EDITOR'S PREFACE

A Tale of a Torso

. . . in accepting the invitation to become President of Iffley College in 1965 Berlin was acknowledging that he was incapable of writing a big book.

<div align="right">Maurice Cowling[1]</div>

275 printed pages! *Quel horreur!*

<div align="right">Isaiah Berlin[2]</div>

Political Ideas in the Romantic Age may be seen as Isaiah Berlin's *Grundrisse*,[3] the ur-text or 'torso',[4] as Berlin called it, from which a great deal of his subsequent work derived, but which also contains much that is distinctive and not to be found elsewhere in his writings. It was first composed between 1950 and 1952, and is based on a distillate of his early work in the history of ideas, itself informed and to a considerable extent constituted by the enormous amount of background reading he did for his Home University Library biography of Karl Marx[5] in the 1930s, when he was a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford. It is the longest continuous text he ever wrote, at over a hundred thousand words.[6] The prologue was written somewhat later, and Berlin revised the main

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[1] *Spectator*, 17 October 1998, 38.

[2] Letter to Henry Hardy, 10 March 1992, on being told the approximate length of the present book: see p. xiv below.

[3] Karl Marx's *Grundrisse* ('Foundations') is the name given to his rough drafts of 1857–8 for his lifetime project, a 'critique of the economic categories', part of which was later published as *Das Kapital* (1867). *Grundrisse* was first published in German in 1939 and 1941 in a rare, two-volume Soviet edition, reprinted in German for general circulation in a one-volume edition in 1953, and first translated into English in 1973.

[4] The metaphor became less appropriate as time went on: instead of adding missing limbs to the torso, Berlin quarried it for shorter pieces. I look forward to reading someone's *The Torso as Quarry: The Intellectual Auto-Parasitism of Isaiah Berlin*.

[5] *Karl Marx: His Life and Environment* (London and Toronto, 1939).

[6] Originally it was perhaps up to half as long again: see p. xii below, note 2.

text in his own hand – particularly heavily in the earlier chapters – after it had been typed from his initial dictation.

I have already recounted the story of this text briefly in my preface to Berlin's *Freedom and its Betrayal*,[1] an edited transcript of a set of radio lectures that derive from it. But let me expand on this a little here.

On 21 April 1950 Katharine E. McBride, President of Bryn Mawr College, Pennsylvania, wrote to Berlin, inviting him to give the Mary Flexner Lectures. The letter reached him at an opportune moment, as he was about to return to All Souls to become a full-time historian of ideas. He accepted with alacrity, in the first place provisionally, and six weeks later definitely. In his second letter[2] he proposed a topic:

> As for the subject of my lectures; I am wondering whether you would find the political ideas of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century a suitable topic. What I should like to talk about is the different fundamental types of approach to social and political problems – e.g. the Utilitarian; that of the Enlightenment (rational and sentimental) from the Encyclopaedia to the French Revolution; the Authoritarian-Reactionary (de Maistre and his allies); the Romantic; the Technocratic-Scientific (Saint Simon and his followers), and perhaps the Marxist.[3] These seem to me to be the prototypes from which our modern views in their great and colliding variety have developed (only stated, it appears to me, with much more clarity, vigour and dramatic force by the founders than by their modern epigoni). My lectures, while occupied with the history of ideas, would have a very direct bearing upon our present discontents. I don't know what I ought to call this subject – it is part of a work on the history of European ideas from 1789 to 1870 which, in any case, I must at some time write for the Oxford History of Europe,[4] but perhaps the title could be thought of later. Perhaps something quite simple, 'Six (or however many) Types of Political Theory', or perhaps something a

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[1] *Freedom and its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty* (London and Princeton, 2002), xii–xv.

[2] Dated 2 May 1950.

[3] In the end Berlin did not discuss Marxism, though he did include a chapter on Marx's historicist precursors – Vico, Herder and Hegel.

[4] A contract for Berlin's contribution to this series (the Oxford History of Modern Europe, edited by A. L. C. Bullock and F. W. Deakin) survives among many that were offered, agreed to or signed for books he never wrote. The book was first discussed with him at dinner in Wadham College, Oxford, in 1948, and was to be entitled *Ideas in Europe 1789–1870* (though the end-date varies).

little more arresting. However, if this kind of subject is suitable I could set to work and prepare some lectures.

[. . .] I hope you will have no hesitation in rejecting my suggested lectures if for some reason they are not what you desire, but I am pre-occupied with the thought of the early nineteenth century and its antecedents, and should find it difficult to turn my attention to something very different; but that is no reason why you should allow this to be foisted upon you if some other plan would suit you better. If, on the other hand, my suggestion is acceptable to you, I have no doubt that I shall myself vastly profit by the experience.

Naturally, Berlin's suggestion was accepted. And he was right to predict that giving the lectures would serve his own purposes, because the invitation proved to be the catalyst for the preparation, over the next two years, of the present work, which can for once rightly be described as 'seminal'. I say 'preparation' rather than 'writing' advisedly, since in December 1951 he is still 'in process of hysterical dictation of the rough draft'.[1]

The only other surviving detailed evidence of Berlin's thinking as he worked towards the typescript, so far as I know,[2] appears in a letter to Bryn Mawr written in November 1951, sent in reply to a request for an overall title under which to announce the series, and for titles for the individual lectures:

I am not sure what the best title of my lectures would be, perhaps 'Political Ideas in the Romantic Age' would be best, and you can put in '1760–1830' if you think well of that. I have been looking for some title denoting what I really want to talk about; i.e. the particular period during which modern political and social beliefs really came to be formulated and the controversies acquired their classical expression, in the sense that present-day arguments still deal in concepts and even terminology which crystallised during those years. What I wanted to avoid was a term like 'origins' or 'foundations', since this would

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[1] Letter to Anna Kallin of 11 December 1951: see p. 279 below.

[2] There is also an undated sheet (MS. Berlin 570, fo. 23) in the Berlin Papers in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, on which Berlin has written what seems to be an intermediate version of his plan: 'The Rise of Modern Political Thought / 1. Nature, Rights & the new scientific spirit (The philosophes & the Encyclopaedists) / 2. The Problem of Freedom (Rousseau & Kant) / 3. Idealism & Romanticism (Vico, Herder, Fichte & the Romantic movement) / 4. The organization of Society (St. Simon & the beginnings of socialism) / 5. The revolt against Reason (De Maistre & Görres) / 6. History & the Individual (Hegel & Marx)'.

commit me to talking about people like Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke etc., who may be the fathers of all these things, but are definitely felt to be predecessors and precursors and, certainly as far as mode of expression is concerned, altogether obsolete. I had therefore thought of as an alternative title 'The rise and crystallisation of modern political ideas'. If you can think of something more elegant than either, I should be grateful. Perhaps the first might be the title, the second a subtitle. I leave that to you.

As for the individual lectures, I should like to suggest the following: (1) 'The Concept of Nature and the Science of Politics' (Helvétius and Holbach); (2) 'Political Liberty and the Ethical Imperative' (Kant and Rousseau); (3) 'Liberalism and the Romantic Movement' (Fichte and J. S. Mill); (4) 'Individual Freedom and the March of History' (Herder and Hegel); (5) 'The Organisation of Society and the Golden Age' (Saint-Simon and his successors); (6) 'The Counter-Revolution' (Maistre and Görres).[1]

His mood as he finished the draft typescript was characteristically unselfconfident. As he wrote to a close friend at New College, David Cecil:

here I am trying to write this book on political ideas, & it is coming out all awry – sentimental, vague, clumsy, soft, unscholarly, a mass of verbiage & dough unseasoned, no sharp points, only occasionally little gleams of what I thought I said, what I thought I wanted to say. However I persist. I don't know what the lectures will sound like, but there *will*, unless I fall ill or die, be a book. Not very good, less so than I can do on the Russians. But I must get the circulation of blood going: I accepted the lectures because I knew they wd lay the foundations of a book. – & having dictated 150.000 words, I suppose there is.[2]

The lectures were duly delivered in the spring of 1952 – the first on 11 February and the last on 17 March – after a good deal of characteristic administrative flimflam into which we do not need to enquire here. As usual, the act of lecturing caused him terrible self-doubt. Between the second and third lectures he wrote to Marion

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[1] Letter of 20 November 1951 to Mrs Samuel H. Paul, Bryn Mawr.

[2] Letter of 29 January 1952. The word-count is not necessarily reliable, but may indicate that he did draft the whole work (see p. xiv below, note 3). IB continues: 'I shd rather like Cole's professorship at Oxford: perhaps the book will help with that: I am being quite frank.' He always said afterwards that the BBC version of the lectures was instrumental in winning him that very professorship in 1957.

Frankfurter: 'The lectures are an agony, of course, I seem to myself to be screaming meaningless phrases to a vaguely discernible, half darkened, audience; & feel terrified before, hysterical during & ashamed afterwards.'[1]

Berlin certainly intended to publish a book based on the typescript he had prepared for the lectures, and to do so within a year or two of their delivery. As he told A. L. Rowse during the last phase of preparation, 'I am even now in the throes of the most awful agony of writing lectures for Bryn Mawr to be given in February & then printed, I suppose next year.'[2] On 25 November 1952 he wrote to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, that he would have 'finished the politics – Bryn Mawr book' in 1953. The following January he remained optimistic in a letter to President McBride:

> This brings me to the subject I am trying to evade and avoid, the question of the manuscript, which I really do hope to be able to send you by about May. Heaven knows what its condition will be, whether it will be 140,000 words or 60,000 words or both – but let us turn away from this bleak and distasteful topic.[3]

He never did complete the necessary work, and the torso was laid aside and forgotten, despite the fact that he had revised much of it extensively.

It is hard to say at what precise juncture hope of a book was lost, but the last reference I have seen in the Bryn Mawr files occurs in March 1956, when President McBride gamely hopes for a manuscript by that July;[4] and in 1959 Berlin still writes to Oxford University Press as if the book was on his agenda; at any rate, it provides an excuse to explain the delay in writing his book for the Oxford History of Modern Europe, from his commitment to which he then proceeds to extricate himself.[5]

In 1992 I produced a fair copy of PIRA, incorporating all Berlin's myriad handwritten alterations, and the prologue that he had written subsequently, but I do not believe that he ever looked at it, at any rate seriously. Here is the relevant part of the covering letter I sent with the typescript:

[1] Letter of 23 February 1952.   [2] Letter of 20 January 1952.
[3] Letter of 22 January 1953.   [4] Letter of 27 March 1956.
[5] Letter to Dan Davin of 11 November 1959.

With somewhat bated breath I enclose my provisional rendition of what is by far your longest unpublished work (about 110,000 words, or 275 printed octavo pages), the 'long version' of the Flexner Lectures. Don't panic! I'm not asking you to do any work on this – not even to look at it in any detail. But since it now exists, it seemed reasonable to show it to you, if only so that you might admire its bulk. Perhaps you had no idea you had in fact written such a long book?!

I have inserted after the contents page a note on the text[1] which you might find of interest. It raises one or two questions, such as: Was there ever a corresponding 'long version' of the last two lectures, or did you never have time to draft this? Why did you never publish the lectures with OUP, as you were under contract to do? Was it indeed Anna Kallin's plan that the Third Programme version should be the 1952 Reith Lectures, and if so, when and why was this notion scotched? Was there a recording of the lectures as delivered in the USA?[2]

Berlin replied:

275 printed pages! *Quel horreur!* I don't know about the last two lectures – the BBC texts are in their own way surely complete? I have no recollection of a contract with OUP (remember, I shall be eighty-three in June). Anna Kallin did indeed wonder whether they might make Reith Lectures – I was only too ready. She put it up, I had a letter inviting me to do them, followed by a letter two days later countermanding. That was that. I was asked to do the series seven or eight years later, and by that time said that I had nothing to say. That was before I thought of Romanticism.

Even though I have still found no trace of the last two chapters, there is some evidence that they were drafted, though one cannot be certain.[3] In any event, for Maistre he could make use of a

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[1] Reproduced on pp. 279–83 below as 'Note from the editor to the author'.

[2] Letter of 3 March 1992.

[3] In November 1951 he writes to his parents: 'I stay at Harvard anyway till Xmas. Then I have a month or so to finish the Bryn Mawr lectures. [. . .] Then I shall go on working – correcting all the six chapters of the book which the Bryn Mawr chapters will become.' At this stage, of course, the later chapters might have been planned rather than actually dictated, but by 21 February 1952 he writes (again to his parents): 'I *have* written the first draft of a *book*. Which is an event. It will take about another 6–8 months of polish but shd appear, in 1953.' And on 7 November of the same year he writes to T. S. Eliot apropos the BBC Lectures: 'I possess the MS. of the text on which the talks are based, even longer, fuller, duller, with an apparatus of notes.' He is perhaps unlikely to have

typescript prepared some years before. He was right about the BBC texts, and his views on Saint-Simon and Maistre appear in *Freedom and its Betrayal*. A longer version of his treatment of Maistre is the centrepiece of *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*. I have not repeated these accounts in this volume, but the reader may wish to turn to them after finishing the present text, to complete the journey begun within these covers.

Readers familiar with Berlin's *oeuvre* will hardly need to be told where in his later work the ideas of PIRA reappear, in a more or less altered form; those less well travelled in his writings may welcome some brief preliminary guidance. At one stage I contemplated an exhaustive concordance of parallels, but once I began compiling this it quickly became clear that a complete listing would be more confusing than helpful, since so much of Berlin's work consists of journeys across similar terrain. The context and the purpose of the enquiry often differ; nor does Berlin ever exactly repeat himself, even when he is ostensibly recapitulating discussions that have appeared elsewhere, which means that one needs to read all his discussions of a topic to be sure that one has squeezed out every drop of what he (not always consistently) has to say about it. Nevertheless there is a good deal of overlap in his work taken as a whole, and readers who tackle it systematically will recognise a number of previous acquaintances – eventually old friends – as they travel onward.

A striking example of Berlin's avoidance of repetition is provided by his multiple treatments of what he sometimes calls the 'three-legged stool' or 'tripod' of key assumptions (for him mistaken) on which Western philosophy has, in his view, rested for some two thousand years. In his usual account, these assumptions are that in ethics and politics, as in science, all genuine questions have unique answers, that these answers are in principle discoverable, and that they all fit together into a coherent whole. This leitmotif is implicit in the first chapter of PIRA, though not set out there in a single coordinated passage.[1] It becomes explicit in Berlin's later work, for example (among many other instances) in 'The Romantic Revolution' (1960; SR), in the second lecture – 'The

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expressed himself thus if two chapters remained unwritten, however great an exaggeration he committed in referring to 'an apparatus of notes'.

[1] See, for example, pp. 21, 23, 28, 54–5 and 77–8 below.

First Attack on Enlightenment' – of *The Roots of Romanticism* (1965), and in 'The Divorce Between the Sciences and the Humanities' (1974; AC).

These accounts are broadly similar. However, if we turn to other treatments of the trope, differences appear. In 'The Birth of Greek Individualism' (1962; L)[1] we find that the usual first and third legs have become legs 1 and 2, and that there is a new leg 3: 'The third assumption is that man has a discoverable, describable nature, and that this nature is essentially, and not merely contingently, social.' Though this substitution is obviously motivated by the topic of the lecture, made clear in its title, one does wonder if there is a certain arbitrariness about the selection of legs for the tripod, indeed about the number of legs this supportive piece of furniture is said to possess. In chapter 4 of 'The Magus of the North' (1965; TCE) we find the Enlightenment tradition resting on 'three pillars' of faith – 'in reason', 'in the identity of human nature through time and the possibility of universal human goals', and 'in the possibility of attaining to the second by means of the first'.[2] The cake is recognisable, even if the recipe is subtly different. In any event, as Berlin wrote in another context, 'like all over-simple classifications of this type, [it] becomes, if pressed, artificial, scholastic and ultimately absurd', though it can certainly offer 'a starting-point for genuine investigation'.[3]

Let me now mention a few of the other principal correspondences between PIRA and later works that may strike the reader who comes to the former when familiar with the latter, or indeed vice versa. The first and most straightforward of these, of course, is between the four chapters of PIRA, the first four Mary Flexner Lectures, and the first four BBC Lectures published in *Freedom and its Betrayal* (reckoning the introduction to that volume together with its first chapter – on Helvétius – as the single item they originally constituted). Next in line is the use of the second and third chapters in 'Two Concepts of Liberty', and of the fourth in 'Historical Inevitability'. These are the reworkings that George Crowder has in mind when he sums up the main thrust of PIRA in these terms: 'In the torso Berlin sketched the outlines of what would become his mature position in many areas, but three in particular: the complex political legacy of Enlightenment rationalism

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[1] L 290 ff., 319.   [2] TCE 278.
[3] 'The Hedgehog and the Fox', PSM 437.

and its critics, the contrast between negative and positive liberty, and the vulnerability of positive liberty to corruption.'[1]

This brings us to more local echoes of individual chapters or passages from PIRA in later writing. Here one should first strike a note of caution: there is not necessarily a straightforward one-to-one correspondence between the subject-matter of earlier and later passages, since different topics, or different aspects of the same topic, appear in different combinations at different times. So, for example, the earlier pages of 'The Divorce Between the Sciences and the Humanities' echo the depiction of Enlightenment scientism in the first chapter of PIRA – the idea that cumulative progress is possible in all areas of enquiry if one applies the scientific method (allegedly the only rational method there is) – while the later part of the essay, with its focus on Vico, is more closely related to PIRA's chapter 4. Conversely, chapter 1 points forward in some ways to 'The Divorce . . .' and in other ways to 'The Concept of Scientific History' (1960; CC, PSM); indeed, chapters 1 and 4 themselves overlap a good deal. So the specification of parallels is a necessarily inexact science.

That said, some rough signposting is possible. The prologue to PIRA contains Berlin's well-known definition of philosophy as a third way, different from both empirical and formal disciplines.[2] This resurfaces in fuller form in several places, including the introduction to *The Age of Enlightenment* (1956; POI), 'The Purpose of Philosophy' (1961; CC, POI), 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?' (1961; CC, PSM), and 'An Introduction to Philosophy', a television interview with Bryan Magee.[3]

The prologue and the first chapter of PIRA, 'Politics as a Descriptive Science', set out the avowedly oversimplified view of the Enlightenment that Berlin rehearsed many times throughout his writings, refining it to some degree as time went by. Notable later instances are the chapter on 'The Enlightenment' in *The Magus of the North* (1965), described by John Gray as canonical,[4] and the relevant part of 'The First Attack on Enlightenment', the second lecture of *The Roots of Romanticism*, delivered in the same

[1] George Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism* (Cambridge, 2004), 56–7.
[2] See pp. 11–12 below.
[3] Published in Bryan Magee (ed.), *Men of Ideas: Some Creators of Contemporary Philosophy* (London, 1978), 14–41.
[4] John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin* (London, 1995), 136.

year. As noted above, all these works include accounts of the variously triform bedrock on which Berlin saw the Enlightenment as being founded.

In addition, Berlin begins the first chapter by raising the problem of obedience as fundamental to political philosophy: 'Why should anyone obey anyone else?' This question also inaugurates the first Flexner/BBC Lecture, and 'Two Concepts of Liberty'.[1] One of the main themes of the same chapter, namely the difference between the logic of enquiry in science as opposed to the arts, and the linked rejection of methodological monism, reappears in 'The Divorce Between the Sciences and the Humanities'.

The discussion of Rousseau and Kant in the second chapter, 'The Idea of Freedom', is recognisable in a condensed form in 'Two Concepts of Liberty'. And the section on Kant that ends the chapter is developed in 'Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Nationalism' (1972; SR).

The material on Fichte in 'Two Concepts of Freedom', the third chapter of PIRA, is used not only in 'Two Concepts of Liberty', but also in the fourth lecture, 'The Restrained Romantics', of *The Roots of Romanticism*. In chapter 3, too, we find intimations of the extended treatment of historical realism that Berlin provided in 'The Sense of Reality', written soon afterwards (1953; SR), though here he calls it the 'sense of history'.[2]

The final, fourth chapter, 'The March of History', after a recapitulation of much of chapter 1, includes not only the material (on Hegel, for instance) that is reworked in 'Historical Inevitability', but also sections on Vico and Herder that can be seen as the germs of Berlin's later work on those two thinkers, represented especially by the studies of them (1960 and 1965 respectively) incorporated into *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*. In this chapter too we see the beginning of Berlin's preoccupation with pluralism and the Counter-Enlightenment, and also the main origin of the discussion of historicism and of differing views of the nature of history in 'The Concept of Scientific History'.

Some later resonances of the appendix on 'Subjective versus Objective Ethics' are identified in Joshua Cherniss's introduction.[3]

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[1] FIB 1, L 168. It appears, too, in 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?' (PSM 64) and in 'The Birth of Greek Individualism' (L 293).

[2] See p. 200 below (the 'sense of reality' appears on pp. 192 and 259).

[3] See pp. xlii–xlvi below.

Once again, I emphasise that the echoes catalogued here comprise only a small selection, chosen more or less at random, and should not be taken as any kind of comprehensive guide to the ubiquitous presence of ideas from PIRA in Berlin's later work. Nor, on the other hand, should their existence be allowed to obscure the fact, alluded to at the outset, that there is a great deal in PIRA that is not said at all – or not said as fully and/or as well – in Berlin's later writings. Some dimensions of the thinkers Berlin discusses receive much more detailed treatment than he ever gave them subsequently. More importantly, as Joshua Cherniss explains, PIRA uniquely draws most of Berlin's main themes together, exhibits them as a coherent overall thesis, and shows how the debates discussed are prototypes of many of our current preoccupations. In this context I should like to quote Ian Harris,[1] who has pointed out that PIRA

> reveals the unity in Berlin's thought much better than anything published hitherto. In particular, it shows very clearly that like Cassirer, Croce, Lovejoy, Oakeshott and Collingwood, Berlin wrote a history that was formed by, and which was a vehicle for, his philosophical views. That is also what makes it intellectually interesting, and puts it in a different category from any number of specialised works published in the intervening half century.

As compared with the other works I have reconstructed from Berlin's *Nachlass* – chiefly *The Magus of the North*, *The Sense of Reality*, *The Roots of Romanticism*, *Freedom and its Betrayal* – PIRA presented a rather special problem of intellectual archaeology. Those other works were in a sufficiently completed state for me to turn them into books that needed no special explanation or apology beyond making clear what their origins were, so that they would not be judged by inappropriate standards. PIRA, however, was in a far more rough-hewn condition, like the massive sculptures for the tomb of Pope Julius II left unfinished by Michelangelo, or the colossal *kouros* that lies, a moment of arrested history, on a hillside near the sea at Apollonas on the Greek island of Naxos. This lent it a certain mystique and grandeur, but meant that it couldn't be brought to completion in the same way as its predecessors were, especially since it lacks its final two chapters. I and Berlin's other Literary Trustees therefore decided to give it the

[1] Personal communication.

rather different treatment that this volume constitutes. PIRA, that is, is offered to the public not as any kind of forgotten though essentially finished work, but as the 'torso' Berlin knew it to be, without artificial prostheses attached where limbs are missing, and without excision of his unimplemented notes for revision, or concealment of other signs of incompleteness.

I am most grateful to Joshua Cherniss, whose introduction skilfully places PIRA in context in the development of Berlin's thought and of his subject. Joshua has generously helped, besides, with the above sketch of later parallels. I should also like to thank Robert Wokler for invaluable contributions from his expert knowledge over a long period; Alan Ryan, one of my fellow Literary Trustees, for his indispensable support and guidance during the preparation of the volume; and James Chappel for timely and efficient research in the Berlin Papers on PIRA's history. Help on individual points was given by George Crowder, Steffen Gross, Jennifer Holmes, Michael Inwood and Serena Moore, whom I warmly thank, as I do all those whose input I have carelessly failed to keep track of.

I hope and believe that Isaiah Berlin would have approved of the dedication of this book to the memory of Solomon Rachmilevich. As Berlin said to his biographer, 'He was the first person who gave me a taste for ideas in general, interesting ideas *telles quelles*.'[1] 'Rach' died in 1953 in his early sixties, at about the same time as the PIRA project, and it seemed right to bring them both back to life together.

Wolfson College, Oxford   HENRY HARDY
May 2005

PS A postscript to the above preface is printed on p. 284.

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[1] See L1 141 note 1.