On the Nature of Nationalism: An Appraisal of Ernest Gellner's Writings on Nationalism

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Ernest Gellner's is the best-known modernist explanatory theory of nationalism. This article summarizes its expression and development before considering its strengths and weaknesses. Discussion centres on Gellner's functionalist mode of explanation, the place of nationalism in his philosophy of history, the predictive and retrodictive nature of his theory, and the merits of his typology of nationalism. The apolitical character of his writings is emphasized: in particular, though Gellner established the connections between nationalism and egalitarianism in modern societies, he did not emphasize the mutually reinforcing relationships between nationalism, egalitarianism and democratization; moreover, his contempt for nationalist doctrines is not something liberals, socialists and conservatives need share.

The theoretical problem is to separate the quite spurious 'national' and 'natural' justifications and explanations of nationalism, from the genuine, time- and context-bound roots of it.

> Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change*, 1964, p. 151.

Nationalism, the most potent principle of political legitimacy in the modem world, holds that the nation should be collectively and freely institutionally expressed, and ruled by its co-nationals. Recent events demonstrate nationalist movements retain the capacity to shake states and empires, as well as the pieties of devout conservatives and cosmopolitan liberals and socialists. Ernest Gellner's writings aimed to explain why nationalism has become the key principle of political legitimacy of our times. In numerous essays and three books this fluent, prolific and witty philosopher, anthropologist, sociologist and multi-lingual polymath provided lucid and persuasive accounts of why nationalism is a necessary component of modernity and why it is the most salient principle of political legitimacy.[1]

[1] See Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), pp. 147–78; 'Scale and Nation', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 3 (1973), 1–17; 'Nationalism, or the New Confessions of a Justified Edinburgh Sinner', in *Spectacles and Predicaments* (Cambridge:

Gellner's arguments disturbed both conservatives and secular rationalists. The reasons are not hard to find. Nationalism relegates religion to a secondary, and even inessential, principle of a stable and legitimate political order and thus challenges traditionalist conservatism. Nationalism also suggests that law, reason, utility, material prosperity and social justice are secondary principles in establishing a stable and legitimate political order, therefore provoking persistent condemnation from rationalist liberals and socialists for some two hundred years.[2] Gellner's writings on nationalism were a sustained criticism of one very pious Oakeshottian conservative, Elie Kedourie; but they were also intended to reassure rationalist liberals. The question is whether he provided the right reassurances. This essay scrutinizes the core arguments of Gellner's *Thought and Change* (1964) and *Nations and Nationalism* (1983). This textual focus is justified because *Nations and Nationalism* is Gellner's most elaborate statement on the subject; because it is largely an expansion of the themes first sketched in *Thought and Change*; and lastly because he never repudiated any of the core propositions advanced in these texts – though some tacit qualifications can be found in *Encounters with Nationalism* (1994).

'THOUGHT AND CHANGE'

Gellner's first extensive statement on nationalism, published in 1964, asserts that both Liberalism and Marxism got it wrong. Liberals assumed nationalism was a doomed legacy of outmoded irrationalism, superstition and savagery; Marxists thought it was a necessary but temporary stage in the path to global socialism. They were both previous in their assumptions. Indeed, while Marxism is now fast heading towards its grave and liberalism is wracked with self-doubt, nationalism seems in vigorous and rude health.

Marxism and Liberalism were not wrong, however, because two other popular theories are right, namely 'Dark Gods theory' and 'naturality theory'. *Dark Gods theory* has it that nationalism is the inevitable expression of the atavistic, irrationalist passions that motivate human beings – an original sin.[3] Gellner rejected this idea as 'utter nonsense', even when it includes sensible

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(F'note continued)

Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 265–76; *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Black-well, 1983); 'Nationalism and the Two Forms of Cohesion in Complex Societies', in *Culture Identity and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 6–28; 'Nationalism and Politics in Eastern Europe', *New Left Review*, 189 (1991), 127–36; and *Encounters with Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994).

[2] A famous nineteenth-century illustration of a liberal criticism of nationalism is Lord Acton's 1862 essay on 'Nationality' (reprinted in J. R. Fears, ed., *Essays in the History of Liberty: Selected Writings of Lord Acton* (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), pp. 409–33. A recent illustration of socialist criticism is Eric Hobsbawm's *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[3] The contemporary version of a 'Dark Gods' theory is socio-biological, see Pierre van den Berghe, *The Ethnic Phenomenon* (New York: Elsevier, 1981).

premises like the importance of belonging, identification and exclusion in human behaviour.[4] That human beings have always been organized in groups with loyalty-instilling capacities must be distinguished from their more recent and historically novel propensity to identify with the modern anonymous nation. *Naturality theory* has it that people have nationalities in the way that they have eye-brows and blood-groups; that it is natural that those who share a nationality should wish to share the same political unit; and this is a good thing. Gellner, by contrast, insisted on the contingency of nationalism. It is, however, underpinned by social foundations: 'there are undoubtedly overwhelmingly powerful factors in the *contemporary and recent social conditions* which *do* make these [nationalist] suppositions … natural and probably irresistible'.[5]

Gellner rejected naturality theory and Kedourie's idealist argument that nationalism is the result of a world-historical intellectual error: an accidental and bad set of ideas, loosely derived from Kant, and disseminated by philosophical incompetents with disastrous consequences.[6] Contrary to the assumption of the naturality of nationalism the typical political units for most of history were not animated by nationalist principles, which did not feature in small tribal or village units, city states, feudal entities, dynastic empires, or in the loose moral empires of a shared religion. Pre-modern political units rarely, and only accidentally, coincided with those of 'nations', 'i.e. linguistic and cultural boundaries'.[7] The nationality of the governors was not a fundamental issue of legitimacy; the governed simply asked of their rulers whether they were 'less corrupt and grasping, or more just and merciful' than their predecessors.[8] Now, to use the nouns of social anthropologists, the relationships between 'structure' and 'culture' are utterly changed. Nationalism is a principle of political legitimacy for us precisely because culture has become so important that it 'does not so much underline structure: rather, it replaces it'.[9] Once social 'structure', the totality of social roles, was tightly circumscribed, nested and ascriptive, and for this reason shared linguistic and cultural communication was not essential to the

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[4] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 149. See also *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 130.

[5] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 151.

[6] Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1960).

[7] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 152.

[8] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 153. Gellner is citing the famous conclusion to Kedourie's *Nationalism*, p. 140. Kedourie thought that his question was the only criterion of legitimacy capable of universal defence. Gellner replied: 'The question which Professor Kedourie asks with such eloquence is indeed one which a typical burgher in an agrarian society would ask himself, if one morning he just heard that the local Pasha had been overthrown and replaced by an altogether new one. If, at that point, his wife dared ask of the burgher what language the new Pasha spoke in the intimacy of his home life – was it Arabic, Turkish, Persian, French or English? – the hapless burgher would give her a sharp look, and wonder how he would cope with all the new difficulties when, at the same time, his wife had gone quite mad.' The sensible implication is that Kedourie's question is no longer coherent in a world in which accountable, participatory and representative government is possible, and in which a modern economy requires a national system of communications (*Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 127–8).

[9] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 155.

preservation of social order and effective interaction; but now social roles are open and changeable, and 'those who communicate must speak the same language, in some sense or other', and the classification of people by 'culture' is classification by 'nationality'.[10]

The negative social foundations of nationalism are thus explained by the erosion of rigid social structures. A shared culture is now much more important in creating and sustaining social cohesion than it was. The positive social foundations are explained by economies of scale in the production of literate citizens by state-sponsored educational systems. The minimal political unit, formerly circumscribed by defence or economic requirements, 'is now determined by the preconditions of education',[11] which means it must be larger than the family, village and city-state. Moreover, the relevant educational system must operate 'in some medium, some language (both in the literal and the extended sense)'.[12] Literacy, an essential aspect of a normally socialized modern human being, is generated by state-sponsored educational systems, which are multiply facilitated if the idioms of the home and the school are the same. In turn, modern educational systems explain the cultural identifications that move so many human beings. These identifications are, however, historically recent and novel, and are not nostalgic: modern people 'do not in general become nationalists from sentiment or sentimentality, atavistic or not, well-based or myth-founded: they become nationalists through genuine, objective, practical necessity, however obscurely recognised'.[13]

Gellner provided a schematic account of why modern loyalty-invoking units are not very small (local, like tribal, feudal or classical units), because functioning educational systems have to operate on a broader scale; and of why they are cultural units, because a shared culture is an indispensable feature of a modern social system. He went one stage further and asked why these cultural units tend to be smaller than those of agrarian religious civilizations (such as Christendom or Islam), even though these wider civilizations could have furnished a shared language or culture. To put matters in another way, he sought to explain the divisiveness of nationalism – why it fractures wider political entities, like the empires of the *ancien régime*. His answer is that 'nationalism is a phenomenon connected not so much with industrialization or modernization as such, but with its uneven diffusion'.[14] The uneven impact of successive waves of industrialization and modernization generate sharp stratifications between peoples which are not hallowed by custom, which are not easily politically regulated, but which are remediable through 'national' secession. Intelligentsias

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[10] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, pp. 155, 157.

[11] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 159; Gellner added: 'It is of course possible for nominally independent political units to exist in a kind of educationally parasitic way. But the present argument is not really undermined by the existence of Monaco or Andorra' (*n.*1).

[12] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 160.

[13] Gellner, *Thought and Change*.

[14] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 166.

who experience blocked social mobility, and who share cultural traits with proletarians experiencing multiple humiliations in urban environments and discrimination in labour markets, provide the personnel for nationalist movements. They seek to establish their own nation-states if at that time they have no feasible prospect of being fairly treated or assimilated – which Gellner treated as the same thing. These new nation-states will be modern, or at least they will be structured as such, even if in ideological self-deception the intelligentsia romantically believe themselves to be restoring their old nation – they will talk like *narodniks* but act as Westernizers.[15] Contrary to the wisdom of historiographers, poets and philologists: 'Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist – but it does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on, even if … these are purely negative'.[16] These are the core propositions of *Thought and Change*.

Gellner anticipated criticisms by clarifying and qualifying his theses in three ways:

(1) He recognised that 'some pre-modern loyalty-evoking political units', notably the strong dynastic states of the Atlantic seaboard of Europe, embraced populations and territories 'similar to those which one would expect to be produced by modern nationalism', and posed the question 'do these rather different phenomena, so close to 'nationalism', contradict the theory?[17] In a dense and slightly confusing passage, he suggested three possible theory-saving options:
  (i) accept that the modernizing forces generating nationalism have been operating in Europe at least since the Reformation, or
  (ii) refuse to classify these phenomena with modern nationalism (leaving open the possibility of a non-modern nationalism?), or
  (iii) accept that a pre-modern shared culture, including membership of a dynastic state whose boundaries roughly overlapped with a language, might be one factor, amongst others, in inclining people in the direction of particular bedfellows for the construction of a modern nation.

Gellner wanted to protect his theory from the charge that it is tautological and/or unfalsifiable, and to separate the modern phenomena of nationalism – 'citizenship through education, group *differentiae* in terms of the language of instruction, and unmediated membership of mass co-cultural societies' – from other superficially related pre-modern phenomena, 'even if a few of those others also make a banner of language-and-culture'.[18] The latter are the religious and linguistic imperialisms of some ethnically based pre-modern dynasties.

[15] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 171.
[16] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 168.
[17] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 173.
[18] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 173.

(2) Gellner insisted that 'it is impossible to predict with confidence, prior to the crystallisation of this or that nationalism, just which "nations" will emerge'.[19] Cultural differences are widespread and real, and injustices, exploitation, humiliation are equally so, but it isn't easy to tell just which identifications and oppositions will emerge to produce specific nationalisms. This predictive weakness may make his theory look suspiciously untestable, but we are left with the impression that it can be tested in other ways, and that it has the merit of rejecting two alternative theses:
   (i) that all pre-modern cultures will inevitably generate nations, and
   (ii) that some pre-modern cultures are far more likely than others to form the raw materials of modern nations.[20]

(3) He recognised that nationalism is not an all-powerful or all-pervasive political force. There are exceptional zones that have resisted the norm of 'one culture, one polity': Switzerland, Belgium and Canada. The last two cases did not concern him because the weaknesses of Belgian and Canadian nationalism confirm the assumption that bilingual or multilingual states will be less nationally stable than those that are monolingual. Switzerland is more embarrassing: Gellner described it as 'a traditional society which has weathered modernization' so it can tolerate linguistic pluralism. Also, there 'is a sense in which various kinds of Swiss "speak the same language" even if they do not do so in a literal sense'[21] – a curious argument. Gellner additionally recognised that just as nationalisms can be obstructed or modified 'by special circumstances', so they can also be facilitated by power-politics which may manipulate nationalist ideas, or by the dissemination of political norms which are infused with nationalist assumptions. He cited what was for him an homely example, the formation of the Czech national state which resulted from a coalition between Czech intellectuals and Western foreign policy.

Gellner closed his first discussion of nationalism by briefly evaluating it. He wasted no time condemning nationalist chauvinism in the standard manner of liberal cosmopolitans. Instead he considered that the 'main boon which nationalism has conferred on mankind … may well be political'. The benefits are not merely psychological – the dignity and self-respect arising from the elimination of 'second- or nth class citizenship' and the joys liberated peoples enjoy from not being 'bossed and knocked about by others with whom they cannot or are not allowed to identify', and being bossed and knocked about by 'their own' people instead.[22] The major political benefit is that nationalism has

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[19] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 174.

[20] Gellner could not consistently claim to reject this thesis and accept, as he appeared to do above (see 1 (iii)), that some pre-modern cultures were a contributory factor in making up the materials of modern nations.

[21] Gellner, *Thought and Change*. Highly educated French, Swiss-Deutsch and Italian speakers frequently speak to each other in English as a neutral second language.

[22] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, p. 177.

preserved pluralism in the world, and thereby preserved political liberalism. This conclusion is reached by considering the most feasible counterfactual alternatives to a world of nation-states: a world-government, or a world in which the major empires of the late nineteenth century had been preserved. In both these counterfactual worlds liberalism would have been obliterated. A world government passing through the second, global phase of industrialization would have resembled South Africa under apartheid, a coercively organized hierarchy of races and ethnic communities; while a world of industrializing empires would have been wracked by ferocious battles over citizenship fought between the metropolitan cores and the more numerous and poorer peoples of the territories they had conquered. The ironic message is that nationalism, unintentionally, preserved the miracle of Western liberalism precisely because it inhibited global despotism, and because it helped destroy the world of the European empires. For this reason, if no others, liberals should take comfort from the benign repercussions of nationalism.

'NATIONS AND NATIONALISM'

The theory articulated in *Thought and Change* went largely unnoticed in the writings of political scientists, political sociologists and political philosophers – perhaps because it was buried within a wider discussion of philosophy and social change, and perhaps because it was patronizingly classed as a provincial 'English' variation on the themes of the modernization school ascendant in American social science.[23] *Thought and Change* was known, if at all, for sharply stating the conventional wisdom of the emergent affluent society of the late 1950s and the early 1960s: a modern state has one key principle of political legitimacy, the Gross National Product must increase. The other key principle, that the state must be a nation-state, was less remarked upon. In complete contrast Gellner's book-length statement, wittily expounded nearly two decades later in *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), was very well received amongst political scientists and political sociologists who study nationalism, and rightly

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[23] Perhaps that explains why, when Gellner re-expressed the argument in *Nations and Nationalism* nearly two decades later, there were complaints that he had ignored the writings of North American scholars – see, for example, Boyd Shafer's 'Review of Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*', *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism*, 11 (1984), 141–2. Many surveyors of writings on nationalism, and many students, appear to see little difference between Gellner's arguments and those of Karl Deutsch's *Nationalism and Social Communications*, 2nd edn (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1966). Yet there is this major difference: whereas Deutsch conveys the notion that the idea of nationalism is transmitted by newspapers, books, radios (and now television) to previously non-nationalist peoples, Gellner insists that it is the media themselves, 'the pervasiveness and importance of abstract, centralised, standardised, one-to-many communication, which automatically engenders the core idea of nationalism, quite irrespective of what…is being put into the specific messages transmitted … That core message is that the language and style of the transmissions is important, that only he who can understand them, or can acquire such comprehension, is included in a moral and political community, and that he who does not and cannot, is excluded' (*Nations and Nationalism*, p. 127).

so.[24] *Nations and Nationalism* is at once more sociologically ambitious than *Thought and Change*, bearing the imprint of Gellner's dialogues with Durkheim and Marx; more conceptually novel, displaying the value-added of his theory; and more empirically promising, as it sets out a typology of nationalism-inducing and nationalism-thwarting situations.

There are fundamental continuities between *Thought and Change* and *Nations and Nationalism*. First, Gellner continued to reject four erroneous theories of nationalism: (i) the nationalist theory that it is natural, self-evident and self-generating; (ii) Kedourie's theory that it is a contingent consequence of 'ideas which did not need ever to be formulated, and appeared by a regrettable accident', and is inessential to the life of industrial societies;[25] (iii) Marxism's 'Wrong Address Theory': the liberationist message intended for classes was 'by some terrible postal error' delivered instead to nations; and (iv) 'Dark Gods Theory'.[26] The thesis is maintained that nationalism is an essential component of modernization, of the transition from agrarian to industrial society – the latter requiring a state that can produce and be maintained by one common, literate and accessible culture. The vocabulary in which this idea is expressed has, however, become part of a wider philosophy of history. Nationalism is now defined as:

the general imposition of a *high culture* on society, where previously *low cultures* had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases the totality, of the population. It means the general diffusion of a school-mediated, academy-supervised idiom, codified for the requirements of a reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication. It is the establishment of an anonymous impersonal society, with mutually substitutable atomised individuals, held together above all by a shared culture of this kind, in place of the previous complex structure

[24] See for example Brian Barry, 'Review of Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*', *Ethics* (October 1984), 182; James Kellas, 'Review of Nations and Nationalism', *International Affairs* (January 1984), 134; and Anthony Smith, 'Book Review: Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism', *Millennium* (1983), 280–82. For newspaper reviews, see Bernard Crick, 'The gad-fly and the eagle', *New Statesman*, 16 September 1983, p. 22; John Dunn, 'For the good of the country', *Times Higher Educational Supplement* (1984); and Alan Ryan, ' More country matters', *Sunday Times*, 4 March 1984, p. 42c.

[25] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 129. One implication of Kedourie's arguments was that nationalism could be cleansed from the planet by the education students used to undergo when they took his courses on the History of Political Thought at the LSE. (Pierre Trudeau, one of Kedourie's students, acted on Kedourie's premises, refusing to make significant concessions to Quebec nationalism, and thereby helped destabilize the Canadian federation.) Another implication was that Kant was the source of all evil. Gellner contested both Kedourie's history of ideas, as well as his idealist insistence on the power of (bad) ideas. He defended Kant, maintaining that there is no relationship, other than a verbal one, between 'individual' self-determination and 'national' self-determination, and that Kant was 'a very model for that allegedly bloodless, cosmopolitan, emaciated ethic of the Enlightenment' which romantic nationalists detested. All that nationalists and Kant have in common is that neither are, in Kedourie's sense, respecters of tradition (Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 133).

[26] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 129–30.

of local groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves.[27]

The preconditions (and maintenance) of nationalism include widespread or universal literacy, and a society committed to economic growth through its formal commitment to social mobility – both horizontal and vertical. Industrial society requires effective and widespread context-free communication through a common medium, a 'high culture'. Communicative media are placed centre-stage in generating and maintaining nationalism, but the argument stresses the functionality of a shared culture for the effective operation of modern work-organizations and bureaucracies.[28]

Nationalism is still seen as distinctive to modernity, but it is now part of a philosophy of history that distinguishes three phases in human progress, the pre-agrarian, the agrarian, and the industrial. In a considerably re-worked and non-teleological form of historical materialism,[29] Gellner maintained that each of the three key phases is associated with characteristic modes of production, coercion, culture and cognition. Nationalism is distinctive to industrial society, and intimately connected to its mode of production. It would have made no sense in tribal societies because such societies were and are stateless, and the ambition to unify the national culture and the state would therefore have been incoherent. In the 'agro-literate' polity or the agrarian empire, nationalism also would have made no sense, because such empires did not need their elites and peasant masses to share a common culture. In the industrial society, by contrast, nationalism is an essential part of the cultural atmosphere – its 'exo-socialization', i.e. educating persons in a culture that mostly frees them from familial and corporate ties, is a *sine qua non* of social cohesion.

To these suppositions Gellner added a modified Durkheimian account of normative orientations through the ages. Whereas tribal societies worship themselves indirectly (as spirits), agrarian societies worship their rulers directly or indirectly (in monotheistic religions), while in industrial societies the participants directly worship themselves (nationalism). Nationalism is the functional equivalent for industrial societies of the world-religions of agro-literate polities, and of the animistic cults of pre-agrarian bands, nomads and tribes.

[27] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* p. 57 (the italics are mine).

[28] Unlike Benedict Anderson who insists on the pivotal importance of 'print capitalism' in the genesis of nationalism (*Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), Gellner stressed the importance of print *per se*. Given that the large-scale production of bibles, so important in the development of European vernacular languages at the expense of Latin, was a state (or state-church) sponsored project, why should we regard capitalism, rather than the mass-production of texts, as the salient cause in the creation of national languages?

[29] This philosophy was stated at length in Ernest Gellner, *Plough, Sword and Book: The Structure of Human History* (London: Collins-Harvill, 1988), published co-terminously with the end of Gellner's long engagement with Soviet Marxist scholarship, *State and Society in Soviet Thought* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

	P	− P	
	− E	− E	
Type 1	A	B	Typical pre-nationalist situation
Type 2	A	A	Untypical pre-nationalist situation
	E	− E	
Type 3	A	A	Early industrialism without ethnic catalyst
Type 4	A	B	*Ethnic nationalism**
	E	E	
Type 5	A	A	*Mature homogeneous industrialism (established nationalism)*
Type 6	A	B	*Classical liberal Western Nationalism*
	− E	E	
Type 7	A	B	*Diaspora or 'middle-man' nationalism*
Type 8	A	A	Decembrist revolutionary, but not nationalist, situation

Fig. 1. Gellner's typology of nationalism-inducing and nationalism-thwarting situations
Source: Adapted from Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 94.
*Nationalism-generating situations in italics.

Gellner also provided a typology of 'nationalism-inducing and nationalism-thwarting situations' which considerably amplifies the crude 'model' sketched in *Thought and Change*.[30] There are three dimensions to the typology. Gellner differentiated: (i) power-holders from the rest (P and − P); (ii) those who have had access to a modern education or a viable modern high culture from those who have not (E and − E); and a polity in which the power-holders and the rest, and the educated or uneducated, share a homogeneous culture (A and A), from one in which they do not (A and B). These three dimensions generate the eight possibilities in Figure 1: a line containing A and A represents a culturally homogeneous territory, whereas a line containing A and B represents a bi-cultural territory.

The typology suggests four situations in which nationalism will be engendered, and four in which it will be thwarted. Consider the latter. In Types 1 and 2, where no one, power-holder or non-power-holder, has access to modern education, nationalism cannot exist, *ex hypothesi*. The typical agro-literate polity, Type 1, is not culturally homogeneous, although a few such specimens might exist, Type 2.[31] In the third scenario, Type 8, the old ruling class of the

[30] Gellner, *Thought and Change*, pp. 164–71.
[31] Pre-modern examples might include Iceland, Korea and Japan.

agro-literate polity retains power, and is challenged by a politically weak, but educationally and economically privileged intelligentsia – a 'Decembrist' revolutionary situation, Type 8. No *nationalist* problems and conflicts arise here, says Gellner.[32] In the last case, Type 3, early industrialism within a culturally homogeneous society, the power-holders are differentiated from the non-power holders by the former's monopoly of modern high culture. This situation gives rise to class conflict, which may be moderately ferocious, but without the catalyst of ethnic differentiation is unlikely to be especially politically destabilizing – contrary to the assumptions of classical Marxism.

The typology implies, by contrast, four nationalism-engendering situations:

—*Satisfied nationalism*, Type 5, characteristic of mature homogeneous industrialism in which the power-holders and non-power-holders share access to the same style of modern education, and are co-cultural co-nationals – in which case we can expect no [internal] nationalist conflicts and problems;[33]
—*Classical liberal nationalism*, Type 6, characteristic of territories in which some have power and others do not, and this difference correlates with cultural differences, even though the relevant persons are both educationally equipped for modern society – a situation which historically corresponds to the 'unification nationalisms' of nineteenth-century Italy and Germany;[34]
—*Ethnic nationalism*, Type 4, characteristic of territories in which power-holders have privileged access to the central high culture, which is their own, while the powerless are also the educationally deprived, sunk in low cultures. The small intelligentsias of the powerless spearhead efforts to make their low culture into a high culture – a situation which historically corresponds to the nationalisms of Eastern, Slavic and Balkan Europe;[35] and
—*Diaspora nationalism*, Type 7, better described as 'middle-man' nationalism, arises in societies in transit from agraria to industria, and is characteristic of groups which previously had access to commercial and educational high

[32] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 95. This argument is odd. It excludes a not untypical form of nationalism, a reformist modernizing nationalism 'from above' – imposed by a Jacobin intelligentsia on a less than modern peasantry.

[33] Gellner strangely treats this case as a 'non-nationalist one' though it is plainly what historians would call 'a satisfied nationalism', *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 97. This suggests that his typology is directed towards explaining nationalist conflicts, rather than forms of nationalism.

[34] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 98.

[35] The contrast between ethnic nationalism and Western liberal nationalism is Gellner's re-working of Plamenatz's contrast between Eastern and Western (European) nationalisms, that in turn is similar to Hans Kohn's contrast between civic and ethnic nationalisms (John Plamenatz, 'Two Types of Nationalism', in Eugene Kamenka, ed., *Nationalism: The Nature and Evolution of an Idea* (London: Edward Arnold, 1973); Hans Kohn, *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History* (Princeton, NJ: Van Nostrand, 1955)). Gellner argues that the key advantage of his approach is that the contrast between 'Western' and 'Eastern' nationalism emerges logically from the three dimensions of his typology, *Nations and Nationalism*, p.101.

culture, often through their caste-roles as pariah 'middle-men' in the agrarian economy. These groups are economically better equipped for modernization than others who have historically lacked access to a high culture. They are also ethnically distinctive, but lack political and military power. They are likely candidates for genocidal assaults or mass expulsions as economic competition grows within a modernizing and nationalizing polity – and in consequence, are likely to generate 'diaspora nationalisms'. Gellner has in mind the Jews, Greeks, Armenians, overseas Indians in Africa, overseas Chinese in south-east Asia, and the Ibos of Nigeria.[36]

This typology rests on a theory of social conflict, explicitly directed against Marxist propositions. Conflict is predicted to occur 'where "ethnic" (cultural or other diacritical marks) are visible and accentuate the differences in educational access and power', and 'above all, when they inhibit the free flow of personnel across the loose lines of social stratification'.[37] In short: blockages in social mobility, when tied to ethnic or other diacritical markers, are at the heart of nationalist conflicts; exclusionary control of cultural capital, or usurpationary attempts to capture it, rather than exclusionary control of propertied capital or usurpationary attempts to expropriate it, give rise to vigorous social wars, nationalist conflicts.

This theory of conflict is tied, in deliberately provocative language, to a theory of 'social entropy' and equality in industrial society.[38] An ideal-typical industrial society should have a systematic randomness, and thus be 'entropic': social origins should not matter in determining placement in the occupational and prestige hierarchies, and in this sense industrial society should be egalitarian. 'Entropy-resistant traits' constitute a very serious problem. They 'have a marked tendency *not* to become, even with the passage of time … evenly dispersed throughout the entire society'.[39] Such traits can be invented to apply to a particular class of persons, but 'the entropy-resistance of a concept, in this sense, will normally be of interest *only if it is a reasonably natural notion*, one already in use in the society in question, rather than artificially invented for the present purpose'.[40] He then discusses a range of entropy-resistant traits, physical or genetically transmitted, and religious-cultural habits which are often just as resistant to the industrial 'melting pot'.

This illuminating discussion sits uneasily with the arguments in *Thought and Change* which had suggested the almost plasticine materials with which modern nation-builders could 'invent' their nations and nation-states. Nevertheless, Gellner restated his conviction that we cannot predict which cultures will be blessed with success in their efforts to become nationalist cultures with political

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[36] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 101–9.

[37] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 96

[38] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 63–87.

[39] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 64

[40] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 65 (the emphasis is mine).

roofs.[41] He went further, and suggested that the 'weakness of nationalism' is much greater than it might appear at first glance.[42] The number of languages in the world may be some 8,000, and the number of other cultural or historical materials which might be used to mark potential national cultures is even higher. Yet there are at present about 200 states in existence – many of which are postage-stamp states that cannot be counted as aspirant nation-states. The potential number of nation-states may be higher given the existence of numerous unsatisfied nationalisms which may succeed, one day. Yet the ratio of effective to potential nationalisms is a small one – much less than nationalists might imagine. The implication is that a blind, unpredictable and evolutionary process selects which nationalisms shall succeed, and which shall not. There is an apparent paradox here. Nationalism is a very strong force in the modern world, in most cases it prevails, and it does set the standard for what constitutes a modern state. However, very few potential nations are strong enough to make it to modernity and statehood.

Gellner's theory has been subject to diffuse criticisms. The remainder of this article addresses how robust the theory remains in the light of these criticisms, and how the theory can be reformulated.

THE PHILOSOPHICAL FUNCTIONALISM OF THE ARGUMENT

Both in *Thought and Change* and *Nations and Nationalism*, Gellner's argument seemed to be unashamedly functionalist. Functionalism is characteristic of historical materialism,[43] and it is ironic that it was Perry Anderson, grandfather of the Marxist New Left, who complained that the 'most arresting feature of [Gellner's] theory of nationalism is its single-minded economic function-alism.'[44] He cites in support a passage from the conclusion to *Nations and Nationalism*:

So the economy needs both the new type of central culture and the central state; the culture needs the state; and the state probably needs the homogeneous cultural branding of its flock … In brief, the mutual relationship of a modern culture and state is something quite new, and springs, inevitably, from the requirements of a modern economy.[45]

There is no denying the functionalist cast of these arguments. If one is sceptical about functionalist arguments in the social sciences, the important question is whether Gellner's case can be reconstructed in a non-functionalist

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[41] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 47.

[42] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 43–50.

[43] See Brendan O'Leary, *The Asiatic Mode of Production: Oriental Despotism, Historical Materialism and Indian History* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989), chaps. 4–5.

[44] Perry Anderson, 'Science, Politics, Enchantment', in John Hall and Ian Jarvie, eds, *Transition to Modernity: Essays on Power, Wealth and Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 207.

[45] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 140.

manner. It is clear that for him nationalism is explained by its beneficial consequences (functionality) for modern society.[46] A strongly functionalist version of his argument would go as follows:[47]

(1) Nationalism is an *effect* of modernization.
(2) Nationalism is *beneficial* for modernizing states – because a highly specialized division of labour requires a unified high culture, which is underpinned by a highly developed and specialized educational system.
(3) Nationalism (in Gellner's sense) is *unintended* by the actors producing modernization.
(4) The causal relationship between nationalism and modernization is not recognized by the agents operating in modernizing societies.
(5) Nationalism functionally maintains modernization by a feedback loop operating through the actions of modernizing states.

Formulated in this way Gellner's argument displays the vices of functionalist reasoning – in which events and processes occur wholly beyond the understanding of human agents, in which consequences precede causes, and in which suspicions arise that supra-individual and holistic entities are tacitly invoked to do explanatory work.

One obvious way to reconstruct Gellner's argument is to deny (4), and replace a functionalist with a 'filter explanation'.[48] It would take the following form: modernizing elites believe that nationalism is essential for modernization, precisely because it breaks down barriers to modernizing success. Nation-building nationalists *recognize* the beneficial consequences of nationalism, and this fact helps explain its political diffusion. Nationalists believe that nation-building will break down traditionalist or religious inhibitions on economic growth, and political blockages – such as imperialist domination or caste-like barriers that prevent the liberation of productive economic, political and cultural energies.[49] It is not at all difficult to find wide-ranging support for this filter explanation. Prospective nation-builders, like Paidraig Pearse and Jawaharlal Nehru, embraced nationalism because they believed it would liberate the Irish and Indian nations, and free them to develop their educational, economic and political systems, and the Japanese reformers of the Meiji restoration deliberately imitated features of German and French nation-building in their efforts to build a modern Japan. The idea that nationalism could lead to a renewal – or revival – of social energies was implicit in the advice rendered by Rousseau

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[46] I use the expressions 'modern society', 'modernity' and 'modernization' throughout, in anticipation of the difficulties attached to Gellner's arguments about the relationships between nationalism and industrialization.

[47] See Jon Elster's formalization of functionalist argumentation, *Ulysses and the Sirens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), pp. 28–35, and *Explaining Technical Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 57.

[48] Elster, *Ulysses and the Sirens*, p. 30.

[49] The same logic explains why nationalists were often liberal feminists, promoting the education of boys and girls, and men and women, outside the home in national educational systems.

in *The Government of Poland*, which commended a citizen's army and a comprehensive state-controlled education system.[50]

Although this 'filter explanation' would avoid strong functionalism, it remains vulnerable on two grounds. First, the 'real' filter in explaining the actions of the first nation-builders and nationalists may have been the perception that nationalism was essential for military success or geo-political security, rather than economic success. Therefore, the historical relationship between nationalism, modernization and industrialization may have been more indirect than the Gellnerian model suggests.[51] Secondly, the universal truth of the 'filter explanation' may be doubted, i.e. nationalism may not be essential for modernizing success. The state-socialist regimes did not primarily rely – except tacitly (remember Stalin's 'socialism in one country') – on nationalism for 'first-stage industrialization'. Moreover, there have been some highly successful industrial city-states, such as Hong Kong, which have not required nationalism to travel to their version of modernity.

These qualifications, do not, however, imperil the general thesis that nationalism is beneficial, and even possibly optimal, for modernization, providing we accept the qualification that this relationship is widely recognized by nationalists themselves. It is also tempting to draw a distinction between explaining the genesis of nationalism and explaining its diffusion. The *genesis* of nationalism may have been at least partially autonomous of modernization and industrialization, and its functionally beneficially consequences may only have been partially related to modern economic development. The *diffusion* of nationalism, its attractiveness to those who followed the first modern nations, may be more centrally linked to their belief in a Gellnerian-style filter explanation. Rather than being foolish victims of contagious bad ideas, as Kedourie implied, nationalists believed that nationalism would assist modernization in the way that it had the British, the Americans, the French, and the Germans. In short, it is possible to argue for the core Gellnerian thesis, of a functional relationship between nationalism and modernity, without expressing it in a strongly functionalist form.

THE PLACE OF NATIONALISM IN A PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Delineating stages in history are partly matters of taste. Some completely reject the idea of a philosophy of history; not everybody likes three-stage models of human progress; and some prefer explicitly evolutionary to non-teleological and episodic conceptions of the transitions between stages in human history. Even

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[50] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Government of Poland*, translated by Wilmoore Kendall, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), chap. xii, and chap. iv.

[51] This is the principal burden of Michael Mann's 'The Emergence of Modern European Nationalism', in *Transition to Modernity: Essays on Power, Wealth and Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 137–63.

within Gellner's philosophy of history there are, however, two potentially difficult questions:

—Could there have been nations before nationalism, and, if so, can Gellner's theory cope with such anomalies?
—Can there be post-industrial national conflicts, and if so, how do they fit in with Gellner's general theory?

Nations Before Nationalism?

Gellner's is a strongly 'modernist' theory. His readers are informed that nationalism only became an historical possibility from approximately the eighteenth century – indeed he casts the philosophers of the Enlightenment in the role of the first alienated intelligentsia, 'the westernisers of the west'. Readers are firmly told that nationalism invents nations, rather than the other way around. Yet a considerable number of specialists on nationalism, implicitly or explicitly, reject the stark modernism of Gellner. Thus historians write of the 'old continuous European nations', and compare them with the 'new nations' of Eastern Europe and elsewhere in the world.[52] Historical sociologists write in a similar vein. John Armstrong's *Nations before Nationalism* and Anthony Smith's *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* are sustained criticisms of the modernist interpretation of nations and nationalism.[53] Smith, for example, argues that ethnic culture and social organization were persistent, intensive, widespread and salient in much of antiquity and the medieval era. Moreover, particular kingdoms were often based on ethnic communities, and he argues that nationalism represents 'the transformation and universalisation of a pre-existing political and social norm'.[54] Similarly Liah Greenfeld's recent study, *Nationalism*, treats sixteenth-century England as the first nation and the site of the first nationalism, and her research on England, France, Russia, Germany and America extends back to the Renaissance.[55]

Can one defend Gellner's theory against these arguments? He anticipated one possible line of defence in *Thought and Change*: the forces of modernization have been at work since the Reformation, or before. This reply is not, however, convincing; it seems to operate against the placement of nationalism within Gellner's triadic stages of history, and to suggest that Protestantism and vernacular print languages were more important than industrialism in spawning nationalism. Yet it seems empirically sensible to concede that 'national

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[52] See *inter alia* Hugh Seton Watson's *Nations and States: An Inquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 15–88, which treats the British, Irish, French, Iberian, Dutch, Scandinavian, Swiss and Russian nations as 'old and continuous'.

[53] John Armstrong, *Nations before Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

[54] Anthony Smith, 'Book Review: Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism', pp. 280–2.

[55] Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992).

consciousness' developed in some territories before full-scale industrialization: consider just the colonies of Latin America, North America and Ireland. Moreover, it seems sensible to concede that proto-nationalist ideas existed, at least in embryonic forms, in commercial societies like early modern England and Holland.[56] This leaves Gellner with his other, and theoretically more consistent, line of defence. He must refuse to classify the phenomena of pre-eighteenth century ethnic or national consciousness with modern nationalism. There are good grounds for doing so.

Many of the authors who survey the rise of 'nations' before nationalism are conceptually confused;[57] and, secondly, many of them concede that nationalism 'both as an ideology and movement, is a wholly modern phenomenon.'[58] Gellner's theory cannot be embarrassed by the existence of the word 'nation' in pre-eighteenth century England, or indeed by the presence of national consciousness, especially of a religiously mediated kind, but it would be by explicitly nationalist doctrines, programmes, and movements flourishing in the time of Henry VII. Most of those who discuss 'nations' before 'nationalism' are in fact establishing the existence of cultural precedents, and ethnic and other materials subsequently shaped and re-shaped by nation-builders. It is a conceptual confusion, or so at least a Gellnerian must insist, to assimilate the materials upon which nationalists will draw, to nationalism itself. Consciousness of a shared cultural, religious or territorial identity is not of the essence of nationalism. The work of Armstrong, Greenfeld and Smith may be used to

[56] The 'vast disagreement among eminent authorities' on the modernity of nationalism 'has been made possible by the near absence of conclusive evidence. Nationalism is a mass phenomenon. The fact that members of the ruling elite or intelligentsia manifest national sentiment is not sufficient to establish that national consciousness has permeated the value-system of the masses. And the masses, until recent times totally or semi-illiterate, furnished few hints concerning their view of group-self' (Walker Connor, 'When Is a Nation ?', in his *Ethnonationalism: The Quest For Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 212).

[57] The conceptual confusions can be illustrated by considering Greenfeld's opening gambit: 'The word "nationalism" is used here as an umbrella term under which are subsumed the related phenomena of national identity (or nationality) and consciousness, and collectivities based on them – nations; occasionally, it is employed to refer to the articulate ideology on which national identity and consciousness rest, though not – unless specified – to the politically activist, xenophobic variety of national patriotism, which it frequently designates' (Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, p. 1.) This strategy elides the admittedly much-tangled concepts of nation, national identity, national consciousness, patriotism, nationality and nationalism. No wonder that 'nationalism' can be found in the 1500s if the term has such empirical range, though lay usage admittedly has this wide range. Connor has been a stern critic of 'terminological chaos' in this field (see 'A Nation is a Nation, is a State, is an Ethnic Group, is a …' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 1 (1978), 377–400, reprinted in Connor, *Ethnonationalism* pp. 90–113). Yet his astringent criticisms of others is somewhat reduced by adding the term 'ethno-nationalism' to the chaos.

[58] See Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, p. 18. Smith recognizes that nationalism has etymological range which Greenfeld suggests, but narrows his definition to 'an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential "nation"' (Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), pp. 72 ff.)

qualify Gellner's in one respect: it furnishes evidence that the first nations were *innovations* rather than *inventions*, and that predicting or 'retrodicting' which nations would emerge within the age of nationalism may be less difficult than Gellner declares.

Most of those who have written of nations before the age of nationalism, whether they be historians like Seton-Watson, or historical sociologists, like Armstrong, Greenfeld and Smith, concede the modernity of nationalist doctrine and political programmes. They recognize that the writers of the Enlightenment and their romantic critics, and the phenomena of the American and French revolutions, produced an explicitly novel set of doctrines, nationalism proper. The Gellnerian theory can thus be saved: there may have been talk about nations, and indeed national consciousness, before nationalism, but, so to speak, *there was no nationalist talk of nations and national consciousness before nationalism.* One is still left with the problem that the historical evidence does not suggest a neat relationship between industrialization and the onset of nationalism.

Nationalism after Industrialization?

Another possible difficulty would be evidence of revived or new nationalist secessionist movements emerging within a fully industrialized environment, after the 'great transformation' from agraria to industria has been completed. Do 'ethnic revivalism', 'ethno-nationalism', 'mini-nationalism' or 'neo-nationalism', as they have been variously labelled, both in advanced Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and among and within the post-Soviet successor states, constitute a problem for Gellner's theory?

It is not transparent how exactly such evidence would refute the theory. The evidence would be consistent with some of the propositions in *Nations and Nationalism*, where Gellner differentiated between early nationalism and late nationalism – which occur in the conditions of early and mature industrialization respectively.[59] In early industrialism there is 'a terrible difference' between the life-chances of the well-off and the starving poor, whereas in late industrialism there is not such acute objective social discontent – and, in consequence, although a late nationalism may be motivated by blocked social mobility and inequality, it will, on materialist assumptions, presumably, be less virulent. In short, Gellner's theory would be most embarrassed by violently virulent nationalist secessionisms within advanced 'industrias', not by the existence of such movements themselves, which, after all, might be occasioned by 'counter-entropic' traits.

One possible reading of his *obiter dicta* on the 'future of nationalism'[60] is that Gellner assumed that the world is drifting towards advanced industrialised

[59] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 74–5.
[60] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 110–22.

homogeneous nation-states in which secessionisms are less likely. A moment's reflection, however, should make clear that an industrialized world characterized by differential demographic growth-rates across culturally differentiated communities, displaying counter-entropic traits of whatever kind, and large-scale migratory movements, in which migrants can retain their original high culture (if they have one), is not going to be free either of nationalist secessionist possibilities, or for that matter of 'integral nationalisms'. Consequently, even if Gellner can be convicted of the view that nationalist secessionist movements are less likely after industrialization his theory itself is not deductively linked to such a view.

Another line of defence would be that the scale of virulent nationalist secessionism, or nationalist irredentism, at least within the OECD, has not been very substantial. There are no significant secessionist or irredentist movements in Austria, Australia, Denmark, Iceland, Luxembourg, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland or the United States. There are significant 'autonomist' movements in some of these countries; and 'regionalist' or 'devolutionist' movements in Wales within the United Kingdom, in Catalonia in Spain, in Brittany and Corsica in France, and amongst both linguistic communities in Belgium. There are also significant, but so far peaceful secessionist movements in Canada, amongst the *Québecois*, and in Great Britain amongst the Scots – who seek independence 'within' the North American Free Trade Area (NAFTA) and the European Union respectively. There has also been a recent effervescence of what may become full-fledged secessionist or remain simply regionalist sentiment in Italy, notably in 'Lombardy'. Germany has been unified, but has officially abandoned its other possible irredentist ambitions. Within 'Western Europe' only Greece, the Republic of Ireland, and possibly Finland display ambitions to complete their nations, and in each case (apart from Greece), the support for 're-unification' is generally peaceful, sentimental and inactive – which is not to say that it is finished.[61] Significant cases of violent secessionism in Europe have existed in Northern Ireland and the Basque country, but even here the relevant movements have smaller support-bases than their peaceful and regionally inclined competitors. The two Cypriot communities are, however, undoubtedly capable of further war.

In short, there is not a great deal in the European Union, or the OECD, for a Gellnerian to be worried about.[62] Extensive armed violence and insurrection by aggrieved nationalist groups from within the OECD is rare: Basque

[61] The most feasible form in which widespread secessionism will occur across Europe will be departures from the European Union if it becomes a federation. Given that the EU has been deprived of its recent geo-political rationale, and has to rely purely upon materialist incentives for co-operation, it may become subject to the predictable strains that nationalism brings to federal systems.

[62] A proper answer to the question 'Has there been a nationalist revival in the liberal advanced industrialized OECD?' would require hard data on (a) support for nationalist parties, (b) the formation and impact of new nationalist parties, (c) evidence of re-learning of old languages and cultural traditions, (d) opinion-poll data on nationalist secessionist or unificationist sentiment, and (e) irredentist/ jingoistic political rhetoric amongst politicians and intelligentsias.

separatists in Spain; Irish republicans and loyalist paramilitaries in Northern Ireland; Israelis and Palestinians in and outside of Israel/Palestine. In many OECD regions the aggrieved ethnic communities would appear to be capable of being satisfied by public policy or constitutional changes which recognize their national cultural claims: the Québecois in Canada, the Scots and Welsh in the United Kingdom, the Walloons in Belgium, the Catalans in Spain. A similar argument may be advanced for the bulk of Basques in their homeland, and Irish nationalists in Northern Ireland: Basques may be satisfied with extensive autonomy, northern Irish nationalists by the functional equivalent of shared sovereignty.[63] Moreover, many of the actual or potential national and ethnic conflicts in advanced industrial countries, may be remediable by political institutions, such as consociations, federalisms and condominiums, a point on which Gellner certainly was weak.

Nationalist secessionism within the industrialized states of what were the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia is an accomplished fact; and there are further secessionist movements within the debris of these former communist systems: in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Dniester, Gagauzia, Chechen-Ingushetia, Kaliningrad, Crimea, Krajina, Kosovo and the Vojvodina. These phenomena are, however, not an overt problem for Gellner's theory – unlike some other theories.[64] These two communist systems failed to invent durable Soviet and Yugoslav nationalisms or 'high cultures', but they did industrialize through adapting – and in some cases creating – national cultures, and, incidentally, national political units, which then, in several cases, became the bases of secessionist movements when the communists lost their grip on power. Their loss of power was in turn connected to their failures in managing industrial performance. This said, not all of the conflicts which generated secession from these communist polities are explicable within Gellnerian theory, which, as currently formulated, cannot treat sensitively the importance of the state-system and political regime-types in explaining what encourages nationalist secessionisms.

A superfluous defence of Gellnerian theory is also available: most other social and political theories are put in a much worse state by evidence of secessionism in industrialized societies. Marxists, who thought the future age of statelessness was also to be an age of nationlessness (when we were all expected to be classless and cultureless or perhaps monocultured in a multicultured way), have

[63] See Brendan O'Leary and John McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism: Understanding Northern Ireland* (Atlantic Heights, NJ: Athlone, 1993), chap. 8; Brendan O'Leary, Tom Lyne, Jim Marshall and Bob Rowthorn, *Northern Ireland: Sharing Authority* (London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 1993); and John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland: Broken Images* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1995), esp. chap. 9.

[64] For example, James Mayall's otherwise excellent *Nationalism and International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), esp. p. 64, suggested that legal and political opinion within the state system, and the geo-political interests of the two super-powers, had placed an effective moratorium on the prospects of further secessions. Mayall's mistake was to suggest that 'there are no more empires to collapse'.

an affinity with liberal functionalists who anticipated that the outcome of modernization would be an instrumental and cosmopolitan world-federal order rather than a world of nation-states, that *ideocracy* would vanish beneath the benefits of affluence, and that the nation-state would be undermined from above, by international organizations, and from below, by political decentralization.[65]

HOW PREDICTIONLESS OR RETRODICTIONLESS IS THE THEORY?

Gellner denied that one can predict which nations will acquire political roofs, and, by implication, just which phenotypically or culturally counter-entropic traits, or other materials, will provide the markers for the nations built by nationalists. There are at least two difficulties here. First, the selection process that determines which of the thousands of potential nations eventually become members of the United Nations may not be as blind, or as unpredictable, as the theory suggests. Secondly, if 'invented' or 'designed' nations are less stable than the 'old' or 'continuous' nations such evidence would suggest that 'real' ethnic or other foundations are more vital to the success of nation-building than Gellner believed.

While many may be called to be nations only a few are chosen; however, Gellner's own theory, in principle, has greater 'retrodictive' potential than he implied. His suppositions point towards a key selection-mechanism: *ceteris paribus*, those possessed of a high culture, or on the verge of possessing one, on the eve of modernization, should be best endowed with nation-building potential. Those who have no 'high culture', or potential 'high culture', are bereft of an intelligentsia, and lack the requisite quota of poets, balladeers, bibliophiles, engineers and officers for successful nation-building. For this reason, Gellner's casual citation of the nationalist potential implicit in the existence of 8,000 languages should not be accepted at face-value. How many of these languages have the capacity for rapid transformation into a high culture, that is one with an extensive vocabulary, a formal grammar, an alphabet, a literary tradition, and a capacity for context-free communication? This question is open to empirical resolution, but I suspect that the number of feasible potential nations on the eve of modernity was less than a fundamentalist Gellnerian would imagine. A Gellnerian should also assume that viable candidates for nationhood must have a threshold population of around 250,000 (the population of Iceland which has successfully produced a national high culture) on the grounds suggested in *Thought and Change*, namely that economies of scale are required to sustain a 'non-parasitic' education system. If so, then the numbers of potential nationalist 'peoples' on the eve of modernity was, probably, much less than

[65] It was anticipated that we would all become monocultured, though our monoculture would be the rationalization of all cultures. In efficient states we would all eat Italian food, listen to Sony Walkmans, distribute welfare like the Swedes and make love like the French, and in inefficient states we would eat American food, listen to Swedish pop music, distribute welfare like the Italians, and make love like the English.

8,000. This question is capable of resolution through appropriate investigation of demographic and anthropological data.

Empirical appraisal of the selection-mechanism implicit in Gellner's theory need not, of course, be confined to the linguistic and demographic properties of potential nations. In *Nations and Nationalism* Gellner recognized that those communities which are tightly integrated into a literate world-religion are more likely to be candidates for successful nation-building or secessionist movements than those which are not. Following this logic, one should predict greater nation-building capacity in some pre-modern cultures than in others, and expect the number of feasible nations on the eve of modernity to be less numerous than he implies. This argument is one way of reconciling Gellner's general theory with the 'nations before nationalism' school.

If one was to extract from the mechanism of possession of a proto-high culture possible retrodictions or predictions about which cultures are most likely to generate modern nations, and test them against the historical evidence, one would, however, run into the issue of rival 'selection mechanisms'. The most obvious alternative selection mechanism affecting which cultures become nations is *exogenous* rather than *endogenous*. Power-politics may best explain which states have the borders that they do, and therefore which nations get to win their own nation-states or stakes in a multi-national state. Since the onset of modernity – whenever that was – the state-system and the great powers have been decisive arbiters of the prospects of nations' achieving statehood or autonomy. The four great waves of modern state-creation have accompanied the collapse or weakening of empires: the formation of the states of Latin America in the 1820s and after, the new European states recognized at Versailles, the new Asian, African, Caribbean and Pacific states established after 1945; and the successor states established on the ruins of the former Czarist and Soviet empires after 1989–91. Most politically realized nations owe their existence, or at least their territorial shape, to the calculations, decisions and indecisions of the extant great powers which watched another great power collapsing (or caused it to collapse). Even if the Gellnerian ingredients of blocked social mobility and strong diacritical markers are present to fertilize nationalism a potentially secessionist movement may be prevented from being successful by its exogenous environment.

'Nation-state' formation frequently takes place 'by permission', rather than as a by-product of the strength of indigenous mobilization for nationhood. Thus the French helped the birth of the American nation, the British empire hastened the collapse of the Spanish empire, the victorious Allies decided the fate and shape of 'nations' at Versailles, and the departing colonial powers shaped the frontiers of the new 'nations' (often multi-ethnic and multi-national states) which they left behind. Similarly, the principle of self-determination was widely ignored by the great powers after the First World War because they wanted to create economically and strategically (rather than nationally) viable states as checks and balances on Germany and the Soviet

Union.[66] The boundaries of Hungary, Poland, Romania and Yugoslavia in the inter-war years were established with scant respect for ethnic boundaries. Plebiscites were used to establish local preferences in some frontier zones, but not in geopolitically significant territories like the Sudetenland or the South Tyrol. Subsequently, from 1948 until 1989, the superpower system preserved borders which make no sense on any reasonable construal of national 'self-determination'. Furthermore, within collapsing empires proto-nations which enjoy strategic resources, demographic, military or economic, are likely to fare better than more marginal communities, which may face the threat of genocide, mass-population transfers or coercive assimilation. In short, power-politics, and power-resources, provide an alternative (or at least a supplementary and over-determining selection-mechanism) to that implicit in Gellner's theory.[67]

THE TYPOLOGY AND FORMS OF NATIONALISM

Gellner's typology is an admirable effort at theoretical parsimony. Three dimensions are used to generate four types of nationalism: Western liberal nationalism, ethnic nationalism, diaspora nationalism and mature homogeneous nationalism. There are, however, problems with it, even if we leave aside the simplicity of the dimensions. First, its explanatory capacities are implicitly limited to nationalist conflicts within states; it has little to say about nationalist conflicts between states (though armed disputes of this nature have formed only a small proportion of those which have erupted since 1989).

Secondly, it is not clear that classical liberal Western nationalism emerges from the conjunction of a clash between educated power-holders from one high culture facing educated non-power-holders from another high culture, whereas ethnic nationalism emerges from a clash between educated power-holders from one high culture facing uneducated non-power-holders from a low culture. Gellner cited as the classic exemplars of classical liberal Western nationalism the 'unification nationalisms' of Italy and Germany, and suggests that 'a few battles' and 'some diplomacy' were all that were required to sort out the right political roofs for the previously subordinated high cultures. By contrast, in Eastern Europe and the Balkans matters were much messier, because nationalism was mobilized behind 'a high culture as yet not properly crystallised' which made matters a great deal more ferociously 'ethnic' – population expulsions, liquidations, coercive assimilation and other horrors

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[66] Alfred Cobban, *The Nation State and National Self-Determination* (Glasgow: Collins/Fontana, 1969), pp. 56–84. 'The more we study the work of the Peace Conference, the less it seems to have been under the control of the principle of self-determination' (pp. 83–4).

[67] Gellner recognized that the major difference between Carr and himself was that the latter was interested in the impact of nationalism on the state-system, whereas he was interested in the societal transformation (from agraria to industria) which generates nationalism, 'Nationalism Reconsidered and E. H. Carr', *Review of International Studies*, 18 (1992), 285–93.

occurred. Gellner euphemistically recognised the 'markedly unbenign'[68] forms that German and Italian nationalisms took in the twentieth century, but did so in a parenthesis that almost suggests that it is a problem for John Plamenatz, who developed the contrast between Western and Eastern nationalisms, rather than for him! German and Italian nationalisms were markedly 'un-benign' in frontier-zones. Indeed the German variety notoriously excelled Balkan nationalism in its bloodthirstiness. This difficulty suggests that the important difference between ethnic (or what Gellner calls Habsburg) nationalism and classical liberal (or Western) nationalism is not the availability of a high culture functional for modernity in the latter case, but rather, amongst other things, the fact that in the Habsburg-type of nationalism there are multiple and roughly equal but intermixed and counter-entropic cultures (i.e. $B_1, B_2, \ldots B_n$), whereas in the classical liberal case the B group can feasibly homogenize all the possible other Bs in its nation-building ambitions. The complaint is that the typology is being used to generate 'types' which do not follow logically from it. The typology is only useful for considering 'homogeneous' and 'bi-cultural' situations; it cannot, by definition, be used to explain 'multicultural' situations.[69]

The typology is also one of cultural rather than of political nationalisms, which have been far more common in the literature on the subject,[70] and because they are bereft of rich political content – other than the crude distinction between power-holders and non-power-holders – it is difficult to assent to Gellner's illustrations of his 'types'. For example, exclusionary and integral nationalisms (which have strong ethnic content) have developed amongst peoples possessed of a high culture in combat with those who also have a high culture (consider only how various European nations treated their Jews); while inclusive and civic assimilationist nationalisms have developed amongst peoples who have not historically had a crystallized high culture but have been engaged in combat with those who have a high culture.

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[68] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 100.

[69] In any case there are difficulties with the alleged 'Western liberal nationalisms'. These are supposed to have been the civic-territorial forms, by contrast with the ethnic-communitarian types of the Habsburg lands. Britain, France and the United States are meant to be the exemplars of Western liberal nationalism. Yet the Catholics of the British Isles, the provincials and Jews of France, and the Red Indians and black slaves of the United States do not have histories which resonate with this 'type'. It seems best to say that civic nationalism is the name often given to a people who already have a state or territorial unit of government; whereas ethnic nationalism is the name often given to a people who do not have such an entity.

[70] Peter Alter usefully differentiates 'risorgimento nationalism', 'reform nationalism' and 'integral nationalism' (*Nationalism* (London: Arnold, 1985)); Wolfgang Mommsen distinguishes liberal, imperialist, fascist and contemporary nationalisms ('The Varieties of the Nation-State in Modern History: Liberal, Imperialist, Fascist and Contemporary Notions of Nation and Nationality' in Michael Mann, ed., *The Rise and Decline of the Nation-State* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); while John Hall distinguishes nationalisms 'from above', nationalisms based on 'desire and fear blessed by opportunity' (Latin America), risorgimento nationalism, and integral nationalism, 'Nationalisms: Classified and Explained', *Daedalus*, 122 (1993), No. 31, 1–28.

THE APOLITICAL CHARACTER OF GELLNER'S THEORY

Gellner's theory of nationalism rests on cultural and materialist premises. What it lacks is a sustained and developed sense of the political – with the notable exception of his perception of the precariousness of Western liberal pluralism and his retrospective thanks to nationalism for preserving it. The apoliticism charge can be substantiated in several ways. His typology does not provide a politically sensitive account of what may dampen nationalist secessionism; and, as we have seen, the theory relies on culturally or materially reductionist accounts of political motivation; Gellner neglected the role of power-politics in explaining which cultures become nations, and the possibility that nation-builders explicitly see the functional relationship between nationalism and modernity which he posited; although Gellner saw the connections between nationalism and egalitarianism in modern societies, he did not, strangely enough, see the mutually reinforcing relationships between nationalism, egalitarianism and democratization; and lastly, but relatedly, he displayed contempt for nationalist doctrines. These points are briefly elaborated below.

(i) Gellner did not provide a politically sensitive account of what might dampen nationalist secessionism. He assumed that the range of possibilities in modern times is bifurcated: a simple choice between nationalist homogenization through assimilation and nationalist secessionism which produces another nationalist homogenization: 'Nowadays people can live only in units defined by a shared culture, and internally mobile and fluid. Genuine cultural pluralism ceases to be viable under current conditions.'[71] This argument is not empirically tenable, unless it is rephrased as an equilibrium theory, in which homogeneous nationalism is the most stable outcome in modern times. In modern times political units have frequently adopted what John McGarry and I call strategies for eliminating national and ethnic differences, through four principal devices: genocide, mass-population transfers, territorial restructuring through partitions/secessions, and cultural engineering through integration or assimilation.[72] Their widespread usage confirms the intuitive sense of a nationalist homogenizing tendency. Yet one initial qualification must be made: political integration of diverse peoples often occurs without full-scale cultural assimilation, which suggests that Gellner too easily assumes that a political nationalism must be a (high) cultural nationalism. More importantly, modern political entities have developed strategies for managing national and ethnic differences that, *prima facie*, counteract nationalist homogenization. There are

[71] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 55. This statement sits oddly with a disclaimer: 'It is not claimed that, even in the modern world, nationalism is the only force operating, or an irresistible one' (p. 138).

[72] John McGarry and Brendan O'Leary, 'Introduction: The Macro-Political Regulation of Ethnic Conflict', in John McGarry, and Brendan O'Leary, eds, *The Politics of Ethnic Conflict Regulation: Case Studies of Protracted Ethnic Conflicts* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 1–47.

four means through which genuine cultural pluralism (if not democracy) may operate; systems of control; arbitration; federation/autonomy; and consociation.[73] Throughout modernity these means have existed at various times, and in many parts of the world, and new versions of them are continually springing into being. Thus Belgium has recently federalized, South Africa was least temporarily consociationalized, and the European Union is increasingly embattled with the ambitions of both federalists and secessionists.

These systems of cultural pluralism may, however, be less stable than homogeneous nation-states. Systems of control, like empires, communist dictatorships, and majoritarian or 'ethnic democracies', as some prefer to call regimes dominated by a *Staatvolk* have shattered in many places. An orthodox Gellnerian might, reasonably, classify them as 'hang-overs' from 'agraria', succumbing to modernizing pressures – the break-up of Ethiopia might be an exemplary illustration. External and internal arbitrations of ethnic conflicts are also infrequently successful.[74] Democratic bi-ethnic or multi-ethnic federations are few and in regular crises. Czechoslovakia broke up very quickly after democratization. Consociations frequently disintegrate, and when they are successful, they can lead to integration, as some believe has occurred through 'depillarization' in the Netherlands.

Yet the persistence of such entities is an empirical problem for Gellner's theory: Switzerland, in particular, is a real anomaly, and it is not alone. *Multi-ethnic* and *multi-national* states in which there is a common sense of political (not cultural) nationhood exist. The point is that his theory too readily assumes that the general case, that the political nation and the cultural nation must be one, is the universal and, in the long run, the irresistible tendency. While he admits that nationalism is 'occasionally defeated by some other force or interest, or by inertia',[75] Gellner left little room for the creative possibilities of political architecture. Constitutional engineers do not figure in his sociologically reductionist conception of modernity.

(ii) Although he denied it, Gellner relied on culturally or materially reductionist accounts of nationalists' political motivations. He defended himself against the thesis that he was economically reductionist, suggesting that it was a parody to claim that the nationalist foot-soldier fights for his tobacco-shop pension. Nevertheless, the impression was conveyed that job-hunting and job-deprived intelligentsias and proletarians provide the nationalist personnel. He recognized that a range of cultural humiliations and repressions might provoke nationalist protests and insurrections, but once experience of repression, as opposed to blocked social mobility, explains the

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[73] McGarry and O'Leary, 'Introduction'. Federation includes all types of genuine territorial autonomy. Mixed types are also possible: for example, a democratic condominium in a bi-cultural region could combine principles of arbitration, federation and consociation.

[74] See the sober case studies in William J. Durch, ed., *The Evolution of UN Peacekeeping: Case Studies and Comparative Analysis* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1993).

[75] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 138.

propensity to engage in nationalist movements then we have moved some distance from industrial society theory. A flexible and non-repressive regime, that has pluralist characteristics, may be able to thwart secessionist pressures precisely because it gives the culturally and educationally differentiated a share in political institutions. In short the political regime within which national minorities operate, rather than their material or cultural grievances, may best explain their predispositions to be secessionists, federalists, or consociationalists.

(iii) We have seen that Gellner underplayed the role of power-politics in explaining which cultures become nations, and the possibility that nation-builders explicitly see the functional relationship between nationalism and modernity. In this respect he was a strict historical materialist: nationalist politics is the superstructural by-product of cultural fissures that are in turn shaped by the uneven diffusion of industrialism. Yet numerous scholars suggest that the genesis of nationalism, and its maintenance, owed much to the functional relationship between nationalism and military success rather than economic performance. The education and cultural standardization of troops in the European *ancien régime* preceded that of the general citizenry, and there is more than wit in the thesis that a language differs from a dialect in that the former has an army and a navy. The state bureaucracies of the old European regimes were mechanisms for the genesis of 'official nationalism', partly through the Gellnerian mechanisms of the development of literacy, the decay of sacred religious languages and their replacement with vernacular high cultures produced by a new clerisy, the meritocratic bourgeoisie. These elites, however, deliberately used proto-nationalism for military purposes that operated autonomously from the logic of industrial society.

(iv) The connections between nationalism and egalitarianism in modern societies were persuasively observed by Gellner, but he did not spell out the mutually reinforcing relationships between nationalism, egalitarianism and democratization. The first political nationalisms in the United States and France were explicitly democratic in character,[76] and there are social structural arguments which explain why the wider distribution of power-resources of modernity has made democratic outcomes more likely than in agrarian societies.[77] Preoccupied with the miracle of Western liberalism, and the virtues of its civil society, Gellner assumed that democratization had been a lucky accident in some industrialized societies, rather than a systemic trait. Yet it is odd to take the view that nationalism is no accidental by-product of modernization, to claim that it is intrinsic to its more egalitarian conditions, but not to notice that exactly the same arguments can be made about democratization. Moreover, the relationships, politically and culturally, between national-

[76] 'The people' of course were narrowly defined to exclude women and slaves in the American case, and women in the French example.

[77] T. Vanhanen, *The Process of Democratization: A Comparative Study of 147 States* (New York: Crane Russack, 1990).

ism and democratization, at least at the doctrinal level, are very clear, or, at least, so one can maintain.

(v) It is central to Gellner's definition of nationalism that nations should be ruled by co-nationals. It is central to liberal nationalism that this should be the case with the express consent of the co-nationals. Nationalism, with qualifications, is therefore a defensible doctrine for modern liberals, and so there is no necessary reason why someone convinced of the merits of Gellner's account of the roots of nationalism must share his contempt for nationalist doctrine. Consistent liberal nationalists hold that all nations should be free, free to express themselves, culturally and politically, and that this freedom is constrained by other nations' rights to the same cultural and political freedom. Liberal nationalist doctrine, which emphasizes freedom, has at least the following corollaries:

—that all people are or should be members of nations;
—that membership of a nation is a beneficial good;
—that nations are the most important cultural and political collectivities;
—that all nations have the right to determine their form of self-government and, relatedly, that all nations have the right to self-determination; and, lastly,
—that the activities of states should, in general, be subordinated to nationalist principles.

Yet Gellner, like most post-war academic commentators on nationalism, refused to treat nationalism seriously as a political doctrine because he shared, understandably, the anti-nationalist animus of the European intelligentsia who matured during or after the Nazi holocaust (although he did so with greater hard-headedness). He happily conceded to cosmopolitans that nationalist authors are either self-evidently vacuous or incoherent. His theory of nationalism is consequently vulnerable to the charge that it ignores the autonomous significance of political doctrine in shaping social life. Yet the claim can be made, but not fully defended here, that nationalist political doctrine is not vacuous, and that all self-professedly practical political reasonings, liberal, socialist or conservative, are parasitic upon nationalist assumptions.

Gellner suggested that nationalism had received little attention from political philosophers because 'there was not enough in the way of good doctrines and texts, which is the kind of material they used to like, for them to get their teeth into'. Even if they had, nationalist thinkers could not really have made much difference: 'If one of them had fallen, others would have stepped into their place'. In any case 'their precise doctrines are hardly worth analysing' since nationalist ideology 'suffers from a pervasive false consciousness…we shall not learn too much about nationalism from the study of its own prophets'.[78] This

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[78] Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 124–5. Compare the verdict reached by Anderson, 'unlike other isms, nationalism has never produced its own grand thinkers: no Hobbeses, Tocquevilles, Marxes or Webers'. Therefore, he reasons, nationalism should not be compared with political doctrines, but rather with kinship and religion (Anderson), *Imagined Communities*,

style of argument was characteristically provocative.[79] Gellner told his readers that nationalist thought is not worth examining in much the same manner that the *philosophes* and Marxists held that religious doctrine was not worth examining, because it represented an inchoate mixture of myth, superstition, error and false consciousness. Indeed Gellner's criticism of Kedourie was just like Marx's criticism of the *philosophes*: do not waste your breath examining the bad ideas, simply seek to explain their material roots. Gellner presumed that nationalist ideas are bad, or low-brow, as Kedourie complained, but also that they are epiphenomenal. He had no wish to disturb the bad press which nationalists' writings have received. This bad press holds nationalism responsible for many disasters and catastrophes, wars, forced mass-population transfers, imperialisms, fascisms, and genocides.

One reason Gellner did not take nationalist doctrines seriously is that there have been few universalist theorists of nationalism, and those that have existed, such as Rousseau and John Stuart Mill, have usually been read, criticized and admired for their non-nationalist writings. Moreover, universalist themes in nationalist authors, such as Burke, Herder, Fichte and List, have been seen as motivated by the particularist concerns of their national cause.[80] The parochial audience to whom exponents of nationalism have addressed themselves has meant that their arguments are not treated with respect by cosmopolitan intellectuals addressing other cosmopolitan intellectuals. I shall simply claim here that liberal nationalist doctrine may be no less coherent than liberalism, conservatism or socialism.[81] Though nationalism often comes packaged with fairy-tales, its myths are no less plausible than those of social contracts, class struggles, wars between the sexes, immemorial traditions, intimations, or the natural harmony of interests.

(F'note continued)

pp. 14–15). It is strange not to classify Weber as a nationalist grand thinker, stranger still that Rousseau, Burke, J. S. Mill and Friedrich List are not seen as nationalist grand thinkers, and exceedingly odd, and I say this as an atheist, to imply that religion has never produced its grand thinkers.

[79] Gellner's contempt is more provocative than the cliché-ridden liberalism which opines that nationalism is the 'starkest political shame of the twentieth century, the deepest, most intractable and yet most unanticipated blot on the political history of the world since the year 1900' (John Dunn, *Western Political Theory in the Face of the Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 55).

[80] Burke can be read, like Rousseau, as an exponent of the thesis that nations have the right to resist rulers who do not meet the obligations expected of them by organically developed nations, and List consistently advocated a system of national economy for the United States and France, as well as his native Germany (Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx versus Friedrich List* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 96–114).

[81] See *inter alia* David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); and Michael Lind, 'In Defence of Liberal Nationalism', *Foreign Affairs*, 73 (1994), No, 3, 87–99. I am at present working on a book, provisionally entitled *National Self-Determination*, that will attempt to defend the liberalism and practical utility of this much-mocked notion.

It is fashionable to scoff at the doctrine of national self-determination.[82] Yet the idea is simple enough: a nation must be free to establish its preferred form of government, whether as a component of a multi-national state or federation, or as an independent state. Properly understood, national self-determination is a recursive principle of democratic consent: every nation should have the right to seek self-determination, including the right to secede to create its own state, providing the members of the nation consent to such self-determination, and providing they grant the same right to those who do not regard themselves as part of the nation concerned.[83] Multiple nations may grant one another free and equal self-determination – through federal arrangements, or even through agreed partitions and freely negotiated exchanges of populations. Indeed the liberal nationalist must agree with John Stuart Mill that where nationalities are inseparably intermingled the nations concerned must make a virtue of necessity by developing appropriately complex forms of political accommodation and respect, such as consociations or democratic condominia.[84]

Nationalism implies that loyalty to the nation should be the first virtue of a citizen. This idea has internal and external implications: loyalty to the national community should, in general, transcend loyalty to more particular identifications, personal, cultural, economic or political; and members of one's nation have, in general, higher moral claims than members of other nations. Nationalist thinking is compatible with the belief that nations may be duty-bound towards other nations; it is internationalism proper to observe (genuine) international law and to provide charitable assistance to other nations. Whatever may be said of the merits of such thinking, it is scarcely fair to say that it is incoherent. In brief, liberal nationalism does not deserve the contempt with which Gellner wished to be associated.

Nationalism additionally has prescriptive policy content, independently of particular political ideologies. It provides a doctrine of citizenship. Nationalists vary in their answer to the question of who is entitled to citizenship, depending on the stress they give to ethnic or civic conceptions of the nation, but at least they provide an answer; whereas liberals, socialists and conservatives accept the nationalist answer or debate its frontiers. The nationalist doctrine of citizenship is closely bound to the welfare state, in which, in principle, co-nationals are treated as a collectivity engaged in mutual insurance and assurance. Moreover, nationalism has other prescriptive implications – educating potential citizens in a national culture, in respect for nationally endorsed institutions and respect for other nations, in prescribing the moral universe of rights and obligations, in preserving and developing distinctive cultural idiosyncrasies, and in freeing the

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[82] For a conservative's perplexed glance at national self-determination, see Kedourie's *Nationalism*, pp. 62–91.

[83] See Harry Beran's 'A Liberal Theory of Secession', *Political Studies*, 32 (1984), 21–31, for a provisional attempt to grapple with these issues. Neither Beran nor his critics think his article is the final word on the subject.

[84] O'Leary and McGarry, *The Politics of Antagonism*.

educated from the prejudices, be they patriarchal or otherwise, of the home or the sect. Nationalism also limits the operation of free markets: nationalists rarely believe in the unrestrained movement of labour, though they may embrace the free movement of capital.[85] Nationalists are anti-Smithians who seek to inhibit particular consequences of homogenizing capitalism, or for that matter of homogenizing cosmopolitan socialism. They have some minimal communitarian values which place the worth of nations ahead of the wealth of nations. These are the core elements of political reasoning endorsed tacitly by millions of people on this planet. They may, of course, be mistaken, but they are not obviously mistaken.

Nationalism should not be equated with fascism or racism, as Gellner recognised, although it may become infected by the latter notions. Such a claim is only plausible when nationalism is defined as the ethnocentric glorification of the in-group, or the religious deification of the nation, or in Conor Cruise O'Brien's inflammatory words as 'the most effective engine for the mobilisation of hatred and destruction that the world has ever known'.[86] The 'argument' is that from the ideal of the nation-state it is but a short step to putting people into cattle-trucks to exterminate them. The implication is that nationalism cannot tolerate ethnic, racial or religious differences but must eliminate them.

Such arguments are refuted by the existence of multi-ethnic, multi-racial and multi-religious nations, and by the fact of peaceful international relations between liberal democratic nations. Yet because Gellner treated nationalism as the doctrine of 'one culture, one state', he left it open to the charge that it spells a simple choice between assimilation, on the one hand, and genocide and forced expulsion or emigration on the other hand. It is here that deficiencies were apparent in his grasp of the range of political forms open to modern political systems, and it is here that he seemed unfairly closed to the feasibility of liberal nationalism.

CONCLUSION

With qualifications, Gellner's arguments about the elective affinity between nationalism and modernity are plausible. Nationalism and nations have not been permanent features of human history. Nationalism may be used to legitimate elites and counter-elites; it is an ideology of mobilization especially favoured by the disaffected intelligentsia, although that does not mean that it is specially

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[85] Barry provides an astringent review of the arguments of cosmopolitan liberals who believe in the unrestrained movement of people and money, 'The Quest for Consistency: A Sceptical View', in Brian Barry and Robert E. Goodin, eds, *Free Movement: Ethical Issues in the Transnational Migration of People and of Money* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), pp. 279–88.

[86] Conor Cruise O'Brien, 'A Lost Chance to Save the Jews?' *New York Review of Books*, 30 (1989), No. 7, 27–8, 35). Gellner wrote an incisive criticism of O'Brien's views on nationalism and religion, 'The Sacred and the National', *LSE Quarterly*, 3 (1989), 357–69.

embraced by 'the lesser-examination passing classes' in Hobsbawm's inaccur-ate phrase.[87] Nationalist arguments may, of course, be manipulated for illiberal purposes, by anti-colonial movements, or established political elites, to obtain and exploit territorial, administrative and economic monopolies. Yet, as Gellner conceded, unless nationalist doctrine made some rough sense of the modern world it could not be tapped by manipulative elites: why else is nationalist manipulation more successful than other kinds?

The criticisms sketched here are not fatal to Gellner's theory, merely necessary qualifications or reformulations. His explicitly functionalist argu-mentation is contestable, as is the primacy he gives to industrialization in explaining the genesis and maintenance of nationalism. Other mechanisms have been conducive to its genesis and maintenance – including explicitly political mechanisms. His theory has greater retrodictive or predictive power than he held, and successful nation-building may depend much more on innovation rather than invention. Gellner's typology is also deficient in its range, and defectively elaborated. These problems, in my view, stemmed from Gellner's Olympian apoliticism, one that was studiously uninterested in the range of stable democratic institutions in the modern world, relied on reductionist accounts of political motivation, missed the interdependencies between nationalism and democratization, and, lastly, failed to treat nationalism as a political doctrine that, when suitably furbished, is consistent with most of the liberal values Gellner held dear. Nationalism is the major form in which democratic consciousness expresses itself in the modern world. It was to Ernest Gellner's eternal credit that his thought helped us understand why that is so, and why it must be so.[88]

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[87] Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*.
[88] This article was finished and in press when the author learned of Ernest Gellner's sudden death.