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The Shaping of the "Second Europe" 1914 - Present

20th Century Nationalism and the Revolt Against Europe

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Introduction

We have been pursuing the theme that the 20th century has witnessed a "Revolt Against Europe" or against the concept of a common culture represented by the Enlightenment or Second Europe. I am presenting nationalism in this light, as a movement rejecting every tenet of the Enlightenment. But first a review to remind us of how nationalism got to be so antithetical to the basic ideas of Europe as a culture.

Review of Nationalism Before the 20th Century

In an earlier lecture we defined nationalism as a state of mind which holds the nation, the people, as the recipient of the individual's highest loyalty. People united by nationalism behave as if they are gripped by a common spirit, a living, corporate will, which dictates that the people and its state is the ideal and only legitimate form political entity, and that belonging to this people gives individuals their only creative energy and well-being.

We traced nationalism back to its roots in ancient Judaism and Hellenism. Both Jews and Greeks thought that they were superior to other peoples because of religious distinctiveness in the first case and cultural distinctiveness in the second. Both regarded peoples as fitting into two categories: us and them. If you are not "us", (unique, superior) you are "them" (lumped together, second-rate). In the early modern era this idea of "chosen-ness" was linked to the form of the nation-state so that by the 17th century nationality, identity as a people, and state became one and the same.

From the 17th century to 1848 nationalism was closely tied to the liberal tradition. Puritans regarded the English Commonwealth (1649-1660) as a New Israel and saw themselves as God's Chosen People, joined by a Covenant with God which gave them a messianic purpose. Knit together with these grander principles were specific political and religious doctrines: individual liberty and freedom of conscience. Puritans were part of the Reformed tradition in Christianity in their conviction about liberty and conscience. Transported to North America the Puritan outlook strongly shaped the American Revolution and early American nationalism. Those who made the Revolution, while not Puritan, were gripped by the Puritan idea that they were God's agents chosen by him to make a new experiment for mankind. Jefferson implied as much in the Declaration of Independence when he aimed the Declaration at "mankind", with its eyes upon the New Israel. This new experiment was to be based upon self-evident truths: "that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The new nation-state being created was to protect the individual and guarantee his safety and well-being.

Nationalism began to veer away from the liberal tradition, however, in the French Revolution. A new theme showed itself for the first time in that Revolution: the **myth of the collective will or personality of the nation**. Jean Jacques Rousseau was the first to define this myth ([The Social Contract](#)). One quote sums it up: "**Whoever refuses to obey the general will shall be forced to obey it by the whole body politic, which means nothing else but that he will be forced to be free.**" The notion of the collective will challenged the emphasis on the individual. In place of the individual, the French Revolution put the emphasis on the nation as representative of all individuals and demanded that the individual yield himself to the community. France needs you, the revolutionary leaders said. She is threatened by kings and aristocrats. Rally to France and save her from enemies of the Revolution. Thus the Revolution turned nationalism toward authoritarianism and away from liberalism.

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Let's pause and discuss Rousseau's idea of "the general will" and its implications.

After the Revolution events widened the division between nationalism and liberalism. As we saw,

Germans began to try to create a sense of national identity by stressing the uniqueness and superiority of the German people. The German volk, to use the phrases, was destined to take cultural leadership of the world; it alone was capable of the highest creativity; it would create and pour out on others the blessings of a higher culture. These ideas were foreign to liberalism and by 1848, except in the United States and Great Britain, nationalism and liberalism were far apart. In 1848 the last of the humanitarian movements which hoped to free nationalities and create a peaceful union collapsed.

After 1848 nationalism in Europe became a part of the Realpolitik of the state or led to antagonism and clashes between nationalities. Nationalism in stressing the exclusiveness and uniqueness of nationalities heightened tensions and set up the atmosphere leading to World War I. With this as background we are ready for the topic of this session.

20th Century Nationalism

After World War I nationalism became increasingly hostile to the liberal tradition of Europe and the Enlightenment. Increasingly, too, it became divisive in European and world affairs as it became a world-wide movement. There are three facets of 20th century nationalism to be examined: (1) nationalism and racialism; (2) nationalism and totalitarianism; and (3) nationalism in the non-European world.

Nationalism and Racialism

Actually, racial nationalism had its roots in the 19th century, as we saw when looking at Social Darwinism. I did not stress racism in that discourse because I wanted to wait and show you that 19th century racial theories led to a demonic end in the 20th century. After Darwin, and the new prestige of the biological sciences, nationalist writers began to use new themes. "Ancestry" and "Blood", they said, tied certain groups of humans together and determined their destinies.

Certain names stand out in the development of racial nationalism. One is that of the French diplomat and essayist, Joseph Arthur, Count de Gobineau (1816-1882), who offered the first systematic treatment of racial nationalism in a work entitled, Essay on the Inequality of the Human Races (1855). Without going into a lot of detail, let me note the following ideas central to his work:

(1) "Blood" was vitally important as a distinctive quality in human beings. It made the difference in being able to pass on a race's creative abilities.

(2) The human races were unequal in their creative ability. The chosen race was (guess who?), the Aryan race.

(3) Higher civilization had been created by Aryans. While adopted in an inferior fashion by other races, civilization could not be carried to a higher level by them. Only Aryans possessed the highest virtues and ideals--honor, love of freedom--which had distinguished mankind.

(4) Since civilization depended on racial ability, racial purity was supremely important. The Latin and Semitic peoples had lost their creative abilities because they had not preserved the purity of their blood, degenerating through racial intermarriage.

(5) Only the Germans had kept their "Aryan purity" by keeping their blood pure. But the trend of the modern world was running against them. They too faced the threat of interbreeding and degeneracy.

(6) Although he feared that western civilization was doomed, Gobineau still held out hope that the Aryan race might preserve its purity if it took extreme measures such as adopting ancestor worship. But the hope was slight; Aryans like other peoples were probably not going to be able to preserve their purity and fulfill their potential cultural leadership.

Gobineau's ideas influenced few in France, but they had more appeal in Germany with its tradition of anti-Semitism. Leading German figures urged and promoted anti-Semitism in the late 19th and 20th centuries. For example, Richard Wagner (1813-1883), composer of 13 operas most of which were set around Germanic legends, was also an anti-Semite. In 1850 in The Jews in the World of Music, Wagner portrayed Jews as mercenary materialists who could not create art, let alone create great art. They were wanderers without the roots which could nourish creativity. Moreover, they prevented Germans from achieving truly original creations by dominating music and art. (Wagner here was expressing frustration at his failure to get financing for his scheme of a national opera.) He proposed their "extinction" ("*untergang*") or their assimilation as means of removing their influence and realizing a pure German culture. Jews, he said, were, the "demon causing mankind's downfall." At about the same time, Heinrich von Treitschke, renowned historian, published The Jews are Our Misfortune (1879), a broad statement of German anti-Semitism. His work was followed shortly by another anti-Semitic statement: Eugen Dühring (1833-1921), social philosopher, wrote The Jewish Question as a Racial, Ethical, and Cultural Problem. With a World Historic Reply. (1881). His prescription was that attempted by the Nazis in the 20th century.

The culmination of 19th century racial nationalism, and the ideas of earlier figures, was Houston S. Chamberlain, The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century (1899). Chamberlain (1855-1927), British by birth, became a German citizen during the First World War and went on to write a biography of Richard Wagner (whose daughter he married). Foundations, a massive world history, purported to show the importance of race in creating and determining the future of civilization. All western history, he said, had been determined by the struggle of the Teutonic (Germanic) race to maintain its creativity and its purity at the same time. "The Teuton is the soul of our culture. Europe of today, with its many branches over the whole world, represents the chequered results of an infinitely manifold mingling of races: what binds us all together and makes an organic unity of us is "Teutonic" blood. If we look around, we see that the importance of each nation as a living power today is dependent upon the proportion of genuinely Teutonic blood in its population." Central in this struggle was the question whether the heart of European civilization would remain pure and undefiled as well. Chamberlain saw Europe as having been Aryan or Teutonic, going back to Jesus' pure doctrines. But this Aryan source had been adulterated by Paul's Judaism. The war between the Aryan creative force in Christianity and civilization, and its adulterator, Judaism, had produced what Chamberlain called "the foundation of the nineteenth century," and was still being waged. Like Gobineau, Wagner, Von Treitschke, and Dühring, Chamberlain believed that only the Germans, the one remaining true Aryan line, had remained racially pure and thus only they could rid the world of the Jewish influence and renew its cultural energy.

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Do you think that the writers cited above in their wildest imagining ever had an inkling that someone might one day try to carry out what they said about the Jews?

Chamberlain's ideas became an inspiration for the racial theories of Nazi Germany. Alfred Rosenberg (1893-1946) officially defined the Nazi position on race and its central place in policy. In [Myth of the Twentieth Century](#) (1930) and in speeches he laid down the party line. For example, on race he said in [Myth](#),

The essence of the contemporary world revolution lies in the awakening of the racial types, not in Europe alone but on the whole planet. This awakening is the organic counter movement against the last chaotic remnants of liberal economic imperialism, whose object of exploitation out of desperation has fallen into the snare of Bolshevik Marxism, in order to complete what democracy had begun, the extirpation of the racial and national consciousness.

And on the waging of war to carry out Germany's racial theory about the master race:

The understanding that the German nation, if it is not to perish in the truest sense of the word, needs ground and soil for itself and its future generations, and the second sober perception that this soil can no more be conquered in Africa, but in Europe and first of all in the East--these organically determine the German foreign policy for centuries.

On the need for a new theology to replace traditional Christianity so as to justify the Nazi theory of race:

Today, a new faith is awakening--the Myth of the Blood, the belief that the divine being of mankind generally is to be defended with the blood. The faith embodied by the fullest realization, that the Nordic blood constitutes that mystery which has supplanted and overwhelmed the old sacraments.

In a speech Rosenberg spoke about the necessity of dealing with the Jews:

For Germany the Jewish Question is only then solved when the Last Jew has left the Greater German space. Since Germany with its blood and its nationalism has now broken for always this Jewish dictatorship for all Europe and has seen to it that Europe as a whole will become free from the Jewish parasitism once more, we may, I believe, also say for all Europeans: For Europe the Jewish question is only then solved when the last Jew has left the European continent.

Hitler himself needs to be quoted before we end this recitation of Nazi policy on race and nationalism. In a speech before the German Reichstag in 1939, the year war broke out, Hitler said,

Europe cannot find peace until the Jewish question has been solved. One thing I should like to say on this day [the sixth anniversary of his being appointed Chancellor of the Reich]

which may be memorable for others as well as for us Germans. In the course of my life I have very often been a prophet and have usually been ridiculed for it. Today I will once more be a prophet: if the international Jewish financiers in and outside Europe should succeed in plunging the nations once more into a world war, then the result will not be the Bolshivization of the earth, and thus the victory of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe.

Nationalism and Totalitarianism

The French Revolution, as I suggested earlier, helped lay the foundation for totalitarian nationalism: the myth of the collective will of the nation to which the individual should yield himself. The 19th century reinforced this myth by using nationalism to achieve their goals through diplomacy and force, or Realpolitik. In the 20th century nationalism carried this trend to its conclusion in Fascism.

From the outset Italian Fascism was passionately nationalistic, directing the gaze of Italians backward to the glory of Imperial Rome and forward to the grandeur of a New Rome. In a speech in 1932, Mussolini proclaimed: "Today with a fully tranquil conscience, I say to you, that the twentieth century will be the century of Italian power, the century during which Italy will become for the third time the leader of mankind."

Mussolini also had comments about the supremacy of the nation to the individual in his essay on Fascism cited earlier:

Anti-individualistic, the Fascist conception of life stresses the importance of the State and accepts the individual only in so far as his interests coincide with those of the State, which stands for the conscience and the universal will of man as a historic entity. It is opposed to classical liberalism which . . . denied the State in the name of the individual; Fascism reasserts the rights of the State as expressing the real essence of the individual. Fascism stands for . . . the only liberty worth having, the liberty of the State and of the individual within the State. The Fascist conception of the State is all-embracing; outside of it no human or spiritual values can exist, much less have value. Thus understood, Fascism is totalitarian, and the Fascist State--a synthesis and a unit inclusive of all values--interprets, develops, and potentiates the whole life of a people.

No individuals or groups (political parties, cultural associations, economic unions, social classes) exist outside the State....

Fascism is . . . opposed to that form of democracy which equates a nation to the majority, lowering it to the level of the largest number; but it is the purest form of democracy if the nation be considered--as it should be--from the point of view of quality rather than quantity, as an idea, the mightiest because the most ethical, the most coherent, the truest, expressing itself in a people as the conscience and will of the few, if not, indeed, of one . . .

A nation, as expressed in the State, is a living, ethical entity only in so far as it is progressive. Inactivity is death. Therefore the State is not only Authority which governs and confers legal form and spiritual value on individual wills, but it is also Power which makes its will felt and respected beyond its own frontiers, thus affording practical proof of the universal character of the decisions necessary to ensure its development . . .the State equates itself to the will of man, whose development cannot be checked by obstacles and which, by achieving self-expression, demonstrates its own infinity.

Totalitarian nationalist themes were also sounded by Adolf Hitler in Germany. In [Mein Kampf](#) (My Struggle) Hitler defined the totalitarian state as necessary to the preservation of the pure Aryan race and its higher development. He asserted that the state achieved its ideal organization when based on the leadership principle: authority comes from the top down. And he declared that the mission of the state was to secure for the race or "volk" its rightful destiny in world history. The following excerpts from [Mein Kampf](#) are, perhaps, the most coherent parts of the work on these points:

The state is a means to an end. Its end lies in the preservation and advancement of a community of physically and psychically homogenous creatures. This preservation itself comprises first of all existence as a race and thereby permits the free development of all the forces dormant in this race. Of them a part will always primarily serve the preservation of physical life, and only the remaining part the promotion of a further spiritual development. Actually the one always creates the precondition for the other. States which do not serve this purpose are misbegotten, monstrosities in fact. The fact of their existence changes this no more than the success of a gang of bandits can justify robbery. Thus, the highest purpose of a folkish state is concern for the preservation of those original racial elements which bestow culture and create the beauty and dignity of a higher mankind. We, as Aryans, can conceive of the state only as the living organism of a nationality which not only assures the preservation of this nationality, but by the development of its spiritual and ideal abilities leads it to the highest freedom.

The [National Socialist] movement...advocates the principle of unconditional authority of the leader, coupled with the highest responsibility....The leader is always appointed from above and at the same time vested with unlimited powers and authority. Only the leader of the whole party is elected, in a general membership meeting compatible with the laws governing associations. But he is the exclusive leader of the movement.

The foreign policy of the folkish state must safeguard the existence on this planet of the race embodied in the state, by creating a healthy, viable natural relation between the nation's population and growth on the one hand and the quantity and quality of its soil on the other hand . . . Only an adequately large space on this earth assures a nation of freedom of existence . . . If the National Socialist movement really wants to be consecrated by history with a great mission for our nation, it must be permeated by knowledge and filled with pain at our true situation in this world; boldly and conscious of its goal, it must take up the struggle against the aimlessness and incompetence which have hitherto guided our German nation in the line of foreign affairs. Then, without consideration of 'traditions' and prejudices, it must find the courage to gather our people and their strength for an advance along the road that will lead this people from its present restricted living space to new land and soil, and hence also free it from the danger of vanishing from the earth or of serving others as a slave nation.

The crown of the folkish state's entire work of education and training must be to burn the

racial sense and racial feeling into the instinct and the intellect, the heart and brain of the youth entrusted to it. No boy and no girl must leave school without having been led to an ultimate realization of the necessity and essence of blood purity. . . This world is moving toward a great revolution. The question can only be whether it will redound to the benefit of Aryan humanity or to the profit of the eternal Jew. The folkish state will have to make certain that by a suitable education of youth it will some day obtain a race ripe for the last and greatest decisions on this earth. And the people which first sets out on this path will be victorious.

Nationalism had reached its nadir in Fascism. The trend downward toward centralization and authoritarianism, begun during the French Revolution, had reached a bottom. Nothing else in 20th century nationalism was quite so hostile to the Enlightenment tradition. But in the next, and last aspect of 20th century nationalism we shall consider there was still plenty to challenge the Second Europe.

Nationalism Sweeps the World

During this past century nationalism as a potent force has spread throughout the world until it is today *the* dominant ideology, challenged perhaps only by radical Islamist beliefs. 19th century humanitarian nationalists believed that when nationalities around the world were free, each with its own state, international harmony and cooperation would spontaneously break out. The result, as even a quick survey will show, has been anything but this ideal. Few of the nations becoming independent in Africa and Asia in the last century have been able to resist some kind of authoritarian nationalism. Nationalism has become a divisive, even a destructive force, creating hostilities and tensions even among nations who had common religious and cultural traditions.

In the Middle and Near East a whole string of nations became independent from European domination during the early and middle of the 20th century: Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Iraq. All had a common tradition of Islam and some envisioned regional harmony and cooperation based on religion or culture. It was not to be. The only common ideology which seems to have united these countries for much of the last century is a fear of, and hostility towards, Israel. But even that has not prevented rivalries. Witness Saddam Hussein's bid for dominance in the early 1990's. Nationalism in the Near and Middle East, heightened by terrorism connected with radical Islam, has made the region a turbulent, dangerous place. And a peace settlement between Israel and her neighbors will probably not lessen the tensions of that area.

Much the same has been true of nationalism in Africa as well. Literally dozens of new states became free after the Second World War. Most developed some form of authoritarian nationalism, suspicious of European states and the United States and hostile to each other. Your text can give you more details than I have time for. Most African states have been also split internally by tribal and ethnic divisions which colonial rule had submerged but which independence unleashed again. These are a continuation of nationalism down to the level of tribal and ethnic conflicts. One recent example is the [Hutu-Tutsi conflict](#) in the states of Rwanda and Burundi in central Africa. Hundreds of thousands of the Tutsi were killed by the Hutu in 1994-1995. The two countries are still in turmoil from the clash, as are bordering countries into which the Tutsi fled for refuge.

Nationalism in Asia may, perhaps, be seen in its most vivid form in China. When the last Chinese emperor was deposed in a revolution in 1911, China under Sun Yat-Sen attempted to establish a republic based on what Sun called the "Three Principles of the People": nationalism, democracy and equalization, or the people's livelihood. Stable reform, however, was impossible without a democratic tradition. Following Sun's death in 1924 power fell into the hands of General Chiang Kai-Shek and the democratic program gave way to authoritarianism. This in conjunction with the Japanese invasion of China in 1928 prepared the way for the triumph of the Chinese Communist Party under Mao Tse-Tung. Nationalism, then, upset the older Chinese traditions and authoritarianism moved into the vacuum. After the victory of Communism in 1949, China became nationalistic in the totalitarian form and began to play on nationality as a means of dominating East and Southeast Asia. Among the movements which it helped support was the Viet Minh or Vietnamese Communists. China aided the Viet Minh, first in ending French colonial rule of Vietnam and establishing North Vietnam, and then in attacking South Vietnam and its ally the United States from 1954-1975. Has Chinese nationalism in recent years focused on economic development as a new strategy to dominate Asian affairs?

20th Century Nationalism and the Second Europe

In almost every aspect 20th century nationalism has been hostile to the basic principles of the Enlightenment. Its view of man, as represented in its emphasis on race or totalitarianism, is inimical to the idea of natural rights. The individual must yield himself to the state to achieve his true meaning in totalitarian nationalism. Which raises another issue, that of the position of the state. Nationalism exalts the state while debasing the individual. Remember the statements of Mussolini and Hitler? And what about the place of God in the face of nationalism's all-consuming loyalty: religious doctrine is remade when the nation-state needs a new theology. And, the future? Nationalism urges men on to more intense and at the same time more particular loyalties. Being part of a traditional nationality is no longer enough. "Nationalistic" feeling focuses on smaller and smaller groupings within traditional nations leading to more agitation and unrest in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, in Africa, and even in regions of Asia. Where is a foreseeable end? And what is there to look forward to if one believes in the community of mankind?

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Jacques Barzun (*From Dawn to Decadence*, p. 775) makes a telling comment about a recent case of hyper-separatism. The Comoros consists of four islands in the Indian Ocean, 300 miles east of Madagascar. These four islands comprise 830 sq. miles with a population of about 500,000. Upon receiving independence from France they became the Federal Islamic Republic of the Comoros. Even this separation did not end the urge to separatism: the inhabitants of the smallest island, the Anjouans, wanted freedom for their own destiny and finally got it. As Barzun says, "a separation from a separation." Your reaction?

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