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The Shaping of the "Second Europe" by Revolutions, 1750-1914

Nationalism

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Introduction: What is Nationalism?

Nationalism was another of the "isms" which grew out of the impact of revolutions in the 19th century. It was closely allied to two other movements produced by revolutions, Liberalism and Romanticism. Although it grew directly out of the French Revolution which espoused the "nation" or people as the source of sovereignty after the deposition and killing of the king, it had roots going back to the ancient world. Before looking at those roots, however, we need to define it.

Nationalism is a state of mind which regards the nation-state--a people unified in its own state--as the focus of man's highest loyalty. A nation-state is usually formed out of people of common descent, sharing a common language, inhabiting a politically-unified territory, with common customs and traditions, and perhaps religion. In the 19th century, however, the form of nationalism known as the "Pan" movements did not possess all of

the characteristics just named. And in more recent times, nationalism has appeared as the attitude of smaller and smaller groups of people who are a "nation" only in a loose sense of the word, and who will only with difficulty constitute a nation-state, if ever.

When we say that nationalism is a state of mind, we are dealing with a very elusive and subjective thing. John Stuart Mill succinctly stated this subjective quality in 1872:

A portion of mankind may be said to constitute a nationality, if they are united among themselves by common sympathies, which do not exist between them and any others - which make them cooperate with each other more willingly than with other people, desire to be under the same government.... This feeling of nationality may have been generated by various causes. Sometimes it is the effect of identity of race and descent. Community of language, and community of religion greatly contribute to it. Geographical limits are one of its causes. But the strongest of all is identity of political antecedents; the possession of a national history, and consequent community of recollections; collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the same incidents in the past."
([Considerations on Representative Government](#))

The elusiveness of nationalism is due in part to the assumption by nationalists that there is a life to the nation which transcends the individuals sharing that identity as a nation. Ernest Renan said in 1882 that the nation was a "soul":

"A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle. Only two things, constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. One is the past, the other is the present. One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of remembrances; the other is the actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to continue to value the heritage which all hold in common...It supposes a past, it renews itself especially in the present by tangible deed: the approval, the desire, clearly expressed to continue the communal life. The existence of a nation is an everyday plebiscite..." ([What is a Nation?](#))

So nationalism postulates the existence of a living corporate will which transcends the individuals making up the nation-state. This general will permeates most if not all of the people and asserts that the nation-state is the ideal form of association and that the people or nationality is the source of all creative life.

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1. The nation-state as the object of man's highest loyalty?
2. Extremist Islamists do not seem to be swayed by nationalist loyalties, do they? Are they a counter current to the force of nationalism?

The Roots of Nationalism

Where did nationalism originate? What were its roots before the French Revolution? The idea of a special people or nation goes back to the ancient world where it appears in both the Greek and Hebrew understanding of themselves as special and different from other peoples. Greeks thought of themselves as unique because they shared a language, a unique form of polity, the polis, and a cultural mission. If you were not a Greek, they said, you were a "barbarian". They meant by that word that you spoke an ugly sounding language and that you did not live as a civilized person should live, in a polis. They were sorry for you; you were never going to be able to perfect yourself into an excellent person. (This was not an exclusivist attitude: you could learn Greek and adopt the polis way of life.) Hebrews also saw themselves as special and different. They had been chosen by God to be His special people; they had a covenant with God by which they were joining God in His Purpose. This messianic promise and hope gave them a identity and a sense of their uniqueness in the ancient world. They were a light to the "nations", as they said. (They too admitted other peoples to "their" nation who were willing to adopt the same covenant and common life as God's people).

The idea of a unique people separated from others in their special status waned in the Roman era and the era of the First Europe, the era of Christendom. In both periods, national differences seemed less important than larger groupings. The Roman notion of the empire sought to comprehend all peoples. Christendom was thought to unite all peoples who shared one faith regardless of whether they shared a common state.

In the early modern era of the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, there was a reawakening of the idea of national consciousness. The "nation as a people" concept or identification once again reappeared. In 17th century England, for example, the Puritan movement reemphasized the Hebrew idea of the covenant, the "chosen-ness" of God's people and the mission to save and reform other peoples. Puritans saw their experiment as a "New Israel". They brought this idea to America where it took root to influence American nationalism.

America, stirred by its independence to pursue its own destiny and also by the prospect of conquering a vast wilderness, embodied the Puritan hope in its concept of the new nation as a "City set upon a Hill." America would be a new experiment in liberty with a mission to show the world that liberty could be realized. This has been called the "excellence of American Nationalism": the state is a framework within which individual liberties could be realized. Despite the evils it committed in enslaving a domestic agricultural force and

in destroying the cultures, and almost destroying the peoples of the native peoples of the West, the best of American nationalism has remained true to that vision. (My opinion!)

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What is yours on this issue? Your reasons?

The American revolution with its vision of a new nationalism influenced the revolution in France. The French Revolution, as we saw, proclaimed nationalist themes. It was the French *people* making the revolution. They had a right, *as a people*, to be free and to resist tyranny at home and abroad. The Revolution first used the myth of the ***collective will of the people*** (The concept was defined by Rousseau in his Social Contract). In the radical stage of the Revolution, the Reign of Terror, French leaders called on the people to rise up and throw back their enemies. Then the Revolution proclaimed the mission of making other peoples enslaved by kings and aristocrats free as well. The individual was subordinated to the collective will of the people. The nation became the object of devotion. The state embodying the people became an end. This is the first appearance of a dangerous trend in nationalism, from the point of view of the Enlightenment, a trend toward centralization and authoritarianism. The Revolution carried the fervor of nationalism, seen in these terms, to all of Europe. It was that which the forces of Conservatism saw as a threat to the security of Europe and attempted to stamp out in the years, 1815-1848. Nationalism in the 19th century is best seen as a diverse movement, assuming different forms as the century wears on. One of the earliest forms is

Nationalism and Culture or Tradition

One of the places nationalism took root was in the German states. There was no Germany then, but an assortment of states, most of them small, except for Prussia. Cultural or traditional nationalism was closely allied with Liberalism and Romanticism. Many early German nationalists were liberal revolutionaries. They looked to the German past and culture to give identity to the German peoples and arouse them against the French. German volk traditions and heritage were studied, and magnified, to create a sense of national community. In the writings of G. W. F. Hegel and Johann Fichte (1762-1814) the state was posited as the embodiment of the people. Fichte in 1807 published [Address to the German Nation](#) and reminded them that their ancestors were willing to die resisting ancient Rome because of love of the nation.

...the noble-minded man will be active and effective, and will sacrifice himself for his people. Life merely as such, the mere continuance of changing existence, has in any case never had any value for him, he has wished for it only as the source of what is permanent. But this permanence is promised to him only by the continuous and independent existence of his nation. In order to save his nation he must be ready even to die that it may live, and that he may live in it the only life for which he has ever wished....

[But] They did not all die; they did not see slavery; they bequeathed freedom to their children. It is their unyielding resistance which the whole modern world has to thank for being what it now is. Had the Romans succeeded in bringing them also under the yoke and in destroying them as a nation, which the Romans did in every case, the whole development of the human race would have taken a different course, a course that one cannot think would have been more satisfactory. It is they whom we must thank---we, the immediate heirs of their soil, their language, and their way of thinking---for being Germans still, for being still borne along on the stream of original and independent life. It is they whom we must thank for everything that we have been as a nation since those days, and to them we shall be indebted for everything that we shall be in the future, unless things come to an end with us now and the last drop of blood inherited from them has dried up in our veins. To them the other branches of the race, whom we now look upon as foreigners, but who by descent from them are our brothers, are indebted for their very existence. When our ancestors triumphed over *Roma* the eternal, not one of all these peoples was in existence, but the possibility of their existence in the future was won for them in the same fight....

Fichte called on Germans to be faithful to their forebears and, against French assertions of superiority, assume the cultural leadership which as Germans only they were capable of. Another writer, Ernst Arndt (1769-1860) echoed this in [Spirit of the Times](#), urging Germans to resist the French and assert their true greatness as a people. He emphasized racial purity as the source of German excellence and superiority. The German language itself, he asserted, embodied [the heart of German greatness](#). Another nationalist, Friedrich Jahn (1778-1852) helped form a gymnastic association, the [Turnverein](#), to organize young people to resist Napoleon. He too saw the German people, the "Volk", as the embodiment of a divine creative force, with a unique mission in the world. Nationalism in its cultural or traditional form helped lay the ground work for unification of Germany later in the century. But its immediate effect was to create German nationalism in reaction to French nationalism.

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Before moving on, stop for a minute and look at Fichte's, Arndt's, and Jahn's use of words and ideas. The individual as worthwhile only as he sacrifices himself for the nation? The importance of race? Racial purity? German as a superior language? Germans as a divine creative force? With a unique mission?

Nationalism and Humanitarianism

A second form of nationalism was as a humanitarian crusade to free people from foreign oppressors. This form was, like cultural or traditional nationalism, identified with Liberalism and Romanticism. It is best seen in Italy in the campaign in the 1830's and 40's to throw out the Austrians and unite Italy as a single nation. And its leading figure was [Giuseppe Mazzini](#) (1805-1872). Mazzini, a foe of Metternich's Austria which controlled Italy, lived in exile in London for many years. There, in letters and works written to Italians back home, he tried to get a revolutionary and democratic movement going to free Italy from Austrian rule and that of local Italian repressive regimes and unify the nation. He founded Young Italy, a true conspiracy as well as a propaganda organization, aimed primarily at the young. Young Italy cells met secretly, planned resistance, and smuggled letters, newspapers and Mazzini's writings to instigate revolt. Their influence was strongest in northern Italy in the cities. Virtually nothing came of Young Italy's plans. The Austrians discovered all the plots, and arrested and executed Young Italy members. But the movement still inspired similar movements in Ireland and Hungary where revolutionaries wanted independence from the English and the Austrian governments. And Mazzini's propaganda had a long term effect in Italy. Italians began to think nationalistically as Young Italy hammered on the theme of unification.

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The youth and nationalism? Why Young Italy? What do youth have which makes them special in this kind of cause? In any kind of cause? The Islamist (that is radical) cause?

One of Mazzini's most important works was [On the Duties of Man](#) written in exile. Certain passages help explain his idea that if all men everywhere lived as nationalities in their own states there would be international peace and brotherhood. Like the Enlightenment, he truly believed that if corrupt government could be overthrown, the

creation of nation-states or states based on nationality would usher in the bright future awaiting mankind. The Enlightenment theme: end the evil and unnatural conditions, customs, and restrictions crippling man and man in his freedom will develop to his full potential as a naturally good being.

Some important passages from On the Duties of Man:

But what can each of you, singly, *do* for the moral improvement and progress of Humanity?... The watchword of the faith of the future is *Association* and fraternal cooperation towards a common aim;... This means was provided for you by God when He gave you a country; when, even as a wise overseer of labor distributes the various branches of employment according to the different capacities of the workmen, he divided Humanity into distinct groups or nuclei upon the face of the earth, thus creating the germ of nationalities. Evil governments have disfigured the Divine design. Nevertheless you may still trace it, distinctly marked out - at least as far as Europe is concerned - by the course of the great rivers, the direction of the higher mountains, and other geographical conditions. They have disfigured it by their conquests, their greed, and their jealousy even of the righteous power of others....

But the Divine design will infallibly be realized; natural divisions and the spontaneous, innate tendencies of the peoples will take the place of the arbitrary divisions, sanctioned by evil governments. The map of Europe will be redrawn. The countries of the peoples, defined by the vote of free men, will arise upon the ruins of the countries of kings and privileged castes, and between these countries harmony and fraternity will exist. And the common work of Humanity, of general amelioration, and the gradual discovery and application of its Law of life, being distributed according to local and general capacities, will be wrought out in peaceful and progressive development and advance. Then may each one of you, fortified by the power and affection of many millions, all speaking the same language, gifted with the same tendencies, and educated by the same historical tradition, hope even by your own single efforts to be able to benefit all Humanity.

O, my brothers, love your Country! Our country is our Home, a house God has given us, placing therein a numerous family that loves us, and whom we love;... Our Country is our common workshop, whence the products of our activity are sent forth for the benefit of the whole world....In laboring for our own country on the right principle, we labor for Humanity.

In 1848 when liberal and nationalist revolutions broke out in France, Austria, Prussia, and Italy Mazzini hoped his dreams would be realized. He returned to Italy and joined other revolutionaries in establishing a Roman Republic, a prelude it was hoped to full Italian unification. Like all other 1848 revolutions, however, Mazzini's was put down and he returned to exile. Italy would unite under other circumstances.

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Nationalism is for humanity's well-being?

Nationalism and Realpolitik

Hopes of achieving unification in Germany and Italy through nationalist uprisings failed in 1848. Optimistic hopes that nationalities would provide the basis for a new European order, like Mazzini's Young Italy movement, collapsed. Henceforth, in the 19th century nationalism became a divisive force. From 1848 on efforts at achieving national interests turned to what historians call Realpolitik: the use of power and diplomacy to achieve national goals. Unification in Italy and Germany, and a reunification of the United States in 1861-65, came through the actions of governments, not spontaneous nationalist revolutions.

In Italy the small kingdom of Piedmont became the center of the drive toward unification. Ruled by a popular king, Victor Emmanuel II, Piedmont had fought Austria in support of the 1848 revolution, and, although defeated, had excited Italians by its actions. In 1852 when [Count Camillo Cavour](#) (1810-1861) became prime minister, plans for unification began to be laid. Cavour believed in nationalism as a means of modernizing Piedmont and Italy. He was no conservative. Neither was he a complete liberal. He wanted representative government, with a limited right to vote, and economic and scientific progress. He admired France and England and wanted to see Piedmont develop along similar lines.

From 1851 until his death in 1861 Cavour pursued his goals single-mindedly. He sought to make Piedmont the leader of Italian aspirations for nationhood. He took Piedmont into the Crimean War on the side of England and France against Russia to win support for Italian unification. Skillfully he courted Napoleon III of France and made secret arrangements with France that if Austria should attack, France would come to Piedmont's

defense. When Austria, alarmed at Piedmont's growing influence in Italy, sent Cavour's government an ultimatum, Cavour replied in terms which meant war. The Austrians invaded Piedmont and France did come to Piedmont's aid. When the Austrian and French armies fought each other to a draw, and the smoke cleared, Piedmont wound up getting the province of Lombardy in the treaty ending the war. Soon after the war's end, all the rest of northern Italy except Venice voted to be annexed to Piedmont. Step one of unification was over.

Step two was accomplished by [Giuseppe Garibaldi](#) (1807-1882), an adventurer and patriot, who in 1860 led a force of a thousand Red-Shirts to liberate the southern kingdom of Naples. Cavour aided but did not join Garibaldi's campaign until he had overthrown the Naples king and was marching towards Rome. Then the Piedmont army met Garibaldi's forces outside Rome. King Victor Emmanuel and Garibaldi shook hands in a symbolic unification of Italy. By plebiscite southern Italians joined the newly proclaimed Kingdom of Italy. Only Rome and Venice remained outside the new nation--Rome because of fears of Catholic reaction to seizing the Papal States and Venice because Austrian troops occupied it. Stage two was over. Italy had been united on the battlefield and at the diplomatic table.

German unification occurred by the same process. The core state around which the nation united was Prussia, the strongest and largest of the German states. Prussia's strength lay in the efficiency of its government, its large army, its prosperity, and its leadership of the [Zollverein](#), an economic union of German states. Under the leadership of King William I and his Chancellor, [Otto von Bismarck](#), Prussia began pursuing a policy which would unite Germany into a single kingdom.

Three wars were necessary to accomplish this task. Bismarck stated the method unambiguously in a [speech to the Prussian parliament](#): "The great questions of the day will not be settled by speeches and majority decisions--that was the mistake of 1848 and 1849--but by blood and iron." War one was against Denmark in 1864 to gain Schleswig and Holstein, which by diplomacy Bismarck got Austria to join Prussia in fighting. After victory, Prussia got Schleswig; Austria controlled Holstein. War two in 1866 was against Austria which was challenging Prussia for leadership in German affairs. By diplomacy Bismarck got the French and Russians to stay neutral, and got Italy's support by promising it Venice. A lightning swift campaign defeated Austria. Prussia formed a Northern German Confederation with itself at the head and annexed several German states which had sided with Austria. War three in 1870 was against France who saw Prussia's rapidly growing strength as a threat to its own power. Again by diplomacy Bismarck isolated France and maneuvered the French so that they declared war first. After victory William I and Bismarck chose Versailles Palace in the famous Hall of Mirrors to proclaim the new united German Reich and William as Kaiser (emperor). This symbolic gesture of national dominance was not lost on either the German people or the French. So Germany was created by a policy of "Blood and Iron" or as we said, [Realpolitik](#).

German nationalist feelings were heightened by Bismarck's skillful use of the press to prepare the population for war and by the successes of the wars themselves. German intellectuals too lent their support to the nationalist cause. Heinrich von Treitschke (1834-1896), a German historian, professor and politician, used his works to popularize the idea that the German state was the highest expression of all goodness, culture, law, and ethical meaning for the individual. This trend in nationalism too was dangerous for the future.

As a last part of Nationalism and Realpolitik, I want to argue that national unification in the United States (or reunification, if you will) in 1861-1865 was achieved by force. American nationalism before the Civil War was focused mainly on westward expansion and the idea of "Manifest Destiny" that the American nation should stretch from shore to shore. A Southern version of nationalism, however, challenged that vision. The South claimed to be a people different from their northern neighbors, in all the different ways which are said to make one people different from another. The Northern version prevailed--Southern nationalism was destroyed. By "Blood and Iron?"

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1. Do you agree with the interpretation in the preceding paragraph? Why? Why not?
 2. Are you aware of the debate between those who think America is "exceptional" and those who think we are no different from any other nation? Where do you stand?
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Nationalism and the "Pan" Movements

Perhaps the most foreboding of the different forms of nationalism in the 19th century was that of the so-called "Pan" movements. Eastern and southeastern Europe was home to many varied groups who saw themselves as nationalities, although they resided in one or the other of the major nation-states. For example there was a nationalist movement known as Pan-Slavism which grew in the 19th century and sought freedom and unity for the Slavic peoples living in the Austrian Empire and the Ottoman Turkish Empire. The main characteristic of this movement, apart from its hatred of the Austrians and Turks, was its lack of focus on long-term goals for Slavs. But it was a strong enough movement to help create the tensions in southeastern Europe which led to the incident triggering World War I. Pan-Slavism was the reason Russia made an alliance with the kingdom of Serbia, a Slavic state which opposed Austrian control of Bosnia and Herzegovina. When

a Serbian nationalist shot the heir to the Austrian throne who was making a visit to Bosnia in 1914, Austria declared war on Serbia. Serbia called on its ally Russia. Other countries allied to one or the other of the belligerents soon followed suit. Sarajevo, Bosnia. Sounds familiar, doesn't it, a century later?

Nationalism and the Second Europe

Nationalism as an ideology affirms some of the Enlightenment beliefs and ideas and rejects others. At least in the humanitarian version, it affirms the basic goodness of man and agrees that man needs freedom from the forces which cripple him if he is going to achieve his true potential as a human being. It is optimistic about the future if men can be united as nationalities. But it is also anti-Enlightenment in several crucial ways. It sees human beings not as mankind, sharing a common nature whose basic characteristics are the capacity for goodness and rationality and possessing natural rights. It sees them as *nationalities*. It is a fragmented view. There is no basis for seeing them whole. From the nationalist perspective some are always unequal. One defines his identity by comparing himself to "The Others", those not like us and, therefore, not of equal worth. Nationalism tends to make the nation-state, the people and its state, an object of reverence. That is anti-Enlightenment. And the nationalist view of the future is also a fragmented view. It is not mankind which is moving toward a time better than the present, a secular heaven on earth; it is the nationality. The Enlightenment included mankind in its vision of a bright future. Nationalism has room only for the favored nation.

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What about my conclusion? Agree? Disagree? Your reasons?
