landscapes of the past, leaving them at the end of the hour to file out into the High Street 'slightly dazed', their feet not quite touching the ground.<sup>11</sup>

In his foreword to Berlin's *The Power of Ideas*, published posthumously, Avishai Margalit wonders why the history of ideas had not been recognised as an autonomous field of scholarship, and why it had been left to Berlin to establish its legitimacy.<sup>12</sup> Berlin could not have failed to do so, for not more than one or two decades earlier

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<sup>8</sup> Gilbert Ryle, 'The Theory of Meaning' in Cecil Alec Mace (ed), *British Philosophy in the Mid-Century: a Cambridge Symposium* (Allen & Unwin, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 1957) 239.

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* (Thornton Butterworth, 1939).

<sup>10</sup> Berlin was broadcast on the BBC's Third Programme. See, eg, Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust, 'Broadcasts', *The Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library*, (Web Page) <<http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/lists/broadcasts/index.html>>.

<sup>11</sup> Ignatieff (n 5) 225.

<sup>12</sup> See Avishai Margalit, 'Introduction' in Henry Hardy (ed) *The Power of Ideas* (Princeton University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 2016) xiv.

the impact on humanity of fanatically held political doctrines and ideas had been disastrously demonstrated.

In 1965 Sir Kenneth Wheare, then Vice-Chancellor, suggested Berlin might wish to become Principal of Iffley College, which had been recently established and was not well-endowed.<sup>13</sup> Berlin's acceptance caused surprise. However, he used his manifold connections to attract large grants, inter alia from the Wolfson and Ford Foundations, and turned Iffley into a graduate college. It was re-named Wolfson College after Sir Isaac Wolfson, who had made a large donation. By 1966 it had secured its own site and Berlin became its President, a position he occupied until 1975. The college caters for a wide range of subjects from the humanities to the social and natural sciences. It is perhaps Berlin's most important legacy.

Regrettably I did not meet Berlin in 1968, during my year as a visiting fellow at All Souls College, Oxford.<sup>14</sup> He had resigned his Chichele Professorship and his Presidency of Wolfson College kept him fully occupied.<sup>15</sup> Visits to All Souls had become rare events.

### C *In Memoriam: Sir Isaiah Berlin*

Isaiah Berlin was knighted in 1957. From 1963 to 1964 he was President of the Aristotelian Society. In 1971 he was appointed to the Order of Merit. From 1974 to 1978 he was President of the British Academy. In 1979 he was awarded the Jerusalem Prize for the Freedom of the Individual in Society, for his writings on liberty.

Berlin died in Oxford on 5 November 1997, aged 88 years. Marilyn Berger of the New York Times published an insightful obituary, calling Berlin a 'philosopher and historian of ideas, revered for his intellect and cherished for his wit and his gift for friendship'.<sup>16</sup> She listed five of Berlin's books,<sup>17</sup> and six others featuring Berlin's

<sup>13</sup> Sir Kenneth Wheare was Oxford's first Australian-born Vice-Chancellor. See JR Poynter, 'Wheare, Sir Kenneth Clinton (1907-1979)' *Australian Dictionary of Biography* (Web Page) <<http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wheare-sir-kenneth-clinton-12005>>.

<sup>14</sup> See Horst K Lücke, 'The Siege of All Souls' (2011) 51 *Supreme Court of Queensland Review of Books* 78.

<sup>15</sup> See Ignatieff (n 5) 259–72.

<sup>16</sup> Marilyn Berger, 'Isaiah Berlin, Philosopher and Pluralist, Is Dead at 88', *New York Times* (online, November 7 1997) <<https://www.nytimes.com/1997/11/07/arts/isaiah-berlin-philosopher-and-pluralist-is-dead-at-88.html>>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. See Berlin, *Karl Marx* (n 9); Isaiah Berlin, *The Age of Enlightenment* (Houghton Mifflin, 1956); Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford University Press, 1969); Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (Vintage Books, 1976); Isaiah Berlin, *The Magus of the North: JG Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism*, ed Henry Hardy (J Murray, 1993) ('*The Magus of the North*').

essays, collected and edited by Henry Hardy,<sup>18</sup> a fellow of Wolfson College and one of Berlin's literary trustees.<sup>19</sup> Many university libraries have acquired this material and have made much of it available online.

Efforts to provide access to all of Berlin's works, documents and letters continue unabated. In 2000 the Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust established the Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library, which provides ready internet access to much of Berlin's literary estate.<sup>20</sup>

### III FOUR FREEDOMS

#### A *Two freedoms*

On 31 October 1957, after his appointment to the Chichele Professorship, Berlin delivered his inaugural lecture in the Schools Building in Oxford, which Ignatieff calls 'the most influential lecture he ever delivered'.<sup>21</sup> It was published by the Clarendon Press as a booklet of 57 pages titled *Two Concepts of Liberty*.<sup>22</sup> Berlin's distinction between the two forms of liberty, negative and positive, has been the subject of a large body of comment and has become established as an important conceptual tool in the fields of philosophy and political theory.<sup>23</sup> He defines 'negative freedom' as 'the freedom which consists in not being prevented from choosing as I do by other men',<sup>24</sup> and 'positive freedom' as the wish to be one's 'own master ... of playing a human role, that is, of conceiving goals and policies of [one's] own and realising

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. See Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, eds Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (New Viking Press, 1978); Isaiah Berlin, *Concepts and Categories* (n 6); Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed Henry Hardy (Pimlico, 1979); Isaiah Berlin, *Personal Impressions*, ed Henry Hardy (Hogarth Press, 1980); Isaiah Berlin, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, ed Henry Hardy (Princeton University Press, 1990); Isaiah Berlin, *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and their History*, ed Henry Hardy (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998); Isaiah Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, ed Henry Hardy (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000).

<sup>19</sup> See 'Henry Hardy on Isaiah Berlin', *Princeton University Press* (Web Page) <<https://press.princeton.edu/berlin/hardy.html>>.

<sup>20</sup> See 'The Isaiah Berlin Virtual Library', *Isaiah Berlin Literary Trust*, (Web Page) <<http://berlin.wolf.ox.ac.uk/>>. The website also contains information about future arrangements regarding Berlin's work.

<sup>21</sup> Ignatieff (n 5) 225.

<sup>22</sup> Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (n 4). The lecture is also available in Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty*, ed Henry Hardy (Oxford University Press, 2002) 166–217.

<sup>23</sup> Concerning the enduring character of Berlin's distinction, see 'Positive and Negative Liberty' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Online Encyclopedia, 27 February 2003) <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/liberty-positive-negative/>>.

<sup>24</sup> Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (n 4) 16.

them'.<sup>25</sup> I have published an analysis of these concepts elsewhere, and will not repeat what I said there.<sup>26</sup>

### B *The other two freedoms*

In 1952, Berlin had already drawn a distinction between two freedoms. 'Two Concepts of Freedom: Romantic and Liberal' was a lecture he had delivered at Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania.<sup>27</sup> 'Liberal freedom' became 'negative liberty' and 'romantic freedom' morphed into 'positive liberty'. There is little substance in the change of the noun because he treats the two terms as synonymous.<sup>28</sup> However, the changed adjectives indicate a significant shift in Berlin's thinking. In the introduction to *Freedom and its Betrayal*,<sup>29</sup> the authors of the modern concept of liberty are identified as John Locke, Thomas Paine, Wilhelm von Humboldt, the Marquis de Condorcet, Benjamin Constant, Madame de Staël and, above all, John Stuart Mill, who defined it as

the right freely to shape one's life as one wishes, the production of circumstances in which men can develop their natures as variously and richly ... as possible ... [subject to] the need to protect other men in respect of the same rights, or else to protect the common security of them all.<sup>30</sup>

Berlin must have realised that Mill's definition (and certainly his own entirely liberal concept of freedom) contained aspects of both 'negative' and 'positive' liberty, so these adjectives became part of the new dichotomy.

The distinction between 'liberal' and 'romantic' concepts of freedom was not discarded; it played an important role in Berlin's analysis of Romanticism. One of Berlin's definitions of 'romantic freedom' as developed by German Romantic philosophers is the freedom to remove obstacles to self-expression.<sup>31</sup> However, there are variants of the concept and they deserve closer scrutiny.

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> See Horst K Lücke, *The Christian Faith Half a Century Ago: John Finnis and the University of Adelaide* (University of Queensland, 2008) 53–60.

<sup>27</sup> Ignatieff (n 5) 202, 326. Published later: Isaiah Berlin, *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age: Their Rise and Influence on Modern Thought*, ed Henry Hardy (Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> See Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (n 4) 6.

<sup>29</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty*, ed Henry Hardy (Princeton University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 2014) 5-6 ('*Freedom and its Betrayal*').

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. This is how Berlin paraphrased Mill's view.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid 76.

## IV ROMANTICISM

I first experienced Berlin in June and July 1975 when I listened to ABC re-broadcasts of six lectures under the overall title ‘Some Sources of Romanticism’.<sup>32</sup> They had first been delivered in 1965 as the AW Mellon lectures in the Fine Arts at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. Originally unscripted, they were later transcribed and published by Princeton University, titled *The Roots of Romanticism*.<sup>33</sup> In one of these lectures he suggested that Romanticism was responsible for the growth of fascism in Europe.<sup>34</sup>

*A Berlin’s Monism and Romanticism*

In these lectures, Berlin developed some rather sweeping ideas. From the time of Plato, philosophers have been searching for the one elusive idea which, if adopted by mankind, would end all strife and would enable people to live in a state of perfect harmony. In the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries the scientific method was increasingly and successfully applied to understand the natural world. This gave further impetus to the ancient quest: some philosophers of the Enlightenment believed that the same method could also be used in the cause of the harmonisation of human relations. Berlin called this kind of thinking ‘monism’.

This optimistic belief was shattered by philosophers who asserted that there would always be human values, legitimately entertained but irreconcilable with other equally legitimate values. This made conflict, even war, unavoidable so the hope for eternal peace was an illusion. The harbinger of this approach was Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), an Italian political philosopher. On 7 November 1975 I heard Berlin’s lecture on ‘Vico, Voltaire and the Beginnings of Cultural History’ in the

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<sup>32</sup> Berlin delivered the following lectures at the Washington National Gallery of Art: ‘In Search of a Definition’ (14 March 1965); ‘The First Attack on the Enlightenment’ (21 March 1965); ‘The True Fathers of Romanticism’ (28 March 1965); ‘The Restrained Romantics’ (4 April 1965); ‘Unbridled Romanticism’ (11 April 1964); ‘The Lasting Effects’ (18 April 1965). These lectures were re-broadcast by the ABC on the 15<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of June; and on the 6<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> of July in 1975. I thank the ABC for having supplied this detailed information.

<sup>33</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed Henry Hardy (Princeton University Press 1999).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid 477–8: ‘Fascism too is an inheritor of Romanticism ... The hysterical self-assertion and the nihilistic destruction of existing institutions because they confine the unlimited will, which is the only thing which counts for human beings; the superior person who crushes the inferior because his will is stronger, these are a direct inheritance — in an extremely garbled form, no doubt, but still an inheritance — from the Romantic movement; and this inheritance has played an extremely powerful part in our lives’.

Napier Building of the University of Adelaide.<sup>35</sup> Berlin called Vico ‘one of the boldest innovators in the history of human thought’.<sup>36</sup> He invented, so Berlin said, the concept of ‘culture’, that was destined to become a crucial element in the thinking of the Romantics. Vico saw man as ‘a self-transforming creature whose each next age is the result of the satisfaction of the needs of the previous ones’ and thus rejected as an ‘absurdity’ the view of natural lawyers and the Catholic Church that ‘there is such a thing as natural law engraved upon the hearts of men’.<sup>37</sup>

### B *Romanticism and the Germans*

After Vico, Romanticism became largely a German affair. The essential anti-Enlightenment ideas were developed by ‘the Magus of the North’, Johann Georg Hamann,<sup>38</sup> and his more accomplished and better-known pupil, Johann Gottfried Herder.<sup>39</sup> However, no German philosopher gave the Romantic message a more radical shape than Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814); Berlin regarded him as one of liberty’s most destructive enemies.<sup>40</sup>

Berlin had every reason to share the anti-German sentiments which had grown in Britain during the war. Both of his grandfathers perished in the Holocaust. Had his father not succeeded in moving his family to the United Kingdom, Isaiah and his parents would almost certainly have suffered the same fate. Perhaps surprisingly, he was in no way blinded by hatred of the nation which had perpetrated many of these atrocities. Berlin’s assessment of some German Romantic philosophers is deeply empathetic. As Adolf Hitler was beginning his fateful march towards Armageddon, and the campaign to remove from national life all persons identified as racially Jewish was well underway, Berlin formed a close friendship with Adam von Trott zu Solz,<sup>41</sup> a Prussian aristocrat and German Rhodes scholar. Von Trott was eventually made to pay for his opposition to Nazi ideology and practice by being hanged from a meat hook in Plötzensee prison on 26 August 1944. AL Rowse, an All Souls prize fellow

<sup>35</sup> Isaiah Berlin, ‘Vico, Voltaire and the Beginnings of Cultural History’ (Lecture, University of Adelaide, 7 November 1975) <<http://www.giambattistavico.it/node/300>>; Broadcast by the ABC on 12 November 1975. See also Isaiah Berlin, *The Power of Ideas*, ed Henry Hardy (Princeton University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 2016) 63–80.

<sup>36</sup> Berlin, *The Power of Ideas* (n 35) 63.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. Concerning the political impact of natural law in Germany and Austria, see Horst K Lücke ‘The European natural law codes: the age of reason and the powers of government’ (2012) 31(1) *Queensland University Law Journal* 7.

<sup>38</sup> Isaiah Berlin, *The Magus of the North* (n 17).

<sup>39</sup> Isaiah Berlin, ‘Herder and the Enlightenment’ in Henry Hardy (ed) *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (Princeton University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 2016) 208–300.

<sup>40</sup> See discussion in Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal* (n 29) 62–78. See also Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (n 33) 303–15.

<sup>41</sup> Ignatieff (n 5) 73–6. See also Christopher Sykes, *Troubled Loyalty: A Biography of Adam von Trott zu Solz* (Collins, 1968).



like Berlin, commemorated von Trott in one of his poems (*In Memory: A v T – I saw the Ship of Death*):

Who could have known when I knew you first  
 Of such a fate in store for you  
 Laid upon that grave and lovely head?  
 ...  
 The hangman's noose about your neck,  
 Sleep soundly in a traitor's grave.<sup>42</sup>

In *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, Berlin explained the origins of Germany's Romantic philosophical revolution.<sup>43</sup> The Thirty Years' War left the Germans in a state of extreme poverty. After the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648, they were still exposed to the arbitrary will of the absolute rulers of numerous kingdoms and principalities. As a result, the ordinary German suffered from 'a sense of being a humbler citizen of the universe than the triumphant French or the free and proud English'.<sup>44</sup> Many adopted a stoic outlook on life, retreating, as Berlin said, into their 'inner citadel',<sup>45</sup> which acquired heightened importance to the Romantic philosophers because it is unassailable:

This is the source of the re-emergence of the doctrine, which has its roots deep both in Christianity and in Judaism, of the two selves: the spiritual, inner, [non-material], eternal soul; and the empirical, outer, physical, material self, which is prey to every misfortune, which is subject to the iron laws of the material world, from which no man may escape.<sup>46</sup>

Like many philosophers of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant believed in objective, universal rules discovered by the right use of reason and was thus in no way a Romantic philosopher. Nevertheless, he helped advance this 'doctrine of the inner self' because of his emphasis on the 'moral law within me':

*Zwei Dinge erfüllen das Gemüt mit immer neuer und zunehmender Bewunderung und Ehrfurcht, je öfter und anhaltender sich das Nachdenken damit beschäftigt: Der bestirnte Himmel über mir, und das moralische Gesetz in mir.*<sup>47</sup>

Two things fill the heart with ever renewed and increasing awe and reverence, the more often and the more steadily we meditate upon them: The starry firmament above and the moral law within myself.

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<sup>42</sup> AL Rowse, *Poems of Deliverance* (Faber and Faber, 1946) 47.

<sup>43</sup> Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal* (n 29) 62–73.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid* 65.

<sup>45</sup> Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (n 4) 19–25. More cynically, he spoke of 'a very sublime, very grand form of the doctrine of sour grapes' in Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal* (n 29) 66.

<sup>46</sup> Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal* (n 29) 66.

<sup>47</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*, tr Thomas K Abbott (Project Gutenberg, 2018) [trans of: *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (1788)].

A resigned and passive attitude to the hostile external world would have been one possible stoic reaction, but that was not how the Romantics coped with the misery around them. They called for courageous action to free the Germans from oppression and from hostile forces of nature. There is an answer to the question of how to act and what to do, '[t]o discover what I ought to do I have to hearken to the inner voice. The voice issues commands, injunctions; preaches ideals which I must live up to'.<sup>48</sup> The idea of the 'inner self' led to enhanced emphasis on motive, intention and, most importantly, the human will. One must be honest, dedicated and true to oneself, as 'all that a man can be responsible for is his own personal integrity, that he be honest, that he be truthful, that he at any rate does not cheat'.<sup>49</sup> Beethoven, to whom nothing mattered but this inner vision, was a hero of the Romantic movement and so was Martin Luther. In 1521, defying danger to his life, he announced at the Imperial Diet in Worms, '[h]ier stehe ich, ich kann nicht anders' (here I stand, I can do no other).<sup>50</sup>

How can one not admire such integrity, such dedication? In yet another break from the past, the Romantics have given us a new message of tolerance of which Berlin thoroughly approved; '[a]nyone who is sufficiently a man of integrity, anyone who is prepared to sacrifice himself upon any altar, no matter what, has a moral personality which is worthy of respect, no matter how detestable or how false the ideals to which he bows his knee'.<sup>51</sup>

The Romantics undermined the optimistic ideas of monism and certainly those of the Enlightenment. Their influence was felt across Europe, not just in Germany. As Berlin suggested, Romanticism spawned fascism.

## V THE POWER OF IDEAS

### A *Heinrich Heine's prophecy*

Berlin took an intense interest in Heinrich Heine, a German poet and essayist of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>52</sup> He even mentioned Heine's ideas in the lecture I attended, even though there was nothing to link him with Giambattista Vico.<sup>53</sup> In an essay published in 1835, Heine had warned that the power of ideas conceived in a

<sup>48</sup> Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal* (n 29) 68.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid 70.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid 72.

<sup>51</sup> Berlin, *Roots of Romanticism* (n 33) 460.

<sup>52</sup> Heine was the child of Jewish parents but converted to Lutheranism: Jeffery L Sammons, 'Henrich Heine, Author' *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Online Encyclopedia, 13 February 2019) <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Heinrich-Heine-German-author>>.

<sup>53</sup> See above, Part IV(A).

professor's study could prove capable of destroying a civilisation.<sup>54</sup> Jean Jaques Rousseau's *Social Contract* had provided the ideas of which Maximilien Robespierre had become the bloody executioner and Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* had been the sword wielded to decapitate deism in Germany: '[d]er Gedanke geht der Tat voraus, wie der Blitz dem Donner' (the thought precedes the deed as lightning the thunder).<sup>55</sup> It is the power of philosophical ideas which occupied Berlin throughout much of his life. He concludes his comments on Heine with a sense of muted optimism:

[Heine] prophesied that the romantic faith of Fichte and Schelling<sup>56</sup> 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 other professors, and they alone, can disarm them?<sup>57</sup>

This passage seems to confirm the view, often voiced, that Heine foretold the horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>58</sup> In his essay on the German philosopher and agitator Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Berlin paraphrased and part-quoted Heine's prophecy:

Heine feels genuine terror ... and had a genuine vision of doom to come: 'Kantians will appear, who in the world of mere phenomena hold nothing sacred, and ruthlessly with sword and axe will hack through the foundations of our European life, and pull up the past by its last remaining roots. Armed Fichteans will come, whose fanatical wills neither fear nor self-interest can touch'. These men, these pantheists, will fight recklessly for their principles, for these principles are absolute, and their dangers seem to them purely illusory. *Naturphilosophen* will identify themselves with elemental forces, which are always destructive. Then the god Thor will wield his gigantic hammer and smash the Gothic cathedrals.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Henrich Heine, *Religion and Philosophy in Germany: A Fragment*, tr John Snodgrass (1959, Beacon Press) 159–62 [trans of: *Zur Geschichte der Religion und Philosophie in Deutschland* (1835)].

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid* 160.

<sup>56</sup> On the philosopher von Schelling, see 'Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Online Encyclopedia, 22 October 2011) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/schelling/>>.

<sup>57</sup> Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (n 4) 2.

<sup>58</sup> See Horst K Lücke, *Justice, Humanity and the New World Order* (2003) 24(2) *Adelaide Law Review* 323.

<sup>59</sup> Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal* (n 29) 77. The passage continues: 'Christianity was the only force which held back the ancient German barbarism with its naked violence; once that talisman is broken a terrible cataclysm will break out.'

‘Fichteans’ in this passage refers to (then only potential) followers of Fichte.<sup>60</sup> From my school days (1939–49),<sup>61</sup> I remember Fichte as the great philosopher and patriot who courageously defied Napoleon and upheld German dignity. Berlin mentions Fichte’s celebrated *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (speeches to the German nation), delivered in the city of Berlin in 1807–8, ‘at a time when the troops of Napoleon were occupying the city, in which he told the Germans to arise and resist’.<sup>62</sup> He was introduced to us by our teachers together with Ernst Moritz Arndt (1769–1860).<sup>63</sup> They were two of the main fathers of German nationalism.

B *Fichte’s concept of freedom; a ‘quantum leap’*

Berlin reports Fichte as having stated: ‘My system, from beginning to end, is merely an analysis of the concept of freedom’.<sup>64</sup> According to Fichte, true freedom consists in listening to the inner voice which issues orders to myself which I, being free to do as I will, obey. Freedom is ‘obedience to self-imposed injunctions’.<sup>65</sup>

Berlin quotes Fichte as saying, somewhat cryptically, that ‘I am wholly my own creation ... I do not accept the law of what nature offers me because I must, I believe it because I will’.<sup>66</sup> ‘Will’ occurs in Berlin’s account of Fichte’s philosophy at least 30 times. It is best understood as the unbending determination to do what one feels called upon to do. Whoever succeeds in translating such determination into action gains a sense of identity and knows that he exists. Fichte is reported as having said ‘I do not wish to think, I wish to act.’<sup>67</sup> The Romantics transferred the emphasis from

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> The school I attended in Wuppertal from 1939 to 1942 was called *Ernst Moritz Arndt Schule*. In 1945 after the lost war it was renamed (somewhat ridiculously) *Schule in der Siegesstraße* (School in Victory Street). It had not occurred to the British military government which ordered the change of name also to change the name of the street.

<sup>62</sup> Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal* (n 29) 74.

<sup>63</sup> Arndt lectured at the University of Greifswald; his publications were anti-French and anti-Semitic, extolling the purity of the German race. He opposed serfdom, as apparent from one of his famous poems *Vaterlandslied* (again arousing patriotic, if not chauvinistic feelings for Germany). Arndt’s agitation against serfdom led to its abolition in Sweden. See Karen Hagemann ‘Of ‘Manly Valor’ and ‘German Honor’: Nation, War, and Masculinity in the Age of the Prussian Uprising Against Napoleon’ (1997) 30(2) *Central European History* 187, 209:

<i>Der Gott, der Eisen wachsen ließ,</i>	The God who made iron grow,
<i>Der wollte keine Knechte</i>	Never wanted slaves
<i>Drum gab er Säbel, Schwert und Spieß</i>	He gave man saber, sword and spear,
<i>Dem Mann in seine Rechte</i>	To man in his right hand.

Hagemann calls Fichte and Arndt ‘contemporary prophets’ at 191.

<sup>64</sup> Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal* (n 29) 63.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid 70.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid 71.

<sup>67</sup> Hans Kohn, ‘The Paradox of Fichte’s Nationalism’ (1949) 10(3) *Journal of the History of Ideas* 319, 319.

reason (from René Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*)<sup>68</sup> to motive, intent and, most importantly, the human will (*volo ergo sum*).<sup>69</sup>

At some stage there was a 'quantum leap' in Fichte's thinking when, according to Berlin, he moved from the conception of the self to a 'superself', the nation to which the self belongs.<sup>70</sup> Berlin finds nothing wrong with groups or indeed nations seeking freedom at least of the positive kind.<sup>71</sup> However, he rejects Fichte's 'theological' suggestion that the nation can achieve freedom only at the expense of the individual:

Starting with the notion of the isolated individual who serves some inner ideal which is out of reach of nature or the tyrant, Fichte gradually adopts the idea that the individual himself is nothing, that man is nothing without society ... The individual, he begins to suspect, does not exist, he must vanish. The group — *Gattung*<sup>72</sup> — alone exists, is alone real ... Individual self-determination now becomes collective self-realisation, and the nation [becomes] a community of unified wills in pursuit of moral truth.<sup>73</sup>

A final step is needed to give meaning and direction to such 'unified wills'.<sup>74</sup> What is needed is a leader; we need the 'divine leadership' of the *Zwingherr*. The Duden defines *Zwingherr* as a '*meist mit Gewalt, despotisch auftretender Herrscher*' (a ruler who is despotic and usually acts violently).<sup>75</sup> '*Zwingherr zur Deutschheit*', says Fichte, calling for a ruler who takes us to *Deutschheit*, best translated as 'Germanness'.

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<sup>68</sup> 'I think, therefore I am.' See, eg, 'Cogito, ergo sum', *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Online Encyclopaedia) <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/cogito-ergo-sum>>.

<sup>69</sup> 'I am determined to succeed, therefore I am.' Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (n 33) 328–9.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid* 312.

<sup>71</sup> Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (n 4) 54: 'Indeed, I have tried to show that it is the notion of freedom in its "positive" sense that is at the heart of the demands for national or social self-direction which animate the most powerful public movements of our time, and that not to recognize this is to misunderstand the most vital facts and ideas of our age.'

<sup>72</sup> The German 'die Gattung' translates into 'genus', 'race', 'family', or 'species'. 'Kind, sort, type, class' are further figurative meanings. See, eg, 'German-English translation for "Gattung" *Langenscheidt Translation* (Online Dictionary) <<https://en.langenscheidt.com/german-english/gattung>>.

<sup>73</sup> Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal* (n 29) 74–5.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>75</sup> 'Zwingherr, der' *Duden Online-Wörterbuch* (Online Dictionary) <<https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Zwingherr>>. The Duden is the German equivalent to the Oxford English Dictionary.

Berlin's *Roots of Romanticism*<sup>76</sup> has been plausibly criticised for loose generalisations and for some mistakes.<sup>77</sup> That may cast some doubt on the complete reliability of his general account of Romanticism (see above Part IV(A)–(B)). However, his account of Fichte's contribution as related in this section is exempt from such strictures; much of the same account is given by an unrelated and reliable German source.<sup>78</sup> If Fichte's effect on German politics was in fact similar to that which Karl Marx exerted on Russia and many other nations, it would be yet another impressive instance of the power of philosophical ideas on human affairs.

### C Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Adolf Hitler

Fascism in Germany equals Nazism, which cannot be separated from the utterly dominant personality of Adolf Hitler. In philosophy, Fichte was the most radical representative of the Romantic movement. For Germany, at any rate, Berlin's suggestion that Romanticism spawned fascism raises the issue of whether Fichte's philosophy exerted a significant influence on Hitler's thought and action. After the Beer Hall Putsch of 1923 Hitler spent a year in Landsberg Prison. While there he wrote *Mein Kampf*.<sup>79</sup> He claimed also to have studied a number of German philosophers in Landsberg. The question is whether that included Fichte, and whether Fichte's ideas became part of Hitler's political platform.

#### 1 Two major parallels

##### (a) *Freiheit*

In Nazi Germany, '*Freiheit*' (freedom) was shouted from the rooftops; it was a key concept of Nazi ideology and political practice. Columns of *Jungvolk*, 13-year old Horst Lücke included, were made to march around the streets of Germany's towns and cities singing: '*nur der Freiheit gehört unser Leben* (we devote our lives to freedom)'.<sup>80</sup> The song can still be heard on YouTube and is now treated in Germany

<sup>76</sup> Berlin, *Roots of Romanticism* (n 33).

<sup>77</sup> Peter Gay, 'Imitations of Partiality, Wrong but Romantic: Isaiah Berlin's Lectures on the Nemesis of the Philosophes' (1999) *Times Literary Supplement* 3, 3-4. See also Norman Podhoretz, 'A Dissent on Isaiah Berlin' (1999) 107(2) *Commentary* 25.

<sup>78</sup> Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800–1866: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Verlag CH Beck, 1998) 303–4.

<sup>79</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1936). For an English version, see Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, tr Ralph Manheim (Hutchinson, 1972).

<sup>80</sup> 'Nur der Freiheit gehört unser Leben' (YouTube, 3 December 2008) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0inc9nMi9Mk>>.

*Nur der Freiheit gehört unser Leben  
Laßt die Fahnen dem Wind  
Einer stehet dem andern daneben  
Aufgeboten wir sind  
Freiheit ist das Feuer  
Ist der helle Schein  
So lange sie noch lodert  
Ist die Welt nicht klein.*

Our lives belong to freedom  
Let our flags flutter in the wind  
We are all standing together  
And we follow the call  
Freedom is the fire  
And the brightest glow  
As long as it still blazes  
The world is not too small.

as folk music.<sup>81</sup> In 1934 the leadership of the Hitler Youth had commissioned Hans Baumann to write and compose it.<sup>82</sup> The 1935 Nazi Party rally in Nürnberg was titled *Reichsparteitag der Freiheit* (Party of the Realm Convention of Freedom).

This ‘*Freiheit*’ had nothing to do with John Stuart Mill. The *Enabling Act* of 1933 had effectively extinguished any legal protection of individual rights in Germany.<sup>83</sup> At the *Reichsparteitag der Freiheit* of 1935, the *Nürnberger Gesetze* (Nuremberg Laws) were announced. They defined about 600,000 Germans as racially Jewish, stripped them of their German citizenship and criminalised marriage or sexual relations of other Germans with them. Hitler despised individual liberty; he saw it as an obstacle to the effective organisation of the state.<sup>84</sup>

It follows that ‘freedom’ was used by the Nazis in the Fichtean sense, viz as wrested from the individual and attached to the nation. As Fichte had invoked it in opposition to Napoleonic domination of German lands, so Hitler employed it in his campaign against the restrictions of the Treaty of Versailles. The fact that Fichte’s and the Nazi’s concepts of freedom are so closely aligned lends some support to the suggestion that Hitler was influenced by the Romantic philosophers and more specifically by Fichte, their most radical representative.

(b) *Der Wille*

To Fichte, *der Wille* (the will) was just as important as freedom. It was also an essential concept in Nazi ideology. Leni Riefenstahl, Hitler’s favourite filmmaker, was asked to produce a documentary about the 1934 *Reichsparteitag* in Nürnberg. Her brilliantly produced film was screened in German cinemas in 1935 and was titled *Triumph des Willens* (Triumph of the Will).<sup>85</sup>

Just how dominant the concept was in Hitler’s mental universe is shown by the fact that he uses it about 140 times in *Mein Kampf*, often tied to other concepts. Examples are *Willenskraft* or *Willensstärke* (strength of the will); *Willensfreiheit* (freedom of the will); *Willenseinstellung* (direction of the will); *Lebenswille* (the will to live); *Mehrheitswille* (the will of the majority); *Kampfwille* (the will to fight); *Forterhaltungswille* (the will of a nation to preserve itself); *Aufopferungswille* (the will to sacrifice oneself); *Eroberungswille* (the will to conquer); *Willensbekundung* (declaration of one’s will); *Selbsterhaltungswille* (the will to ensure self-preservation);

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Baumann joined the Nazi party in 1933 and served on the Russian front during World War Two. After the war he disavowed Nazi ideology and wrote children’s books.

<sup>83</sup> *Ermächtigungsgesetz, Gesetz zur Behebung der Not von Volk und Reich* (Germany) 24 March 1933.

<sup>84</sup> HR Trevor-Roper (ed), *Hitler’s Secret Conversations 1941–1944* (The New American Library, 1953) 401. There have been further editions, eg, HR Trevor-Roper (ed) *Hitler’s Table Talk 1941–1944: Secret Conversations* (Enigma Books, 2007). Trevor-Roper’s introduction has not changed, nor have Hitler’s comments on individual rights.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Triumph des Willens’ (Leni Riefenstahl-Produktion, 1935).

*Willensenergie* (the energy of the will); *Willensschwäche* (weakness of the will); and *Willenslosigkeit* (lack of any will). Here again, it could be argued that Hitler learnt the importance of the determination to succeed, of the will, from the Romantics and from Fichte in particular.

## 2 Other parallels

Many of the slogans and ideas which were common political currency in Nazi Germany were well aligned with Fichte's theories. Examples are '*Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz*' (common good before private good), '*du bist nichts; dein Volk ist alles*' (you are nothing, your nation is everything). Ryback noted that 'Johann Gottlieb Fichte was in fact the philosopher closest to Hitler and his National Socialist movement in tone, spirit, and dynamic'.<sup>86</sup> Ryback relies on a few further parallels: Fichte called for a *Volkskrieg* (peoples' uprising), Hitler for the overthrow of the political elite; both believed in 'German exceptionalism' as manifested in customs and language, and which both wanted purged of foreign elements.<sup>87</sup> Anti-Semitism was one of Hitler's deadliest and most ferocious passions; Ryback calls Fichte 'decidedly anti-Semitic'.<sup>88</sup>

## 3 Impact of Fichte on Hitler

Napoleon's conquest of German lands and the loss of World War I, followed by the harsh Treaty of Versailles, engendered similar emotions in many Germans; a sense of domination by foreign powers, collective frustration and national humiliation. It turned Fichte into a 'national-revolutionary prophet and propagandist' against Napoleon,<sup>89</sup> and caused Hitler either to be gripped by a burning desire for revenge and national salvation, or to politically exploit such sentiments in others. These similarities did not remain hidden from contemporary observers. Professor Ernst Bergmann of the University of Leipzig, one of Hitler's ardent admirers, even called Fichte one of the first National Socialists.<sup>90</sup> These facts alone would help explain some of the parallels which have been discussed.

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<sup>86</sup> Timothy W Ryback, *Hitler's Private Library: The Books that Shaped his Life* (Vintage, 2009) 107.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid 107–8: 'It was Fichte who provided the philosophical foundations for the toxic blend of Teutonic singularity and vicious nationalism.'

<sup>88</sup> See also JG Fichte: 'A State Within a State' in P Mendes-Flohr and J Reindharz (eds) *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History* (Oxford University Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 1995) 309. It has been suggested that Fichte's views on this subject were ambiguous. See Edward L Schaub, 'JG Fichte and Anti-Semitism' 49(1) (1940) *Philosophical Review* 37.

<sup>89</sup> Nipperdey (n 78) 303: '*Fichte wird ... zum national-revolutionären Propheten und Propagandisten*'.

<sup>90</sup> Schaub (n 88) 36: 'To regard Fichte as the first great forerunner of National Socialism, ... even as a National Socialist, therefore appears not unjustifiable.'



Hitler certainly took an interest in German philosophers. He boasted that he took Arthur Schopenhauer's *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (the World as Will and Representation)<sup>91</sup> into the trenches during World War I and that he read it there.<sup>92</sup> He borrowed books by Schopenhauer from a library in 1919 when he first joined the *Deutsche Arbeiter Party* (the German Workers' Party), the forerunner of the Nazi Party.<sup>93</sup> *Mein Kampf* quotes Schopenhauer's comment that the Jew was '*der große Meister im Lügen*' (the masterful liar);<sup>94</sup> however, he eventually tired of the philosopher's bookishness. The library of his Chancellery contained a set of Nietzsche's collected works but his reverence for the philosopher seems to have had its limits; he is said to have told Leni Riefenstahl that Nietzsche was more of an artist than a philosopher. His language, Hitler is supposed to have said, is possibly the most beautiful which German literature has to offer.<sup>95</sup> What of Johann Gottlieb Fichte?

Dietrich Eckart, a poet and writer and one of the first members of the Nazi Party,<sup>96</sup> is reported as having stated that Fichte, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche were the 'philosophical triumvirate of national Socialism'.<sup>97</sup> Eckart, who died in 1923, was Hitler's much admired mentor; *Mein Kampf*, written in 1924, concludes with a tribute to him.<sup>98</sup> Sherratt mentions Kant, Fichte, Schiller, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche as philosophers who were 'usurped' by Hitler.<sup>99</sup> In at least one of his speeches, Hitler mentioned Fichte's 'Speeches to the Nation'.<sup>100</sup> In 1933, after he had become Chancellor, Leni Riefenstahl presented him with an eight-volume set of Fichte's collected works, a first edition published in 1848.<sup>101</sup> It is safe to conclude that Hitler knew of Fichte throughout his political career.

The weight of the pro-Fichte indicators is somewhat lessened by the fact that his name does not appear in a book written by Houston Stewart Chamberlain, a British-born German philosopher.<sup>102</sup> It was his *Foundations of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, which, with

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<sup>91</sup> Ryback (n 86) 104.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Hitler (n 79) 253.

<sup>95</sup> Ryback (n 86) 107. Remembering poems like *Venedig* and *Die Sonne Sinkt* makes it difficult to disagree with Hitler's judgment.

<sup>96</sup> See 'Dietrich Eckart' Spartacus Educational (Web Page) <<https://spartacus-educational.com/GEReckart.htm>>.

<sup>97</sup> Ryback (n 86) 108.

<sup>98</sup> Hitler (n 79) 781: 'As one of the best he devoted his life to the awakening of our people in his life, in his poetry, in his thinking and finally in his action'.

<sup>99</sup> Yvonne Sherratt, *Hitler's Philosophers* (Yale University Press, 2013) 30.

<sup>100</sup> Ryback (n 86) 107.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid 100. The dedication reads: 'to my dear Führer with the deepest reverence' and is dated 20 June 1933.

<sup>102</sup> 'Houston Stewart Chamberlain, British-German Political Philosopher' *Encyclopædia Britannica* (Online Encyclopedia) <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Houston-Stewart-Chamberlain>>.

its strongly anti-Semitic orientation, could almost be described as Hitler's bible.<sup>103</sup> Trevor Roper has called it 'the avowed and recognisable basis of [Hitler's] racial doctrines'.<sup>104</sup>

Hitler's school education had been second-rate and, as Ryback says, he was well aware of his academic deficiencies.<sup>105</sup> He had neither the time, the patience nor the intellectual equipment to truly study the philosophical works which he encountered. Ryback has found no evidence to support the view that Hitler ever engaged in the serious study of German philosophy.<sup>106</sup> His claim to have done so seems like an attempt to make himself look erudite; the realistic view is that, from his limited reading, he would have picked out whatever suited his racial and chauvinistic prejudices and ignored the rest. As he says in *Mein Kampf*, '[d]ie Kunst des Lesens ist auch hier: Wesentliches behalten, Unwesentliches vergessen' (the art of reading is: remember what is important, forget what is unimportant).<sup>107</sup>

Trevor-Roper has summed up Hitler's incredible rise to power:

The son of a petty official in rural Austria, himself of meagre education and no fixed background, by all accounts a shiftless, feckless, unemployable neurotic, living from hand to mouth in the slums of Vienna, he appeared in Germany as a foreigner, and, in the years of its most abject condition, he declared that the German people could, by its own efforts ... conquer and dominate the whole of Europe [and] ... that he personally could achieve this miracle. Twenty years later he had so nearly succeeded that the rest of the world thought it another miracle that he was at last resisted.<sup>108</sup>

Who was this man? There has been endless speculation about the nature of Hitler's personality. Trevor-Roper's account<sup>109</sup> and Joachim Fest's *Hitler*<sup>110</sup> are the best that I have seen, but even they have not given us a definitive answer. Even those who were very close to him have told us that they did not really know him. General Alfred Jodl, Chief of the Operations Staff of the Armed Forces High Command, is reported as having stated: 'I ask myself: Do I then know this person at all, at whose side I led so

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<sup>103</sup> Houston Stewart Chamberlain, *The Foundations of the 19th Century* (Bodley Head, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, 1912). The same is true of Alfred Rosenberg, *Der Mythos des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts* (Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1930) a deeply racist rant which is best ignored. Chamberlain's book was originally published in German in 1899.

<sup>104</sup> Trevor-Roper, *Hitler's Secret Conversations 1941–1944* (n 84) xxvii.

<sup>105</sup> Ryback (n 86) 53.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid* 104–7.

<sup>107</sup> Hitler (n 79) 12.

<sup>108</sup> Trevor-Roper, *Hitler's Secret Conversations 1941–1944* (n 84) vii–viii.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid* vii–xxxii.

<sup>110</sup> Joachim C Fest, *Hitler*, tr Clara Winston and Richard Winston (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987).

thorny an existence? ... Even today I do not know what *he* thought, knew and wanted to do, but only what *I* thought and suspected about it.<sup>111</sup>

Whatever the answer, the view, to adapt Berlin's words, that Hitler simply wielded Fichte's fatal power in a way which other professors could have cured, can hardly be part of it.<sup>112</sup>

## VI CONCLUSION

The theories of Karl Marx appear to have had a major impact on Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia.<sup>113</sup> A similar conclusion about the impact of Fichte's philosophy on Adolf Hitler's doctrines, attitudes, emotions and cast-iron prejudices is not sustainable — there is simply not enough persuasive evidence for it. Hitler was the central figure of the fascist movement in Europe during the 1920s and '30s, so it is unlikely that Berlin's broader thesis, viz that Romanticism was responsible for the growth of fascism in Europe, can be sustained.

In my study of Berlin's views on liberal and romantic freedom and of information about his life, two matters stand out which I find profoundly appealing: the liberal concept of individual freedom and a cosmopolitan outlook on life.

The freedom of the individual to which Berlin was committed can never be unlimited. There are many other important values such as justice, happiness, culture, security and varying degrees of equality which need to be accommodated at the expense of personal freedom.<sup>114</sup> However, it must never be completely extinguished:

there ought to exist a certain minimum area of personal freedom which must on no account be violated, for if it is overstepped, the individual will find himself in an area too narrow for even that minimum development of his natural faculties which alone makes it possible to pursue, and even to conceive, the various ends which men hold good or right or sacred.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (London, Harper Collins, 1991) 414.

<sup>112</sup> Berlin, *Freedom and its Betrayal* (n 29) 77.

<sup>113</sup> Nadezhda Krupskaya 'How Lenin Studied Marx' *Marxists Archive* (Online Archive) <<https://www.marxists.org/archive/krupskaya/works/howleninstudiedmarx.htm>>: 'Lenin had a wonderful knowledge of Marx. In 1893, when he came to St. Petersburg, he astonished all of us who were Marxists at the time with his tremendous knowledge of the works of Marx and Engels.' From 1898 until Lenin's death in 1924, Krupskaya was Lenin's wife.

<sup>114</sup> Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (n 4) 9.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

Within Berlin's system of value pluralism, his 'minimum area of personal freedom' comes as close as anything to an absolute value.<sup>116</sup>

In 1929 Berlin was naturalised,<sup>117</sup> and there was never any doubt about his complete loyalty to his adopted country. In Britain he found a spirit of respect for others and toleration, of freedom of thought and debate, including the freedom to cultivate one's own foreign traditions. As he has explained, his heritage was threefold: British, Russian and Jewish.<sup>118</sup> In his infancy the family spoke Russian. He read Russian authors and gave lectures on his favourite, Ivan Turgenev. He shared with Turgenev 'an ability to enter into beliefs, feelings and attitudes alien and at times acutely anti-pathetic to his own'.<sup>119</sup> When he visited Leningrad in 1945, he spent many hours with the famous poet Anna Akhmatova; they exchanged views on Russian writers and formed an intense friendship.<sup>120</sup> He grew up in a Jewish family, was a lifelong Zionist and observed Jewish festivals, although he was not religious. No heritage was more important to him other than his Jewish one. For all his Britishness, Isaiah Berlin was, I believe, a cosmopolitan citizen.

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<sup>116</sup> Berlin has explained the system of value pluralism as follows: 'values are not discovered but invented – created by men like works of art, of which it is senseless to ask where they were before they were conceived'. See, eg, Berlin, *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age* (n 27) 12.

<sup>117</sup> A Ryan, 'Berlin, Sir Isaiah' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-65663>>.

<sup>118</sup> Berlin, *Personal Impressions* (n 18). For a brief summary, see Ignatieff (n 5) 292–4.

<sup>119</sup> Ignatieff (n 5) 256.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid* 151–68.