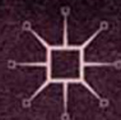
Andreas Hess

The Political Theory of Judith N. Shklar

Exile from Exile



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By Andreas Hess

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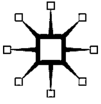

THE POLITICAL THEORY OF JUDITH N. SHKLAR
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This book is dedicated to the memory of Judith Shklar.

Introduction: “The Peculiarity of the Kind of Refugee I Was”

Judith Shklar’s Intellectual Legacy • Shklar as “Fox” • Shklar’s Coinage of Words and Use of Unusual Terms: The Attempt to Bring Theory and Political Practice Closer Together • The Theme of Exile in Shklar’s Life and Work • Shklar’s Exile from Exile in Context • Outline of the Book

Judith Shklar’s Intellectual Legacy

On September 19, 1992, the *New York Times* carried a short piece on the death at the age of 63 of Harvard Professor Judith Nisse Shklar. The *Times* noted that Shklar was originally from Riga and that she had fled with her family first to Sweden and then, in 1941, to Canada. The article mentioned her major academic qualifications, awards, and distinguished career and made a short reference to Shklar’s interest in political theory and intellectual history, chiefly from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twenieth centuries. It was also noted that she had served as President of the American Political Science Association between 1989 and 1990, the first woman to head this large professional organization. As the *Times* further reported Shklar was survived by her husband, two sons, and a daughter.

While the reader of this brief article might detect a successful professional career, one that had led an immigrant from Riga to become a distinguished professor at one of America’s leading academic institutions, the *New York Times* did not acknowledge Shklar as an iconic thinker nor did the deceased seem to have left any noticeable intellectual traces. In the article’s brevity and sobriety but also in its obvious omissions lay an odd reluctance fully to acknowledge Shklar’s considerable achievements; not one of her eight books was mentioned and neither could one encounter a reference to her unique contributions

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to political theory, such as her defense of an illusion-free barebones liberalism.

With the hindsight of more than 20 years, it is now even more evident that Shklar was indeed an iconic thinker, although in an unusual way—a story too complex perhaps to be fully reflected in a short *New York Times* obituary. Shklar formed the minds of generations of students. She had a huge impact on her colleagues, intellectual acquaintances, and friends. Her influence reached far beyond the Ivy League institution to include quite a few outstanding thinkers in the Western academic community. Looking at the list of those who paid tribute to Shklar one can clearly detect an intellectual network that speaks a common language and in which the reference to or the dialogue with Shklar and her work played and continues to play an important part. Some of the most distinguished minds of the later twentieth century were part of Shklar's orbit: Bruce Ackerman (Yale), Seyla Benhabib (Yale), Isaiah Berlin (Oxford), John Dunn (Cambridge), Amy Gutmann (Harvard, Pennsylvania), Albert O. Hirschman (Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton), Stanley Hoffmann (Harvard), Stephen Holmes (NYU), Isaac Kramnick (Cornell), John Rawls (Harvard), Nancy Rosenblum (Harvard), Quentin Skinner (Cambridge), Dennis F. Thompson (Harvard), and Michael Walzer (Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton). The list is by no means exhaustive; there are many more renowned individuals who knew Shklar and surely remembered her. Some of them were part of Shklar's postgraduate student cohort at Harvard who later opted for political careers, for example, Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Her own academic training and intellectual formation was influenced particularly by Frederick Watkins at McGill (a Rousseau specialist from Harvard who had moved to Montreal) and later, at Harvard, Carl Joachim Friedrich, Shklar's supervisor and mentor (a political scientist who was known for analyzing totalitarianism and its main features and threats, and who introduced Shklar to the study of modern ideologies). When Shklar became a lecturer some of her former teachers became colleagues, such as Harvard historian Bernard Bailyn (who introduced Shklar to American intellectual history), Rupert Emerson (who had always been protective of her, particularly in her early Harvard years), or political scientist Louis Hartz (who helped promote the notion of American exceptionalism and the role that Lockean liberalism played in America's intellectual formation, something that Shklar was not impressed by but nevertheless learned from).

Shklar was passionate about arguments. She generally adopted a Socratic approach. Students and colleagues admired her for speaking out, although she sometimes did so in a challenging manner and tone. Despite this, she was held in high esteem, not least because she had the kind of personality that combined integrity with honesty. Yet she did not easily fit into Harvard—an institution where speaking one's mind was not always appreciated. She believed that to command intellectual authority and to perform as a teacher demanded a clearheaded and uninhibited skepticism. By all accounts, Shklar played that role well, mixing her psychological insights with a unique capacity to detect intellectual nonsense and sloppy thinking. As a teacher Shklar sought to inculcate intellectual sensibility, curiosity, and, crucially, the courage to use one's own mind. Many former students who now hold academic positions have acknowledged how much they benefited from her intellectual guidance.

Despite having exercised such influence Shklar's legacy still remains somewhat in the shadow when compared to, let us say, Hannah Arendt, Isaiah Berlin, or John Rawls. One can find hundreds of citations, references, and, additionally, numerous reviews in academic and nonacademic journals and magazines, yet it is rare to encounter really comprehensive analyses or accounts of her work. Even in the posthumous essay collection dedicated to Shklar's work and life, *Liberalism without Illusions* (Yack 1996), most of the contributors used her insights, ideas, and concepts to advance their own approaches rather than face Shklar as a thinker in her own right.

It is true that some scholarly attempts to promote Shklar's work have been made. A posthumous two-volume collection edited by Stanley Hoffmann and Dennis F. Thompson, *Political Thought and Political Thinkers* and *Redeeming American Political Thought* (1998 and 1998a), has made her essays, which had been dispersed across many journals, more easily accessible.[1] Yet, despite such attempts to popularize Shklar and her writings, very few systematic attempts have been made to look at her entire oeuvre, including the collected papers and notes that are now housed in the Harvard Archives. Of those few attempts to provide a general account three are noteworthy: One is a PhD dissertation from the Central European University, supervised by former Shklar student Bernard Yack (Stullerova 2005), which tries to reconstruct the core ideas of Shklar mainly by focusing on her unique conceptualization of a barebones liberalism. There exists also a short introductory book by a Belgian scholar, Paul Magnette, with the somewhat unfortunate title *Le libéralisme des opprimés*

(Magnette 2006). The book is a helpful overview but says little about the making of Judith Shklar's thought. Compared with the two aforementioned studies a recent Cambridge PhD dissertation is more ambitious. Its author, Katrina Forrester, tries to trace the development of the liberal political thought of John Rawls, Michael Walzer, and Judith Shklar in the context of debates that took place between 1950 and 1990 (Forrester 2012a). Together with two longer articles (Forrester 2011 and 2012) this dissertation is perhaps the most comprehensive attempt so far to discuss the development of Shklar's thought historically.

Besides the three studies mentioned there exist half a dozen other articles whose authors have tried to identify various patterns in Shklar's thought (Hoffmann 1993, Allen 1998, Berkowitz 1998, Strong 1999, Whiteside 1999, Miller 2000, Young 2007). Finally, we should mention those studies that have taken their lead and inspiration from one or another of Shklar's unique coinages of terms, such as Levy's *The Multiculturalism of Fear* (2000). To that group also belongs Tony Judt's conceptualization of a "social democracy of fear," an appraisal that takes its main inspiration from Shklar's stripped-down version of liberalism (Judt 2009).

Shklar as "Fox"

Judith Shklar's legacy remains a puzzle from which parts are still missing. To be sure, there are reasons for this. First of all, there simply is no "Shklar school" of followers who work endlessly to safeguard the reputation of the master thinker. This lack of systematic appreciation may not be an accident; as she herself remarked once "(I) do not like disciples" ([Shklar 1989]; Yack 1996, 277). Second, and perhaps more important, Shklar never was a fashionable systems thinker, or, to use Berlin's distinction, a "hedgehog." There is simply no single identifiable masterpiece out there that disciples could mine for years. Shklar always remained a "fox," somebody who shifted position and sought new observation points, somebody who was curious but also took great care when dealing with ideas and intellectual history. Third, Shklar always gave thinkers and ideas their historical due and remained skeptical as to whether it was possible to use political ideas without referring first to the historical context within which they were conceived. As she puts it, her attempt has always been to "preserve the canon by expanding it" (278). This makes the analysis of her writings a complex, double hermeneutical task: one has to comprehend how

Shklar understood the canon in the first instance before being able to detect how her own argument emerged from Sherlock Holmes-like historical reconstruction.

The following examples may best illustrate what I mean. When Shklar wrote a book about Hegel's phenomenology, she did so from a position that remained highly skeptical of the Prussian philosopher's system-building attempts and grand theory in general. Yet, despite the fact that her Hegel book appeared to have been written with no great empathy for the larger idea behind it, it is still one of the best works on the subject. This is so because Shklar remains critical to the system-building attempt while at the same time giving the text of the philosopher its due. Her attempt at understanding Hegel was both modest and ambitious—modest because it appeared like one more interpretation of a classic text, and ambitious because of the attempt to make sense and to use plain English in place of Hegel's notoriously complicated German style. She brought Hegel all the way down to earth, not by turning him on his head as Marx claimed to have done, but in the sense of humanizing his political theory by reading the phenomenology as a masterpiece of political and social psychology.

Another example that reveals Shklar's sensitive treatment of ideas relates to concepts used outside the context in which they were first conceived. When she refers to Montaigne and uses his ideas to discuss modern moral dilemmas as she does in *Ordinary Vices*, she does so with an historical awareness and sensibility that one rarely finds in political theory. In effect, *Ordinary Vices* is "Montaigne applied to America." The particular task consists of building a bridge between the classic discussion of vices and the somewhat "timeless" surplus meaning that remained of value to the contemporary reader and which is of use in understanding present dilemmas.

Context and contextualization mattered a great deal to Shklar, independently of how systematic the ideas were and whether or not she favored them personally. One had to give the text its due and giving it its due meant developing a certain sense for its specificity and its unique historical dimension. Alluding to the various psychological, biographical, sociological, and political dimensions actually helped to humanize both text and thinker. It is this textual practice that clearly distinguishes Shklar's argumentation from that of many contemporary social and political theorists; in fact, it puts her almost into the camp of the so-called Cambridge School of Intellectual History. At the same time her approach is distinguished from the Cambridge School by her inclination to look not only for a meaning that a text

might reveal in a given historical constellation but also for the additional value a text can still transmit beyond the specific context in which it was first conceived.

Shklar's Coinage of Words and Use of Unusual Terms: The Attempt to Bring Theory and Political Practice Closer Together

Shklar's unusual and surprising coinage of terms and concepts has a humanizing effect on her work. For example, when writing about the American Founding Fathers, she used the terms "party of memory" (mainly but not exclusively associated with Adams and Madison) and "party of hope" (mainly associated with Jefferson and Paine), terms that were first coined by Emerson. Shklar's unique contribution consists in having given these entirely new meanings: the first term explained the psychological inclination and the attempt to bear in mind past sufferings and how to learn from them, while the second referred to the Jeffersonian idea of having a revolution every 15 years, thereby putting all hope into future liberations. The effect was to show the Founding Fathers and their developing political factions in a different psychological light. The changed vantage point and the change of perspective reveal differences or details that another interpreter might have missed.

Inventive and novel conceptualizations also elucidate her idea of the "liberalism of fear." For Shklar the liberalism of fear had its origins in postReformation Europe. Its most basic and perhaps only aim is to avoid cruelty. Yet, from its early conceptualization—Montaigne and Montesquieu come to mind, although they would certainly not qualify as being liberals in the modern sense of the word—it would still take a very long time for the liberalism of fear to turn into a political idea that could inform real institutional practices. Since its inception in late medieval times the record has been uneven. During the course of the nineteenth century France experimented with liberal ideas in two republics, yet even at the beginning of the twenty-first century and after another three republics it is still far from being a secure tradition. In Britain where it had its longest history it was never applied to the rest of the Empire, nor indeed closer to home in Ireland. In the United States it made obviously little sense in the context of slavery and legal segregation. Yet, despite the United States's uneasy history in this regard, it was here that the liberalism of fear really took root

and liberal reforms and policies were successfully introduced. There was, as Shklar explained, a collective political memory at work that reminded people of the *summum malum* that needed to be avoided. On occasion, such remembrance would metamorphose into political ideas and opinions. At various historical moments it helped to promote rights and to secure legal protection, be it through demanding full civil rights or defending liberal immigration policies. To be sure, progress was not unilinear, and liberal achievements were always under threat or remained challenged; even in the course of the twentieth century they were never safe and did not prevail automatically.

In coining the term "liberalism of fear" Shklar manages to follow a thin thread through historical time. Her conceptualization never uses broad historical strokes but is always sensitive to the ups and downs of particular historical circumstances. There is never anything self-evident or automatic in the way she describes the historical process. She knew that the liberalism of fear was a vulnerable achievement. There was nothing complacent in her use of the term. This is unusual when compared to other definitions and notions of liberalism, which often have lost their fighting potential or have degenerated into a defense of the status quo.

The overall purpose of such imaginative and psychologically insightful conceptualizations was always to bring philosophy and theory closer to real-life experiences. Shklar was a realist, yet without wearing the realism badge of any particular school of thought. She was interested in the relevance of ideas and intellectual thought and at the same time aware that there always remained an irreconcilable gap between theory and practice. She rejected grand theory—in contrast, for example, to John Rawls. At the same time she encouraged her Harvard colleague and friend to work out his arguments about justice and liberalism despite remaining skeptical about such generalizing attempts.

Shklar held political theory in such esteem that she believed that to popularize it meant to run the risk of watering it down or losing its critical substance. In her writings we thus encounter not only an opposition to grand theory but also a reluctance to pander to the general public. She was the antithesis of an intellectual pop star. She made a conscious decision to exercise her intellectual influence through teaching. In seminars, far removed from the limelight of public addresses and radio or TV shows, she exercised her most remarkable intellectual power and influence. The jazz world includes the figure of the "musician's musician," top-notch professional musicians who work

hard and sometimes brilliantly, but who enjoy making music more than the prestige of being at the top of the bill or in the spotlight. Like a musician's musician, Shklar does not make the cover, nor did she seek that sort of acclaim. Instead, she had the ability to spot higher forms of nonsense and winced at superficial performances and said so publicly or in private—just as a brilliant musician might spot the imperfections of those in the spotlight. While it would be to go too far to label Shklar a marginal thinker, there is something about her reluctance to put herself in the limelight that is exemplary, particularly when compared to the intellectual pop stars of today whose output seems often to resemble comets or fireworks—shiny and sparkling for a moment but hardly lasting. Shklar's conscious and often self-sought marginality and the writings it produced still trigger real intellectual curiosity and debate. In other words, her success should not be measured by the applause of a broad public but by having stimulated and encouraged others to think further.

Shklar considered those former academics who went on talk shows or who walked the corridors of power to have not so much betrayed the profession as to have lost the plot. For her the medium of power was one thing—acquiring knowledge that contributes to thinking about liberty and justice was quite another. Even at the zenith of her career, in an address she gave in 1989 to the American Council of Learned Societies titled "A Life of Learning," she did not present herself as a public intellectual or defender of certain political ideas and ideals. Instead she identified herself, very much to the surprise and amusement of the audience, first and foremost as a bookworm. In this confession and in the context of the event lay a story: here was a thinly veiled message about the role and task of those who were directly involved in teaching and learning—particularly for those whose subjects were political theory and the history of ideas. Their job was not to wander the corridors of the Pentagon or the White House or become "excessively fashionable," "gurus," or "substitute parents" ([Shklar 1989]; Yack 1996, 277f).

For Shklar there was no difference between the role of academic and that of intellectual; the two were inseparable. Today, such convictions are no longer widely shared. Furthermore, the language of political philosophy has become extremely academic and is full of technical terms, often amounting to pure jargon—perhaps a price that philosophy and political theory may have had to pay in order to become academically acceptable. While there are exceptions, the tendency toward completing and making theory ever more perfect seems

unstoppable. Everything has to be contradiction-free and watertight. This, as Shklar knew, is foolhardy. In turn, she reminded us not only of the deeply held values, convictions, and contradictions that political theorists had held in the past but also of their unique rhetoric and style of writing. She thus made these thinkers and ideas come to life again.

Shklar was not slow to criticize human imperfection and flaws that marked a given thinker or text. She was convinced that this was part of bringing political theory back to life. Interpreting and dissecting a text should be stimulating and exciting. Such thinking is directly opposed to the attempts to fill the last gap or hole to achieve the perfect or supercritical political philosophy. Shklar's skepticism and critical psychological insights prevented her from going down such routes of perfection—hence her numerous "interventionist" articles and essays with her clarifications or comments attempting to reclaim a classic humanist tradition yet without sermonizing about it. The task of political theory as Shklar understood it is to decipher potentially complex psychological meanings and messages. Her political theory is simply not interested in academic newspeak or soulless academic perfectibility and certainly not in the senseless jargon that often accompanies it.

The Theme of Exile in Shklar's Life and Work

There is another, very important element or theme in Shklar's life and work that is crucial when discussing her contribution and legacy. It is the theme of being an outsider, which in her case is linked to the experience of having been a peculiar type of refugee. One could of course question this interpretation of Shklar's life, given her academic position and accomplishments. So one may ask: how much and what kind of an outsider was Shklar really? And, did her experience of having been a refugee contribute to such self-perception and stylization? A life in exile and emigration can lead to the rejection of mainstream attitudes and positions, but is it indeed possible to spend an entire academic life at Harvard, among the world's most prestigious institutions, and yet remain an outsider? The answer to these questions might give us some clues and hints about how to gain a deeper understanding of Shklar's life and theoretical legacy. So before outlining the main steps and chapters of the present book, let me briefly elaborate on these themes of refugee and outsider status, because a meditation on these issues will form the backbone of my reconstruction of Shklar's political theory.

Just before her death Shklar was working on a larger project in which she attempted to demonstrate that it was not only intellectually profitable but also indeed possible to write the entire history of political thought from the perspective of exiles. It ranged from the role that exiled philosophers and involuntary sojourners had played in classic Greek thought to the modern phenomenon of exile and refugee status of entire populations. The leading idea was linked to an earlier argument about barebones liberalism, which was based not on an assumption of what could be best for all (the *summum bonum*) but which, in contrast, was based on the experience or realistic threat of what she called the summum malum, cruelty. As the argument goes, to appreciate basic liberal conditions one does not need to know what is best but only to have had one existential experience such as having been thrown out of a country, having lived as a refugee, having possessed no rights, or having been a dissident whose voice has been silenced. Remembrance plays a crucial role in this respect. Experiences of cruelty and fear will never be entirely forgotten, even when one might have had the luck to escape and find a new home in a democratic country in which liberal institutions are still valued.

To put it slightly differently and using the language of Albert O. Hirschman, in functioning institutions and in modern democracies loyalty presupposes the right to voice one's concerns or to dissent. Yet, loyalty is not easy for those who have experienced exile or who have been threatened, persecuted, or treated cruelly in the past. Psychological scars remain. Fear, or the remembrance of it, does not just evaporate or disappear. Yet—and this is Shklar's genuine contribution to the argument about exile and obligation—what looks like a negative in one sense can also be turned around to become a positive. What Shklar identifies here is that the experience of exiles and immigrants can have a positive impact on how liberal democracies conceive themselves. In other words, they can serve as permanent reminders of the limits of loyalty and the preconditions for voice. This holds even more true for an immigrant nation like the United States that is built on the exit of citizens from other countries and the voice it promises to its newcomers (Hirschman 1972, Hess 1999).

It does not take much to see how the arguments in relation to fear and exile have some basis in Shklar's own experience. Having been forced to leave Riga as a young girl, her experience of exile, first in Sweden, then on the family's long odyssey to Canada, had a profound impact on her psychological make-up. With time, the wound would heal to some extent. But it seems that she never forgot what had

turned her life upside down, despite having later had a distinguished career at Harvard and, by all accounts, a happy life surrounded by family, friends, and close colleagues. Once existentially threatened, that experience might eventually be overcome in terms of immediate pain levels; however, it can never be entirely forgotten. At a later phase in life, as is the case with Shklar, such experiences can be channeled productively. It was, as I will argue, Shklar's greatest personal achievement to have used her experiences exactly in this vein. For her, it became a habit of thought.

What made Shklar so passionate was not always easy to understand, not even for her closest colleagues and friends. There are numerous accounts that "Dita" (as her friends called her) could be fearless and ferocious when it came to argument. I suspect that this sense of passion for argument and ideas was a creative way of dealing with that émigré experience from her childhood and early adolescent years, the fear that had accompanied the exit from Riga and Sweden, and the self-made life and independent learning that followed the refugee odyssey. Later experiences of independent learning may have confirmed such preexisting feelings of strong individual independence. We all know of cases of people who have had similar experiences: the sense of being thrown back onto one's own resources, having no fallback position and no security but that which constitutes the true *homo sacer*. Having felt existential fear and being threatened with cruelty, such experiences can later potentially be turned into strong opinions in which defending one's argument passionately and firmly becomes crucial—even long before the "official" arguments may have been stated or become clear to others. It is a latent response mechanism, both defensive and creative as it fashions an environment in which one can feel safe and secure. In Shklar's case the experience not only of having to live with fear and exile at a young age but also of learning a lot quickly on her own, mainly due to the absence of real parental influence in the times of existential crisis, later turned into an adult *habitus* which impacted on her work and publications.

Shklar had a privileged upbringing and an excellent private education, yet her formative experiences included rampant anti-semitism in Riga and the loss of a beloved sister at the crucial moment of having to leave Latvia and having to change countries and languages. All this had an impact and might serve as an explanation of Shklar's own personality and for a considerable part of her early and later writings. Other experiences such as being blocked for many years from promotion to full professor must be seen in the light of these earlier events.

Shklar clearly cultivated her role as an outsider to a certain extent; she always considered herself to be intellectually from Harvard without actually being part of the university's establishment. In an interview she gave in 1981, by which time she had been promoted to full professor, she confessed that maintaining an outsider status after many years at Harvard was perhaps not quite appropriate (Walzer, 1981, Session III, Part 1, 4 of transcript). However, in the same interview she also pointed out that she understood her role still very much in those terms—although the function had changed somewhat and the energy appeared now to have been channeled into the intellectual realm. Thus, the role of outsider first helped Shklar to prevail against adverse institutional circumstances such as starting an academic career and surviving as the only woman at Harvard's Department of Government while also fulfilling other important roles such as being a wife and a mother of three. Later in life such struggles were reflected upon and used imaginatively and creatively, mainly in the context of her distinct and idiosyncratic way of dealing with intellectual history and political theory.

Gaining autonomy and being in control of her own life were important to Shklar. That her research themes were linked to her experience of exile seems beyond doubt; yet many aspects of Shklar's teaching and writing cannot be reduced to early biographical circumstances alone. At Harvard and throughout most of her adult life Shklar was exposed to numerous influences and contacts, and it would be unfair to link them all to the refugee and outsider experience. Having said this, the theme of exile and her self-perception of being on the margins or as an outsider (although in a peculiar way that I will discuss further down), form an important thread that runs through her life and it is not by chance that toward the end of her life Shklar planned a book on the experiences of exile and obligation. She was, after all, making explicit a theme that had preoccupied her all her life.

The main task of an intellectual portrait of Shklar is to tease out these various connections between her experience of life and her teaching and writing. In contrast to some works that have been published in recent times it remains important to have a sense of proportion when it comes to the history of ideas. It seems to me problematic to have an over-socialized conception of man in which everything is reduced to social and cultural circumstances.[2] Particularly when it comes to rich experience and lives that are not limited purely to the academic realm, we must always ask how individuals have managed to succeed, despite earlier hindrances, hurdles, and often traumatic

experiences. Individual creativity, individual autonomy, and the psychological capacity to be the maker of one's own fortune are crucial when fighting against adverse conditions. I maintain that this was certainly the case with Shklar. It shows in her writings: she attempted to humanize the history of political theory by always giving credit to individual effort and almost existentialist notions of self-creation.

At the same time an intellectual portrait cannot limit itself to the view that a person is entirely self-made. While we try to make sense of the world as individuals we also learn, struggle, fight, and take issue with the world and the people around us. For a portrait of an intellectual, it is crucial to get the proportions right. Certainly intellectual networks and influences matter, but so do individual perception and digestion of information in the light of lived experiences. In Judith Shklar we encounter a person who preferred to set or choose her own intellectual agenda and who was extremely self-reliant in pursuing her epistemological interests. Although she took note and on occasion responded to intellectual currents of the time she would never become a follower, joiner, or networker. Neil McLaughlin has termed such a creative way of making use of outsider status, of being a stranger, of belonging to what Tony Judt has called "edge people," "optimal marginality" (Judt 2010, McLaughlin 2001). It is an alternative way of explaining how individual thinkers and ideas have moved from the creative margins to the center by using their outsider status to optimal effect. Such a view does not deny the role of socialization or the importance of belonging to a network, of being a member in some established organization or professional association; but instead of using these as the only explanation for an individual intellectual's success, "optimal marginality" gives more credit to the creative and innovative subject who keeps his or her critical distance from both established orthodoxies and from sectarian minority positions.

However, "optimal marginality" is not just "out there," it is a process that needs to be described in greater detail. This means that it is only by looking at the *making* of Shklar's political theory that we can gain a deeper understanding of her work. In other words, when trying to make sense of her political theory we should attempt to treat her teaching and writing with the same respect and detective spirit that she devoted to her favorite thinkers. We must try to pay the same attention to psychological, biographical, sociological, and political detail that mattered and continued to matter in her writings. Only then will we be able to identify Shklar's "optimal marginality" and benefit from Shklar's genuine insights and unique achievements.

However, accounting for Shklar's life and writing presents us with a specific problem. Her life until she arrived at Harvard had a different pace than the years that followed it. Retrospectively, the time leading up to Harvard is marked by larger events and decisions that heavily impacted on her life and her choices—adolescence in Riga, becoming a refugee and exile first in Canada and then in the United States. In contrast, Shklar's life after her arrival at Harvard is marked by relatively "normal" events, getting married, becoming a mother, struggling for a permanent academic position, teaching, writing books, and so forth. There is of course a connection between the early vita activa and the later vita contemplativa, and it seems to me that an intellectual portrait needs to cater to the two different paces and dimensions of survival and being an outsider on the one hand and being a scholar, teacher and writer on the other. A different form of presentation is needed to do justice to the two different worlds and time periods. This is the reason why the first two chapters of this book contain more detailed biographical information while the later chapters focus more on Shklar's chief publications. Only in the last chapter do I try to "unite" the two "strands" again.

Shklar's Exile from Exile in Context

Before dealing with the development of Shklar's political thought in detail one last but very important qualification is necessary. Shklar was, as noted in the previous paragraphs, an exile and a refugee, but it cannot be stressed enough that she was also a very peculiar kind of emigrant, something that had a profound impact on her habits of thought and the way she wrote. In short, what I have called Shklar's "optimal marginality" needs some real legs to stand on. It is not enough to call her an outsider, a stranger, a refugee, or an exile.

By way of introduction I would like briefly to discuss her particular position in the context of three independent-minded European thinkers whose lives and works were also marked by a peculiar from of exile. My hope is that such a discussion will reveal what was so different and special about Shklar, her way of thinking and writing, and her "optimal marginality."

The first thinker is Alexander Herzen, the Russian journalist, critic, and writer. In his book on Russian exiles Isaiah Berlin discusses the cultural legacy and prime influence of those liberty-seeking exiled Russians of 1848 for later generations (Berlin 2008). As Berlin points out, Herzen "belonged to the class of those who are by birth

aristocratic, but who themselves go over to some freer and more radical mode of thought and of action" (213). But Berlin also notes that despite rejecting class privilege "there is something singularly attractive about men who retain, throughout life, the manners, the texture of being, the habits and style of a civilised and refined milieu. Such men exercise a peculiar kind of freedom which combines spontaneity with distinction. Their minds see large and generous horizons and, above all, reveal a unique intellectual gaiety of a kind that aristocratic education tends to produce" (213f).

Berlin describes Herzen as a kind of thinker who was living "near the frontier that divides old from new, between the *douceur de la vie* which is about to pass and the tantalising future, the dangerous new age that they themselves do much to bring into being" (ibid.). Herzen became fascinated with German philosophy, particularly Hegel. However, his study of Hegel and Hegelianism also convinced him that it was a mistake to follow the logic of great systems and ideas. No great system would ever be able to make sense of the complexity of the modern life and the actions of humans. The project of perfecting the human race or to look for a better socialist world was but a pipe dream (218). Herzen would remain highly critical of any system or order that demanded perfection, no matter how noble the cause might be—hence his life-long opposition to those who looked for perfection, whether they were socialists like Luis Blanc or liberty-seeking thinkers like John Stuart Mill.

Having left Russia, Herzen would live the rest of his life in exile but even there he would continue to challenge protototalitarian ideas, often paying the price of finding himself isolated from fellow exiles or those who sympathized with their cause. All his life he fought against dictators and unelected rulers; he remained a defender of liberty, perhaps not so much in the traditional sense of the word "liberal" or as we understand it today, but more out of a need to defend the individual and to protect him against fear, cruelty, or violence that seem to be associated with the "despotism of formulae" (228). Berlin points out that there are some remarkable parallels here between Herzen and the thoughts of Montaigne and Montesquieu (230).

Shklar's intellectual passion, preoccupation, and intellectual interests were not far away from those of Herzen, despite the huge generational gap and their different political and historical circumstances. But before discussing the parallels and differences in greater detail, I would like to first introduce the other two writers, Robert Musil and

Hans Sahl, whose experiences of exile both also overlap with but also differ from Shklar's.

Austrian-born Robert Musil, author of *The Man without Qualities*, spent the last years of his life in Swiss exile. He was one of the few continental Europeans who, after Hitler had come to power, remained skeptical of the simplistic slogans of the anti-fascist, mostly communist-leaning Left that began to reassemble again in exile. Musil's view remained that of an anti-totalitarian thinker who argued against the simplistic beliefs of the radical Left, which saw ideology as constant and static, the outcome of a false consciousness produced by capitalism. Instead he argued for a real effort in understanding the plasticity of the modern consciousness as it had emerged in twentieth-century continental Europe, including its complications and contradictions. Musil advocated intellectual independence and favored keeping a distance from any party or dogmatic group thinking. Firmly opposed to Fascism, he had no illusions as to the promise of an earthly communist paradise, which was supposedly just around the corner.

Musil took particular issue with orthodoxies (Musil 1978; 1990). He argued that Hitler's victory in 1933 and the defeat of the Left were the outcome of a general lack of understanding. The dogmatic left's failure was that they focused too much on class and collective dimensions and thus failed to understand the complex psychological make-up of the modern individual (and voter). In his later years Musil developed a keen interest in studying the psychological make-up of the modern individual. The capacity and art of drawing distinctions was crucial to this intellectual and aesthetic project, as one can easily detect from the unfinished masterpiece *The Man without Qualities* (1981) and some of the essays he wrote in exile (Musil 1978; 1990). He would never become a joiner and remained a solitary yet original thinker for the rest of his life. Although Musil never used the expression "exile from exile," the term suggests itself as the most appropriate description of his life and work.

Hans Sahl's life and work again differ from that of the Austrian writer. Sahl belonged to that group of German-speaking exiled writers who, in the attempt to escape the Nazis, found themelves on an odyssey through Europe before finally finding asylum in the United States. Like Musil, Sahl kept a critical distance from his fellow writers who sympathized with the Communist Party and its Stalinist agenda. His dissident inclinations led him to estrangement from many former friends and colleagues. He compensated for that by becoming increasingly self-reliant and developing an independent mind.