

Ethnicity, Will and The State

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Ethnonationalism, in one form or another, is one sociopolitical vision that has always existed, rather than being purely a product of abstract theorizing, as liberalism or cosmopolitanism has been. There is no time in history where the cultural community, unified by language and historical experience, did not hold sway over those who were born under it. Whether it politicized itself into the modern, flawed notion of the “nation-state” in pre-modern times is another question and one irrelevant to social theory. Whether the ethno-linguistic attachments absolutely necessary for human life “politicized” themselves at any time is something different from the power of the ethnic and linguistic tie in shaping human perceptions and making sense out of one’s environment. This author takes the idea of “nationalism” in the Hederian, rather than the contemporary, fashion. Ethnonationalism or ethno-communalism concern the idea that human beings are defined, molded and shaped by institutions and ideas having developed in a specific cultural, that is, ethno-linguistic, context. This particular idea is substantially distinct from the straw-man definitions of nationalism the Modernist school has developed over the years. Ethnic nationalism or communalism is therefore a product of antiquity, while the statism that often passes for “nationalism” is a pure product of Modernity.

Benedict Anderson’s famous *Imagined Communities* (1991, Verso) makes the claim that, due to the size of modern nations, national attachment is an “imagined” idea. That is, one is making claims toward, or having feelings for, a group of people where it is impossible for the individual to know each one. Therefore, through the development of markets and, in consequence, the unification of (already fairly related) languages, sets of phrases, places and ideas come to build bridges among people who otherwise would have no affection or knowledge of one another at all. Anderson’s thesis, then, is that such things comprise the national totality. The idea that the nation is imagined does not necessarily remove it from rational discussion, however. What it does do is remove the nation from history, and make it a concoction of modern market capitalism. Olli Lagerspetz writes in his (2000) article, “On National Belonging:”

By means of culturally specific symbols — including sites, events, works of literature — we are connected to a specific past. In Benedict Anderson’s words, we are forged into an “imagined community.” Imagined — not because unreal or faked, but because our relation to symbols creates a link between ourselves and others which whom we are not directly connected. [1]

The state, of course, is another matter altogether. The tribe, and, later, the ethnos, has existed and even thrived under the most centralized of empires from the beginning of human history. As a result, the national idea is one at present radically ambiguous and ill-defined as it must reach across countless time periods and cultural distinctions, and, importantly, levels of politicization. It contains the liberalism of the western European nineteenth century and the

national-Communism of eastern Europe up until recently. It contains traditional Christian themes as well as liberal-scientific ones. It includes a strong reliance on statism and assimilation, as well as devolution and cultural particularity. In short, the mission of nationalist theory in this age of a violent and enforced globalism is a difficult one.

The nation is not synonymous with the state or public administration. It, further, is not synonymous with its own conceptual codification, for a culture is something primarily lived rather than theorized about. It is a life imbued with the cultural patrimony of one's people; it is something that is lived day to day, a national idea that is internalized within the people themselves — the folk. It is a continuing offering of thanks to both God who created all things and the fathers and martyrs of the nation which has build all that one enjoys. Furthermore, it is the apogee of autonomy, for, in a nationalist regime, people are ruled by, and in accordance with, their own collective self, the nation. Ethnic nationalism is about the overcoming of otherness; it is about the vision of oneself in the other, as well as localized institutions one's fathers and grandfathers might have built. Members of the ethnos are not strangers to one another, regardless of the fact that they may never have met.

Most recently, nationalism has taken on the aura of the revolutionary mid-nineteenth century as well as the statist post-colonial systems in the twentieth century, where such concepts as "Nigerian" are supposed to have some meaning. These manifestations, however, fail to uncover the root of the national idea in political thought and history, and are rather eccentric transmutations of the ancient idea of the ethnos and are based around contingent political situations taken as absolute. The liberal nationalisms of the 1848 and 1870 revolutions were largely means whereby certain groups attempted to throw off the reign of royal houses in France, Austria-Hungary and Italy. The "nation" was a convenient prop to the political drive of liberals and socialists who needed to destroy the patrimonial monarchy to clear the field for social experimentation and regimentation. Such revolutionary and Masonic ideas (in nineteenth century France and Italy especially) have little to do with the resurrection of the ancient ethnos. Such a reference to "republicanism" may use the "nation" as an abstraction to cover any set of ideas about government.

Additionally, the use of the term "nationalism" to cover the erection of authoritarian states in the third world also makes little sense. The creation of the super-national state (such as post-colonial Sudan or India) has as its end the destruction of nationality, through the agency of the state, rather than its protection. In countries such as Burma or Iraq, as it turns out, the statist model of "nationalism" has been a miserable failure, and has, in general, led to the intensification of nationalist and secessionist views from much older and more authentic religious and ethnic nationalisms in these artificial countries. European nation-building has, of course, taken and unified many differing tribal and ethnic distinctions in Italy or France. It must be noted, of course, that national feeling existed among the Germanic states long before unification, though this cannot be said of France. As a result, many claim, nationalism, in the modern sense, has been built on the backs of previous ethnarchs and smaller "nations."

Contemporary nationalism of the sort that is being described here (in opposition to the Modernist school of thought on the matter) is a reaction against the invasions of the national culture by the stealthful movements of the world-state of international capitalism and international liberalism. These sister ideologies — in fact, the same ideology seen from two

different perspectives, one economic and the other, political — are the result of western European and American political ideology and power, having reached their imperial apogee at the end of the second Christian millennium. The reaction, however, is far more rational politically than most of the nationalisms of the past, and has learned much from the ghosts of 1848. These invasions from western capitals have not created a national consciousness, but in fact have resurrected one, given impetus to the national idea long considered dead, though a national idea that does not recognize old borders, political centralization or the claims of the state. Identities were not “constructed,” but rather were “reconstructed” and resurrected.

The mid-nineteenth century was a revolutionary age. In western Europe, liberal intellectuals gravitated towards the idea of “the nation” so as to escape the dynastic rule of royal families and clans. It was “the people” — considered as an acultural abstraction — who were to rule and thus the idea of the national collectivity was a convenient starting point. It was ironic that the abstractions of the “people” or the “individual” were seen as the basis for what later was termed “nationalism,” i.e. that “nationalism” has nothing to do with the nation. Rousseau was the main political theorist of this movement, nearly a century after his productive years, but found its most sophisticated expression in the German idealist school of nationalism founded by Johann Fichte and Hegel, and was made active by the work of Lajos Kossuth and G. Mazzini.

On the other hand, the violently anti-clerical tone of the nineteenth century nationalist movements and popular fronts might be interpreted as a reaction to the vehemently anti-national basis of Roman Catholicism. One of the major distinctions between Orthodoxy and the Church of Rome is that the former, stemming from Sts. Cyril and Methodius, insists that the truths of the faith be strongly inculturated into the ethnic mainstream of any specific people, and that the Scriptures, as well as Church services be quickly translated into the native language. In the West, the Church of Rome systematically erased the ancient Christian identities of the Irish, Gauls and Spanish, with their own distinctive liturgies (many of which have completely disappeared) and monastic traditions, traditions fully accepted by the ancient Church, replacing them with the Latin language, a celibate priestly class and the central rule of the pope. An argument could be made that the more radical revolutionaries of the nineteenth century were resurrecting ancient ethnic identities long choked under universal empire, centralized Roman rule and the effective elimination of the vernacular from liturgical services. Therefore, the attraction of Masonic and anti-clerical ideas might make some sense, however distorted their ultimate form became.

Rousseau’s famous idea of the “General Will” was an abstracted notion of the social interests of all people in a specific community (an abstract “democracy”), rather than the General Will being the collected and codified traditions of one’s ancestors, the very heart of a people and the center of public loyalty, self-sacrifice, and humility. Rousseau’s “General Will” as the basis of social thought fails because it refuses to envisage the real, day-to-day life and customs of the common people, the true repository of the public ethos and civic cooperation. In other words, the “General Will” cannot be an abstraction, but can be found in (often inchoate) form at any given time in the collective traditions of a people. The continuing consent of a population in this developing group of traditions fits perfectly what Rousseau was attempting to realize in the language of eighteenth century Enlightenment abstraction. [2]

In the present day, it is the distinction between the nation as a liberal collection of “individuals” seeking the “General Will,” on the one hand, and the idea of the nation as an ethno-

cultural community, on the other. The latter this author has called “ethno- nationalism” or ethno-communalism while the former should more correctly be called a national statism, though both often travel — bizarrely — under the same name: “nationalism.” The latter is devolutionary, agrarian, and monarchical, as the latter is secular, scientific, bureaucratic and centralized. Generally speaking, this latter is what normally is implied to mean “nationalism.” Unfortunately, it is a false and misleading view.

Nationalism as referring to the culture in all its complexity (rather than having the theoretical stress on “rational choice,” the state or “individual self-determination”) is the meaning of the word worthy of it. It is the very content (rather than the conceptualization) of national particularism and distinctiveness and the fullness of man as a culture-bearing creature. The mere existence of an independent national administration and state structure is solely an epiphenomenon of the idea of the nation (at best) and can never be considered the essence of the nation itself, as many modern theorists of nationalism do. Mankind does not exist without culture, nor does he exist, strictly speaking, without rationality. It is however, the culture that is the seat of his reason, for it is only within a healthy and stable cultural milieu that an intellectual class can arise, and the native intellect given free rein.

Human rationality is not something that can ever be separated from the community. This is simply because man is not born with developed rational faculties, nor is he born free, but these develop in becoming exposed to the stock of intellectual culture found in a healthy national community. This exposure is the job of the family and a truly culturo-national (rather than statist) educational system. The full use of man’s rational potential assumes a functioning civic culture and the proper meeting of man’s material needs. Social stability and a strong public ethos are necessary ingredients for mankind to exemplify his nature as a rational being, but his rationality is contingent on his being part of a healthy cultural community.

This collectivity naturally develops means whereby the objective and natural needs of its members are met: Intellectual, material, spiritual, and so on. These means, over time, become traditions and customs, that is, culture. It is these traditions that form the rational faculties and the free will of men, and from these cultural types derive the various trains of thought that mark what is sloppily called “European civilization.” Rationality comprising an abstract faculty of the human soul is only understood as such in a stable and healthy culture. The perversion of modern times, from liberalism to Marxism to post-modernism, is that the traditions of the civilization have been rejected in favor of the abstracted and alienated individual. The “moral agent” of the liberals, the “purely material creator of wealth” for the Marxists, and the “consumer” of the capitalists have replaced the true citizen and the rational, cultural human being that nations have created over the centuries, and upon which they still depend. Tyranny, alienation, and materialism are the direct result of the theoretical rejection of mankind as both a tradition bearing and cultural being, and these perversions seek, and have sought, to remake him into merely an abstract cog in the statist machine.

Individualism, as the center of the liberal political vision, is self-contradictory. This is because the very ingredients that make someone a productive and rational individual are things that are not made or maintained by individuals, but rather are the intellectual and social capital of the community. A true individual understands this, and realizes his objective responsibilities to the community that has provided him with the various means whereby any sort of responsible

individualism can be established. To center one's existence on the "ego" or the "self" is to have already fallen into the decadence of alienation. Individualism is the vision of the decadent, pampered dilettante of a decaying society or a dying intellectual tradition of the modern Occident. The individualist is essentially an unhealthy being, as he sees his person as a *sui generis*, owing nothing to the ethnos which produced him. Is the very conceptualization of "individual" even possible without the intellectual patrimony of a specific civilization?

The difficulty with the revolutionary idea of the mid-nineteenth century, found most radically in Mazzini in Italy, a product of the radical Carbonari Masonic sect, and Fichte and Hegel in Germany, is that the nation was a "positing" of the ego, rather than it being something that comes to exist in its own right; the nation is not a natural entity in the nineteenth century rendering of the national collective. There existed first, an isolated ego that posits its own "limitations" so it might come to know itself not as an infinity (which is not knowable), but as a real object, as "limitations" force the ego back upon itself, knowing itself differently when the mind contains some object as "known" rather than being a pure abstraction, pure consciousness, or something called "mind" in and of itself.

Mind comes to its own full realization when confronted by the "objects" of the created world and finally, the "other," that is, other men. The question of the "other" was most vigorously dealt with as the centerpiece of the development of Mind in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Translated by Sir James Baillie. George, Allen and Unwin, 1964 edition called the *Phenomenology of Mind*). It is the struggle with the "other" that the mind comes to know itself, which is another way of saying that reason is social, or that the human, collective Mind is a product of social interaction. The struggles of the human mind mirror human history, that is, the struggle between classes, estates, etc., lead the mind to knowledge of the inherent (legal) equality of persons and the community of the "state." It was the untenability of the constant friction between groups within the community that led to the modern notion of the unitary state and the ideas of legal equality that Hegel and Fichte believed were a necessary part of that arrangement.

The "others" by which the individual was to come to know himself became the idea of the nation, centered almost exclusively on the common language (something necessary to knowledge), so dear to Fichte. The individual ego was eventually hemmed in by the egos of others, and, as they came to know their common interests. A happy medium, simplistically, between self and others was reached. [3]

In other words, the individual ego was coming to a full knowledge of itself through "positing" others, and, in turn, being posited by them, thus coming to a stage of mutual recognition — that is, the mutual opposition between isolated egos reached an equilibrium. The nation was a collective, but one with merely individual and utilitarian value, in that it was to facilitate individual self-knowledge. This is why it did not and could not last, as the nation is not a "position" of the ego, but something that, on the contrary, forms what might be termed the ego, or the will. The nationalism worthy of the name is a cultural community based on the natural law, or the natural solidarity of those who share the same meanings, ideas, and patrimony through historical experience. Hegel writes in his *Philosophy of Right* (translated by T.M. Knox, Oxford, 1952):

If the state is confused with civil society [i.e. bourgeois life], and if its specific end is laid down as the security and protection of property and personal freedom, then the interest of the individuals as such becomes the ultimate end of their association, and it follows that membership of the state is something optional. But

the state's relation to the individual is quite different from this. Since the state is mind objectified, it is only as one of its members that the individual himself has objectivity, genuine individuality and ethical life. Unification pure and simple is the true content and aim of the individual, and the individual's destiny is the living of a universal life. His further particular satisfaction, activity and mode of conduct have this substantive and universally valid life as their starting point and their result (156).

There is much of value in this statement, it is a clear rejection of the bourgeois world, where the primary reasons for living, and the primary ethical truths are found in the "security of property." Any other goods are decidedly secondary. The individualized will is supreme, but is supreme towards what end is another question, as there is no inherent end to ethical life in classical liberalism. On the other hand, Hegel is positing the nature of social institutions as functions of the ego itself. As the human will moves through history, it comes to realize that only through the equilibrium of competing wills, that is to say, legal equality, can lead to the recognition of the human ego as the master creator, that is, as infinite and, to be frank, little deities.

In other words, preceding periods in history such as slave societies or feudalism, as well as abstract positivist scientific methods, failed because will was always treated, to put things simply, as being dependent on things outside of itself. The notion of "creation" or "reality" existed outside of Mind, alienated from its true bearer, the human being. "Reality" became known as a product of Mind, that is, what science had taken as "external" objects were as much a product of method, conditioned by mind itself, as actual "external" entities. Therefore, "external objects" were products of the structure of the human mind. History is the projection of Mind in development, with its final gnosis the idea that Mind is the origin of all things, for its is within Mind's own conceptual apparatus that "external objects" make any sense at all, or can even be perceived. Therefore, what is taken to be "external" is actually the alienation of concept and content, with "content" being taken as "external," as in modern positivism.

Hegel claimed that there is no basis for this view because the content, without an a priori conceptual apparatus (that is, space, time, quantity, motion, etc.), "content" is non-existent. Therefore, according to Hegel, Mind is the (ultimate) creator of all things. Both the concept of an object and the content of an object is a function of Mind. The identical relation must exist with human freedom: the concept, that is the abstraction of the freedom of the will, needs to coexist with the content, or the ethical end of that freedom, it must be a freedom to do "something," rather than have it dependent upon external whim. This ethical end then, becomes the common culture and language making up the nation. The "commonality" therefore, makes it possible for the will to fully understand itself, acting in concert with other wills treated as legal equals without being dependent upon any heteronomous "externality."

For Mind to understand that everything is a product of Itself, and that the internal/external bifocality is purely ephemeral, is for Mind to understand itself as self-justifying and self-grounding. This realization is objectified in institutions that take mind as the central focus of social life, that is, human autonomy as the ethical center, coordinating them into a social community; coordinating them to an end that is not abstract, but determinate and ethical. The self-justifying human will cannot be dependent on whim, for this would compromise the position of

Mind, making it dependent on impulse, i.e. something outside of itself. Therefore, an ethnical community must be formed, providing content to human freedom, rejecting the abstraction of “free will,” that is, a sense of free will that does not provide an end to freedom, making it contingent on something else, which is heteronomous. It is these sentiments that provide the connection between nineteenth century revolutionary left-nationalism and occult, gnostic theories of the person.

To make this a bit less mystifying, Hegel scholar Terry Pinkard (Hegel’s *Phenomenology*. Cambridge, 1997) writes, explaining this idea of nationalism further:

For it to be possible for civil society to be a genuine ethical end, therefore, there must be more to “social space” than just a collection of families and a civil society composed of families, individuals, estates, corporations and a set of legal institutions for administering the law and various public works. There must be a deeper ethical community, which Hegel, interestingly enough, calls the state.

In other words, for the revolutionary nationalism of Hegel — the Mind of 1848 — Mind’s discovery that it is the creator of all things leads it to demand respect and recognition as such. The notion of autonomy is therefore born. However, autonomy itself must have content, that is, an end to reach for. Therefore, the state is posited, not as an administration, but a different use of the word “state,” one used by neo-Hegelian Bernard Bosanquet, namely that of a shared culture and language, entities that protect freedom and communal independence as a community of autonomous ends.

The major distinction between the cultural and ethnic nationalism of the Christian world and the nineteenth century western variety described above was that the latter begins with the abstract ego, or consciousness abstractly considered, positing its limitations (culminating in the nation, or the groups of legally equal wills) for its own self-knowledge. Thus, Hegel needed to explain how the national state system, in short, was to satisfy the needs of the free, that is, infinite, knowing no inherent limitation, self coming to know itself precisely as a self, an autonomous self. For the natural law tradition of ethno-communitarianism, however, the self is something essentially communal, coming to know itself collectively, through culture, and through culture to even develop the concept of the “self.” The self is, then, a product of the community, of the culture taking the desires of childhood and rendering them fit for proper social life rather than the abstract ego of the German idealists. It makes more sense to theorize that the abstraction of self, far from being the first act of cognition, was its very last.

The self, then, is an “embedded self,” one that only becomes properly such in a cultural community rather than through its own “self-positings” for its own purposes. The severe difficulties with German idealism is that their first act of cognition already assumes, much like the more prosaic liberal “contract theory,” a well developed notion of self. It is a philosophical projection from the present to an ill-defined primordial point in history. The present obsession with will leads to a pseudo-historical concept of the “infinite,” the will in complete isolation, which then is projected outward infinitely. As it turns out, such a projection is identical with nothing, for the projection of the will infinitely outward is to project nothing, for there is no object, and therefore, will cannot know itself. Therefore, pure will is non-existence, and in turn, must then posit its own limitation so “something” can be known.

Objects, in proper gnostic fashion, are hindrances to the stretch to infinity, to godhood. However, this inconceivable projection to infinity is a function of human logic, not experience. In order for the will to come to understand (in an inexplicable process left unexplained) that limitation is necessary for anything to be known, assumes a functioning society that can teach such lessons. How does the abstract will know that it must posit its own limitations, or even recognize them? Where does it get the concept of limitation anyway? How could there even be concepts of anything at this stage in the development of Mind? It is a far more plausible understanding to first consider the empirical reality of social life, that which is necessary for any cognition whatsoever. From there, the development of the self makes sense; the development of social life which in turn creates the notion of selfhood through its own limitations, that is, expressions of its own collective experience, which make up a cultural and a conceptual apparatus which forms the entity of “mind.”

There is much of value in Hegel, and his rejection of bourgeois life is on target. However, the origin of the nation and the “embedded self” is a problem. Hegel’s atheism leads him to posit Mind as the true genesis of creation, with Christianity as an alienated version of Mind, Mind projected into a “god” who contains all its inherent properties. This view is false, and is the basis of Marxism and modern revolutionism (hence its relation to 1848), as it takes man’s will (refined as “creative” and “productive potential”) as potentially infinite. Mind is a creation of social institutions, not the other way around. Institutions and culture make mind a possibility, as it is never an abstraction, but rather a product, as the inchoate desires and impulses of immaturity are refined into a free reasoning apparatus of a mature man. Such impulses are recorded back into psychic history as “non-ego” or “limitations.” Mind finds itself the product of historical experience and the conceptual apparatus that creates and engenders.

A tradition which “stifles” the self (as some have complained) is a self that does not understand its true origin. A tradition — that is to say, the distillation of historical experience into a way of life — is the creator of the self or ego, rather than the other way around, which come to comprise the meanings and understandings that develop within a cultural community that make the world intelligible. Alienation sets in when the self posits itself over and above the tradition or the mutual self-understandings of a people, as the German idealists posited and the tradition of 1848 adopted. This is a perversion of the human person, as the individual is a gradually developing social product, not an abstraction that then passes judgment upon the tradition itself, given its abstract “needs.” Such “needs” are the function not of the self, but of the arch-enemy of the national idea properly considered: Ideology. Criticism can only properly function when present reality contradicts the notion of the collective self that is dependent upon history.

The nation, then, shows itself as the bearer of the tradition and culture of a specific people, the ethnos. The true ethnic collective, or the primary bearer of a specific and lived tradition, is the centerpiece of nationalist thought. This is the idea of the nation that derives, not from elites (though they may codify it), but from the volk itself, those who actually live and breathe the tradition, those who are the living repositories of the national particularity. Thus, the nation is something decentralized, something that can reach to the very level of the folk itself. The human being is communal. Rationality, spirit (or its specific manifestation and form of worship), freedom, thought, and civilization are all the product of the specific culture that develops in meeting the natural needs of man. None of these things has ever been understood

outside of the context of a specific national and cultural vision. As the great nationalist poet and Ukrainian Taras Shevchenko put it:

Your own Ukraine, before your eyes;
Then let your heart, in love sincere,
Embrace her mighty ruin here!
Break then your chains, in love unite,
Nor seek in foreign lands the sight Still less in lands that strangers love...
Then in your own house you will see
True justice, strength, and liberty! . . .
Gain knowledge, brothers! Think and read,
And to your neighbors' gifts pay heed, —
Yet do not thus neglect your own:
For he who is forgetful shown
Of his own mother, graceless elf,
Is punished by our God Himself.
Strangers will turn from such as he
And grudge him hospitality —
Nay, his own children grow estranged;
Though one so evil may have ranged
The whole wide earth, he shall not find
A home to give him peace of mind.[4]

Endnotes cf. *Nationalism and Ethnic Conflict: Philosophical Perspectives*. (Edited by Nenad Miscevic, Open Court). 57-74.

2 Rousseau is treated by nationalist theory fairly regularly. The best, classic exposition of nationalism in relation to the “General Will” can be found in Bernard Bosanquet’s *A Philosophical Theory of the State*, (Macmillan, 1930) especially chrs. 4 and 5 (75-115), and again in chapter 9 (esp. 218-220). Cf. also, Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *The Social Contract and the Discourses*. (Translated by G.D.H. Cole. E.P. Dutton, 1913.)

3 This essay will not get into the amazingly complex process developed by Hegel in his *Phenomenology*. However, it will be saved for another project.

4. Translated by C. H. Andrusyshen and W. Kirkconnell.