Introduction

> Why, thou must be thyself.
>
> *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (III.iv.3)[1]

> The nonchalance of boys who are sure of a dinner, and would disdain as much as a lord to do or say aught to conciliate one, is the healthy attitude of human nature.
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> Emerson, 'Self-Reliance'(1897), *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. R. Poirier (Oxford, 1990), 133.

Shakespeare is an author for a liberal, individualistic culture. Ralph Waldo Emerson called poets 'liberating gods': 'They are free, and they make free.'[2] This isn't always true. Yeats and Eliot were authoritarian in outlook, even fascist. But the claim does work for Shakespeare. In 1850 Emerson said Shakespeare 'wrote the text of modern life'. If we associate modernity with individualism and self-realization, with choice, freedom, authenticity – if modernity means being true to yourself – we can agree with Emerson that the world has been 'Shakspearized'.[3]

'Individuality' and 'being true to oneself' seem straightforward enough notions. Individual freedom is being able to act as one wants. But how do I – or you – want to act? What is your authentic, real desire as opposed to a false, fleeting one? All of us, at one time or another, have wanted something very badly, only to find years later (or days…) that our former wish is incomprehensible. 'What on earth was I thinking?' we ask ourselves. 'For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,/Who art as black as hell, as dark as night', rues Shakespeare in Sonnet 147. How could he have loved this appalling whore, the so-called Dark Lady? (Martin Amis notes the same

[1] When citing Shakespeare, I rely on *The Riverside Shakespeare*, edited by G. Blakemore Evans with J. J. M. Tobin, second edn (Boston, 1997).
[2] 'The Poet' (1844), *Emerson*, ed. Poirier, 210. Shakespeare 'moves through all of Emerson's writing', argues Michael Bristol: see his *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (London, 1990), 127.
[3] 'Shakspeare; or, the Poet', *Emerson*, ed. Poirier, 338, 335.

predicament as recurring in Philip Roth's novels: 'The good thing about these girls is that you can do whatever the hell you like to them in bed. The bad thing is that you wish they wouldn't let you.')[4] How could the speaker of Sonnet 147 have done what he did not want to do? There is no answer to that question; but Ovid knew the phenomenon ('*video meliora proboque,/-deteriora sequor*' – 'I see the better and approve it, but I follow the worse')[5] and so did St Paul: 'For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do' (Romans 7:19). (Menecrates observes something similar in *Antony and Cleopatra*: we are often 'ignorant of ourselves', he says, and 'Beg often our own harms' (II.i.5–6).) Montaigne – an author Shakespeare read, at least in part – wrote that 'our willing of anything is never free, final or constant'.[6] In *All's Well That Ends Well* the snobbish Bertram, Count of Rossillion, loathes the thought of having to wed the lovely, clever and charming (but untitled) Helena. His wise mother and everyone else know that Helena is a catch: Bertram would be out of his mind to reject her. Eventually the French king insists this 'rash and unbridled boy' (III.ii.28) go through with the marriage; Bertram promptly tears off to the Italian wars with his idiotic pal Parolles; is finally tricked into bedding the all-suffering Helena; and so, willy-nilly, the union is consummated. All's well that ends well, then; Bertram, as Dr Johnson remarked, 'is dismissed to happiness'.[7] But, as Johnson's rather acid comment indicates, it is not quite obvious that Shakespeare intends us to delight in the outcome. Our misgivings about the marriage are captured in the King's somewhat queasy words at the play's end: 'All yet *seems* well' (V.iii.333; my emphasis). The title of Shakespeare's play is, then, slyly ironic. Yet before saddling up our high horses and excoriating Bertram as a fool and cad we might recall those many other young, silly and headstrong lovers in Shakespeare who also reject arranged marriages. What makes Bertram so different? Why does his reluctance to be hitched up to Helena not count, but Hermia's refusal of Demetrius (in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) does? Setting aside the important question of whether Bertram is worthy of

[4] 'Philip Roth: No Satisfaction', *The Moronic Inferno and Other Visits to America* (London, 2006; first pub. 1986), 38.

[5] Book VII, lines 20–1, *Metamorphoses*, trans. F. J. Miller, rev. G. P. Goold, third edn (Cambridge, Mass., 1977).

[6] Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M. A. Screech (London, 1991), 375 (II.1). All citations of Montaigne are from Screech, indicated (henceforth in text) by page number then book and chapter number; I omit the editorial convention that distinguishes different stages of composition of the *Essays*.

[7] *Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. A. Sherbo, vol. VII of *Yale Edition of the Works of Samuel Johnson* (New Haven, 1968), 404.

Helena (probably not), the play raises some perennial human problems. How does one tell when a particular impulse (for example, to go off to war and play around rather than settle down with a nice middle-class girl) is harmful for the person possessing it? Do you possess a desire, or does it possess you? What is the difference between an inauthentic and an authentic wish? Can a drive be genuine yet still harmful to me? And what does 'harmful' mean in this context anyway? Suppose a drive was 'authentic' yet also self-destructive: would yielding to it be admirable – or just mad? Yeats's Irish Airman says that 'A lonely impulse of delight/Drove to this tumult in the clouds.'[8] Here death is the price of a real, fulfilled, valuable life. Nietzsche celebrated such recklessness as marking an heroic individuality: 'it is of the very essence of the rich spirit to squander itself carelessly, without petty caution, from day to day'.[9]

The twentieth-century Russian-British philosopher Isaiah Berlin addressed these issues insightfully. Among his many writings is a translation of Ivan Turgenev's novella *First Love* (published 1860).[10] The story tells of a young boy's desire, one summer in the country, for the daughter of a down-at-heel princess – and the destruction of that love when the boy discovers the girl is having an affair with his virile and selfish father. Towards the end of the story the boy recounts his feelings just before the family is about to return to Moscow (the father's liaison with Zinaida has been hushed up):

> I walked about in a daze, as if I had lost my wits, longing for it all to end as soon as possible. One thought kept running in my head: How could she – a young girl and a princess – have brought herself to do such a thing, when she knew that my father was not free, and she could after all have married, say, Byelovzorov? [A retired hussar, one of Zinaida's many well-placed suitors.] What did she hope for, was she not frightened of ruining her whole future? Yes, I thought, this is it – this is love; this is passion; this is devotion. And I remembered Looshin's words: 'To sacrifice oneself is the height of bliss – for some people.' (95)

Zinaida ruins herself for love, dying in childbirth. But some time before this the boy catches a last glimpse of her. Out one day riding with his father – who is such an excellent horseman 'that the horse itself … seemed to take pride in the rider' (98) – the boy secretly watches him talk with Zinaida, who urges him to leave his wife:

[8] 'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death' (first pub. in *The Wild Swans at Coole* (1919)), *Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, second edn (London, 1950), 152.
[9] Book I, Para. 77 of *The Will to Power*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York, 1968), 49; this note from 1883–8.
[10] *First Love*, trans. I. Berlin (London, 1978; translation first appeared 1950); page references in text.

Then something unbelievable took place before my eyes. My father suddenly lifted his riding-crop, with which he had been flicking the dust off the folds of his coat, and I heard the sound of a sharp blow struck across her arm which was bared to the elbow. It was all I could do to prevent myself from crying out. Zinaida quivered – looked silently at my father – and raising her arm slowly to her lips, kissed the scar which glowed crimson upon it. (100–1)

It is easy to see the appeal this story must have had for Berlin: it illustrates ideas about human beings at the heart of his philosophy.[11] Berlin felt that people's choices are often irrational but not to be despised on that count; that reason is a central, but not defining, feature of our species; that not all human goods are compatible (passionate love, for instance, conflicts with autonomy). Zinaida's love is crazily destructive and ends tragically. But it is also mysterious, awe-inspiring and worthy of respect by its very intensity: sacrifice ennobles her. The story underscores something Turgenev wrote in his 1860 lecture 'Hamlet and Don Quixote'. Like Don Quixote, Turgenev says, we cannot be sure that our ideals are not meretricious – 'a barber's tin basin [rather than] a magic golden helmet'. Consequently 'any and all significance lies in the sincerity and strength of one's convictions'.[12] What makes something valuable is the amount of passion one pours into it – the key thing, as Nietzsche argued, is to *will something* – precisely what is immaterial. As Zarathustra puts it, 'Esteeming itself is of all esteemed things the most estimable treasure. Through esteeming alone is there value: and without esteeming, the nut of existence would be hollow.'[13] In *Troilus and Cressida*, Hector makes the opposite case. 'Value', he points out, and reasonably enough, 'dwells not in particular will.' It is 'mad idolatry/To make the service greater than the god,/And the will dotes that is attributive/To what infectiously itself affects' (II.ii.53, 56–9). It is irrational – 'mad' – to permit our estimation of a thing or person (such as Helen of Troy) to be infected or distorted by our will, which should of course never *attribute* value. But Troilus's response to Hector's argument is the modern one: it is admirable – heroic even – wilfully to stand by one's valuation irrespective of

[11] On Berlin's love of Turgenev, who 'embodied the liberal's "negative capability", his capacity to act and make commitments despite an empathy that enabled him to see the other side of any coin', see M. Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York, 1998), 71. Turgenev was attacked by Right and Left, like Berlin (Ignatieff, 256). In the 1972 essay 'Fathers and Sons', in *Russian Thinkers*, ed. H. Hardy and A. Kelly (Harmondsworth, 1978), Berlin observes in relation to Turgenev that 'The middle ground is a notoriously exposed, dangerous, and ungrateful position' (297).

[12] 'Hamlet and Don Quixote' (1860), *Essential Turgenev*, ed. E. C. Allen (Evanston, 1994), 553.

[13] *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* (pub. in sections from 1883), trans. W. Kaufmann, in Kaufmann's *The Portable Nietzsche* (Harmondsworth, 1978), 171 (from First Part, 'On the Thousand and One Goals').

the actual worth of the thing in question. My 'election' (i.e. my judgement of the worth of something) 'Is led on in the conduct of my will' (II.ii.61–2) – and, once I have made that judgement, 'honor' itself demands that I 'stand firm' by it – even if 'my will' has now altered, and 'distaste[s] what it elected' (II.ii.68, 66). I may have changed my mind about Helen – see now 'she is not worth what she doth cost/The keeping' (II.ii.51–2) – but this doesn't weaken my (illogical) conviction that it is essential that I stay true to my former valuations (and thus, in a way, to myself) – to the consequences of my acts of will. When Troilus witnesses Cressida's betrayal of him with Diomedes, his reaction is in accord with this view. His 'love' for a now evidently 'false' and 'stained' woman is exactly equal to the 'hate' he will bear henceforward towards her seducer (V.ii.167, 178, 179, 168); he will fight for Cressida even though he knows all too well her shocking unworthiness – as the cynical Thersites sniggers: 'He'll tickle it for his concupy' (V.ii.177). Berlin helped us recognize this 'apotheosis of the will' as a founding ethos of the modern world.[14] A different attitude towards the will, he held, is the principal distinction between modernity and the whole pre-Romantic or classical Western order. It was the 'romantic thinkers', particularly in Germany, who taught us that the 'ends of action are not discovered, but … created' and that the goal of life is 'something which cannot be found' but 'only invented' by 'an act of will … obedient to no pre-existent rules or laws or facts'.[15]

From Berlin's perspective, Turgenev's tale could only have been written under this new Romantic dispensation. Zinaida's self-destructive desire cannot now be read, as it might once, as merely a sad case of folly or madness. An adequate response to it does not see it as essentially demeaning, or draw the moral about the perils of erotic attachment. The story provides important and unsettling evidence about the nature of human beings. We humans are passional creatures. It is noble to have a passion as powerful as Zinaida's, even – perhaps especially – when it is directed at an unworthy object (such as a callous, irresponsible womanizer). 'Especially' because in that case the passion is creative rather than reactive: anyone can love the obviously good, only a heroically willing nature (Troilus, for example) can adore the unworthy. This was, Berlin felt, the Romantic revelation. The European thinkers and writers of 1760 to 1830 inaugurated

[14] 'The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will: The Revolt Against the Myth of an Ideal World' (first pub. in Italian translation in 1975), in Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays*, eds H. Hardy and R. Hausheer (London, 1998).
[15] 'Does Political Theory Still Exist?' (first pub. in French in 1961), in Berlin, *Proper Study*, 70.

a moral revolution that taught us to admire 'wholeheartedness, sincerity, purity of soul, the ability and readiness to dedicate yourself to your ideal, no matter what it was'.[16] In this new order, '[s]incerity becomes a virtue in itself' because Romanticism 'undermine[s] the notion that in matters of value, politics, morals, aesthetics, there are such things as objective criteria which operate between human beings, such that anyone who does not use these criteria is simply either a liar or a madman, which is true of mathematics or of physics'.[17] Lars von Trier's 1996 film *Breaking the Waves* is a potent and disturbing recent expression of the ethos Berlin describes. When her husband Jan is crippled in an oil-rig accident, the mentally unstable Bess keeps their love alive – and miraculously cures him of his injuries – by submitting herself to a series of impersonal and degrading sexual encounters with other men, the last of which ends in her violent death; at the conclusion of the film her closeness to God is signalled by a vision of bells ringing in heaven, a kitsch yet also deeply moving version of the end of a saint's life. Von Trier manages to convey simultaneously the madness of Bess's sacrifice; its ethical-religious seriousness; its character as an authentic act of self-realization. As she explains: 'God gives everyone something to be good at. I've always been stupid, but I'm good at this.' Bess's 'talent', she claims, is her ability to 'believe'. Modern people – *qua* modern – largely accept Nietzsche's proposition that it is the will that makes value. Passionate 'belief' such as Bess's is itself a value.

Turgenev's story and von Trier's film challenge all those theories, dating back to Plato and the Christian fathers, and continuing through the Marxists and beyond, of 'freedom as rational self-direction':[18] the notion that one is truly free only if governed by a higher (rational or spiritual) part – the part the twentieth-century American philosopher Richard Rorty dubbed 'the extra added ingredient which makes us truly human'. Rorty thought this ingredient mythological; for Plato, or for 'orthodox Christian theology', it is 'divine'.[19] This Christian-Platonist conception of freedom as rational self-direction lies at the heart of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. It appears in Shakespeare, though only alongside other, riskier conceptions. In this classical view political liberty requires psychological freedom from the tyranny of any irrational and insatiable drive, since being enslaved to such a drive forces one to dominate other human beings in the vain attempt to gratify it: 'Boundless intemperance/In

[16] Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (lectures delivered 1966), ed. H. Hardy (Princeton, 1999), 9.
[17] Ibid., 140. [18] Isaiah Berlin, 'Two Concepts of Liberty' (1958), *Proper Study*, 216.
[19] Richard Rorty, 'Afterword: Pragmatism, Pluralism, and Postmodernism', *Philosophy and Social Hope* (Harmondsworth, 1999), 263, 266.

[a man's] nature is a tyranny', as Macduff says (*Macbeth*, IV.iii.66–7). Hence, Milton foresaw, no plutocrat can ever possess a big enough media empire or a luxurious enough jet, because he or she is always at the mercy of 'inordinate desires' and 'upstart passions' that have overcome reason.[20] This understanding of reason underlies those theories of 'positive liberty' that hold that 'freedom is not freedom to do what is irrational, or stupid, or wrong' – theories Berlin attacked, in the influential 1958 essay 'Two Concepts of Liberty', as potentially an apology for slavery (human beings, blinded to their own '"true" natures' and real interests, must, if necessary, be compelled to be free – free, that is, of their unworthy or lower or misguided selves).[21] Neither Turgenev nor Berlin are prepared to view Zinaida's need for the narrator's father in this unsympathetic light (though what is an irrational and self-damaging passion if not this?).

Central here is the role of the will in modern thought. In *The Roots of Romanticism* Berlin argued that the sanctification of such words as commitment, sincerity and authenticity is the Romantics' main legacy to Western civilization – and that Romanticism itself was a convulsion in that civilization, making Westerners more concerned with self-creation than with knowledge. The philosopher Charles Taylor calls this 'the expressivist turn' in Western culture: the idea, foundational to modernity (and one which, like Berlin, he credits the German Romantic thinker Johann Gottfried von Herder with inaugurating), that the main thing – the *moral* thing – in life is to be yourself, *whatever that is*.[22] According to Taylor (and this was Berlin's interpretation, too), in Herder's view the differences between people 'lay the obligation on each of us to live up to our originality'.[23] As the radical Romantic critic William Hazlitt put it in his history of Elizabethan drama: 'We are something in ourselves, nothing when we try to ape others.'[24] For Taylor, this amounts to a new or modern 'ethics of authenticity': Herder and others

[20] Book XII, lines 87–8, *Paradise Lost*, in *Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. W. Kerrigan, J. Rumrich and S. M. Fallon (New York, 2007); all citations of Milton from this edition.

[21] Berlin, 'Two Concepts', *Proper Study*, 219.

[22] See chapter 21 of *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), esp. 368, 375–6.

[23] Ibid., 375.

[24] *Lectures Chiefly on the Dramatic Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* (first pub. 1820), vol. V of *Selected Writings of William Hazlitt*, ed. D. Wu (London, 1998), 173; Hazlitt is talking about the drama of 'a nation of islanders' (the English – see 173) but, as in Herder, the exhortation to be oneself, rather than imitate others, applies to individuals as well as countries.

put forward the idea that each of us has an original way of being human … Before the late eighteenth century no one thought that the differences between human beings had this kind of moral significance. There is a certain way of being human that is *my* way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's.[25]

The Romantics exploded the notion that the goal of all human beings should be to acquire what Rorty called 'The One True Account of How Things Really Are' – a desire based on the 'traditional theologico-metaphysical belief that Reality and Truth are One'.[26] Berlin committed himself to this Romantic revolution. For Berlin, as for Rorty, 'life or nature' in the wake of the Romantics was not to be compared to 'a jigsaw puzzle' which we could put together if we were clever and energetic. The pre-Romantic assumption is that we are 'in principle capable of fitting all the various pieces together into one coherent pattern'. If we did we would 'know what the world is like' and could therefore answer the question of the ancient philosophers: what is the best life for man?[27] But the Romantics destroy the notion 'that there is one and only one structure of reality'[28] and, consequently, that there is a universally right way for all people to live, in accordance with the way things are.[29] The Romantics believe 'there is no structure of things, … you can mould things as you will – they come into being only as a result of your moulding activity'.[30] Reality is made, not found: as Rorty's hero William James put it, 'The trail of the human serpent is … over everything.'[31] (Even atoms, Rorty argued, are human *in so far as* they are the objects of discourse, one more discursive ingredient in the pot out of which human beings construct themselves.[32])

Quite as much as James or Rorty, Berlin was a pluralist. There is simply no one way the world is, no one Truth about it. (Montaigne says something similar in the essay on Raymond Sebond: 'Any object', he says, 'can be seen

[25] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), 28–9. For Berlin's discussion of Herder's 'expressionism' – the view 'that self-expression is part of the essence of human beings' – see 'Herder and the Enlightenment' (1976), *Proper Study*, 367, 368.

[26] Rorty, 'Afterword', *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 262. [27] *Roots of Romanticism*, 23.

[28] Berlin, 'The Counter-Enlightenment' (1973), *Proper Study*, 248.

[29] See Berlin, *Roots of Romanticism*, 65–6. [30] Ibid., 127.

[31] William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (London, 1912; first pub. 1907), 64. 'All the descriptions we give of things', says Rorty, 'are descriptions suited to our purposes': see 'Introduction: Relativism: Finding and Making', *Philosophy and Social Hope*, xxvi; see xvii.

[32] Rorty, 'Ethics Without Principles', *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 85. Science is yet one more way humans notice the world. As James expressed it in *Pragmatism*: 'Human motives sharpen all our questions, human satisfactions lurk in all our answers, all our formulas have a human twist' (242); 'In our cognitive as well as in our active life we are creative. We *add*, both to the subject and to the predicate part of reality. The world stands really malleable, waiting to receive its final touches at our hands. Like the kingdom of heaven, it suffers human violence willingly. Man *engenders* truths upon it' (256–7; italics in original).

in various lights and from various points of view' (655; II.12).) James captures Berlin's position exactly when, in *Pragmatism*, he objects to

> that typical idol of the tribe, the notion of *the* Truth, conceived as the one answer, determinate and complete, to the one fixed enigma which the world is believed to propound. For popular tradition, it is all the better if the answer be oracular, so as itself to awaken wonder as an enigma of the second order, veiling rather than revealing what its profundities are supposed to contain. All the great single-word answers to the world's riddle, such as God, the One, Reason, Law, Spirit, Matter, Nature, Polarity, the Dialectic Process, the Idea, the Self, the Oversoul, draw the admiration that men have lavished on them from this oracular role. By amateurs in philosophy and professionals alike, the universe is represented as a queer sort of petrified sphinx whose appeal to men consists in a monotonous challenge to his divining powers. *The* Truth: what a perfect idol of the rationalistic mind![33]

But because reality is *not* unified under one of these 'great single-word answers' it is silent with regard to the question of 'the' best life. Indeed, Berlin argues, the question is incoherent – it is impossible any particular way of life could combine all human goods. Reality is not One, 'the universe is not a cosmos, not a harmony';[34] consequently values are often incompatible and clash: 'Some among the Great Goods cannot live together … We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss.'[35] The good that is the sense of belonging to a specific community, for example, might be at odds with the good of liberty.[36] Any particular life will realize some values but not others – may even offend against other values. Berlin, then, is in essential agreement with Max Weber, who wrote that the 'ultimately possible attitudes toward life are irreconcilable, and hence their struggle can never be brought to a final conclusion. Thus it is necessary to make a decisive choice.'[37] We have no recourse to some supernal scale that could rank different kinds of lives. As Rorty put it, '[f]rom Plato to Hegel, it was natural to think of the various ways of leading a human life as hierarchically ordered'. Berlin rejected this notion along with the metaphysical assumption (that all things are unified) underpinning it. He concurred with Rorty – the 'Greek question: What is the Good Life

[33] *Pragmatism*, 239–40; italics in original.
[34] Berlin, 'Two Concepts', *Proper Study*, 238.
[35] Berlin, 'The Pursuit of the Ideal' (1988), *Proper Study*, 11. Rorty argued similarly: 'moral choice' is generally 'between alternative goods rather than between good and evil' ('Introduction', *Philosophy and Social Hope*, xxviii). The common ground here is that neither Berlin nor Rorty thought the universe a seamless whole.
[36] Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, 184.
[37] 'Science as a Vocation' (pub. 1919), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London, 1947), 152.

for Man?' is a non-starter.[38] We will not know all the good ways for men and women to live until the end of days, when all possible kinds of human life will have been experienced.

Berlin was a pillar of the Cold War Anglo-American intellectual and political establishment. It is only since John Gray's book on him, however, that he has also been recognized as a precursor of postmodern or anti-rationalist thinkers such as Rorty.[39] The thinkers to whom Berlin was drawn (such as Herder) practised a thorough-going 'historicism [and] evolutionism' – they thought culture went very far down, regarding human beings as above all creatures of time and place. For such historicists, it is taken for granted that, in Berlin's words, 'different ages had different ideals, and these ideals were each … valid for [their] time and place'.[40] There was no metaphysical way of sloughing off the merely temporal part of human beings, no getting outside the flux of history. Berlin was out of sympathy with the 'naïve craving for unity and symmetry at the expense of experience'.[41] So (again like Rorty) he felt even our deepest commitments, such as those to freedom or diversity, couldn't be justified by an appeal to something outside history and local preferences – and (like Rorty once more) he was unperturbed by this.[42] What the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey called 'the quest for certainty' was hopeless: 'As for the meaning of life', Berlin wrote in a letter, 'I do not believe it has any … We make of it what we can and that is all there is about it. Those who seek for some deep cosmic all-embracing libretto … are … pathetically mistaken.'[43] And reason will certainly fail us in this quest should we be so foolish as to undertake it. Like James, who held that '[t]he history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a

[38] Rorty, 'Afterword', *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 266.

[39] John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton, 1996). Gray doesn't explore the affinity between Rorty and Berlin in detail, though he sees them both as liberals who did not attempt to ground their politics in anything other than 'a specific form of life'; see 161–2. For Rorty the term 'postmodernism' expresses 'a perceived loss of unity' ('Afterword', *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 262). On the Weberian theme of 'moral tragedy' in Berlin, or 'clashes of irreconcilable values', see Gray, *Isaiah Berlin*, 56 and 58, as well as 1, 6, 8, 35, and Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, 198 and 203. In 'Two Concepts' Berlin wrote: 'the belief that some single formula can in principle be found whereby all the diverse ends of men can be harmoniously realised is demonstrably false. If … the ends of men are many, and not all of them are in principle compatible with each other, then the possibility of conflict – and of tragedy – can never wholly be eliminated from human life, either personal or social. The necessity of choosing between absolute claims is then an inescapable characteristic of the human condition' (*Proper Study*, 239).

[40] *Roots of Romanticism*, 62, 63.

[41] Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability' (original version 1954), *Proper Study*, 121.

[42] Berlin was not 'bothered by his own failure to ground the defence of liberty on ultimate principles' (Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin*, 229).

[43] Quoted ibid., 279.