

NATIONALISM

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Summary

Nationalism is a political ideology that places moral value on the continued (past and future) existence of the nation and argues that political rights are necessary to protect the nation's continued existence. This ideology assumed prominence in the modern period, because it was perceived to be a necessary accompaniment to state modernization and rationalization, industrialization and democratization. However, nationalism drew on older cultural and ethnic identities, and this explains its political power and appeal. There are two basic types of political projects that nationalists typically defend. Nation-building projects involve the creation of a common political identity, as members of a common political project. National self-determination projects typically aim at securing self-government or political autonomy for national groups (including secession). One common distinction in discussions of nationalism is between civic and ethnic nationalism. Civic nationalism is the doctrine that everyone in the state is also a member of the nation. Ethnic nationalism is the doctrine that national communities are based on shared culture, ethnicity or language. However, this distinction does not fully capture the normative acceptability of different kinds of nationalism. In order to adequately assess the acceptability of nationalism, and the nation-building and/or self-determination projects that it aims at, it is important to look at the treatment of minorities in the state and the cultural overtones and requirements of the state.

1. Introduction

Nationalism is a political ideology, centered on the idea that there is moral significance attached to membership in a nation, and in the continued (in the past and into the future) existence of the nation. Nationalists typically argue for political rights to protect the

nation's continued existence, and express its identity. This ideology is one of the most powerful political and social forces in modern times.

2. What is Nationalism?

One problem in the study of nationalism concerns the contested definitions of its two key components: nationalism and nations. A common line of argument, running through the works of social scientists interested in nationalism, is that “nationalism” is not an “ism” like other “isms.” We should not assume that there is a core idea to “nationalism” in the way that there may be to “liberalism” or “socialism” (see *Liberalism, Socialism, and Communism*). Part of the difficulty is the contextual and protean nature of nationalism. It is very responsive to circumstances and can adopt many different forms. There are religious, conservative, liberal, political, cultural, separatist and many other versions of nationalism.

Another reason for thinking that nationalism should not be identified with a few fundamental principles or beliefs is that the term incorporates a large range of phenomenon (cultural, political, psychological, social). Sometimes the term “nationalism” refers to the process of forming or maintaining nation-states (otherwise called “nation-building”); sometimes it refers to the psychological feeling or identification with a particular national community; sometimes, to the aspiration to be self-determining, which can take a secessionist form; and sometimes, to pride in the culture, language, and symbolism associated with the nation. The range and diversity of phenomenon encompassed by the term “nationalism” makes it imperative for students of nationalism to define the term carefully. One of the potential problems or difficulties attached to theorizing about nationalism is this lack of clarity about what the object of study is.

Some theorists treat nationalism like other “isms” and identify it with a few fundamental principles or beliefs. Ernest Gellner has argued that nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent. This has the advantage of conceptual clarity, indeed simplicity; but it also entails that every nationalist movement seek separation or independence.

In fact, there are many movements, which we might think of as nationalist, and which bear many similarities, in terms of their discourse and concerns, with nationalism, but which do not demand independent statehood. They are content with other forms of recognition, within the existing multi-national. Gellner's definition has the unfortunate effect of obscuring from view the range of policies and prescriptions that nationalists might endorse and the extent to which these policies and prescriptions are similar.

While it is important to recognize the amorphous character of the phenomenon, nationalism can be identified with a range of normative argumentation and pattern of justification which confers moral significance on members of such a group, on its existence across time (in the past and into the future) and typically seeks some form of political protection to safeguard the future existence of the nation. This pattern of argument is normative in the sense that it is intended, by nationalists, to offer a reason

that is not merely self-interested. Nationalists often appeal to the good of the nation, and this presupposes a conception about *legitimate* political action.

One advantage of viewing nationalism, as a normative theory about the value of national membership and nations is that it can account for the key policies or demands of nationalists. On this conception, the demand for national self-determination, which, as Gellner emphasized, is an important plank in many nationalist movements (though not a fundamental principle of nationalism), is a means to advance the national cause. Independence may be the means to achieve the interests of the nation. However, in some cases, where the costs of independence might be too high, or the benefits of independence too precarious, nationalists may seek other forms of institutional recognition.

3. What is a Nation?

Although it is very difficult to enumerate a list of characteristics that is shared by all examples of what we would normally regard as national communities, there is general agreement on certain clarifications of the concept of the “nation.” There is a well-established distinction between nations, states, and ethnic groups. These three concepts—state, nation, and ethnic group—are closely inter-related, since (a) ethnic groups have the potential to become nationally mobilized; (b) many nations aspire to be politically self-governing (aspire to have states), and (c) states like to characterize their body politic as being a “nation” for this implies that they have a common political identity. It is, however, important to distinguish them carefully.

The distinction between nations and ethnic groups is recognized even by those, like Anthony Smith, who argue that many nations have ethnic groups at their core—that they were founded around one particular ethnic group—and that many ethnic groups have the potential to become nations. Ethnic groups (like nations) are social groups, characterized by myths of common descent, some common culture and mutual recognition, and complex rituals regarding boundary-maintenance—but they are not co-extensive with nations because they lack the political self-consciousness that is usually associated with national communities. What is distinctive about nations is the way in which they frame their aspirations or understand themselves in terms of a certain kind of social solidarity as an actual or potential political community.

It is also important to recognize that nations are not co-extensive with states. This confusion (between states and nations) still pervades the literature especially in “international relations.” It is embedded in terms such as “United Nations,” which is really an organization of sovereign states. Some states have more than one recognized nations (they are viewed as a “compact” between two founding “nations” as is Canada for example); some nations have more than one state (e.g., North and South Korea, West and East Germany prior to 1989); and some nations (e.g., Kurdish and Palestinian nations) do not have their own states, although many of their members do aspire to this.

Debate on what constitutes a nation mainly revolves around the balance between subjective and objective elements. Some scholars of nations and nationalism have emphasized only the subjective elements: in some social groups, the distinguishing

features are independent of the perceptions and feelings of the agent, whereas, in others, they are not. The category “nation,” like “friends” and “lovers,” falls into the second group. It is contingent on its members“ sustaining a certain image of their nationhood based on their perceptions and feelings (although of course there are a number of conditions which lead to the construction of an image of an image of a nation, such as shared religion, language, law, geographical isolation, colonial policies, bureaucratic decisions, and the like).

Most theorists agree that this subjective component is a necessary condition for shared nationality. In many cases, this subjective identification with an historic territory or homeland, and with co-nationals is based on an objective element—the various ties of shared language or religion or culture or public life that helps to make members identify with one another as a community. It is therefore possible to define a national community as consisting of a group of people who identify with each other as co-members, who share some common beliefs and mutual commitments, that is (a) extended across time; (b) connected to a particular territory; and (c) marked off from other communities by a distinct public culture. These objective conditions are very general, because they could be constitute in different ways by different communities.

Whatever the balance between subjective and objective elements in the definition of a nation, it is clear that these “objective” markers—such as language, religion, shared history, or shared public life—are important at least partly because they tend to foster the necessary, and possibly even sufficient, condition for being a nation, namely, national identity. Which “objective” features are important in shaping the identity will be different for different nations, but it is probably true that the subjective bonds of identity are based on some shared history or culture or institutional practices.

4. Nationalist Movements

The beginnings of nationalism may be traced to Europe in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Many historians identify the period from 1775–1807 (which includes the 1775 partition of Poland, the 1776 Declaration of Independence, the French Revolution, and Fichte’s 1807 *Address to the German Nation*) as pivotal in the development of nationalist movements and ideology. The French Revolution certainly signaled the breakup of feudalism, and replaced loyalty to the king with loyalty to the patrie (fatherland). The creation of a National Assembly, and the united and unitary state with common laws and institutions, realized the nation-state ideal. The aggressive and militarily successful French Republic then became a model for the creation of other political communities in Europe and Latin America. French armies also facilitated the spread of nationalism to other countries.

Nationalism involved both the breakup of multi-national empires and the incorporation of independent city-states and principalities into nation-states. In 1848, rebellions on behalf of national independence broke out all over Europe: amongst Poles, whose territory was divided between Russia, Germany and Austria; by Czechs, Italians and Hungarians, agitating against the Austrian (Hapsburg) monarchy; and by Serbs, Croats, Slovenes and Rumanians, living in Habsburg lands, and in the Balkan peninsula under

the Ottoman Empire. In 1861, the Italian peoples were united; in 1871, the German peoples were united.

When the U.S. entered World War One, President Woodrow Wilson declared that the nationalist aspirations of the various peoples in Europe were a central issue in the conflict. In his famous Fourteen Points speech of 1919, he endorsed the principle of national self-determination. After World War One, numerous states were carved out of the remains of the Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman empires: Poland, Czechoslovakia, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland.

Beyond Europe, Atatürk reorganized modern Turkey along nationalist lines in the post-World War One period; and Japan, which had already successfully defeated Russia in the 1905 war, and had independently become organized along national lines, served as an inspiration for the nation-state ideal in Asia. Nationalist ideology fell into disfavor after the Second World War, because of the incorporation of nationalist ideals into the fascist ideologies of the Third Reich. Part of the ideological basis for the fascist regimes of Mussolini and Hitler was the celebration of German (Teutonic) folkways, which, combined with so-called “scientific” racism, led directly to the Second World War and the Final Solution, in which millions of Jews were murdered.

While the term “nationalism” became associated with xenophobia and ethnic exclusiveness following the Second World War, nationalist ideals - of self-government, popular sovereignty and freedom from external domination - became incorporated into the movement for de-colonization. It became widely accepted that it is not sufficient for a government to make rules and dispense justice with a minimum of brutality and coercion. The government must also be one that the people, who are subject to its rule, think of as, in some sense, “their own.” Nationalist movements have not abated since the demise of the overseas empires. Most states in the world are not (nationally) homogeneous, and many of these face movements within them for national self-determination. The multinational states of the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Ethiopia have collapsed along national lines, and nationalism continues to be a force for political instability, as many of the successor states are themselves comprised of a number of actual (or potential) national groups. There are secessionist struggles, justified on nationalist grounds, in all areas of the globe: in developed regions (e.g., Quebec, Catalonia, the Spanish Basque country, and Israel/Palestine); and in developing countries (e.g., Sudan, Kashmir in India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, and the Kurdish regions of Iraq and Turkey).

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Biographical Sketch

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