Nationalism

by Peter Mentzel

From **Humane Studies Review Vol. 8, No. 1**

> The theory of [nationalism]...is a retrograde step in history...[it] does not aim either at liberty or prosperity, both of which it sacrifices to the imperative necessity of making the nation the mould and measure of the State. (Lord Acton, "Nationality," Selected Writings of Lord Acton, Vol. I [Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985], pp. 432-433)

When Lord Acton wrote these words in 1862 nationalism was well on its way toward becoming one of the most powerful motivating forces in world affairs. Acton, unlike most of his contemporaries, could see that nationalism would bring suffering to millions of people. However, he probably could not have foreseen the extent to which nationalism radically changed the way in which people perceive the world. Even today, over two centuries since nationalism first developed, it remains a potent force in politics.

Yet, despite the importance of nationalism in modern history, there is a startling lack of consensus about what it is and why it has maintained such a firm hold over so much of the world's population. This essay is meant as an introduction to the study of nationalism. As part of this examination, I want first to survey various attempts to define the word "nation." Secondly, I will sketch a brief history of the development of nationalism. Finally, the essay will conclude with some possibilities for further research.

Theories of the Nation

Nationalism is a slippery term. There is a great deal of dispute as to what, exactly, it describes and to which historical periods it can usefully be applied. In fact, any examination of nationalism must be preceded by some kind of definition of what constitutes a nation.

This question, among Americans especially, is complicated by the manner in which people often use the terms "nation," "state," and "country" interchangeably. The last two terms refer to political entities. The first is a term used to describe a group of people who may or may not live in the same state or country. The difference is exactly conveyed in the German by the words Staatsangehorigheit (citizenship) and Nationalitat (nationality). A person can be of German Nationalitat without being a German citizen.

Definitions of nation or nationality rely either upon objective or subjective criteria, or on some combination of the two. Most objective definitions of nationality rely on the commonality of some particular trait among members of a group. Shared language, religion, ethnicity ("common descent") and culture have all been used as criteria for defining nations. A casual examination of the history of national differentiation indicates that these factors often reinforce each other in the determination of a nationality. Certain nationalities, such as the Croats, are now defined as distinct from Serbs almost exclusively on the basis of religious differences. Likewise, Urdu-speaking Pakistanis are distinguished from Hindi-speaking Indians largely because of religion.

In other cases, however, a shared religion seems a less accurate method for drawing the boundaries of a nationality. The German nation, for example, is divided mainly among Protestants and Catholics. Conversely, the inhabitants of France and Italy, though both overwhelmingly Catholic, belong to two different nationalities.

One of the most often used of all the objective marks of nationality is a common language. Initially,

this seems to be a fool-proof mark of a nation. Indeed a shared language has been a very powerful factor in national unification. Ludwig von Mises, among others, presents nationality and language as almost synonymous. As von Mises puts it "...all national struggles are language struggles" (Ludwig von Mises, Nation, State and Economy [New York: New York University Press, 1983], p. 12). Yet this definition, too, is fraught with difficulties. For one thing, what we today call "national languages" are, to one degree or another, artificial constructs (E.J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991], p. 54). This is certainly true in the case of many of the languages of east central Europe and of the non-European world. For example, the modern standard Slovak language is largely the work of Jan Kollar. The Serb philologist Vuk Karadzic modeled modern Serbo-Croatian out of the so-called Stokavian dialect in the early nineteenth century; this was part of a self-conscious attempt at uniting the Southern Slavs (i.e."Yugoslavs") into a "Great Serbian" nation.

Other "national" languages have been created for imperialistic purposes. The various languages of central Asia, e.g. Uzbek, Kyrgyz, Khazak, etc. did not exist until they were "discovered" (actually conjured out of local dialects) by Soviet linguists during the 1920s and 30s. The languages were then used as evidence to support the Soviet claims of the existence of several nations in Central Asia, which was then divided into separate Soviet Socialist Republics as part of a divide-and-rule strategy (Georg Brunner, "Die Stellung der Muslime in den fderativen Systemen der Sowjetunion und Jugoslawiens," in Kappeler et al, eds., Die Muslime in der Sowjetunion und in Jugoslawien [Cologne: Markus Verlag, 1989], pp. 157-159).

Even in cases where a popular vernacular becomes a "national language" this transformation typically only happens after the foundation of a nation state. For example, the language today called French became a "national" language only after the creation of a French nation state. In 1789, only 50% of the population in the Kingdom of France spoke French (Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism, p. 50). To the nationalist Revolutionaries, making French the common language of the nation was of the utmost importance. The same could be said of German, Italian, Hungarian and other modern European languages.

A common vernacular language of administration, state education, and military command was an important tool in the extension of the modern state's bureaucratic control. Thus, "national" languages are largely the creation of modern nation states, not the other way around.

It seems, therefore, that pre-existing common linguistic or religious attributes may not be absolute indicators of a nation. "Ethnicity" or "common descent" are other possible objective criteria for national boundary drawing. These were especially popular definitions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and blended with that era's fascination with racial pseudo-science. To the modern student, however, ethnicity seems a much less compelling criterion. The people of the various Mediterranean nations, for example, are plainly the product of centuries of inter-ethnic marriages. Likewise, the American, Mexican or British nations are made up of people of many different ethnic backgrounds.

Hence, while objective traits can be useful as very rough criteria for defining the existence of a nation, it seems that they are not by themselves enough. Indeed, it seems that a nation may be a very subjective entity. Many students of nationalism are eventually led to the (almost tautological) conclusion that people belong to a certain nation if they feel that they belong to it. For example, Hans Kohn writes "...the most essential element [in the formation of a nationality] is a living and active corporate will" (Hans Kohn, Nationalism [New York: D. Van Nostrand Co., 1955], p. 10). Likewise, Hugh Seton-Watson remarks: "All that I can find to say is that a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one" (Hugh Seton-Watson, Nations and States [Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977], p. 5). One of the most interesting recent studies along these lines is by Benedict Anderson, who calls

nations "imagined communities" (Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities [London and New York: Verso, 1991], pp. 5-7).

The Development of Nationalism

Nationalism is usually considered to be both an ideology, and a phenomenon or "historical process." (Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism [Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983], p. 125. See also Carlton J.H. Hayes, Essays on Nationalism [New York: The MacMillan Co., 1926], p. 5) As an ideology, nationalism claims that people belonging to a particular group called a "nation" should inhabit a particular area and control a state "of their own." Such a definition points to nationalism as a method of boundary drawing among people. (See for example, Elie Kedouri, Nationalism [London: Hutchison University Library, 1960], p. 9.) Hans Kohn defines nationalism as something between ideology and phenomenon when he states: "Nationalism is a state of mind, in which the supreme loyalty of the individual is felt to be due the nation-state." (Kohn, Nationalism, p. 9)

Whether nationalism is viewed as an ideology or a phenomenon (or "state of mind"), one can still ask why so many people abandoned earlier, universalist ideologies (e.g. Christianity) and non-national self-identifications "or states of mind" (for example, by occupation or social status) for "imaginary communities" called nations, and based an exclusivist ideology upon them?

Some trace the roots of nationalism to the Reformation period. The Reformation itself was important in the development of proto- nationalist feeling, especially when considered in light of the contemporaneous revolution in printing and the subsequent surge in publications in various vernaculars (as opposed to the universalist Latin), which both disestablished the church hierarchy as interpreters of the Bible and laid the groundwork for the establishment of "imagined communities" based on the idea of the nation. (Anderson makes this point convincingly, pp. 37-46.) In England the translation of the Bible sponsored by King James served to bind the English closer to the Anglican church, thereby uniting church, language and nation. In contrast, in France, as Elizabeth Eisenstein notes, it was only after the dissolution of the Jesuit Order in the 1760s, "under anti-clerical auspices that French triumphed over regional tongues and the basis for a truly national system of lay education was laid." (Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], pp. 350-351)

While the print revolution may have sown the seeds of national self-consciousness, most people continued to identify themselves by their religious affiliation, rather than their nationality. Such religious identification, of course, often carried with it political loyalty, such as for or against the feudal estates or the Habsburg power. Similarly, the dynastic wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth century had little, if any, connection to national differences.

Most students of nationalism draw a causal link between the changes underway in Europe during the end of the eighteenth century and the development of nationalism during that same period. Ernest Gellner, for example, portrays nationalism as being inextricably bound to the development of the social and economic conditions of the eighteenth century. (Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, p. 125. See also Karl Deutsch, Nationalism and Social Communication [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press,1966], which links the development of nationalism with "modernization.") As people left their villages and farms for the growing cities, they also left behind many of their previous attachments and were receptive to new ones.

The great social and economic changes underway during the late eighteenth century were accompanied by change in political thought as liberalism began to compete effectively against the ideas of divine right of kings and absolutism. Some forms of "exceptionalism" (a precursor of nationalism, as it were), as they grew in England and British North America, were closely tied to

liberalism, particularly those ideas articulated by John Locke and radical Whig thinkers. The American War of Independence, for example, was both a manifestation of the idea of national self determination and an assertion of radical liberal principles. The American nationality was defined by the belief in a set of liberal propositions which, the Americans believed, applied not only to themselves but to all humankind. Similarly, English nationalism as it developed during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries maintained its roots in the idea of individual liberty.

Locke's philosophy, and especially the American Revolution, made a profound impression on many French intellectuals. To the belief in individual liberty, however, the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau added other ideas which were to lead to a very different kind of nationalism. Unlike Locke, who saw each individual person enjoying self proprietorship, Rousseau developed the idea of the sovereign power of "the people" or of "the nation." As this view developed, it was concluded that the sovereign state is the manifestation of the nation. (Kohn, p. 22)

Rousseau's shift of emphasis had very far reaching consequences. In the developing American and (to some extent) British nationalism the nation was equal to the sum of its individual members. Furthermore, (in theory at least) the State existed as an autonomous entity that was a servant of the people -- circumscribed in power -- and not its highest expression. In Rousseau's formulation, the nation was an entity constituted by the general will, transcending the significance of the individual. The nation was, in other words, greater than the sum of its parts. This subtle difference was to become extremely significant since the peoples of central and eastern Europe, and later of the rest of the world, became acquainted with the "Rousseauist" rather than "Whig" version of nationalism, with very serious results.

During the French Revolutionary period, intellectuals elsewhere in Europe became interested in the idea of nationality. Perhaps the most important of these was Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803). Von Herder was intrigued by the idea of nationality. Clearly influenced by Rousseau, he developed the idea that nations were "organic" entities that were made up of individual people but that had a transcendent existence, greater than the individuals that comprised them. He argued that the individual could only attain his greatest potential through the medium of his nationality. Herder, however, was not a "nationalist" since he did not seek the establishment of nation-states. To him, nationality was a "spiritual and moral," rather than political, concept. (Kohn, p. 31)

Herder was convinced that the development of nationalism would usher in an era of peace as each nationality strove to develop itself. Although German, he glorified the Slavs as a peaceful and industrious people who had a wonderful future ahead of them as soon as they became nationally self conscious. (Kohn, pp. 106-108, see note 1).

Herder also formulated the idea that each nation's language is somehow mystically tied up with its "soul" and that a person can only really express himself and develop through the medium of his native language. To this end, Herder was an indefatigable linguist and folklorist. He wrote many volumes on the languages and folktales of the Slavs. Two of his disciples, the Brothers Grimm, are famous for their catalogue of German folktales.

The growth of the centralized state as well as the fascination with vernacular languages both fostered the growth of nationalism. Hobsbawm develops this theme at some length. Concentrating on the importance of a "national" language to the construction of an "imagined community" he presents the growth of nationalism as a direct consequence of the establishment of the modern bureaucratic state. The modern state needs to promote a common language among its subjects. "Public" (i.e. state-run) schools emerged at precisely the time when nationalism was growing. The state used its schools to teach a common "national" (i.e. enforced) language, partly to reinforce a sense of "belonging," or loyalty to the state, but also to facilitate state functions, such as tax collection and military conscription.

The extraction of revenues from the population and the formation of vast military organizations for territorial aggrandizement drove the evolution of the modern state system in Europe. The breakdown of "particularism" and the subsequent emergence of nationalist ideology are closely connected to this process. The historian Otto Hintze stressed the role of military organization in the formation of centralized states, pointing out that "In the Continental states the army became the very backbone of the new centralized greater state. In order to enable the French crown to fight Spain and Austria, Richelieu suppressed with force the particularism of the provinces and thus created a unified absolutist state, such as was hitherto unknown." ("Military Organization and State Organization," in Felix Gilbert, ed., The Historical Essays of Otto Hintze [New York: Oxford University Press, 1975], p. 199; see also his essay "The State in Historical Perspective," in Reinhard Bendix, ed., State and Society: A Reader in Comparative Political Sociology [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968].)

Charles Tilley has argued that the elimination of particularism and its replacement by direct rule fostered national homogenization and nationalism: "As direct rule expanded throughout Europe, the welfare, culture, and daily routines of ordinary Europeans came to depend as never before on which state they happened to reside in. Internally, states undertook to impose national languages, national educational systems, national military service, and much more. Externally, they began to control movement across frontiers, to use tariffs and customs as instruments of economic policy, and to treat foreigners as distinctive kinds of people deserving limited rights and close surveillance." (Coercion, Capital, and European States: AD 990- 1992 [Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992], pp. 115-116) As a result, argues Tilley, two mutually reinforcing forms of nationalism emerged: one refers to "the mobilization of populations that do not have their own state around a claim to political independence," the other to "the mobilization of the population of an existing state around a strong identification with that state" (op. cit., p. 116). (Tilley builds much of this work on the important insights of the economic historian Frederic Lane about the striking parallels between the growth of states and modern "protection rackets." See Tilley, "War Making and State Making as Organized Crime," in Evans, Roueschemeyer, and Skocpol, eds., Bringing the State Back In [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990] and Frederic C. Lane, "Economic Consequences of Organized Violence," Journal of Economic History Vol. 18 (1958) and "The Economic Meaning of War and Protection," in Venice and History: The Collected Papers of Frederic C. Lane [Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1966].)

Besides these aspects of the growth of the modern state it is no accident, according to Hobsbawm, that the participation of the "masses" in politics coincided with the age of nationalism. As politics became more democratic and monarchs lost the last vestiges of their previous legitimacy, rulers needed something new upon which to base their power. (Hobsbawm, p. 84) To summarize this view, Hobsbawm states:

The very act of democratizing politics, i.e. of turning subjects into citizens, tends to produce a populist consciousness which, seen in some lights, is hard to distinguish from a national, even a chauvinist, patriotism -- for if Ôthe country' is in some way Ômine', then it is more readily seen as preferable to those of foreigners...(Hobsbawm, p. 88) Both liberalism and nationalism shared a healthy loathing of dynastic absolutism and of the censorship and oppression that it brought, linking their fates closely together through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, however, largely succeeded in destroying whatever aspects of individualism and liberalism had existed in nationalism. Beginning with the middle of the nineteenth century, the history of nationalism on the continent of Europe would be dominated by increasingly anti- liberal, or anti-individualistic, themes. The emerging nations of Europe became acquainted with nationalism "not as a vehicle of individual liberty but as an adoration of collective power." (Kohn, p. 29)

Nation Building

In much of western Europe the geographic boundaries of the nation state had preceded the building of the nation itself. For example, there was a Kingdom of France (a "proto-nation state") before there was a French nation. In central and eastern Europe the situation was completely reversed. In these areas "nations" were born before proto-nation states. Much of east-central Europe was controlled by four great multi-national empires, namely the German, Russian, Habsburg and Ottoman. Many of the people who inhabited these empires had no historical state "of their own" with which they might identify. The Slovaks, Slovenes and Ruthenians, for example, had never had even an embryonic state as had the Czechs, Croats, Bulgars, Germans, Lithuanians, Magyars, Poles, Romanians and Serbs. For the peoples living in central and eastern Europe, the liberal aspirations of nationalism were submerged while the goal of building a nation state became paramount.

The best example of this transformation is the development of the German nation that occurred over a long period between approximately 1700 and 1871. During this period there was no such country as "Germany," but a German nation was slowly emerging. The most spectacular evidence of this newborn nation was the Revolution of 1848. As Hans Kohn puts it: "...the new nationalism stressed collective power and unity far above individual liberty: it tended to mean independence from outside rather than freedom within." (Kohn, p. 50) The sad results of this confusion of liberalism and nationalism were to plague the countries of central Europe well into the twentieth century.(see note 2)

The importance of nation building grew at the expense of liberalism throughout eastern Europe. As in Germany, nationalism in eastern Europe quickly focused on narrow national issues at the expense of individual liberties. Moreover, nationalists were not at all inclined to grant other nationalities the same rights that they themselves sought. For example, the revolutionary "April Laws" enacted by the Magyar nationalists in 1848 created a virtually independent Hungarian state with many liberal trappings. However, the state was to be a unitary, Magyar nation-state. Other nationalities, such as Croats, Romanians, and Slovaks, although making up half the population of the Kingdom of Hungary, were ignored and even suppressed, as the language of the state school system was decreed to be Hungarian; this provision was to be changed only in 1849, after the Habsburgs had succeeded in mobilizing the non-Magyar population against the revolution. (Robert Kann and Zdenek David, Peoples of the Eastern Habsburg Lands, 1526-1918 [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1984], pp. 344- 345)

In the Balkans, most of which were divided between the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires during most of the nineteenth century, nationalism emerged as part of the general dissatisfaction with the maladministration of the declining Ottoman Empire, or as a reaction against the changes within Austria-Hungary. In Serbia nationalism developed as a reaction against the outrageous depredations of the Janissaries, the local Ottoman military forces. In the South Slav lands dominated by the Habsburgs two Croat clerics, Bishop Josip Strossmayer and Cannon Franjo Racki, formulated a national idea called Yugoslavism (i.e. "South-Slavism"). These clerics and their followers built on an earlier south Slavic movement called Illyrianism. (Kann and David, pp. 265-266)

The Yugoslavists believed that there was essentially no difference between the various Yugoslav peoples. According to Yugoslavism, the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Macedonians, Muslim Slavs, and even Bulgarians formed not distinct nations, but were "tribes" of one great People: the Yugoslavs. The Yugoslavists sought actively to foster the newly discovered nationality. Perhaps most importantly, they continued the Illyrianist movement's encouragement of the use of the "Stokavian" dialect (which approximated dialects spoken by many of the south Slavic peoples) rather than the "Kajkavian" dialect popular in the Zagreb area. An anti-Yugoslav national movement among the Croats was the "Party of Rights" of Ante Starcevic. He, like the Yugoslavists, believed that all South Slavs belonged to one nation. However, according to Starcevic, that nation was Croat, not Yugoslav.

Serbs, he believed, were simply orthodox Croats. (Charles and Barbara Jelavich, The Establishment of the Balkan National States, 1804-1920 [Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986], p. 252)

The Yugoslav idea was the creation of South Slavs, mostly Croats, who lived in the South Slav lands of the Habsburg Monarchy. South Slavs outside the monarchy, in the Serbian kingdom for example, were considerably less interested in the idea. In fact, most Serb intellectuals and the Royal Serbian government were interested in the Yugoslav idea only insofar as it facilitated their own ambitions for a Greater Serbia. Interestingly, the great Serbian philologist Vuk Karadzic (mentioned earlier), like the Illyrianists and Yugoslavists, selected the Stokavian dialect as the basis for a common literary language. Unlike the Illyrianists and Yugoslavists, however, he firmly believed that anyone who spoke Stokavian was a Serb, not an Illyrian or Yugoslav.

Both the Yugoslavist movement and the Croat nationalism developed by Starcevic and his followers were encouraged (indirectly) by the changes occurring within the Austrian Empire (after 1867 called Austria-Hungary). The growth of nationalism among many of the peoples of the Empire, especially the Magyars, further stimulated the development of nationalism among the Croat, Slovene, and Serb populations in the Empire.

In east and central Europe nation building was complicated by the language problem. The selection of any one vernacular as the standard for a national language immediately gave the speakers of that dialect an advantage over speakers of other dialects. The purpose was not always national chauvinism, however. For example, Emperor Joseph II of Austria's choice of German to replace Latin as the administrative language of the Empire in 1784 was not motivated by any sense of German nationalism. As Oskar Jaszi, in his very rewarding study of the Habsburg nationality problem (The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961]) points out, "(T)his Germanization was not directed against the mother-tongue of the people but it aimed rather to establish in the place of the dead Latin language which remained the language of the nobility, particularly in Hungary, a modern language for the use of international communication and the state administration." (pp. 63-64)

Yet, the Emperor's move very quickly created great problems with the other politically active peoples of the Empire, particularly the Magyars and Czechs. As these two nations developed their own "national" languages, other groups within the Empire, such as the Croats and Slovaks, were stimulated to do so. The language issue was important not merely for sentimental reasons, but for practical ones as well. As the Austrian (Austro-Hungarian after 1867) bureaucracy grew during the nineteenth century, the language one spoke became of great importance. Only speakers of "official" languages could obtain high-ranking positions within the government's service.

The development of nationalism in Asia, and later in Africa, was greatly influenced by the growing role of European powers in those areas. It is, in fact, in Asia and Africa where nationalism developed last and where many of its worst manifestations are today in evidence. The study of the experiences of the people of these areas with nationalism over the past century should be extremely interesting and valuable to the student of nationalism. For example, all attempts at forming a single Arab nation state, from the early twentieth century until today, have failed. These failures have been despite assertions, based on common language, that the Arabs do indeed form a nation. Have the political boundaries of the states of the Middle East (drawn only after World War I) created separate Syrian, Jordanian, Iraqi and Egyptian "nations?" Or did these political boundaries only reinforce a sense of regionalism which had been developing for decades, if not centuries? (For an account of the creation of a modern state system in the Arab lands, see David Fromkin's A Peace to End all Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East [New York: Avon Books, 1989]. See also Rashid Khalidi, ed., The Origins of Arab Nationalism [New York: Columbia University Press, 1991].)

The process of "nation building" that began during the late nineteenth century and has continued

well into the twentieth century was dominated by an interpretation of nationalism almost completely divorced from its roots as an associate of liberalism. As early as 1900, the German-American classical liberal E. L. Godkin was able to foresee the triumph of illiberal nationalism and the horrors that it would bring:

"Nationalism in the sense of national greed has supplanted liberalism. It is an old foe under a new name. By making the aggrandizement of a particular nation a higher end than the welfare of mankind, it has sophisticated the moral sense of Christendom...The old fallacy of divine right has once more asserted its ruinous power, and before it is again repudiated there must be international struggles on a terrific scale." ("The Eclipse of Liberalism," The Nation, Aug. 9, 1900)

Suggestions for Further Research

As this essay has shown, despite the great importance of nationalism in modern history, it is still only imperfectly understood. The study of nationalism has been dominated by Marxists (for example, Hobsbawm and Anderson), who bring with them their economic-class based methods of analysis. While much of the work done by these scholars is excellent, they generally portray the development of the national idea and nationalism as the result of the emergence of capitalism and related changes in state structure. Classical liberal scholars have the chance to bring new insights to many of the problems of nationalism.

For example, historians interested in classical liberalism should examine the relationship between the changes in state structure and politics during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the growth of nationalism. During the early nineteenth century, nationalism and liberalism often went hand in hand in the struggle against the absolutist political regimes of Europe. The process by which nationalism came to dominate liberalism needs to be investigated more fully.

The relationship between nationalism and communism in the former U.S.S.R and its satellites is another interesting and timely topic. Despite the fact that these regimes were ostensibly based upon the supranational ideology of communism, they all had to incorporate nationalism within their official ideologies to a greater or lesser extent. This gave rise to the horrible mutations of "national communism" and "communist nationalism." With the breakup of the Soviet system, many of the former communist states have been turning to nationalism to provide a new basis for their power and legitimacy. Unfortunately, many of these states seem to have reverted to the militaristic nationalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (Juliana Geran Pilon provides an extremely interesting examination of post-communist nationalism, particularly in Romania, in her book The Bloody Flag [New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1992].)

The problems of national self-consciousness and nationalist struggles should be of interest to students of public choice theory and those studying group conflict. Of particular interest is the question of group rights as opposed to individual rights. (See, for example, the arguments for group rights in Will Kymlicka's Liberalism, Community, and Culture [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989], and those against group rights in Chandran Kukathas's "Are There any Cultural Rights?" in Political Theory Vol. 20 [February 1992].) In place of the idea that nations (supposedly like the economic classes of Marxist analysis) have irreconcilable differences, classical liberal thought offers a philosophy of mutual interests among all "classes" and nations. Ludwig von Mises argued in his essay "The Clash of Group Interests" that the operations of the free market tend to draw people together and that government meddling in the market bears much of the responsibility for creating conflict among different groups. (The Clash of Group Interests and Other Essays [New York: Center for Libertarian Studies, Occasional Paper Series No.7, 1978])

Scholars interested in classical liberalism are in a position to explore the ways in which an application of classical liberal ideas could help to defuse the conflicts and tensions created by

nationalism. Von Mises, for example, pointed out that it is precisely the wide range of activities that are carried out by the modern state that makes the issue of national borders so significant. (Ludwig von Mises, Liberalism [New York: Foundation for Economic Education, 1985], pp. 118-121, 144)

Since the modern, central state intrudes so significantly into the life of the individual, people are only acting rationally if they do not wish to live in a state dominated by a nationality other than their own. The majority nationality would necessarily control the state apparatus, including the means of coercion and the redistributive mechanisms common to most modern states. A state based on classical liberal ideas would intrude far less, or not at all, into the lives of its citizens and therefore the issue of which national group controlled the state apparatus would be largely irrelevant. As von Mises wrote:

Of course, the struggle of nationalities over the state and government cannot disappear completely from polyglot territories. But it will lose sharpness to the extent that the functions of the state are restricted and the freedom of the individual is extended. Whoever wishes peace among people must fight statism. (Nation, State and Economy, p. 77)

Notes

1. Such hopes for national realization did not always rest on the idea of founding a nation state. The Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, for example, combined his national appeal to the Slavs with an explicit rejection of the state: "The Germans seek their life and liberty in the state, while to the Slavs the state is a coffin. The Slavs must seek their liberation outside of the state, not just in struggle against the German state but in an uprising of all nations against all states, in a social revolution. The Slavs can liberate themselves, they can destroy the hated German state, not through futile efforts to subject the Germans to their domination and make them slaves of their own Slavic state, but only by summoning them to universal liberty and universal brotherhood on the ruins of all existing states." (Mikhail Bakunin, Statism and Anarchy [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 45])

2. For the long-term effects of the failure of the liberal revolutions of 1848 on German politics, and especially on the growth of chauvinistic nationalism, see Woodruff D. Smith, Politics and the Sciences of Culture in Germany, 1840-1920 [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991]: "In general, the effects of the 1848 revolution on German liberalism are well known. The failure of the revolution [that is, the failure of the liberal governments of 1848 to maintain themselves in power and of the National Assembly to unify Germany under a liberal regime] was clearly a setback to the liberal movement." (p. 36)

Peter Mentzel is completing his Ph.D. in History at the University of Washington, Seattle.