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FORUM

Metaphor as Method in the Writings of Isaiah Berlin

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The conventional approach to Isaiah Berlin's writings has been to treat them discursively, as philosophical texts. While such approaches are insightful, there is more to Berlin's writings than his arguments. Among his literary strategies is a comparative approach that involves the use of metaphors, similes, and analogies. As I will argue, Berlin's use of metaphor constitutes a core component of his work, where his meaning is often suggestive more than precise. Berlin's intention seems to be to exhibit those aspects of experience reflective of uncertainty, where our choices are not determined by necessity. Such an intention ostensibly exhibits his value pluralism, as well as an oft-neglected sensitivity to the forms of language. By resorting to metaphors Berlin accomplishes several things: he shows how the intelligibility of experience is partially imagistic, he illustrates how meaning can be structured comparatively but nondiscursively, and he exemplifies the importance of these things for decision making.

Introduction

The evident eloquence of Isaiah Berlin's prose is undeniable. Renowned as a conversationalist, Berlin's prose style is taken to simulate his skills as a speaker, something facilitated by the fact that he dictated many of his writings.[1] Among the effects his essays evoke is an immediacy of presence, as Berlin's "voice" collapses the distance between reader and author. The implications of this for his work as a historian have been noted by various scholars, who highlight how Berlin illuminates the ideas of the past by bringing to life the individuals he studies.[2] However,

[1]Arie Dubnov provides a succinct account of Berlin's reputation as a conversationalist, while a bemusing impression of Berlin's use of the Dictaphone has been provided by Serena Moore. Michael Ignatieff considers both in his biography of Berlin. See Arie M. Dubnov, *Isaiah Berlin: The Journey of a Jewish Liberal* (New York, 2012), 2–3; Michael Ignatieff, *Isaiah Berlin: A Life* (New York, 1998), 3–4; and Serena Moore, *In the President's Office: Working for Isaiah Berlin* (Oxford, 2014), 13–14.

[2]Compare Joshua L. Cherniss, "Introduction," in Isaiah Berlin, *Political Ideas in the Romantic Age: Their Rise and Influence on Modern Thought*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, 2006), xxi–lx, at xxxvi–xxxvii; Roger Hausheer, "Introduction," in Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. Henry Hardy (London, 1978), xiii–liii, at xv; Aileen Kelly, "Introduction: A Complex Vision," in Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers*, ed. Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly (New York, 2008), xxiii–xxxv, at xxviii–xxix; Sidney Morgenbesser and Jonathan Lieberson, "Isaiah Berlin," in Edna Ulmann-Margalit and Avishai

rather than use such observations as an invitation to explore further Berlin's abilities as an author, the general tendency has been to assume that these abilities were *sui generis* and, to that extent, insusceptible to further investigation.[3] The assumption seems to be that Berlin's essays reflect an idiosyncratic talent incapable of distillation beyond the observation that he wrote like he spoke and possessed a fertile imagination. I believe such an assumption is incorrect, and that the limit it imposes upon the appreciation of Berlin's skills as a writer is unnecessarily narrow. While it is true both that Berlin's essays exhibit an imaginative insight into the lives of the figures he studies and that his conversational style imparts a sense of immediacy to his writings, these things alone are insufficient to explain his abilities as a writer. For careful examination of Berlin's essays reveals particular literary strategies that frequently recur, the study of which clarifies why his writings are compelling. Among these strategies is a comparative approach that relies upon the use of metaphors, similes, and analogies in an attempt to illustrate those facets of human experience that defy easy categorization. As his friend Steven Spender once said, "Berlin excelled in description of people by metaphor."[4] This observation—made by a poet—is an astute one, and the starting point for my study.

To highlight Berlin's use of metaphor is to invite consideration of his views of language and its features. Such things have been the subject of previous studies by others, some of whom have wondered whether or not Berlin's views tend towards subjectivism, others of whom have focused upon his early training as a philosopher. Arguments concerned with the subjectivist aspects of Berlin's thought take various forms, ranging from tempered acknowledgments that there is an unresolved tension within Berlin's position to stronger indictments of relativism.[5] Those concerned with Berlin's work as a philosopher frequently attempt to determine how his earlier writings anticipate his later ones.[6] Rarely, however, have any of these investigations been couched in terms of aesthetics, and none of them to date have taken Berlin's literary strategies as their primary topic.[7] As a result, the

Margalit, eds., *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration* (Chicago, 1991), 1–30, at 2; Alan Ryan, "Isaiah Berlin: The History of Ideas as Psychodrama," *European Journal of Political Theory* 12/1 (2012), 61–73; and Steven B. Smith, "The Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment," in Joshua L. Cherniss and Steven B. Smith, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah Berlin* (Cambridge, 2018), 132–48, at 143.

[3]Such is the tenor of Noel Annan's description of Berlin's abilities. See Noel Annan, "Introduction," in Isaiah Berlin, *Personal Impressions*, ed. Henry Hardy (Princeton, 2001), xv–xxxii, at xxiii–xxiv.

[4]Stephen Spender, *World within World: The Autobiography of Stephen Spender* (New York, 1994), 71.

[5]See John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton, 1996); George Kateb, "Can Cultures Be Judged? Two Defenses of Cultural Pluralism in Isaiah Berlin's Work," *Social Research* 66 (1999), 1009–38; Michael Sandel, "Introduction," in Sandel, ed., *Liberalism and Its Critics* (New York, 1984), 1–11; and Leo Strauss, "Relativism," in Thomas Pangle, ed., *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism: An Introduction to the Thought of Leo Strauss* (Chicago, 1989), 13–26.

[6]Joshua L. Cherniss, *A Mind and Its Time: The Development of Isaiah Berlin's Political Thought* (Oxford, 2013); Naomi Choi, "Berlin, Analytic Philosophy, and the Revival of Political Philosophy," in Cherniss and Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah Berlin*, 33–52; and Jamie Reed, "From Logical Positivism to 'Metaphysical Rationalism': Isaiah Berlin on the 'Fallacy of Reduction'," *History of Political Thought* 29/1 (2008), 109–31.

[7]George Kateb and perhaps John Gray are the two exceptions to this, although neither focuses upon Berlin's abilities as an author.

presentation of Berlin's thought remains incomplete, since a key component of his writings is overlooked. For there is more to his essays than the arguments he provides; there are also the images Berlin marshals to express himself. Such images are more than ornamentation meant to adorn a discursive point. Rather, they provide content to Berlin's claims and structure the reader's response. This is unsurprising, as Berlin was attentive to the figurative use of language. I will therefore begin with a consideration of what his thoughts about language are, before turning to his own writings.

As I will argue, Berlin's sensitivity to language allows him to explore those aspects of experience where the decisions individuals make are not causally determined. Unlike some philosophical approaches that attempt to explain everything discursively, Berlin's position maintains that there are areas of experience that resist rationalist techniques. Such is the case, for example, with logical positivism's method of verification, which Berlin holds involves a form of reductionism that mistakenly treats statements of distinct sorts as categorically the same, irrespective of the fact that such statements involve claims of different types.[8] In a similar vein is his opposition to Marxism, whose deterministic philosophy of history he regards as involving a similar form of reductionism in terms of material interests, and is therefore also mistaken.[9] Yet to contest such approaches is not to hold that human experience is fundamentally irrational or unintelligible. Rather, it is to redirect attention toward those modes of expression that exhibit what otherwise appears inexpressible. Here arises the significance of metaphors for Berlin, as they not only allow him to illustrate the intelligibility of experience via figurative language; they also allow him to show how meaning can be structured comparatively. The importance of this latter point becomes clear when one notes a puzzle that springs from Berlin's claims about pluralism. According to Berlin, pluralism involves the incommensurability of values. Some, such as Joseph Raz, have taken this to mean that values are incomparable.[10] Yet Berlin compares positions, viewpoints, and beliefs throughout his writings. If Raz is correct and incommensurability entails incomparability, then how can Berlin compare anything without falling into self-contradiction? As I will show, Berlin's use of metaphors indicates how non-commensurative comparisons can be made, and in the process clarifies how decision making proceeds when rationalist techniques fail. In effect, metaphors provide Berlin a means to demonstrate the moral agency he associates with value pluralism. With this in mind, I will now begin.

[8]Isaiah Berlin, "Verification," in Henry Hardy, ed., *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays* (London, 1978), 21–31. Berlin is especially critical of the treatment of statements about the past and future, which he feels the method of verification gives a "meaning which is prima facie very different from that which they seemed to have." The issue is how statements about past or future events have to be restated in terms reflective of the present tense, something that changes (and thereby distorts) their meaning. See ibid., 15–16.

[9]Isaiah Berlin, "The Philosophy of Karl Marx," in Henry Hardy, ed., *The Power of Ideas* (Princeton, 2000), 115–33.

[10]Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford, 1986), 321–65.

Thinking metaphorically

Metaphors are commonly associated with the figurative use of language. *How* they are associated with figurative language—what they are taken to *do*—has been the subject of much study. The standard understanding of metaphors is that they involve a comparison in which the meaning of one term is associated with that of another.[11] Aristotle provides what is perhaps the architectonic conceptualization of metaphors in this manner in his *Poetics* when he states that a metaphor applies a noun to something that "properly applies to something else."[12] His view of metaphors is notably broad, as metaphors encompass forms of comparison that include analogies and similes, and his focus is primarily upon the ways in which meaning is transferred between the terms. This is done either by attributing to one term the meaning associated with the other or by elucidating one term with connotations associated with another term.[13] Such a conceptualization of metaphor provides the template later scholars use, even as they attempt to refine Aristotle's position. Thus, among the more prominent recent treatments of metaphor, Max Black acknowledges that metaphors involve the transference of meaning from one term to another, but then argues that metaphors also express something through the interaction of the terms that eludes the literal meaning associated with them individually.[14] As he indicates, a literal restatement of metaphorical meaning involves a "loss in cognitive content" as "it fails to give the insight that the metaphor did."[15] Black's argument has been challenged by Donald Davidson, who holds that metaphorical meaning can still be literally expressed since metaphors can be paraphrased.[16] While there are other treatments of the concept of the metaphor—such as with Paul Ricoeur's sweeping study of how metaphors have been conceptualized and used over the centuries—the difference between Black and Davidson encapsulates the general topography of contemporary debates about what metaphors are.[17] Do metaphors express a form of truth that is otherwise inexpressible? Or are they mainly rhetorical flourishes that can be restated without loss?

[11]M. H. Abrams, "Figurative Language," in Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th edn (New York, 1993), 66–70, at 67.

[12]Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Anthony Kenny (Oxford, 2013), 21 1457b8.

[13]Ibid., 21 1457b9. Compare Aristotle, *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse*, trans. George A. Kennedy (Oxford, 2007), 1405a, 1406b–1407a.

[14]Max Black, "Metaphor," in Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy* (Ithaca, 1962), 25–47, at 46.

[15]Ibid., 46.

[16]Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," in Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford, 2001), 245–64.

[17]Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello (Toronto, 1977). Some other significant discussions of metaphor are Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne K. Langer (New York, 1946); Denis Donoghue, *Metaphor* (Cambridge, 2014); Eva Feder Kittay, *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure* (Oxford, 1990); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, 1980); Andrew Ortony, ed., *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge, 1979); I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Oxford, 1936); John R. Searle, *Expression and Meaning* (Cambridge, 1979); and Josef Stern, *Metaphor in Context* (Cambridge, MA., 2000). Note that despite their range these discussions remain within the boundaries outlined above, which is to say, they consider the question whether or not metaphors can express something cognitively meaningful that literal statements cannot.

As regards Berlin's views on metaphor, he says various things in different essays and therefore his position requires a degree of assembly. Sometimes he mentions the term in passing, as one item on a list of terms concerning the ways we make sense of the world. For instance, when talking about the "task of philosophers" Berlin indicates that they should seek to construct "less internally contradictory, and … less pervertible metaphors, images, symbols and systems of categories."[18] When he speaks this way the impression is that metaphors are just one among the many ways we explain things to ourselves. At other times, however, Berlin makes bolder claims, such as when he says, "All language and thought is, in this sense, necessarily 'metaphorical'."[19] Statements such as this seemingly prioritize metaphors, and foreground them as constitutive of the way we reason. Despite appearances, there is no real tension between these different claims—between metaphors being one way of making sense of the world among others and metaphors being the substratum of thought itself. For like Aristotle, Berlin regards "metaphor" broadly, as encompassing analogies and similes, while simultaneously embodying comparative judgment itself.

To determine fully Berlin's use of metaphors, the place to begin is with his views about language. Following Vico and Herder, Berlin regards language as the medium of thought that is social in form and provides content for the individual's identity.[20] Like Vico and Herder, Berlin believes that language is not simply a tool by which we communicate for purposes of cooperation; it is also a vehicle to articulate our values, purposes, and beliefs. To this extent Berlin is sensitive to the expressive rather than functional aspects of language, insofar as language is a repository of experience and the use of language expresses that experience. As he says, "We cannot … enumerate all we know and believe, for the words and symbols with which we do so themselves embody and express attitudes which are *ex hypothesis* 'encapsulated' in them."[21] And again, "Words, thoughts and behaviour are not easily divorceable elements."[22] From this perspective, literature, poetry, philosophy, and history all embody the distinctive experiences of various groups and peoples, and

[18]Isaiah Berlin, "The Purpose of Philosophy," in Henry Hardy, ed., *Concepts and Categories: Philosophical Essays* (London, 1978), 1–11, at 11. Compare Isaiah Berlin, "Logical Translation," in ibid., 56–80, at 59.

[19]Isaiah Berlin, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?", in Hardy, *Concepts and Categories*, 143–72, at 158.

[20]Isaiah Berlin, "Vico and Herder," in Henry Hardy, ed., *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (Oxford, 2000), 3–242, at 86–7, 109–10, 189–205. Compare Isaiah Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," in Henry Hardy, ed., *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (London, 1979), 1–24, at 4, 5, 7, 10–11. Charles Taylor explores Berlin's reliance on Herder for his view of language, and is closely followed in this by John Gray. See Charles Taylor, "The Importance of Herder," in Ulmann-Margalit and Margalit, *Isaiah Berlin*, 40–63; and Gray, *Isaiah Berlin*, 95–6, 127–31, 173 n. 26. However, Berlin attributes his views as much to Vico as to Herder, something I believe Taylor and Gray overlook, but Johnny Lyons rightly notes. See Isaiah Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," in Henry Hardy, ed., *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Humanity* (London, 1990), 1–19, at 9–10; Berlin, "Vico and the Enlightenment," in ibid., 120–29, at 128; Berlin, "My Intellectual Path," in Hardy, *The Power of Ideas*, 1–23, at 7–9; and Johnny Lyons, *The Philosophy of Isaiah Berlin* (London, 2020), 58–61.

[21]Isaiah Berlin, "The Sense of Reality," in Henry Hardy, ed., *The Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and Their History* (London, 1996), 1–39, at 15–16.

[22]Isaiah Berlin, "The Origins of Israel," in Hardy, *The Power of Ideas*, 143–61, at 154.

serve to shape the individual's identity.[23] In other words, language articulates the different experiences, norms, ideas, cultures, and histories of societies, and thereby provides the patterns by which individuals live their lives.[24] Yet, as Berlin notes, the boundaries between the descriptive and evaluative uses of terms are vague, something that potentially blurs the distinction between the literal and figurative use of language. As he puts it, "the lines between description, explanation, and analysis, selection and interpretation of facts or events or their characteristics, are not clear, and cannot be made so without doing violence to the language and concepts that we normally use."[25] Metaphors become akin to concepts insofar as both contain depictions of the world that help the individual understand their experience. Metaphors thereby are a means of organizing experience to make it more intelligible, even as conceptual models or theories are.

That metaphors help organize experience to make it intelligible points to the importance of comparative judgment for Berlin. His comments about judgment in general are not completely unfamiliar, as others have investigated what Berlin says in this regard in terms of a so-called "sense of reality."[26] Yet such investigations typically focus upon the utility of history for providing evidence for judgment and the implications of this for political practice. What is neglected in these accounts is a fuller explanation of the specific conditions that render judgment possible. Although it is true that Berlin holds that history provides the evidence that judgment assesses, this does not account for what he says about the significance of language and how linguistic meaning depends upon comparison. Such additional claims also contribute to his view of judgment, and clarify how judgment itself is structured comparatively.

To see the dependency of judgment upon comparison and the role of language in this process, consider Berlin's arguments against determinism and relativism. There Berlin takes up the question of how objective judgments can be made despite the lack of criteria that allegedly transcend human experience and are somehow timeless. The fear is that without such standards our judgments are relative to

[23]"There is no need to subscribe to racist or other repulsive brands of dangerous nonsense in order to hold that art and literature are inevitably rooted in the traditional experience of the social unit to which the artist belongs; for it is true … that the language, or the musical forms, or the colours and shapes in terms of which he expresses himself are the product not merely of his own individuality, but of a wider social tradition, of which he himself is largely unconscious and which alone puts him in harmony, and gives him the possibility of instinctive communication, with those to whom he speaks." Isaiah Berlin, "Jewish Slavery and Emancipation," in Hardy, *The Power of Ideas*, 162–85, at 172–3.

[24]A good example of this is when Berlin criticizes historians who attempt to judge prior eras according to a "timeless" standard. As he sees it, the concepts and methods used by historians themselves express "the general characteristics" of their time, and it is "in terms of such shifts in the methods of treating the past … and in the idioms which they expressed, that the development of political ideas and the conceptual apparatus of society and its most gifted and articulate representatives can be judged." See Isaiah Berlin, "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century," in Henry Hardy, ed., *Liberty* (Oxford, 2017), 55–93, at 58.

[25]Berlin, "Vico and Herder," 5.

[26]See, for example, Joshua L. Cherniss, "'The Sense of Reality': Berlin on Political Judgment, Political Ethics, and Leadership," in Cherniss and Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah Berlin*, 53–77; and Ryan P. Hanley, "Political Science and Political Understanding: Isaiah Berlin on the Nature of Political Inquiry," *American Political Science Review* 98/2 (2004), 327–39.

context and thus ultimately subjective.[27] Berlin's response is that such fears are unwarranted, as the terms we use to cognize and evaluate experience endure "across large stretches of time and space."[28] Whatever changes might arise over time do so gradually, and not to the extent that they make others alien to us (which for Berlin is the larger concern). More important, however, is the fact that such evaluations involve contrast; for example, we do not fully appreciate our own way of life unless we situate it in relation to preceding periods that are distinct enough to allow us to see what distinguishes ourselves.[29] Indeed, such comparisons run deep, for the very terms we use themselves depend upon an awareness of their contraries; that is, terms are only intelligible to the extent that we grasp their opposites. To call a judgment "relative" implies that there is a sense of "objective" that renders both meaningful; otherwise the terms have no meaning and are useless to us. Similarly, "the very meaning of such terms as 'cause' and 'inevitable' depends on the possibility of contrasting them with at least their imaginary opposites."[30] Berlin's position is different than is often presumed, for he does not ground comparative evaluation solely upon social or cultural standards, or even upon some vision of objective values or a shared human nature. Rather, comparative evaluation also depends upon the nature of language and linguistic practice. We judge by evoking comparisons between the objects evaluated—our values versus others, or our historical era against a preceding period. But our comparisons are structured by the terms we use, which themselves require their contraries to be fully meaningful. We cannot understand "freedom" without grasping "subjection"; we cannot understand "equality" without comprehending "inequality"; we cannot understand "pluralism" without contrasting it to "monism" and "relativism." They are "nodal points" that provide the content to our conceptions of the world.[31] Put simply, terms are fundamentally relational and involve meanings that become fully significant for us through their comparative associations. We necessarily evaluate things comparatively because the terms and concepts we use become meaningful to us through their mutual juxtapositions. In his words, "To think is to generalise, to generalise is to compare."[32]

It should now be clear why Berlin says language and thought are fundamentally "metaphorical." It is not simply that we comprehend the world through images or that our concepts are like "spectacles."[33] While such ideas are a part of Berlin's position, it is an oversimplification to confine what he says about metaphors to the claim that they serve a role similar to that of concepts. Rather, the act of judgment itself depends upon reasoning by comparison, and comparison is in turn tied to the structure of language and linguistic meaning. Reasoning by analogy, similes, metaphors more strictly understood—all involve forms of comparison that reflect the pluralism that defines the human condition, as well as the fact that intelligibility

[27]For a good survey of the issue here see George Crowder, *The Problem of Value Pluralism: Isaiah Berlin and Beyond* (New York, 2020), 24–8; and Crowder, "Pluralism, Relativism, and Liberalism," in Cherniss and Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah Berlin*, 229–49, at 240.

[28]Isaiah Berlin, "Historical Inevitability," in Hardy, *Liberty*, 94–165, at 149.

[29]Berlin, "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century," 58.

[30]Berlin, "Historical Inevitability," 122.

[31]Berlin, "The Purpose of Philosophy," 8.

[32]Berlin, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?", 158.

[33]Berlin, "The Purpose of Philosophy," 9.

depends upon the comparative meaning of terms. Thinking "metaphorically" becomes a fundamental feature of human reason, as metaphors involve the type of comparative evaluation that Berlin indicates characterizes judgment more generally. To clarify this completely, however, requires a review of instances of such reasoning. So let me now turn to Berlin's specific use of metaphors.

Writing with a point

Metaphors abound in Berlin's essays, so much so that it is easy to underestimate how important they actually are for him. Berlin himself sometimes suggests that their significance is minimal and that their role is secondary to other concerns. When asked about his most famous metaphor—the hedgehog/fox distinction—he responds, "I never meant it very seriously. I meant it as a kind of enjoyable intellectual game, but it was taken seriously. Every classification throws light on something, this one was very simple."[34] While this is a rather deflationary statement about this particular piece of imagery, it remains the case that Berlin uses metaphors regularly in his writings, and to different ends. Of these ends, one has been noted previously, this being the way metaphors help individuals to cognize the world, or render experience intelligible. Another is as a means of critique, where the metaphor helps to illustrate the shortcomings of a particular position, or reveals how a set of beliefs mistakenly leads people astray. And finally, metaphors facilitate comparisons in the face of incommensurability. I will take each in turn, saving the discussion of metaphors and incommensurability for the next section. What should become clear is that Berlin's use of metaphor constitutes an integral part of his writings—something I believe explains why his essays continue to appeal to readers.

As regards the cognitive content of metaphors, the issue is the way in which metaphors generate meaning by synthesis and integration. Black's discussion is relevant here, as he argues that metaphors organize our view of the subject they apply to. From the association of one term's meaning with another, "new implications" arise that draw attention to novel features which might otherwise be overlooked. In effect, metaphors direct attention to particular aspects of a subject by bringing them to the fore while "suppressing" others. The effect is that a "suitable hearer will be led by … [these] implications to construct a corresponding set of implications" that are associated with the metaphor. Hence, given the example of a man being described as a wolf, "the new implications must be determined by the pattern of implications associated with the literal use of the word 'wolf.'"[35] In short, "the wolf-metaphor … *organizes* our view of man."[36]

That Berlin uses metaphors in this way cannot be doubted. To take the hedgehog–fox metaphor just mentioned—its use by Berlin is to categorize authors and

[34]Isaiah Berlin and Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (New York, 1991), 188. Berlin makes a similar claim in personal correspondence with Noel Annan: "I was sorry my awful title misled reviewers (almost all but you) into taking the myth—the jeu d'spirit about the animals—so seriously." Isaiah Berlin, "Letter to Noel Annan 13 January 1954," in Henry Hardy and Jennifer Holmes, eds., *Enlightening: Letters 1946–1960* (London, 2009), 421–4, at 423.

[35]Black, "Metaphor," 41.

[36]Ibid., 41, original emphasis.

scholars as monists or pluralists. Simplicity of the metaphor notwithstanding, it has proven to be one of the most enduring images Berlin is known for, to the point that other scholars emulate him.[37] As for its cognitive import, it provides a means of interpreting the history of thought, as its application supports Berlin's thesis that Western thought has been historically dominated by monists, with pluralists serving as skeptical foils. Whether every thinker can be identified as a "fox" or a "hedgehog" is questionable (as Berlin himself was aware), and the metaphor has been taken to say as much about Berlin's interpretation of history as it does about any particular figure to which it might apply.[38] That noted, there are other metaphors whose purpose is to help synthesize and integrate experience, among them his depiction of monism as a "jigsaw puzzle" or a "three-legged stool," the description of the Jewish diaspora as a "hunchback," the characterization of a rationally organized society as the "Temple of Sarastro," the picture of people as "puppets" being manipulated according to a "cosmic libretto," and his account of philosophical investigation as involving "baskets."[39] In each case the metaphor imparts a meaning that draws out Berlin's purpose and influences the reader's attitude towards the subject. Thus monism pieces together an artificial picture of reality or rests upon a minimal number of assumptions; Jews are subject to a debilitating self-consciousness without a state of their own; the ideal of a rationally organized state entails an elitist form of despotism; certain metaphysical views deny individuals any moral agency; and there are clear boundaries between types of inquiry. Perhaps each of these points could be made without the use of metaphor, but they are the more striking *because* of the use of metaphor. Why be misled by a mistaken picture of reality? Why believe that knowledge reposes upon only three grounds? Why ignore the suffering of others? Why accept a benign paternalism? Why deny our experience of ourselves as autonomous? Why believe all questions are easily sortable? The reader is not left wondering what Berlin's view might be. Instead, the reader is inclined to

[37]Thus Mark Lilla speaks of "wolves and lambs," Henry Hardy of the "genius" and the "pedant," and David Miller "crooked timber" and "bent twigs." The precise nature of their metaphors is less important than the fact that Berlin's use of metaphor has inspired others to attempt the same. See Henry Hardy, *In Search of Isaiah Berlin: A Literary Adventure* (London, 2018), 1–11; Mark Lilla, "Wolves and Lambs," in Mark Lilla, Ronald Dworkin, and Robert B. Silvers, eds., *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin* (New York, 2001), 31–42; and David Miller, "Crooked Timber or Bent Twig? Berlin's Nationalism," in George Crowder and Henry Hardy, eds., *The One and the Many: Reading Isaiah Berlin* (Amherst, 2007), 181–206.

[38]Lilla, "Wolves and Lambs," 33–4. Compare Joshua L. Cherniss and Henry Hardy, "The Life and Opinion of Isaiah Berlin," in Cherniss and Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to Isaiah Berlin*, 13–30, at 19–20. Berlin indicates his awareness of the limits of the metaphor when he applies it to Tolstoy, who he indicates does not fit easily into either category. See Isaiah Berlin, "The Hedgehog and the Fox: An Essay on Tolstoy's View of History," in Henry Hardy and Aileen Kelly, eds., *Russian Thinkers* (London, 2008), 24–92, at 25–6.

[39]He describes monism as a "jigsaw puzzle" in Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," 6, and as a "three-legged stool" in Isaiah Berlin, "The Decline of Utopian Ideas in the West," in Hardy, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 20–48, at 24–5. His "hunchback" imagery is found in Berlin, "Jewish Slavery and Emancipation," 174–5. The "temple of Sarastro" depiction arises in Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in Hardy, *Liberty*, 166–217, at 200, and in Berlin, "European Unity and Its Vicissitudes," in Hardy, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, 175–206, at 176. The account of people as "puppets" being manipulated according to a "cosmic libretto" is in Isaiah Berlin, "Herzen and Bakunin on Individual Liberty," in Hardy and Kelly, *Russian Thinkers*, 93–129, at 106. The "baskets" metaphor occurs in Berlin, "The Purpose of Philosophy," 3–4.

share that view through the imagery involved. For in each case the metaphor conveys something that hones Berlin's illocutionary intent and sharpens it.

That Berlin's metaphors sharpen his arguments by substantiating his position is crucial for interpreting his writings. Keeping in mind that "metaphor" includes analogies and similes, it becomes clear that Berlin's use of them is extensive, and often complex. For example, when speaking about historiography he says that the historian is "concerned to paint a portrait which conveys the unique pattern of experience, not an X-ray photograph which is capable of acting as a general symbol for all structures of a similar type."[40] The reason is because the details of experience are too minuscule to be captured by a scientific approach, which can only capture the uppermost observable phenomena and misses those things that reside in the depths "which constitute the unique essence of a particular situation."[41] The complexity of Berlin's position becomes clear when one notes that he combines one set of metaphors (portrait/X-ray) with another (that experience consists of levels). He himself draws attention to this when, speaking of revolutions, he says, "But this upheaval inevitably stirs up, if we may continue to use the metaphor, the lower levels of life."[42] Another example is when he discriminates between the literal and metaphorical uses of the term "freedom," where, by way of comparison with the term "slavery," he highlights the different forms of liberty (economic, political, and social) which he indicates are most often understood figuratively.[43] Yet another example is the distinction between "French" and "Russian" attitudes toward literature, a distinction that, if taken literally, "would, of course, be misleading."[44] Finally, there is "boomerang effect" that occurs when a less developed nation enthusiastically receives the ideas of a more developed one, and radicalizes what it learns before slinging everything back at the original nation.[45] As Black might say, each of these metaphors evinces a synthesis between disparate elements, the integration of which generates meaning. Put differently, the association of ideas through comparison becomes a means for Berlin to express his views more fully, by specifying relations that are potentially novel (such as the reverse influence of underdeveloped nations upon developed nations) or that might otherwise pass unremarked (such as the use of the term "slavery" figuratively rather than literally).

Then there are Berlin's various similes and analogies: the Russian intelligentsia are "[l]ike persons in a dark forest"; statesmen who are sensitive to context "resemble doctors who have a natural gift for curing"; the questions of philosophy "are more akin to the 'problems' of art than to those of science"; the cynicism of disillusioned idealists is "like a chemical reaction"; the radical, rationalist, and progressive traditions of the nineteenth century contain "Cassandra-like prophets"; ideas can

[40]Berlin, "The Sense of Reality," 22. Compare Isaiah Berlin, "The Concept of Scientific History," in Hardy, *Concepts and Categories*, 103–42, at 125.

[41]Berlin, "The Sense of Reality," 23–4.

[42]Ibid., 30.

[43]Isaiah Berlin, "Fichte," in Henry Hardy, ed., *Freedom and Its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty* (Princeton, 2002), 50–73, at 53.

[44]Isaiah Berlin, "A Remarkable Decade: The Birth of the Russian Intelligentsia," in Hardy and Kelly, *Russian Thinkers*, 130–54, at 145.

[45]Isaiah Berlin, "Artistic Commitment: A Russian Legacy," in Hardy, *The Sense of Reality*, 194–231, at 195–6.

"develop lives and powers of their own … like Frankenstein's monster"; and the features of "historical thinking seem more like the operation of common sense" than the "generalisations which an electronic brain could mechanically apply."[46] While his similes and analogies may not be as deeply illustrative as "foxes," "hedgehogs," "boomerangs," or "X-rays," the result remains the same, as by them Berlin uses a comparative approach that structures the reader's response to what is said. One grows sympathetic to the plight of the intelligentsia, distrustful of statesmen who approach politics like an applied science, more comfortable with the aesthetic dimensions of philosophy, wary of earnest reformers, aware of the pessimists of various intellectual traditions, attuned to the potential dangers of philosophical doctrines, and sensitive to how the study of history overlaps with ordinary life. Each of these points is more forcefully put because of the way in which it is presented. Consequently, each enriches Berlin's position by dramatizing his claims.

The depth of Berlin's comparisons becomes clearer when one also accounts for his use of metaphors as a form of critique. A sense of this has already been provided in noting the ways metaphors shape the reader's response. "Portraits" are undoubtedly more pleasing to look at than "X-rays," and the association of "portraits" with the study of history connotes the colorfulness of historical studies against the monochromatic picture that science, as an "X-ray," provides. Similarly, the thought that ideas can lurch from their original setting like "Frankenstein's monster" portrays the danger of misguided intellectuals more threateningly than simply saying "ideas are dangerous when taken out of context." Such comparisons clearly have an edge to them, and Berlin certainly uses them in a critical manner. Yet there are instances where his use of metaphor provides a deeper and more subtle form of critique. At such times Berlin not only signals the shortcomings of a particular point of view or position, but also turns its arguments against itself. A good example of this is his discussion in "The Concept of Scientific History," where he uses mathematical metaphors to argue against the possibility of history being a scientific subject.

According to Berlin, a decisive moment occurs with the work of Descartes, whose revolutionary approach "denied to history any claim to be a serious study."[47] The common understanding of Descartes is as a rationalist, someone whose methodology is analytical and proceeds primarily by way of deductive reason. As Berlin makes clear, the "Cartesian criterion of what constitutes rational method" disqualifies history as a scientific study, as the elements that constitute the subject of history are not amenable to it: "where were the definitions, the logical transformation rules, the rules of inference, the rigorously deduced conclusions?"[48] The result is roughly two hundred years of historians attempting to show that

[46]Berlin, "A Remarkable Decade," 144. The source of the respective similes and analogies are "doctors": Isaiah Berlin, "President Franklin Delano Roosevelt," in Henry Hardy, ed., *Personal Impressions* (Princeton, 2001), 24–33, at 29; "philosophy as art": Isaiah Berlin, "Philosophy and Government Repression," in Hardy, *The Sense of Reality*, 54–76, at 63; "chemical reactions" and "Cassandra-like prophets": Berlin, "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century," 64, 90; "Frankenstein's monster": Isaiah Berlin, "Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Nationalism," in Hardy, *The Sense of Reality*, 232–48, at 234; and "electronic brain": Berlin, "The Concept of a Scientific History," 116.

[47]Berlin, "The Concept of Scientific History," 103.

[48]Ibid., 103.

history can be transformed into a science, and failing. Berlin's study is meant to clarify how these efforts unfolded and to delineate the sources of their failures. Along the way, he has recourse to terminology derivative of Descartes and Newton, and in the process reveals how history has its own set of criteria that are appropriate for it in light of its own particular goals. In essence, history does not attempt to provide causal explanations in a scientific sense, but to clarify the relation between events for the purpose of rendering them intelligible. This requires a different set of skills, which are less like an external observer and more like those "of the actor."[49] Berlin's statements are familiar, having been repeated in other places, and studied by later scholars.[50] However, what distinguishes this particular essay is that Berlin incorporates the language of calculus and analytical geometry in his discussion, with the latter being particularly noteworthy since Descartes is credited with its creation.

Regarding Berlin's utilization of calculus terminology, here he speaks of attempts to "integrate" facts to provide a holistic account of human experience according to a given theory (such as Marxism), which are doomed to failure because "the facts to be fitted into the scientific grid and subsumed under the adopted laws or model … are too many, too minute, too fleeting, too blurred at the edges."[51] By contrast, successful historians focus on that which "differentiates one thing, person, situation, age, pattern of experience, individual or collective, from another."[52] Such terms appear in other essays by Berlin, but the use of "integration" and "differentiation" arguably takes on special significance given the way he makes repeated references to Newton and Newtonian physics.[53] Then there is Berlin's recourse to terms derived from analytical geometry. When speaking of the "assumption of one particular objective order of events or facts," Berlin says we sometimes conceive it as a "vertical order—succession in time," and sometimes conceive it as "horizontal" or as "interconnections between different aspects of the same stage."[54] In other words, we conceptualize the objective flow of time along the lines of a Cartesian plane. These statements are undeniably metaphorical, and there is a notable amount of irony in Berlin's discussion. For his adaptation of Cartesian and Newtonian language concedes their points, but not on their terms. History is not a subject of study in the way physics or astronomy are—history is not "scientific." However, that does not mean it is not a rigorous discipline and that it lacks its own standards. Here Berlin's recourse to metaphor is deft and pointed—a pin that pricks overinflated pretensions.

[49]Ibid., 137.

[50]See, for example, Berlin, "The Sense of Reality," 25; Berlin, "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century," 64–5; and Berlin, "The Concept of Scientific History," 128–30. For discussions of his view see George Crowder, *Isaiah Berlin: Liberty and Pluralism* (Cambridge, 2004), 19, 55; Claude Galipeau, *Isaiah Berlin's Liberalism* (Oxford, 1994), 16–21; Ryan Patrick Hanley, "Berlin and History," in Crowder and Hardy, *The One and the Many*, 159–80; and Hausheer, "Introduction," xxx–xxxii.

[51]Berlin, "The Concept of Scientific History," 119.

[52]Ibid., 125.

[53]The references to Newton occur in ibid., 105, 106, 111, 121, 135. The terms are also used in Berlin, "The Sense of Reality," 24, 33; and Isaiah Berlin, "Political Judgement," in Hardy, *The Sense of Reality*, 40–53, at 46; as well as Berlin, "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century," 81.

[54]Berlin, "The Concept of Scientific History," 109.

Metaphor as a bridge for comparisons

At this point it should be clear that metaphors, as an expression of comparative judgment, serve an integral role in Berlin's thought. Many of his arguments rely upon comparisons, and the comparisons are frequently structured around metaphors, similes, and analogies. Discursively, metaphors allow him to raise points, and clarify unusual or novel relations; rhetorically, they allow him to influence the reader's response through the imagery he uses. In this respect, metaphors embody the juxtaposition of terms that constitutes meaning, where words gain their significance by way of contrast with other words, as well as conveying an evaluation that results from the comparison. The implications for an appraisal of Berlin's essays should be clear, as attending to his use of metaphors is necessary to grasp his views fully. Along these lines, the full import of his "metaphorical method" becomes clearer when one notes its consequences for his arguments about pluralism. One of Berlin's insights is about how values conflict, the issue being that of their incommensurability. Because values are incommensurable, there is no metric by which they can be compared.[55] And yet Berlin frequently compares values and the positions associated with certain constellations of values. Is he, then, guilty of self-contradiction?

That incommensurability leads to incomparability is true, as the lack of an overarching measure involves the absence of a means of commensuration that can be used for comparative evaluation. The question, however, is whether incommensurability precludes *any* form of comparison whatsoever, or only comparisons of a certain sort. The historical understanding of the process of commensuration is as a form of comparison according to a scale that assigns a weight or rank to the objects compared.[56] For example, "price" serves as a metric by which we compare items in the grocery store or at a restaurant. Similarly, "kilometers per hour" provides a metric that allows for the comparative determination of speed, as well as calculations about time and distance. Yet, despite the prevalence of such metrics, there are forms of comparison that do not rely upon such measures. For example, someone who has overcome an addiction is not "freer" than they were in a literal sense. They are described as having "escaped the clutches" of their addiction or "thrown off the shackles" of their habit. The language is clearly figurative, yet no less meaningful because of it. The comparative state of individuals who have freed themselves from an addiction is not a matter of degree determined by a slide rule or abacus; it is one that that invokes a comparison understood along different lines.[57] Here is where Berlin's use of metaphor provides a means of thinking about making choices in a situation of incommensurability that has been unnoticed by others. For Berlin's use of metaphor involves a type of comparative judgment that is "non-

[55]Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 216.

[56]Ruth Chang, "Introduction," in Chang, ed., *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, MA, 1997), 1–34, at 1. Compare Chang, *Making Comparisons Count* (London, 2002), xvii, xxiii n. 2.

[57]Compare to what Berlin says: "When we speak of the extent of freedom enjoyed by a man or a society, we have in mind … the width or extent of the paths before him, the number of doors, as it were, and the extent to which they are open. The metaphor is imperfect, for 'number' and 'extent' will not really do." See Isaiah Berlin, "'From Hope and Fear Set Free'," in Hardy, *Concepts and Categories*, 173–98, at 191.

commensurable"; that is, one that that does not follow the form of commensurative comparison, yet is not precluded by incommensurability either.

The issue at stake concerns the justification of decisions when the choice is a comparative one. The fear about incommensurability is that lacking an overarching standard that covers all options—such as "utility" is alleged to do—the choice is ungrounded, and hence indefensible. According to Raz, a situation of incommensurability entails that the decision one makes is a form of radical choice, for in the absence of overarching standards the decision is undetermined by reason, and therefore a reflection of the will.[58] The implications of this position have been drawn out by John Gray, who argues that in a situation of value pluralism—where incommensurability defines the relation of values as rationally incomparable—liberalism is simply one among many ideologies.[59] Liberals who affirm pluralism can no more rationally vindicate their commitment than someone who believes in theocracy, or autocracy, or any other non-liberal position. Following a similar line of argumentation, John Kekes makes a case on behalf of conservatism, holding that conservative values are just as merited as liberal ones in a situation of pluralism.[60] While Raz, Gray, and Kekes ultimately affirm the importance of the rule of law and individual rights, it is easy to imagine someone who has no interest in these things using similar arguments on behalf of a radically illiberal society. The problem is that the cumulative effect of such discussions is the steady erosion of a reasoned commitment to liberal values—or any values, for that matter. For in a situation where incommensurability entails absolute incomparability, and where there is no reason to hold one commitment rather than another, then why not simply be a partisan and assert the primacy of your own position? To go from the incomparability of values to explicit chauvinism is an easy step to take, and one that cannot be gainsaid given the purported failure of reason in the face of incommensurability.[61]

So how does all of this relate to Berlin? Beyond the fact that each of the scholars mentioned recognizes Berlin as one of the sources of contemporary concerns about pluralism, there is the question whether or not Berlin regards the problem posed by incommensurability as they do.[62] He *does* attribute incommensurability to

[58]Joseph Raz, "Incommensurability and Agency," in Chang, *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason*, 110–28, at 127.

[59]John Gray, "Where Pluralists and Liberals Part Company," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 6/1 (1998), 17–36. Compare Gray, *Isaiah Berlin*, 23.

[60]John Kekes, *The Morality of Pluralism* (Princeton, 1993).

[61]George Crowder has attempted to respond to the various criticisms raised by Raz, Gray, and Kekes, with varied success. Crowder believes the issue depends upon the way "pluralism" is conceptualized, arguing that one can derive a case for liberalism if the definition of pluralism allows it. Unfortunately this blunts the strength of Crowder's rejoinder, as it seems to tilt the scales towards liberalism as a matter of basic assumptions. That noted, Crowder does not shirk the challenge the others pose and is aware of the limits of his own account. See Crowder, *The Problem of Value Pluralism*, 136–7. By contrast, Johnny Lyons dismisses these debates as forms of "logic-chopping" that miss the spirit of Berlin's writings. While I am very sympathetic to Lyons's point—much about these debates does descend into excessive pedantry—I believe they nevertheless require some engagement, at least as regards interpreting Berlin. See Lyons, *The Philosophy of Isaiah Berlin*, 118–22.

[62]Raz, *The Morality of Freedom*, 14; Gray, "Where Pluralists and Liberals Part Company," 18; and Kekes, *The Morality of Pluralism*, 12, 91–2.

pluralism. He also indicates that incommensurability precludes a certain form of lexical decision making.[63] Yet he resists the association of incommensurability with incomparability in the fashion of Raz. Instead, Berlin argues that individuals still choose in such situations and do so intelligibly rather than blindly. His comments about how these choices are justified vary: sometimes they are in light of the norms of our society, sometimes according to what we think is best, and sometimes according to what the situation requires.[64] Obviously these sorts of statement open Berlin to the accusation of relativism; at the very least his position seems susceptible to the charge of ambiguity, if not inconsistency. Nevertheless, it remains clear that Berlin does hold that comparison is possible despite the condition of incommensurability, and it is important to see why. I believe that his reliance upon metaphors can help clarify his position, as well as indicate how he avoids falling into relativism.

One of the concerns Berlin raises during the course of his discussions about pluralism is the problem it poses regarding uncertainty. In the face of the competing claims of different belief systems—or in the face of the demands of divergent values—we are often unsure of what we should do. This uncertainty sometimes entices individuals to attempt to reify one view over all others, or to assert that one position contains the correct account of experience while all others are incorrect.[65] Berlin describes such approaches as "monism," and delineates the various threats they pose: the justification of coercion in the attempt to impose one vision of life on everyone, the restriction of certain inquiries or prohibition of particular questions, the rationalization of revolution as a means to take power, and the deformation of individuals as they are warped by an enforced conformity.[66] Many of his essays explore the sources of monism and the different forms it has taken historically, beginning with classical Greece and the "Ionian fallacy," running through the Enlightenment and its "scientism," and ending with the Cold War and the dangers of Marxism.[67] In these essays, Berlin examines the ways in which monism fails to achieve the goal it sets for itself, which is to say, it fails to provide the certainty that it is meant to secure. Among his criticisms, one recurs, this being the falsification of experience that monism entails. As he notes, monistic approaches misportray the structure and relation of values, as monists assume that values can be arranged in a manner that applies to everyone, everywhere, irrespective of

[63]The clearest statement of this is in Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 216, where he speaks of pluralism as a "truer" and more humane position than the alternatives. As he characterizes it, "It is truer, because it does … recognise the fact that human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and in potential rivalry with one another. To assume that all values can be graded on one scale, so that it is merely a matter of inspection to determine the highest, seems to me to falsify our knowledge that men are free agents, to represent moral decision as an operation which a slide-rule could, in principle, perform."

[64]Isaiah Berlin, "Introduction," in Hardy, *Liberty*, 3–54, at 47; Berlin, "The Power of Ideas," 22; Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," 18; and Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 217.

[65]Berlin, "Historical Inevitability," 155, 159–60; and Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 214.

[66]Berlin, "My Intellectual Path," 17–18; Berlin, "Political Ideas in the Twentieth Century," 75–81; Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," 15–16; Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 192–5, 216.

[67]Berlin, "Logical Translation," 76–7; Isaiah Berlin, "The Philosophers of the Enlightenment," in Hardy, *The Power of Ideas*, 36–52, at 44; and Berlin, "The Artificial Dialectic: Generalissimo Stalin and the Art of Government," in Henry Hardy, ed., *The Soviet Mind: Russian Culture under Communism* (Washington, DC, 2004), 98–118, at 107.

context. The result is the application of models that successfully address problems in one area to problems found in another.[68] Berlin's sensitivity to metaphor arises at this point, as he pinpoints the problem as being that of incorrectly drawn analogies. For example, an "error is perpetually perpetrated whereby philosophy is conceived as a discipline analogous to the most successful pursuits of the day—typically some given science."[69] Similarly, "Who can say how much harm and how much good … came of the exaggerated application to social relations of metaphors and models fashioned after the patterns of paternal authority … or of priests to the laity?"[70] That said, "The notion that a simile or model, drawn from one sphere, is necessarily misleading when applied to another … will not bear criticism."[71] The issue, then, is how monism mistakenly applies its images.

The relevance of Berlin's critique of monism lies in how it narrows down the range of alternatives to pluralism. As I have noted elsewhere, Berlin's defense of his position involves discrediting alternative views—and in this case, monism is the target of his attention.[72] Recognizing the role metaphors play for Berlin allows one to see how his refutation of monism unfolds. Monism does not simply describe experience incorrectly; it reasons by analogy wrongly. Things are what they are, Berlin reminds us, and the mistaken interpretation of something as other than what it is can lead to horrific outcomes.[73] In this respect, Gray's understanding of pluralism is inaccurate. For some views are grounded upon metaphors that provide unsuitable accounts of our moral and political lives. For example, the application of images taken from biology to society—or the extension of descriptions taken from physics to the individual—involves figurative language that distorts and misleads. Society does not have the composition of an organism, nor are individuals atomistic, and in each case the descriptive content of the metaphor applies badly when related to human beings. That we know that such language distorts and misleads is seen most clearly in the consequences. Fascism treats society as an organic whole, while Hobbes's Leviathan treats individuals as isolated atoms. The abuses that then follow in their wake are indicative of the false analogies that actually underlie such approaches. Here Berlin's comparative approach and sensitivity to figurative language allow him to indicate how certain positions can be seen as beyond the pale, and thus discreditable.

Yet there remains the issue raised by Raz about radical choice. If incommensurability obtains and incomparability follows from it, then how can one justify one's commitments? As noted, although Berlin does associate incommensurability with pluralism, he does not identify incommensurability with comprehensive incomparability. In other words, incommensurability precludes comparisons according to a metric, but this does not define all the forms of comparative evaluation. Berlin's position is that moral values are not amenable to statement in commensurative

[68]"The great distortions, the errors and crimes that have sought their inspiration and justification in such images are evidence of mechanical extrapolation, or over-enthusiastic application of what, at most, explains a sector of life, to the whole." Berlin, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?", 159.

[69]Berlin, "Philosophy and Government Repression," 62.

[70]Berlin, "The Purpose of Philosophy," 10.

[71]Berlin, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?," 158.

[72]Jason Ferrell, "Isaiah Berlin as Essayist," *Political Theory* 40/5 (2012), 602–28, at 616–17.

[73]Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 172.

terms. For attempts to articulate values in quantifiable terms—as components that can be entered into an equation that allows one to calculate an outcome—misconstrue what values are. As Berlin puts it in an article coauthored with Bernard Williams, there is no "priority rule" that provides such a calculation.[74] Once again figurative language proves important, as the language associated with moral reasoning is often metaphorical. As mentioned previously, our conceptual terms are relational: we fully grasp their meaning by contrasting words with one another, as conceptual terms gain their full intelligibility by way of juxtaposition with other terms. Thus the notion of a "cause" is intelligible to the extent that we also understand that of "free will."[75] Similarly, negative liberty is to be understood in tandem with positive liberty. And equality is best grasped as "equality of rules," or as "equality proper," or along with a notion of "fairness."[76] Yet, while we often speak of someone as being "more" or "less" free—or as individuals being "equal to" one another—such comparisons are not to be understood as expressions of a commensurative process, where one assigns a precise quantity of freedom or equality to individuals. Rather, such statements are to be interpreted figuratively, as indicative of an appraisal of things that accords with our ordinary understanding. To this extent, comparisons remain possible even in a situation of incommensurability, which is to say, moral evaluation remains possible despite the absence of an architectonic standard that commensurates values.

That comparative evaluation is possible in a situation of incommensurability opens the door to another aspect of Berlin's thought. Our terms are relational and evoke a figurative understanding of meaning. This indicates why our choices are not reflections of blind will, as they reflect a mode of understanding constituted by language and its different forms. Relatedly, comparative judgment is what provides the bridge by which we understand others, and this clarifies why the capacity for imaginative insight is so important to Berlin. What fully distinguishes Berlin's position is his insistence that we can regard the world from another's perspective. Much has been made about the conditions of this ability to understand things from the vantage of another, and particular attention has been given to Berlin's statements about a "human horizon." Is this "horizon" something that bounds human experience? Or is it understood as a "core" that involves shared human interests or capabilities? George Crowder and Henry Hardy have investigated Berlin's claims about this, and both have found what he says to be problematic.[77] The main failure is taken to be the imprecision of what Berlin says—that his explicit

[74]Isaiah Berlin and Bernard Williams, "Pluralism and Liberalism: A Reply," *Political Studies* 41/2 (1994), 306–9, at 307.

[75]Berlin, "Historical Inevitability," 122.

[76]Isaiah Berlin, "Equality," in Hardy, *Concepts and Categories*, 81–102.

[77]See George Crowder and Henry Hardy, "Appendix: Berlin's Universal Values—Core or Horizon?", in Crowder and Hardy, *The One and the Many*, 293–7; and Hardy, *In Search of Isaiah Berlin*, 228–61. Hardy recognizes the "horizon" and "core" as metaphors, but objects to them as entailing "muddle" and being "obscure." Hardy, *In Search of Isaiah Berlin*, 141. I think this slightly sidesteps the point of their actually being metaphors to begin with. Figurative language is not meant to be taken literally—why else use it? Hardy *does* recognize this, and is reluctant to dismiss the metaphors completely because they do help him visualize Berlin's position. However he does not go further and explore a more general use of metaphor by Berlin, and remains critical of these particular metaphors.

statements are anything but concise, and that what "horizon" refers to is different than what "core" does. I believe that the problem is not with Berlin's statements, but with the expectation that they be understood as components of an argument that is meant to generate a logically precise position. Berlin's terms are clearly figurative forms of speech—"horizon" and "core" do not delineate anything literal in reference to human beings. The true significance of such terms is that they complement what Berlin says about the capacity for imaginative insight into the beliefs of others. Berlin repeatedly champions the idea that seeing things from another's perspective is necessary to achieve toleration. Even if we do not share another's beliefs, understanding how they came to hold those views is important for respecting or rejecting them.[78] If this is not possible—if we are unable to imaginatively enter into another's point of view—then we cannot regard them as fully human.[79] The notions of the "horizon" or "core" accord with this view of the imagination, as they *illustrate* the conditions for insight, as opposed to delimiting the conditions of humanity literally. Is all of this imprecise? Is all of this ambiguous? Yes, it is—which leads to the last point I wish to make.

Perhaps the most striking thing that comes from studying Berlin's reliance upon metaphor is how comfortable he is with an amount of ambiguity. He notes in several places that the boundaries between facts and values, or between descriptive and evaluative statements, are blurred or porous.[80] The attempt to pin down the meaning of terms with absolute precision is possible, but comes at a price. The cost is that those aspects of human experience that do not fit the clearly defined categories have to be twisted to do so. The result is not only the falsification of what we experience, but also the deformation of human beings who have to be mutilated to fit the ideal.[81] As a consequence, Berlin reminds us that some amount of slippage of terminology better accords with our ordinary experience of life than does a clinically precise approach which discriminates meaning like a doctor applying a scalpel. Metaphors and comparisons that rely upon figurative language are more suited to our moral and political lives than not. Does this mean that someone such as Kekes might be able to make a compelling case for conservatism given the condition of pluralism? It does—and I do not think this would bother Berlin very much. For the issue is not to provide an account of liberalism that defines things so strictly that it is the only response to pluralism; rather, the issue is to note how some responses involve mistaken evaluations based on poorly constructed comparisons, in order to avoid falling prey to ideas and arguments that rationalize harming people. Realizing the role of figurative language in our moral decision making—particularly by seeing how it involves comparative judgments that depend

[78]Berlin's comments about the Nazis are instructive here. As he argues, "I do not regard the Nazis … as literally pathological or insane, only as wickedly wrong [and] misguided by the fact." More, it is easy to see how someone could be misled by enough misinformation into committing the "most unspeakable crimes." On the other hand, "if I am a man or woman with sufficient imagination … I can enter into a value-system which is not my own, but which is nevertheless something I can conceive of men pursuing while remaining human." He then indicates that the respect this can lead to is a condition of toleration. See Berlin, "My Intellectual Path," 12–13.

[79]Berlin, "The Pursuit of the Ideal," 11–12.

[80]Berlin, "Historical Inevitability," 145, 148–9.

[81]Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty, 195–7, 216.

upon metaphors, analogies, and similes—is an important part of avoiding errors of these sorts. Is this relativism? No, because not all views are acceptable. Does this potentially allow for more than liberalism? Yes, because there remain a broad variety of valid ends and constellations of values within the human horizon. The ambiguity that attends figurative language should not dismay, but prompt us to be more imaginative about the ways in which we address the problems we face, as well as one another. This, I think, is what Berlin would have us recognize by writing as he does.

Conclusion

So is Berlin guilty of self-contradiction? Perhaps, if one believes that the only way to justify one's commitment is through the use of literal language that lacks any ambiguity. But, as should be clear by now, that is not Berlin's view; to judge him along those lines does him an injustice. Berlin is aware of—and responsive to—the various forms and uses of language, and such sensitivity expresses itself through his use of metaphor. This, in turn, proves significant, as Berlin utilizes a comparative approach that allows him to evaluate the objects that interest him: values, such as liberty, or writers, such as Tolstoy, or ideologies, such as Marxism. In so doing, Berlin provides examples of critical appraisal that are also attempts to persuade. His efforts go well beyond paeans on behalf of select individuals, as his approach encompasses moral and political philosophy, literature, and music. Thus the range of Berlin's essays reflects the breadth of his interests, as well as the depth of his understanding about how fully "metaphorical" our conceptions are.[82]

As for what comes from this, I believe that the appeal of Berlin's writings is crucially constituted by his reliance upon figurative language. Overlooking this leads to misreading Berlin as it neglects an especially important dimension of his work. Jeremy Waldron accuses Berlin of being too abstract, but this misses the mark.[83] Berlin is no more or less abstract than Kant, Hobbes, or Rawls, and such an accusation ignores what Berlin actually accomplishes. One of Berlin's achievements is to prompt his readers to reconsider their beliefs, something more easily done with language that is not overly technical, and does not date itself by being tied to timely debates. Berlin's use of metaphor is evocative, and its effect is to invite us to further reflection. Where others attempt to lock one into a logical straitjacket and make it

[82]One cannot help but also wonder about the influence of more literary figures upon Berlin, rather than the primarily philosophical ones I have referenced (Vico and Herder). Undoubtedly his love of Russian writers such as Herzen and Turgenev inspired him, as presumably did his appreciation of the work of T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf. However, such matters seem fitting subjects for further study in their own right, thus I have refrained from pursuing them here. While a reappraisal of Berlin's interest in literature and what it portends for him is certainly in order, for now I think it has been enough to establish the central role of metaphor in his writings and situate this role relative to his views about language.

[83]Jeremy Waldron, "Political Political Theory: An Inaugural Lecture," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 21/1 (2013), 1–23. Waldron's specific criticism is that Berlin is uninterested in institutional issues, such as the arrangement of constitutions. Such a criticism is poor, as accusing someone of not talking about what you, yourself, are interested in neglects what they do say. Crowder has the appropriate rejoinder to Waldron when he says, "No one can write about everything that is important. Waldron has focused on institutions, Berlin on other matters. Should Waldron be taken to task for not spending time on what interested Berlin?" See Crowder, *The Problem of Value Pluralism*, 195.

impossible to avoid agreeing with them, Berlin instead presents his observations and indicates what he believes is best, leaving it to us to assess what has been said. This is not the sign of a weak writer, but of one who respects his reader.

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