

Preface

Reconciling the Spirit and Ethics of Liberalism in the 21st Century*

Isaiah Berlin helped shape my belief that liberalism embodies the ideals of generosity, openness and tolerance—of seeing diversity not as a threat to identity but as an opportunity to deepen it. This defines Canada: I see Canadian values, particularly those of confidence and conscience, the two essential pillars of liberalism, as a reflection of liberal values.

From this perspective, the emblematic figure of Isaiah Berlin constitutes, in my view, a source of incomparable inspiration. One need only read “Freedom and Its Betrayal,” a compilation by Henry Hardy of famous radio lectures that Berlin devoted to six enemies of liberty: Helvétius, Rousseau, Fichte, Hegel, Saint-Simon and Joseph de Maistre.

Today, freedom is under major threat, even from those who would claim to be its servants. However, just as Berlin’s dire reminders caution us to be wary about loss of freedom, so too do his positive reflections on the nature of liberty invite us to be ingenious in its promotion.

In this regard, Berlin’s newer work, assembled by Henry Hardy in “Liberty,” provides a salutary lesson that we urgently need to adapt for our own time. Liberalism, as embodied so well in the figure of Berlin himself, has to discover the tragic sense of human existence and at its core, the practice of freedom.

Freedom ceaselessly forces us to choose between competing values that are not necessarily equivalent—that sometimes are reconcilable, but often not. We are at a juncture where choices of the latter kind are before us.

The ideas encapsulated in market fundamentalism—privatization, deregulation, free trade and reduction of the role

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