

Eras Journal - Dubnov, A. Abstract

Abstract of

Dubnov, A . "Liberal or Zionist? Ambiguity or Ambivalence?: Reply to Jonathan Hogg".

The paper is a reply to Jonathan Hogg's "The Ambiguity of Intellectual Engagement: Towards a Reassessment of Isaiah Berlin 's Legacy"(ERAS edition 6, November 2004). In his essay, Hogg offers Isaiah Berlin 's (1909-1997) future interpreters two major themes to focus on: first, he asks what was Isaiah Berlin 's role within the Cold War discourse. Secondly, he presents Berlin 's ardent support of Zionism as central to the understanding of his thought.

Hogg's argumentative approach fails to offer adequate answers to these central questions. Although I use these two questions as points of departure, I offer different answers. First, unlike Hogg who presented Berlin as a member of a British milieu of Cold War intellectuals, I suggest that Berlin 's thought should be located beyond the context of British liberalism. Furthermore, I argue that Hogg fails to show that such a milieu actually existed and ignores the fact that Berlin's anticommunism predates the Cold War years and is more similar to that of non-British thinkers. Second, unlike Hogg's narrow treatment of the Zionist ideology, I will distinguish between several trends within Jewish nationalism.

By understanding the varieties of Zionism and the historical dynamics of the movement, I will show that although he accepted its basic premises Berlin was never a passionate and enthusiastic devotee of Jewish nationalism. His pro-Zionism developed gradually, and was based on hesitation and skepticism, which might explain why he chose to support Chaim Weizmann's Zionism. Thus, rather than seeing Berlin as an ambiguous and passive Cold War intellectual, as Hogg does, I wish to see Berlin, the Liberal and Zionist, as a thinker characterised by his ambivalence, inner doubt and scepticism.