

STATUS QUO PATRIOTISM

KENNETH MINOGUE HAS paid my article 'In Praise of Empires Past: Myths and Method of Kedourie's *Nationalism*' the tribute of a critical response, even if the compliment is somewhat back-handed, since he taxes me with pedantry, illogic and lack of control. He hopes, nevertheless, that he is still a friend. He is: but among the lesser duties of friendship are to tell a friend when he has missed the point, and when egocentricity goes so far that it threatens identity loss. My critic presents himself as the doughty defender of Kedourie's *Nationalism*; in fact he is defending a less famous text, *Nationalism*, written some years later by one K. R. Minogue,¹ and what he has modestly subtitled 'Minogue's Theory of Nationalism' in a recent encyclopaedia.² Let me remove initial confusions. He and I (with Kedourie and Gellner) agree that nationalism, understood as a doctrine about the legitimate foundation of states, is modern. Minogue responds as if I wish to 'dismantle' the modernist theory of nationalism. I do not. I want to throw out the bathwater, not the baby. By this I mean that, unlike Gellner,³ Kedourie or Minogue I recognize the significant difficulties in that theory, to which Anthony Smith has devoted his life's labour.⁴ My argument was that Kedourie did not achieve the decisive clarification that Minogue suggests; that he erred as an historian of ideas; and that his later work in *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* plainly contradicts his earlier claims in ways that he appears not to have noticed.

Minogue concedes that I have a—pedantic—point in criticizing Kedourie's thesis that nationalism was 'invented' in the early nineteenth century, but mounts his defence around the claim that there was no nationalism in the American or French revolutions. For Minogue and Kedourie nationalism proper, the full photograph, only emerges in German intellectual reactions to the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The young Minogue was aware the USA posed a problem: 'It is very easy to see the

[War of Independence] in nationalist terms. Yet it would seem that the people of the American colonies, while they certainly developed a rapid awareness of themselves as Americans, did not think seriously of themselves as an American nation. Their struggle came too early for them to conduct it in that way.' How improper of the Americans to display nationalist traits before the Germans, or for the *Federalist Papers* to be published in 1788; but fortunately, they took these matters more lightly, with a better sense of humour than those Teutonic Romantics.

For me, as for many others, liberal nationalism, viz. the doctrine that the nation—or the people, or the citizenry (the terms were used as synonyms)—should be the source of political legitimacy, developed in the USA, Britain (including England), France, Ireland and Latin America *before* (or in some cases simultaneously with) the flowering of the more overtly cultural or ethnic nationalisms of central Europe. Nationalism came first, in short, amongst those in (or in imminent) possession of states. This position is scarcely unusual. So far as the United States, Great Britain and France are concerned, it was the historiographical orthodoxy before Kedourie wrote, and has remained so among those not wholly immersed in life at the London School of Economics.

The reason why it matters that Kedourie asserted nationalism was invented 'at the beginning of the nineteenth century' is that only this dating enables the German Romantics to be put in the dock as the primary suspects for its confection. Minogue knows this is a weak point, since elsewhere he has written that 'scholarly opinion now recognizes, however, that nationalism is a doctrine invented *at the end of*

¹ Minogue's *Nationalism* was the sincerest form of flattery towards Kedourie's book of the same title: it has a similar structure, the same number of chapters, and similar prejudices. It even begins, as did Kedourie's, with a quote from Yeats, albeit 1916 rather than 1919. But Minogue was not Kedourie's parrot, even if at times he can sound like Oakeshott's.

² Kenneth Minogue, 'Nationalism and Patriotism: Minogue's Theory of Nationalism', in Athena Leoussi, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Nationalism*, New Brunswick 2001, pp. 230–2.

³ Brendan O'Leary, 'Gellner's Diagnoses of Nationalism: A Critical Overview or What is Living and What is Dead in Gellner's Philosophy of Nationalism?' in John Hall, ed., *The State of the Nation*, Cambridge 2000, pp. 40–90.

⁴ See his *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford 1986; *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism*, London 1996; and *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates About Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Oxford 2000.

the eighteenth century.⁵ My objection to Kedourie was that he did not demonstrate through standard scholarly evidence that many of the fundamental tenets of what he defined as nationalism are first found—or found at all in the case of ‘national self-determination’—in the German thinkers he indicts. The language of republicanism was one of the discourses in which liberal nationalism widely expressed itself on its first outings: that was certainly true of the United Irishmen.

In reply, Minogue writes that Kedourie ‘thought nationalism an essentially opportunistic response to various kinds of collective grievance: in his eyes, it had no “essence” (*pace* O’Leary)’. It was in fact the young Minogue, not Kedourie, who offered a ‘general description of nationalism’ as ‘a political movement depending on a feeling of collective grievance against foreigners’. As he put it, ‘nationalism teaches that the fact of foreign rule itself is an affront to human dignity’.⁶ Now, of course, nationalism may often be a response to collective grievances, and nationalists can be as opportunistic as other human beings. But to be nationalists they must have some recognizable core beliefs that make it coherent to apply this category to them. No ‘deep’—or allegedly mistaken—philosophical essentialism is involved here. The issue turns rather on the distinction that Minogue’s own theory makes between loyalty to the state (patriotism) and loyalty to the nation (nationalism).⁷

This is a good distinction, one that is often occluded or misunderstood. But in making it Minogue includes a surreptitious move. He endorses the national state as the site of patriotism, and approves of ‘nationality’ (with its passports and citizenship rights) as a source of value, in tension with universal or ‘Olympian’ values; at the same time he repudiates nationalism. His sympathies with at least two existing national states, the USA and the UK, are well advertised—indeed, this antipodean is a most patriotic, Euro-sceptical Briton. Why is he then not a nationalist?

⁵ Kenneth Minogue, ‘Olympianism and the Denigration of Nationality’ in Claudio Veliz, ed., *The Worth of Nations*, Boston 1993, p. 73. Observe Minogue’s footnote to this assertion: ‘The crucial work here is *Nationalism* by Elie Kedourie’. The Young Minogue did his homework better: ‘On most views the decisive move [in the emergence of nationalism] came in the eighteenth century’; ie, he was aware that Kedourie’s chronology was an outlier (Minogue, *Nationalism*, pp. 10, 17). The Old Minogue (1993) credits Kedourie with establishing a consensus with which he in fact had disagreed. The Vintage Minogue (2003) now regards the matter as ‘pedantic’.

⁶ Minogue, *Nationalism*, p. 25.

⁷ ‘Nationalism and Patriotism’.

Because, so his argument runs, nationalists are (by their 'essence?') disaffected from their state, or at least with the state in which they reside. 'Whereas nationalism aims at a *future* civil state in which the *nation* will be self-governing, the patriot enjoys a *present* condition of civic involvement.' There cannot, by definitional fiat, be any satisfied nationalists or nationalisms.

This is what might be called 'minologue', rather than dialogue. Do successful nationalists morph into patriots, or is it just impossible for nationalists to be successful? The effect of this variation on an old trope—my patriotism is good, your nationalism is bad—is to legitimate the defence of existing states, and denigrate any questioning of them. Nationalism can be dismissed as 'an ideology for the young', a 'pure-minded rejection of the compromises of adult authority', 'involvement in a fantasy, and those involved in a fantasy are liable to violent and unpredictable rage if the world fails to fit their dreams.'⁸ But why should those with a less complacent view of the array of states current at any given point of time, or an inclination to inspect the world as it is, be thought confused when they distinguish between nations with and without states, or satisfied as opposed to dissatisfied nationalisms?

So far as method goes, at issue here is not a conflict between history (Kedourie) and Gellner (sociology). My claim was that Kedourie's *Nationalism* is defective history. In showing that with his procedures one could as legitimately make Locke the ancestor of liberal nationalism as Kant of cultural nationalism, I did not, of course, suggest that either proposition was true. Gellner's view, by contrast, was that Kedourie's history was accurate enough (apart from a mistreatment of Kant), but had no explanatory force. Minogue, Kedourie and I in fact agree on something with which Gellner did not, namely the importance of political ideas (what Oakeshottians call 'practical doctrines'). But I hold to the common-sense view that ideas resonate more in some contexts than others. It is in the democratization of the modern state and in the multiple dimensions of modernization that nationalism resonates—as doctrine and as mass sentiment—more than it did or could have done in the past.

Minogue sees me as an orthodox or devout Gellnerian. But I am a critic of the thesis that 'industrialization causes nationalism'. Nor do I anywhere reject 'diffusionism' as such (did Gellner?). But with Gellner I believe it is

⁸ Minogue, *Nationalism*, pp. 8, 32.

possible to differentiate types of nationalism, and to provide convincing historical *and* sociological explanations of their origins and trajectories. In Oakeshott's landscape there would appear to be just philosophy, history and 'practical doctrines': and it's true I don't live in this wilderness. In Gellner's there is too much functionalism, but there is a profound understanding of modernity, and a serious respect for science, including social science. I am not completely at home there, but it is certainly a more congenial environment. One can admire Gellner without making a cult figure of him; he would have despised anyone who did.

So far as Kedourie is concerned, it is not because I am an avid 'partisan of nationalism' that I described him as a conservative exponent of the benefits of empire. Kedourie's writings, cited carefully, demonstrate that he was such an exponent. That is plain from his early essay on 'Minorities', and finds uninhibited expression in his tribute to Acton at the close of his *Nationalism*. No 'rampaging' sociology of knowledge is at work in my portrait of his person, which was based on his writings, including his own recollections of his life; the tributes to him published after his death; and my memories of him. The sole point on which I venture a speculation is his motive for blaming German Romanticism for the onset of full-blown nationalism. Nor did I 'patronize' him; if I did not regard the man and his work as significant I would not have wrestled with them.

Minogue holds that nationalism is 'one term in the fundamental (and ultimately unresolvable) conflict in human affairs between universalism and particularism'.⁹ I have no quarrel with that—who could? But Minogue questions any interest in a political science of conflict regulation, contemptuously referring to me as 'toying' with statistics on the conditions under which federalism and nationalism can cohabit.¹⁰ Managing conflicts involves coping with intractable situations; and regulation—rather than resolution—may be all that is possible in many national, ethnic and communal conflicts. No-one knows in advance which conflicts are 'unresolvable' through institutional arrangements. Minogue doubts in advance that the political management of such conflicts could ever be informed by reliable social science. I think it worth trying to develop usable knowledge on the subject.

⁹ 'Nationalism and Patriotism', p. 232.

¹⁰ See my 'An Iron Law of Federations? A (neo-Diceyan) theory of the Necessity of a Federal Staatsvolk, and of Consociational Rescue', *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 7, no. 3.