

## Hedgehogs and foxes. Isaiah Berlin's Dichotomy of Intellectual Identity Revisited and Expanded. An Assessment of Four Notable Cases.

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### Abstract

In this paper, the revisit and expansion of the dichotomy launched by Isaiah Berlin in 1953 is proposed in order to label the type of intellect of writers and thinkers from different eras. The division between hedgehogs and foxes he proposes has been used since its creation in different settings of theoretical speculation, but without altering the schematism of its original configuration. The hereby presented conceptual expansion of Berlin's binomial consists of coupling it to two new categorizations based on developments by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze: action-intellect for the hedgehog thinkers; and position-intellect for the foxes, and putting it to work to explain the kind of intellect of four Jewish Russian thinkers of the same generation, including Isaiah Berlin himself, creator of the original concept. It is our contention that in this way, Berlin's classification system is enhanced with a new operational system of analysis, with possibilities to be used in the study of intellectual creativity.

**Key words:** Isaiah Berlin; Simon Dubnow; Lev Trotsky; Ilya Ehrenburg; Jewish Russian thinkers; Intellect; Intellectual creativity; Epistemological analysis

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### Introduction

In 1953, the Russian-British historian and philosopher Isaiah Berlin presented his dichotomy in which the intellectual identity of writers and thinkers, from different eras were labelled in two categories: hedgehogs and foxes.

The idea was originally taken from the ancient Greek poet Archilochus: "The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows only one big thing". This dual categorization, was later included in a collection of essays by Berlin, Russian Thinkers, as well as in the subsequent volume of the historic essays *The Proper Study of Mind*. [1-2]

Thus, Berlin describes to varying degrees, Dante, Plato Lucretius, Pascal, Hegel, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, Ibsen, and Proust as hedgehogs; and Herodotus, Aristotle, Shakespeare, Montaigne, Erasmus, Moliere, Goethe, Pushkin, Balzac, and Joyce as foxes. Berlin used this binomial, to revise the intellect and the theory of the history of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy, based on his great work *War and Peace*. [1-3]

Berlin's dichotomy is apparently schematic and arbitrary, but according to our criterion, it can acquire greater conceptual depth and power of analysis of intellectual identity, if after reconsidering it, it is given expansion with a new categorial operation.

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In this paper, a prototype of conceptual coupling that enhances the aforementioned binomial is proposed; and its speculative application on four twentieth-century Jewish-Russian intellectuals, including Berlin himself, from the same generational context. These are the great Jewish-historian Simon Dubnow, and the revolutionary Marxist Lev Trotsky as hedgehogs; and the Soviet writer Ilya Ehrenburg and Isaiah Berlin as foxes, Berlin himself creator of our basic epistemological axis.

## Background

On several occasions, Berlin's binomial was used in its original configuration in different settings: political psychology; history/historiography; biographical essays, but without any conceptual addition to enrich it. [4-9]

The political psychologist Phillip E Tetlock from the University of Pennsylvania, used Berlin's distinction tool, in his research book on the accuracy of experts and forecasters in different fields - especially politics - *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* published in 2005, known as The Good Judgment Project. [4]

Frank C Keil presented an interesting critical analysis of Tetlock's work, where he considered that the main finding was that: *"hedgehogs" experts (those with one big theory) are worse predictors than "foxes" (those with multiple, less comprehensive theories) [...]; [...] in many cases "foxes" –those who don't base their predictions on one principle, but instead use several pieces of information even when they are contradictory –tend to make accurate predictions than do "hedgehogs" –who favor one big idea and use it with gusto and usually great confidence.* [5]

The North American historian Joseph J Ellis, in his notable work *Founding Brothers. The Revolutionary Generation* (2001 Pulitzer Prize for history) uses Berlin's dichotomy in evaluating George Washington: Washington was an archetypal hedgehog. And the one big thing he knew was that America's future as a nation lay to the West, in its development over the next century of a continental empire, "According to Ellis, that is why Washington insisted on the construction of canals". [6]

In the Latin American history field, the Chilean Claudio Véliz in his book *The New World of the Gothic Fox*, applies Berlin's system to modern culture, economic development, and the history of the New World, focusing on the *longue durée* period of English and Spanish America over the past 500 years. In Véliz's hypothesis, there is a great contrast between the British colonization of America, derived from the cultural and economic achievements of the European Industrial Revolution-presented as the style of the vernacular Gothic fox, versus that of declining Spanish America, sunk in the inhibitions and hostility to modernization, coming from the Counter-Reformation, considered a baroque hedgehog. [7]

Berthold Honecker, music historian, in his article *Wagner and the Origin of Evil*, uses the dichotomy to differentiate two main branches in the historiography of Wagner's antisemitism. A hedgehog-like functionalist line, that considers the composer's attacks on the Jewish as mere assimilationist rhetoric; and a second fox-like internationalist, that appears instead as much more violent, and truly eliminationist as from the *Judenhass*. [8]

The British philosopher Peter Hacker, shows in a witty work the position of his colleague Ludwig Wittgenstein in the analytical philosophy of the twentieth century. According to him, Wittgenstein, unlike the Tolstoy gauged by Berlin *as a fox by nature, but a hedgehog by conviction, was by nature a hedgehog, who after 1929 was transformed, through a great intellectual and imaginative effort, into a paradigmatic fox.* [1,9]

## The action-intellect of hedgehogs

I The large form

The first step to strengthen the hedgehog pole of Berlin's dichotomy is to include it in a new operational regime. To this end, this paper uses the categories of the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze which were developed for the analysis of different settings of creative

activity: the action-image in the cinema; Chinese painting, or mathematics. So, the thinker hedgehog labelled by Berlin, happens to be considered as belonging to the action-intellect category, which in turn is divided into two classes: the small and the large form; both formalized by Deleuze in a sequential algorithm: ASA' for the small form, and SAS' for the large form. In this light then, the hedgehogs S Dubnow and L Trotsky, belong to the small form of action-intellect the first, and the large form of the same intellect type the second. [10-11]

As it can be seen schematically in Table I, L Trotsky developed the large form of the hedgehog intellect-action [SAS'], in the first part of his life -probably the most complex and interesting one- between his birth in 1879, and the beginning of political ostracism in which he submerged himself from 1924, after Lenin's death. Trotsky knew only one great thing: only a violent revolution, led by a group of intellectuals of Marxist ideology, would put an end to the regime of the Tsars, which kept Russia in backwardness, extreme poverty, and which had led to the massacre of the First World War. [12-15]

This was what the situation was like [S] when he left, and towards which he undertook a feverish action of a hedgehog [A] to break. This behaviour continued after the October Revolution of 1917, in the defence of the new proletarian regime, when he organized the Red Army and defeated the counterrevolutionary White forces in the Civil War (1918-1921) [S']. See Table I [12-15]

Trotsky's intellect-action of hedgehog experienced a great twist or shift towards the small form [ASA'] when he was deported from Russia in 1929, after the defeat of the Leftist Opposition, which he led against the Stalinist sector, within the Bolshevik Party. There is a shift here from a political action-factional struggle [A] to an almost untenable situation [S] of a leader first disarmed, and then outcast -according to words of his foremost biographer Isaac Deutscher-, to fall into decline through multiple exiles, and a failed hedgehog action, entirely dedicated to denouncing Stalinism, and to sustain the Utopia of the permanent Revolution [A]. His life ended when he was assassinated in his fortress-house in Coyoacán-Mexico, by an agent of Stalinism in 1940. See Table I. [12-15]

S Czarist autocracy/ antisemitism/ Odessa-Nikolayev/ Interior exile. Context: Russian populism/Marx- ism/Zionism 1879-1902	A Encounter with Lenin/Revolution- ary option/Interior-exterior exile in Europe-USA [1902—1917] FWW* context Russian Revolution 1902-1917	S Soviet regime Foreign/Military Affairs Commissar. Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty. Red Army.Civil War. 1917-1923
A Bolshevik party-left opposition- political defeat/ The Rise of Stalinism. 1923-1924	S Interior exile/ Forced deportation (multiple) 1924-1940	A Stalinism consolidation/ Radical political-activism- IV International. Murdered/ Trotskyism/ SWW*context 1940
	*First World War	** Second World War

**Table I:** L Trotsky. The large form of hedgehog's action-intellect [SAS'] and shift to the failed small form [ASA].

**The action-intellect of hedgehogs**

II The small form

Dubnow's intellect-action of hedgehog, is twisted in an elliptical way according to the binomial oppression-opening, mediated by small actions [A] to allow the advancement of the situation of the Jewish Belarussian, Polish or Baltic community [S], towards cultural autonomy and self-government. It is about inducing reforms in the consciousness of the Jews themselves, separating them from the great revolutionary actions - defended by Trotsky or the leaders of the BUND (General Union of Jewish Workers of Lithuania, Poland and

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Russia) - or from the Zionist principles of T Herzl, Oppression-action/situation/new action [ASA], described by Deleuze as the small form. An intellectual twisting circuit in triple sequence, which is triggered by the first action [A], creates a new situation [S], which in turn determines the need for a new movement of the intellect-action, for the approach of the following praxis [A']. [10-11, 16-17] See Table II.

In short, Dubnow also knew one great thing: that the East European Jews should fight for their rights of autonomy as a community in Russia, and they should not dissolve their identity in the diffuse Marxist concept of internationalist class; or migrate en masse to Palestinian land, according to the Zionists.

A1 Traditional Judaism to Wissenschaft des Judentums.	S1 Window to modern lay Judaism/Haskalah context	A' Advance to be a Jewish-Russian freethinker 1860-1880
A2 Abandonment of Pale of Settlement-St Petersburg/Odessa	S2 Window to Jewish-Russian intelligentsia/Czarist antisemitism--BUND*--Zionism context	A'' Journalism. Community political activism. Folkist Party 1880-1897
A3 Return to-St Petersburg	S3 Window to Jewish-Russian intelligentsia/Revolutionary-- WW I** context	A''' Ideologist of the Jewish Diaspora nationalism. History teacher. 1905-1917
A4 Emigration to Kaunas/ Berlin	S4 Historian	A'''' Writing of HJP*/ essays about East-European Jewish past-1922-1933
A5 Emigration to Riga	S5 Nazi persecution/ ghettoization	A''''' Autobiography Murdered/Extermination of European Jews—WW II* context 1933-1941
	*BUND: General Union of Lithuanian/ Polish and Russian Jewish Workers **WW I: First World War	*HJP: History of Jewish People **Second World War.

**Table II:** S Dubnow. *The small form of hedgehog's action-intellect [ASA].*

**The position-intellect of foxes**

Ilya Ehrenburg [1891-1967] and Isaiah Berlin [1909-1997] can be considered as foxes in the dichotomy designed by the Russian-British thinker. Unlike the hedgehog, the intellectual fox is the one that knows many things and can be handled in different settings with great adaptive flexibility. [1]

From this point forward, it is no longer the action-intellect, but another type of actions or interventions in the production of events --the great socialist Revolution; or the autonomy of the Jews in the Russian Empire--, as it has been presented in the hedgehog intellectuals Trotsky and Dubnow, a configuration which can be called position-intellect.

I Ehrenburg appears as the great fox of the Jewish-Russian intellectuals of the Soviet Stalinist period, effective even after the death of the dictator in 1953. His loyalty to the regime is "tangled" and indecipherable at times; the same as his reversible Jewish identity in the face of the pressures of the totalitarian system in which he lived, although without completely abandoning it, as evidenced by the unwavering project of carrying out a complete chronicle of the Nazi genocide of Russian Jews, overturned in his Black Book, together

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with the writer Vasili Grossman; and being a prominent member of the Jewish Antifascist Committee. His complex fox position-intellect can be described as dual-split. As it will be seen in this new approach, Ehrenburg's fox-position intellect is deployed between different and biased positions, to sustain himself as a Soviet writer praised by Stalinism and with recognized prestige in the West, and in turn without surrendering his Jewish identity. [18-20]

After the settlement of his Jewish-Russian family in England, Isaiah Berlin was able to educate himself and then evolve to become part of the Oxfordian intellectual lineage. As it will be shown, he develops an intellect-position of a fox, which is only slightly committed to the events he experiences. While working in British diplomacy in the US, before and during World War II; or travelling as a correspondent to the Soviet Union, his behaviour can be considered as in-between, always between facts and people, not taking sides or making a firm commitment to any of them. He is more interested in the Idea and less in the Event; the social, ideological, or political position, rather than facing actions or committing himself effectively. He moved like a fox in all the arenas in which he ventured, in Europe, the US, Russia or Palestine. [21]

Although Berlin was a fox in interpersonal relationships and knew many things, he behaved like a hedgehog in matters related to totalitarian ideologies, or the monistic conception of history and human civilization. He energetically resisted the "totalitarian temptation", as described by the sociologist R Dahrendorf in his work on the liberal intellectuals or "Erasmians", by not adhering to any of them, despite the charged and challenging ideological context that he had to live in through the twentieth century. The defence of the "crooked timber" of humanity, developed in its pluralist theory of values also accounts, in the manner of the hedgehog, that these are incommensurable; and that the ethical positions of the different groups of Civilization are irreducible, often irreconcilable and with an equal pretension of legitimacy. [22-24]

The fox thinker moves closer to the action-intellect of the hedgehog, which we call position-intellect. Although he performs actions, his interest is to hold an intellectual plane adhering to a position -ideological; politics; ethics; aesthetics [...]. Position-intellect- that is configured with content, folds, contradictions, reverses, paths, or links; that can twist or turn; approach the edge of one or more of its contents, inhabit the fold of any of them, or deploy it to generate a new content, category, or concept. But it has always been in a Euclidean topological space, except in the form that we call dual-split, where the plane of consistency of the position-intellect can be displaced, as a whole, in a Möebius band. [25]

In this paper, Berlin is attributed the intellect-fox position of the classic or Euclidean type. He moves freely in multiple epistemological registers, but always within clear limits, even with a refusal to cross them, or to let himself be tempted to move on to transgression. His position-intellect admits the struggle of Ideas or confrontation of concepts, such as the one he had with the British historian EH Carr, about the concept of history. But in all that configuration, the Event remains in eclipse because it demands compromising actions. [26]

Ilya Ehrenburg is considered a dual-split intellectual. He shows a non-Euclidean intellect-position, but Möebiusian, which moves through the entire band of positions without being altered, or it is torn by some confrontation. He is at the same time Russian-Soviet, and Western or internationalist; Stalinist and anti-totalitarian; Jewish and an ecumenical layperson. It is not about twisting or splitting the intellect, but he is deployed with all the possible biases simultaneously, to face a certain situation. He moves from a bias, fold, or edge of a certain position to another that can be the opposite, without rip or damage. He can drift towards the hedgehog in certain extreme situations, as it happened with his role as correspondent in the Red Army during World War II where he was dedicated to war propaganda, writing incendiary proclamations to sustain the morale of the troops. This intellectual unfolding of the fox-hedgehog probably preserved him from the clutches of Stalin, due to his apparent collusion with Western intellectuals of a liberal tendency - for example, at the II Congress of Antifascist Writers of 1937 in Spain affected by the Civil War - an escape of the terror of the Purges. [18, 20, 25, 27-28] See Table III

<b>I Ehrenburg</b>	<b>I Berlin</b>
1891-1967	1909-1997
Position-intellect of fox-Möebiusian type	Position-intellect of fox- Euclidian type
Skewed Russian-Jewish identity	Russian-British Jewish identity
Holocaust memory	Liberal Zionism
Multiple contexts: Czarist/Stalinist- post Stalinist	Multiple contexts Czarist/Stalinist/British liberalism
Cosmopolitan dual-split pluralism	Cosmopolitan liberal pluralism

**Table III:** Position-intellect of the fox. A comparative analysis I Ehrenburg/I Berlin.

## Conclusion

This paper has proposed a revisit to the categorization enunciated by Isaiah Berlin in 1953, of foxes and hedgehogs to label the type of intellect of thinkers and writers from different eras. This classification system has been used since its creation by different authors and in different settings, but it has always been in its original version. [1]

It is our belief that despite its schematism, Berlin's binomial can acquire a robust conceptual depth, if it is expanded or enriched with more elaborate epistemological operations, such as the dual concepts of small and large intellect-action in the case of hedgehogs, with their algorithmic representation ASA'/SAS', originally developed for different settings by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze. In the same way, the power of the fox category is increased, if it is expanded to that of intellect-position with its two topological Euclidean and Möebiusian variants. [10-11,25]

To create a field of ad-hoc analysis of the Berlin system, his preliminary instrument was applied, although already expanded, on a group of twentieth-century Jewish-Russian intellectuals, including Berlin himself. S Dubnow and L Trotsky are considered hedgehogs, with their algorithmic representation of the small or large form of the intellect-action; and I Ehrenburg and the I Berlin himself as foxes, in the two topological variants of the intellect-position.

The two selected hedgehog thinkers were contemporaries, born in the Russian Empire between 1860 and 1879; and both were killed at almost the same time, Trotsky in 1940 and Dubnow in 1941, in the context of the Holocaust and the rise of Stalinism. Likewise, the fox intellectuals, were almost contemporaries and Russian by birth: 1891-1967 [Ehrenburg]; 1901-1997 [Berlin]. This generational similarity makes it possible to place all four before the same secular historical incidence vectors, useful when an epistemological analysis is conceived with a homogeneous experimental sample.

The purpose of this brief work would be completed, if the other classificatory systems of intellectual creativity, such as those based on ideological, psychological (psychoanalytic), moral precepts, etc., incorporate the Berlinian categorization powered by this or other epistemological articulations.

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