

COMMISSIONING A TAXI DRIVER: OF PHILOSOPHICAL PROFESSIONALISM

Olli Loukola

Dr., Docent of Philosophy of University of Helsinki, FINLAND, olli.loukola@helsinki.fi

Abstract

Isaiah Berlin said in a number of occasions that he had no personal interests in philosophy, and that he was like a taxi driver, who didn't work without a commission. During his life Berlin however dealt with a wide variety of topics, and the interesting question is, how did he choose those topics? And more importantly, why did he insist on having the disinterested motives of a taxi-driver?

This essay discusses the requirements of philosophical professionalism from these starting points, in essence in the emphasis of the role of analytical skills in locating and defining philosophical topics and issues. These capabilities are however found wanting, even according to Berlin's own account. The background of his insistence of the taxi-driver attitude is traced back to the presuppositions of analytic philosophy of Oxford in the 1930's, where Berlin had his training.

Keywords: Isaiah Berlin, philosophical professionalism, teaching philosophy.