



Alexander J. Motyl

NATIONAL QUESTIONS

*Theoretical Reflections on Nations
and Nationalism in Eastern Europe*

ibidem

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I dedicate this book to the Ukrainian victims of fascist Russia's genocidal war.

In memoriam of my friends, colleagues, and teachers at the Harriman Institute:

Edward Allworth, Nick Arena, Serhii Berezovenko, Seweryn Bialer, Oded Eran, Henry Ergas, Neil Felshman, Dan Gutterman, John Hazard, Peter Juviler, Michael Lucas, Cathy Nepomnyashchy, Marshall Shulman, Mark von Hagen, Janet Willen.

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Preface

National Questions consists of thirteen articles and two speeches. All deal with nations, national identity, and nationalism. The earliest article appeared in 1991; the latest in 2016. Remarkably or not, given that the articles span 25 years, they actually hang together, forming a coherent whole that amounts to a book, and not just a collection. There are some repetitions (and, possibly, contradictions), but they don't (I hope) upset the overall narrative arc, which begins with discussions of national identity and nationalism, moves on to the Soviet, post-Soviet, and Ukrainian contexts, and concludes with assessments of nationalism's relationship with fascism, in general and with regard to Vladimir Putin's criminal regime in particular.

Readers will notice my obsessive concern with and interest in concepts and conceptual clarity – for which I am eternally grateful to Giovanni Sartori. They will also notice my belief that theory, however frustrating and inconclusive, is as indispensable as analytic logic – especially of the kind practiced by Arthur Danto; that comparison is always useful, if not indeed imperative; and that, notwithstanding the slipperiness of concepts, empirical reality, both now and in the past, does in fact exist and can and must be known for theory to make any sense.

New York City, 2022

Alexander J. Motyl

The Modernity of Nationalism

Nations, States and, Nation-States in the Contemporary World*

What is nationalism? Above all, nationalism is a word—a rather obvious point, to be sure, but one that goes a long way toward resolving the confusion so evident in many interpretations of nationalism. In emphasizing that nationalism is first and foremost a word, I wish to underline the fact that it is neither a thing that can be physically grasped, such as a rock or tree—a fact that, as John Armstrong points out, makes its referent ontologically no less real than those associated with the so-called economic “base”¹—nor a phenomenon that can be comprehended without the mediation of some concept. Determining what nationalism is, therefore, is in the first place a definitional task and not an empirical challenge. We establish what nationalism is not by examining the beliefs or behaviors of self-styled nationalists, but, as Giovanni Sartori recommends,² by investigating the multiple meanings that the term nationalism possesses, isolating its defining and central characteristics and then determining which meaning is most appropriate in given circumstances.

The point is that nationalism, like revolution, state, class, modernity, development and most other weighty social science terms, is what William Connolly calls an “essentially contested

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1 John A. Armstrong, “The Autonomy of Ethnic Identity: Historic Cleavages and Nationality Relations in the USSR,” in Alexander J. Motyl, ed., *Thinking Theoretically about Soviet Nationalities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) pp. 23-44.

2 Giovanni Sartori, “Guidelines for Concept Analysis,” in Giovanni Sartori, ed., *Social Science Concepts* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1984) pp.15-85.

concept" – that is to say, a word that resonates with a number of different meanings.³ Does nationalism therefore possess every meaning that is, or can be, ascribed to it? Of course not. Such an approach to the problem of defining is no solution: It leads only to the creation of ungainly and internally self-contradictory mega-phenomena that serve merely to depict a multitude of details that may or may not be logically related.⁴ In a word, nationalism, like any other essentially contested concept, is either something – some one thing – or it is nothing, that is to say everything. And inasmuch as its being everything subverts any attempt to grasp the phenomenon, nationalism evidently must be deemed only one thing: The word must be given only one meaning and thus "attached" to only one phenomenon.

Does such an approach not distort "reality"? Does it not overly simplify, indeed caricature, that which is "in reality" enormously complex? The answer to both questions must be an emphatic "no," but – and this point is critical – only if we accept the view that we can grasp phenomena exclusively by means of the mediating influence of language, a point argued conclusively by Sartori.⁵ The alternative view, that language is just a vehicle at best, or a nuisance at worst, with no tangible relationship with the "objective reality," would appear to require epistemological assumptions that run counter to much of twentieth-century philosophy.

What, Then, Is Nationalism?

The answer to the question "what is nationalism?" depends on the definition and, more substantively, on the definer. This is to say that the meaning of nationalism, like the meaning of every essentially contested concept, is neither value-neutral nor divorced from context – be it that of the political, social and cultural environment within which the word is used or that of the text within which the

3 William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1974) pp. 9-44.

4 Alexander J. Motyl, "Concepts and Skocpol: Ambiguity and Vagueness in the Study of Revolution," *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 4, no. 1 (January 1992).

5 Sartori, pp. 15-22.

term is nested. Defining nationalism obviously permits no definitive solution. Meanings will vary from person to person and from context to context. The task before scholars is not to impose a uniform meaning on their colleagues, which would be impossible both practically and epistemologically, but to ensure that the way nationalism is used in their own texts is uniform. Internal consistency is the goal. Where consistency is lacking, confusion usually reigns, discussions of semantics masquerade as discussions of substance, description substitutes for explanation and, ironically, despite all the effort expended on understanding nationalism, “it” remains as mysterious as it always seemed.

As we would expect, the meanings assigned to nationalism in much scholarship and most political discourse reveal more about the users of the term than about the phenomenon. A complete listing of current scholarly and nonscholarly understandings of nationalism would reveal that it is used to denote virtually everything and everyone however remotely related to nations. Thus, nationalists appear to be people who belong to nations, who love their nations and aspire to their well-being, who desire some form of political self-government for their nations, even up to independent statehood, and, last but not least, who hate everything but their nations. That is to say, nationalists are all living people, inasmuch as the self-conscious cultural communities that are nations represent the dominant form of contemporary social organization, and belonging to nations, love of nations, self-government of nations and hatred of other nations are ubiquitous. Used in so broad a manner, one that is almost equivalent to life itself, nationalism becomes meaningless.

Further complicating the definitional problem is that users of the term often ascribe to it an exclusively pejorative connotation. The adjectives that are frequently appended to the word—such as suicidal, irrational, hyper and emotional—reveal that nationalism is merely a code word for exaggerated national sentiment.⁶ Indeed,

6 Jack Snyder, “The New Hypernationalism in Europe: Searching for Antidote,” unpublished manuscript (New York: December 1990). “Suicidal nationalism” is, of course, President Bush’s term.

Conor Cruise O'Brien explicitly defines nationalism as "a conglomerate of emotions."⁷ (So, too, I add, are love, hate and, alas, virtually everything else!) Not surprisingly, those who speak of nationalism in this manner see it only within others and never within themselves. Thus, Alan Dershowitz's *Chutzpah* is considered bold and daring by American critics, while *The Japan That Can Say No* is denounced for its arrogance; Brooklyn youths who assault blacks are rightly called racist thugs, while Moscow youths who assault Jews are always nationalists.

The following examples are also illustrative. By any definition, American behavior during the 1991 war with Iraq, and especially during the so-called "Operation Welcome Home," must qualify as the apogee of exaggerated national sentiment. Nevertheless, few Americans would consider their own behavior nationalist. In contrast, were some Balkan nation to stage such a "conglomerate of emotions," were the Germans to wave as many flags as Americans do, were the Japanese to express themselves in forms that Americans generally do ("We're Number One!" being a typical sentiment), even fewer Americans would refrain from calling their behavior a typical manifestation of backward thinking, of emotionalism, of irrationality, of, well, nationalism.

Compare also President Bush's State of the Union message on 29 January 1991 with Saddam Hussein's interview with Cable News Network the day before. Appeals to God abound in both texts, both Americans and Iraqis are depicted as inspired by the divine and both are considered to be the bearers of world salvation.⁸ To be sure, the terminology is different: Hussein's language is Middle Eastern and strikes Western ears as odd; Bush was far more in tune with the dominant discourse in the West. But beneath the surface, the substance of both texts was remarkably similar. Yet few if any Americans would consider Bush to be the functional equivalent of Hussein. None would dare extend the Hitler analogy to the American president, although the content of

7 Conor Cruise O'Brien, "Nationalists and Democrats," *New York Review of Books*, 15 August 1991, p. 29.

8 See *New York Times*, 30 January 1991; 31 January 1991.

his speech was in fact only marginally different from Hussein's interview.

Defining Nationalism

How should nationalism be defined? I shall not answer this question in this article, although I do, of course, have my own preferences.⁹ The most important points to keep in mind when defining nationalism are: First, the definition should not rest on the erroneous view of concepts as being descriptive of a reality that is divorced from the conceptualization of it; second, it should not conflate defining characteristics with central or associated ones; and third, it should avoid creating megaphenomena that subvert attempts at explanation.

With these cautionary words, I suggest that nationalism, if it is to be a useful concept, should be endowed with only one of the possible meanings noted above; the others may then be demoted to the rank of central characteristics that generally appear to "go with" the defined phenomenon. That is, nationalism may be a political ideology or ideal that argues that nations should have their own states (or enjoy self-rule); it may be the belief that the world is divided into nations and that this division is both proper and natural; it may be love of one's nation; and, finally, it may be the belief that one's own nation should stand above all other nations. In simple terms, these views of nationalism boll down, respectively, to the following beliefs: in the nation-state, in self-government, in national identity, in national well-being and in national superiority.¹⁰ As these or other beliefs are not forms of behavior, individuals or groups with such beliefs may attempt to translate them into reality, but the specific actions they undertake cannot, by

9 See Alexander J. Motyl, *Sovietology, Rationality, Nationality: Coming to Grips with Nationalism in the USSR* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), where I define nationalism as a "political ideal that views statehood as the optimal form of political organization for each nation," p. 53.

10 Classic views of nationalism as a thing of the mind are Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1944) and Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1966).

definition, be nationalism – unless we make the absurd assumption that beliefs invariably translate automatically into behavior.¹¹

If and when we employ the above definitions, it is imperative that we do so in an even-handed manner that permits the term nationalism to be maximally applicable to a variety of situations, including one's own. Thus, if nationalism is belief in the nation-state, then it can be found only amongst those nations that lack their own states, and to speak of contemporary American or French nationalism would be illogical. If nationalism is belief in self-government, then the pool of potential candidates expands to include those individuals and movements that aspire to autonomy: In this sense, even the ostensibly quiescent Turkmen would have to be considered fervid nationalists. If nationalism is belief in nations and in national identity, then we are all nationalists. If nationalism is dedication to a nation's well-being, then, again, we are all nationalists. Finally, if nationalism is some form of chauvinism or supremacism, then we would have to admit that it is manifest in East and West, North and South – indeed, as I suggested above, no less in the United States than in Iraq, no less in Great Britain than in Romania.

A dispassionate application of the concept of nationalism leads us to the conclusion that nationalism, in all of the above five designations, is not only alive and well in the West, which claims to be everything but nationalist, but that it is also quite modern. True, fewer groups may be striving for the nation-state in the West than in other parts of the world (although this claim appears questionable in light of the Quebecois, Basque, Puerto Rican, Corsican, Scottish, Welsh, Northern Irish and South Tyrolean independence movements), but only because nation-states already emerged in Europe and North America some one hundred years ago.¹² National identity, national well-being, chauvinism and the desire for self-government, however, remain fully enthroned in the United States, Canada and Western Europe. The desire of East

11 See Motyl, *Sovietology, Rationality, Nationality*, pp. 49-52.

12 See Edward Tiryakian and Ronald Rogowski, eds., *New Nationalisms of the Developed West* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1985).

European nations or of Third World nations to attain their own states or to be nationalist in the other four senses of the term are thus nothing but attempts to be like the modern world. That is to say, to be nationalist, in any or all of the senses of the term, is to be modern—naturally, if by modernity we mean that which the self-styled modern world is or claims to be.

Nationalism and Modernity

But there are also more substantive reasons for suspecting that nationalism is not about to leave the world stage and that West Europeans and Americans will, *nolens volens*, continue to be among the world's most important promoters of the idea. As I will argue below, the central elements of what generally passes for modernity promote all "forms" of nationalism. Democracy, the market and secularism strengthen the nation and reinforce its current hegemony. Contemporary values regarding social justice and the dynamics of the international system strengthen the state and, thus, willy-nilly its current incarnation, the nation-state. Education, urbanization and industrialization create national elites, who, together with nations and states, represent the necessary conditions of the actual striving for nation-states and self-government. The discourse of human rights enormously facilitates this pursuit, while democracy acts as the sufficient condition of its emergence. Because the nation and the state are, respectively, the dominant social and political organizing principles of the contemporary world, the continued striving of national elites for their own states is inevitable in a world of democracy and human rights.

If, on the other hand, nationalism is defined as, say, a form of chauvinism, then the above division of factors into necessary, facilitating and sufficient ones would obviously be different. The existence of elites and states with national identities would only facilitate chauvinism; the ubiquity of the nation would be necessary to its emergence, while democracy and the market might suffice to produce it. Although the perception of others as "other" will be with us for a long time, national differentiation on its own does not produce chauvinism. For such attitudes to arise, nations must be

brought into contact and competition, in which some lose and others win. Democracy and the market are two forces that compel individuals and groups to compete unremittingly, that produce winners and losers continually—it goes without saying that there will always be bad winners and sore losers—and that encourage groups to pursue their interests on the basis of their semiotic self-understanding, their cultural “groupness.” Add to this combustible mixture the modern state, which acts as an arena within which struggles can be pursued, and another potent element contributes to conflict and competition. And if, as seems likely, the state becomes the preserve of some dominant group, we may expect ethnic animosities only to intensify.

The Modernity of Nations

Fundamental to my argument is the proposition that the nation and the nation-state are, as I stated above, the dominant forms of organization in the modern world. Of course, the claims that modern countries make are quite different: namely, that they are modern precisely because they are on the verge of abandoning the nation-state and demoting the nation. This self-perception, which I believe is both self-serving and fundamentally wrong, seems to be part and parcel of the discourse of human rights that has been appropriated by the elites of these countries and which functions to legitimize their rule internally, to preserve their hegemony externally and to isolate “Europe” from troubling developments in neighboring states. We need not take this self-perception too seriously as a practical program, except perhaps to ask, as I do at the end of this essay, what the subtext is of so unabashedly ideological a formulation.

Despite such rhetoric, neither the nation—as a self-conscious cultural community—nor the state—as a political organization with a monopoly of violence in some territory—appears to be on the verge of extinction. Ethnic groups in the United States and Canada are very much in the process of asserting their nationhood, even as Washington and Ottawa desperately struggle to foster pan-ethnic identities. The peoples of Western Europe, both the majority

nations and the minorities, are all reclaiming their history, asserting their prerogatives and establishing themselves as bona fide corporate entities. To be sure, people are learning foreign languages, traveling and developing multiple identities, but none of these characteristics contravenes the fact that the background on which all of these trends are taking place is the nation. And if the emergence of a self-confident Japan, a reunified Germany and a beleaguered America is a portent of things to come, we may expect the sense of national identity and the feeling of belongingness to a nation to continue to grow. The trend may change, of course, but there seem to be few indications of why it should anytime in the near future.

Why and how nations emerged several centuries ago are questions that John Armstrong, Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, Carlton Hayes, Eric Hobsbawm and many others have attempted to answer, but these issues do not concern us here.¹³ Far more important is explaining why nations, which are regularly denounced for their supposedly atavistic qualities, still exist. Although a definitive answer is probably impossible, critically important to the nation's continued hold on humanity are, as I suggested above, secularism, democracy and the market. Thus, Anthony D. Smith has argued that the crisis of the intelligentsia, a crisis that had much to do with the emergence of secularism in a religious world, was directly responsible for the emergence of national identity among nineteenth-century European elites.¹⁴ Regardless of whether or not Smith is correct in his argument, it seems unquestionable that the growing absence of the divine from the world, its *Entzauberung*, to use Max Weber's term, at least facilitates the continued maintenance of national identity and national self-assertiveness in the modern world. God's presumed

13 John A. Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983); Carlton Hayes, *Essays on Nationalism* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

14 Anthony D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (London: Duckworth, 1971).

“death” has surely contributed to the growing emphasis on values that underline the human side of life. Human rights are in this sense an ersatz of sorts for the divine. Possibly even more powerful a substitute is the nation, or, until recently perhaps, the class. As many observers have noted, the fervor with which nationalists and communists have dedicated themselves to their groups has often resembled that of religious devotees in their common willingness to sacrifice their lives for the higher goal of an abstract ideal.

The connection between democracy and the nation is equally straightforward. Democratic regimes are self-styled popular regimes; they derive their legitimacy from the people and from their activity on behalf of the people. The American Declaration of Independence, in its insistence on government by, for and of the people is thus a classic nationalist document. Naturally, the people can be a multiethnic, indeed a multinational association. Yet it would appear to be highly likely, if not indeed inevitable, that in its appeals to the people, a democratic regime will either emphasize the national characteristics of that people if it is ethnically homogeneous, or will attempt to create more or less homogeneous characteristics if the people is ethnically heterogeneous. Legitimacy requires that a strong connection be established between government and “the” people: The logic of the situation demands that a people, or people in general, be transformed into a collectivity deserving of the definite article. The United States, with its constant emphasis on the American qualities of the people that inhabit the country, may serve as an example of the pressures faced by strongly democratic governments in multi-ethnic societies and of their tendency to adopt positions that lead to the creation of self-conscious cultural communities and an emphasis on national solidarity and national superiority.

The market, so goes the claim, is the best solvent of nationalism: It overcomes national differences, brings nations together, makes the state and, of course the nation-state superfluous. Contemporary Western Europe is supposed to be the prime example of the manner in which market relations overcome national narrowness, passions and emotionalism. Of course, one could point to just as many, if not far more, examples of how market relations also

seem to have the radically opposite effect, leading to such phenomena as neo-Nazi attacks on racial minorities in Germany, Jean-Marie Le Pen's fulminations against immigrant threats in France, Jörg Haider's encouragement of *Ausländerfeindlichkeit* in Austria and Thatcherite economics in England. Theoretically, however, the important point is that markets place peoples into contact and competition. Nations that may have not known one another and thus, ipso facto, could not have been in conflict, are brought together under conditions that contribute little to peaceful resolutions of emergent problems.¹⁵ What is more, the market has an inevitably differential impact on individuals and peoples. After all, it is in the very nature of market relations to reward efficient regions and to penalize inefficient ones. As Michael Hechter has argued, the market's accentuation of regional differences can create national differences, thereby not only leading to competition but also actually generating the drive toward independence as the only solution to the perceived inequities of capitalist relations.¹⁶

If these considerations are correct, we should expect "national liberation struggles" to multiply in Western Europe after 1992, with the creation of a unified market in a democratically ruled "Europe of regions." Not only will regionally-based national minorities assert their right to self-determination, but the dominant nations will likely experience a renewal of national pride, perhaps even hatred, toward these minorities, toward other nations and toward other states.

The Modernity of the State

The future also looks good for the state, since the major features of modernity—the market, democracy and secularism—well-nigh require the continued existence of that institution. Although recent developments in a variety of countries represent something in the nature of a scaling down of the functions of the state, largely under

15 Karl Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966).

16 Michael Hechter, *Internal Colonialism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977).

the guise of neoconservative justifications that emphasize the role of the market in creating social prosperity, it is equally true that countervailing pressures are pushing the state to assert itself in such areas as social policy, education, infrastructure and the like—precisely those spheres in which, as Adam Smith pointed out long ago, the market is perhaps inherently incapable of playing a decisive role. Seen in this light, the growing importance of communications to the industrial and postindustrial worlds means that the state will continue to exhibit a high profile in this sector for the foreseeable future. Roads, bridges, ports, satellites and other expensive public projects will long remain the preserve of the public institution par excellence, not of the market.

Perhaps more important, the market, while possibly the most efficient form of social production, is also unable to guarantee the just distribution of the social product, be it in the form of public services or social safety nets. Short of the realization of utopian socialist visions of the self-rule of autonomous workers, it is the state that will continue to be most responsible for the fair division of the social surplus and for the creation of conditions under which all individuals will be best able to pursue what they universally consider to be their entitlement—human rights. In current circumstances, the demand for social equality and economic and political justice can but enhance the role of the state, even if with a more human face.

Parliamentary democracy is also unthinkable without a strong state to act as its prop. Except in the tiny political settings that approximate Jean-Jacques Rousseau's utopian vision of direct democracy, in which the entire homogeneous people can deliberate over every issue, popular rule—the rule of the *demos*—necessarily entails institutions, organizations, groups, procedures and laws—in a word, a state. Strong institutions may be no guarantee of democracy, as too strong a state, one that is authoritarian or totalitarian, undermines democratic procedures and civil society. But weak institutions virtually ensure that democracy will function poorly and thus be prone to breakdown. Finally, secularism is premised on the division of authority between a ghettoized religious sphere and an ever-growing public sphere, a polity that

exerts the authority formerly exercised by the religious. As the rule of the theocrats and gods is replaced with the rule of public servants, the state becomes a necessary condition for the grouping together of the secular holders of authority.

In addition to arguments concerning the continued vitality of the state's internal functions, the division of the world into states that claim to be, or by and large actually are, nation-states will continue to privilege the state as long as that division persists, which to all appearances will be a long time. States, after all, do not disappear easily. Not only are their resources generally far greater than those of their challengers within opposition movements, but the international system in general, and the great powers in particular, are usually opposed to the disappearance of states, at least since the Peace of Westphalia. Even under conditions of war, states are reluctant to see the complete eradication of their rivals and the emergence of successor states. The recent crises in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, whose republics appealed to the very right to self-determination that the West loudly proclaimed for several decades, were thus instructive, showing — once again — that Western states are still as concerned as ever with *raison d'état* and not the rights of individuals or of nations.

By the same token, the emergence of international organizations is not only not contradictory of the state, it is premised on the existence of states: It is states, after all, that are united in the United Nations, the European Community and so on. There is no transformation of quantity into quality at work here, inasmuch as sovereignty, the supreme authority that all states still claim to want to preserve, is something that states either possess or do not. However great their involvement in international organizations, therefore, states will continue to be the repositories of sovereignty until and unless they decide to self-destruct. By the same token, however great the autonomy of sub-state regions, their authority will always remain subordinate to that of the state and therefore not be supreme. To be sure, the growing role of international economic processes, of international organizations and of non-state international actors will reduce the dominant position of the state on the world arena, and in this sense critics of realist theories may

be right in hoping that the state will no longer have a monopoly on international affairs.¹⁷ Perhaps, as they claim, wars will be less frequent and international harmony more likely. But even if this prognosis is correct, the state will continue to exist and will continue to be sovereign within the territory that it claims for itself. In becoming enmeshed in a greater variety of international networks, the state may therefore be tamed, humanized and reduced in stature – but, at home and within the very organizations that will hope to tame it, the state will remain of paramount importance.

If modernity truly promotes the nation and the state, and as most modern states are indeed nation-states – that is to say, not ethnically homogeneous polities, but merely the sovereign political organizations of particular cultural communities – then it follows that nation-states will continue to prosper. Their persistence, however, need not logically entail chauvinism or persecution of minorities. As I suggested above, the nation-state only facilitates interethnic animosities. It is in combination with other aspects of modernity, especially democracy and the market, that chauvinism may be inevitable. If I am right in thinking that modernity also fosters nations, states and nation-states, then it is obviously hopeless for policy makers and scholars to expect that chauvinism will disappear as modernity deepens. At best, while chauvinist attitudes will remain, actual conflict and violent behavior may be curtailed. Life, in other words, is rather tougher than Voltaire's Pangloss suspected.

West European Exceptionalism?

But is not the state rapidly becoming passé? Does not the trend toward European integration suggest that the nation-state, if not the state, is becoming the least modern of contemporary political organizations? Is not the internationalization of human life and the creation of common homes, be they in Europe or in other parts of the world, irreversible and overwhelming? Once again, in

17 James Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990); Robert Keohane, ed., *Neorealism and Its Critics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

evaluating what some might consider to be iron laws of development, we would do well to distinguish between rhetoric and reality. To be sure, the rhetoric suggests that Europe has now embarked on union, that wars have finally come to an end and that the millennium, indeed the end of history, are just around the corner. Still, we would not be remiss in being somewhat skeptical of such grandiose claims, surely not the first to herald the end of strife and the coming of paradise on earth. Neither would we be remiss in pointing to the fact that the euphoria of 1989 disappeared within a mere year. Nor would we be wrong to note that the key slogan of the 1970s and 1980s was Euro-sclerosis and not Euro-optimism and that all slogans—like proletarian internationalism, *die Neue Ordnung* and the new world order—appear to have a limited life span.

Rather than leaving the argument at the level of skepticism, however, I should like to refer to three rather more concrete factors. First, 1992 represents economic integration: There is no reason why a single European market should not exist side by side with the state or, indeed, with a strengthened state. Although politics and economics obviously intersect and overlap, the modern state and capitalism can and do occupy relatively autonomous spheres. Second, the underlying impetus for Western Europe's integration was, I suggest, the division of Europe into two spheres of influence and the concomitant elimination of European security concerns. The end of the Cold War, the unification of Germany, Eastern Europe's insistence on being accepted into a common European "home," and the disintegration of the USSR suggest that European integration will be extraordinarily difficult to achieve. Notwithstanding declarations to the contrary, West European states have very different interests, and these interests, be they geopolitical or economic, are unlikely to converge effortlessly in post-perestroika Europe.¹⁸ Third, political unification would have to involve the voluntary, and not compulsory, abdication of sovereignty by decidedly sovereign, institutionally strong and resource-rich

18 For a particularly gloomy view, see John Mearsheimer, "Back to the Future," *International Security*, 15, no. 1 (Summer 1990) pp. 5-56.

European states. Because sovereignty is an all-or-nothing proposition – by definition, supreme authority cannot be “lessened” or “increased” by degrees – such abdication not only appears to have no precedents in history, but by necessarily involving the creation of a pan-European political organization with a monopoly of violence its chances of success seem minimal. Is “Europe” an exception, then? For better or for worse, no.

The Modernity of Elites

Just as nations and states are necessary to nationalism, so too are national elites, who utilize the nation as a vehicle for advancing their political, material or cultural interests and launch struggles for independence, self-government or enhanced well-being.¹⁹ Such a view of nationalism necessarily assumes that elites, not masses, are the key actors in history, that elites invariably pursue power and influence precisely because they are capable of doing so and that they can successfully mobilize masses by means of various strategies, some focused on rational calculations of means and ends, others centered on perceptions of status still others appealing to “constitutive myths,” or mythomoteurs.²⁰ Can elites therefore create nations *ex nihilo*, or must specific ethnies be present out of which nations can then be forged? Do nations follow appeals to material self-interest or do symbols mean most to them? Different theorists provide different answers, but most, fortunately, premise their arguments on the centrality of elites and thus accept my basic point.²¹

Although elites may or may not be a given in all forms of social organization, it is surely the case that conditions of modernity

19 See Joseph Rothschild, *Ethnopolitics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981) and John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1985).

20 See Michael Hechter, *Principles of Group Solidarity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); Donald Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) p. 15.

21 See Paul Brass, “Language and National Identity in the Soviet Union and India,” in Motyl, *Thinking Theoretically*, pp. 99-128.

virtually guarantee that ethnic majorities and minorities will possess them. The spread of education, urbanization and industrialization may or may not attenuate ethnic differences, as modernization theory at one time suggested, but they clearly function to produce strata that are socially mobilized, technically trained and thus ideally equipped to mobilize their nations for the advancement of their own or their nations' interests.

Not surprisingly, modern national elites have appropriated the language of human rights in general and of self-determination in particular. Indeed, the discourse of human rights exerts a hegemonic influence on contemporary thinking: Even dictators feel impelled to proclaim themselves solemn defenders of human rights. In and of itself, this hegemony does not suffice to propel elites onto the path of nationalism, but it greatly facilitates such a move. The championing of human rights literally invites elites to assert themselves. Moreover, it provides them with a universal language and with irrefutable arguments, so much so that even opposition to human-rights demands must also be couched in the language of human rights. The irony is that, because human rights have become the dominant discourse of Western states, politicians and statesmen are forced to pay homage to a principle that privileges the sovereign individual or the sovereign group over the sovereign state and, if universally implemented, would lead to the destabilization of the international system and to the internal delegitimation of their own rule.²²

Sufficing to push national elites toward the actual pursuit of states for their nations is—*horribile dictu*—democracy. Political freedom, party competition, voting and the like permit, encourage and compel elites to pursue their interests in the most efficient manner, and that means utilizing nations as vehicles of political and material power. Conditions of freedom remove whatever political obstacles there may have been to the pursuit of nationalism. Parliamentary competition accentuates the groupness of groups

22 Alexander J. Motyl, "Rites, Rituals, and Soviet-American Relations," in Robert Jervis and Seweryn Bialer, eds., *Soviet-American Relations after the Cold War* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991) pp.183-96.

and thus provides elites with ready-made vehicles for their ambitions. The imperative of popular legitimation forces elites to identify with the supposed repository of sovereignty and, in this manner, to be supporters of the nation. National elites in democratic settings, therefore, will both express nationalist sentiments and actually translate their beliefs into the pursuit of nation-states or self-government. Recent events in the postcommunist states of East Central Europe appear to substantiate the truth of this proposition. Whether or not nationalist elites then succeed in their endeavors is of course a wholly different question, one that depends on their ability to attract followers and overcome opposition.

Whither Nationalism?

Far into the future, I suspect, is how long nationalism will persist. As I have argued above, nationalism is not some atavistic, pre-modern phenomenon that is slated to disappear with the growing modernity of the world. Quite the contrary: The things called nationalism are likely to intensify under conditions of modernity, which is the ideal breeding ground for chauvinism, national self-determination, national self-government and national identity. Modernity promotes nations, states and thus nation-states. We can expect nationalism, however defined, to grow in intensity as modern states become even more modern and unmodern states embark on the road to modernity. In short, *modernity breeds nationalism*.

Contrary to the Western assertion that nationalism is non-European, in being modern, nationalism is the most European of contemporary phenomena. The newly liberated peoples of East Central Europe are, as a result, faced with an insoluble conundrum. Being genuinely European by being nationalist will not get them admitted into "Europe." Rejecting European values and behaviors by not being nationalist, on the other hand, might get them admitted, but is probably a hopeless endeavor in a world of nations, state and nation-states. Cynics – or is it idealists? – might add that, in insisting on such rigorous entrance requirements, "Europe" has just this impossible dilemma in mind.

Liberalism, Nationalism, and National Liberation Struggles*

This paper consists of three parts. Taking John Rawls's recently published *The Law of Peoples* as my starting point, I argue that the principles he enunciates and the definitions he employs necessarily endorse independence for liberal peoples in both a liberal and a not fully liberal world. I then examine the question of the compatibility of liberalism and nationalism, a compatibility that Rawls takes for granted in his discussion. I conclude that, although there is no definitive answer to the question, there are persuasive conceptual reasons for viewing liberalism and nationalism as compatible as well as eminently important practical reasons for attempting a reconciliation between the two. Finally, I argue that the national liberation struggles of liberal peoples in the former Soviet bloc either demonstrate empirically that liberalism and nationalism are compatible or, at the very least, raise important questions about the relationship of liberalism and nationalism that should concern liberals.

I.

In *The Law of Peoples* John Rawls sets out the following agenda:

By the "Law of Peoples" I mean a particular political conception of right and justice that applies to the principles and norms of international law and practice. I shall use the term "Society of Peoples" to mean all those peoples who follow the ideals and principles of the Law of Peoples in their mutual relations. These peoples have their own internal governments, which may be constitutional liberal democratic or nonliberal but decent governments. In this book I consider how the content of the Law of Peoples might be developed out of a liberal idea of justice similar to, but more general than, the idea I called *justice as fairness* [ital. in original] in *A Theory*

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