

NATIONALISM AND LIBERALISM: FRIENDS OR FOES?

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During the course of the twentieth century, eruptions of nationalist ardour and aspiration have resulted in great hardship and depredations being visited on various peoples of the world. Few peoples, if any, have escaped becoming engulfed in major conflicts arising from either their own nationalistic aspirations or those of other peoples.

However, national pride and allegiance, in themselves, can seem not merely innocuous but positively benign. Such forms of attachment also foster a *prima facie* attractive cultural diversity among the different peoples of the world. Nationalism can also provide a sense of meaning, belonging, and pride which many people might otherwise have been without. In addition, it can serve to foster solidarity and civility among those who look on each other as being of the same nation.

What should be the attitude of classical liberals toward nationalist aspiration and sentiment? Should classical liberals value and cultivate these attitudes in themselves and others—at least in their ostensibly less xenophobic and aggressive forms? Or should they look on all forms and manifestations of nationalism as nothing more than atavistic remnants of pre-modernity? That is, should nationalism be viewed as an outmoded form of attachment which, ideally, should be expunged from humanity? Should it be replaced by a cosmopolitan in-

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dividualism the universal adoption of which will mark the liberation of humanity from all divisive partial allegiances and attachments? Alternatively, should classical liberals regard nationalist sentiment and allegiance as a purely private matter, one that has nothing to do with their political outlook as such?

For a considerable time after the end of World War II, classical-liberal and libertarian writers paid comparatively little attention to the phenomenon of nationalism or, indeed, to international relations in general, save those issues directly connected with the Cold War and international trade. However, with the end of the Cold War, a dramatic and somewhat unforeseen recent worldwide resurgence of various forms of nationalist aspiration and particularism has led both classical liberals and libertarians to turn their attention to the phenomenon of nationalism.

At first sight, the prospects for effecting a reconciliation between nationalism and classical liberalism seem bleak. With characteristic acumen, Friedrich Hayek has gone to the heart of the problem.

The advocates of individual freedom have generally sympathised with . . . aspirations for national freedom [that is, with the desire of peoples to be free from foreign yoke and to determine their own fate], and this has led to the constant but uneasy alliance between the liberal and the national movements during the nineteenth century. But though the conception of national freedom is analogous to that of individual freedom, it is not the same; and the striving for the first has not always enhanced the second. It has sometimes led people to prefer a despot of their own race to the liberal government of the alien majority; and it has often provided the pretext for ruthless restrictions of the individual liberty of minorities.¹

Further, in his famous essay explaining why he is not a conservative, Hayek registers a second reservation about nationalism from a classical-liberal perspective.

Nationalistic bias frequently provides the bridge . . . to collectivism: to think in terms of “our” industry or resource is only a short step away from demanding that these national assets be directed in the national interest.²

¹F.A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 14–15.

²Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, p. 405.

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In light of Hayek's concerns, we might feel there is little point in trying to reconcile nationalism and classical liberalism. However, despite the undoubted truths contained in Hayek's misgivings, it still seems worthwhile to attempt such a reconciliation. For, however enlightened and cosmopolitan classical liberals may rightly consider themselves, and however illiberal and barbaric some manifestations of nationalism have undoubtedly been, there can be few classical liberals who, if honest with themselves, will not admit to harbouring deep within their breasts some form of nationalistic attachment and affiliation. These sentiments might manifest themselves only as some inarticulate love for the country and traditions of their birth and residence, combined with some weak and generalised affection for those they regard as their compatriots, but they are, nonetheless, both apparent and real.

TERMINOLOGICAL PRELUDE

We hardly need remind ourselves of an attachment to the ideals and values constitutive of the classical-liberal outlook. They include, most importantly, private property rights and minimal government, and, hence, the utmost equal freedom of thought, expression, activity, and association, together with constitutional representative government, division of powers, and the rule of law.

It is not much more difficult to form a relatively clear and distinct idea of what "nationalism" is. For this term, the *Oxford English Dictionary* lists two distinct but related meanings. The first is *devotion to one's nation*; the second is *a policy of national independence*. Combining these two meanings, we arrive at the following definition of the term: "Nationalism" denotes *the devotion members of a nation feel toward their own nation, as well as the striving by members of a nation on behalf of its political independence, enjoyed, ideally, in that territory considered its traditional homeland*.

However, we shall not be able to decide on the compatibility of, on the one hand, this species of sentiment and aspiration, with, on the other, liberal ideals and values, without first obtaining a clear understanding of what a "nation" is. What, then, is a nation? This question is by no means as straightforward as it first seems. To see wherein the complexity lies, consider Ayn Rand's definition of the term: "A 'nation' is not a mystic or supernatural entity; it is a large number of

individuals who live in the same geographical locality under the same political system.”³ The first part seems undoubtedly true; the second, though, is questionable.

Is it really true that all people residing in the same geographical locality under the same political system are members of the same nation? Try telling that to Serbs and ethnic Albanians in Kosovo, or to Palestinian Arabs and Jewish settlers on the West Bank of the Jordan River. Again, do members of a nation always reside in the same geographical locality under the same political system? Try telling that to Irish Republican Catholics in West Belfast, or to former residents of East and West Berlin before the Wall came tumbling down, or to former citizens of the Soviet Union.

Rand’s definition of a nation clashes with two more nuanced accounts offered by earlier eminent classical liberals. John Stuart Mill once declared,

A portion of mankind may be said to constitute a Nationality, if they are united among themselves by common sympathies, which do not exist between them and any others—which makes them co-operate with each other more willingly than with other people, desire to be under the same government, and desire that it should be government by themselves or a portion of themselves exclusively.⁴

Likewise, Henry Sidgwick once observed,

[W]hat is really essential . . . to a Nation is . . . that the persons composing it should have a consciousness of belonging to one another, of being members of one body, over and above what they derive from the mere fact of being under one government; so that, if their government were destroyed by war or revolution, they would still hold firmly together.⁵

Mill and Sidgwick clarify a vital fact that is obscured by Rand’s account: the forming of a nation is, above all, a function of a people’s

³Ayn Rand, “Don’t Let It Go,” in *Philosophy: Who Needs It* (New York: Signet, 1984), p. 205.

⁴John Stuart Mill, “Considerations on Representative Government,” in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. J. Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 427.

⁵Henry Sidgwick, *Elements of Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1891), p. 214.

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consciousness and will. In forming a nation, it is not sufficient that a people reside together under the same government in the same territory. In addition, they have to *want* to live together in such fashion. Further, this desire alone might not be sufficient to form a nation from a group of people residing together in a territory under no governance but their own or their representative's. Beyond having the desire and opportunity to live as one, a people must, to be a nation, also share sufficient mutual affinity in order to succeed in this endeavour, should they seek to do so.

William McDougall, in *The Group Mind*,⁶ his ground-breaking 1920 social psychology classic, offered guidance on how much mutual affinity a people needs in order to be a nation. McDougall contended that no fewer than seven separate conditions must be satisfied so that people could enjoy sufficient mutual affinity to live together harmoniously in a territory under the same government, should they endeavour to do so. Without satisfying these seven conditions, a people cannot be considered a genuine nation.

First, they must possess what McDougall terms a certain degree of *mental homogeneity*.⁷ According to McDougall, this similarity of outlook and sensibility can result not just from a people sharing a common culture and physical environment, but also from their being of the same race. Typically, in McDougall's view, all such mental homogeneity as distinguishes one nationality from another derives in part from both sources, with only the degree of predominance of each varying from nation to nation.

Second, to live together harmoniously, a people must enjoy *freedom of communication*.

Without . . . freedom of communication, the various parts of the nation cannot become adequately conscious of one another; . . . The idea of the whole must remain very rudimentary in the minds of the individuals; each part of the whole remains ignorant of many other parts, and there can be no vivid consciousness of a common welfare and a common purpose. . . . [M]ore important still,

⁶William McDougall, *The Group Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920). Despite its off-putting and misleading title, this work remains one of the best, albeit neglected, works on the subject of nationalism, and one that repays close study by classical liberals and libertarians alike.

⁷McDougall, *The Group Mind*, p. 107.

there can be none of that massive influence of the whole upon each of the units which is the essence of collective mental life.⁸

Included in the means of communication which facilitate free and reciprocal communication among a people who reside in any territory larger than the city-states of antiquity are the press, radio, telephone, and television, as well as such mass transportation systems as railroads, cars, and airplanes. However, the prime necessary condition for a people to communicate with each other is fluency in the same language.

A third condition of a people's being able to live harmoniously together is their jointly possessing the capacity to produce *national leaders*, "personalities of exceptional powers who . . . play the part of leaders."⁹

Fourth, there must have been, on occasion at least, a *common well-defined purpose* "present to, and dominant in, the minds of all individuals."¹⁰ One such occasion is the need for concerted action on the part of a people to stave off a threat to their survival or freedom posed by the prospect of their imminent invasion or conquest by a foreign power. War is one, but not the only, such occasion for common purpose.

A fifth condition of a people being able to live together harmoniously is their enjoying a sufficient degree of what McDougall terms *material and formal continuity*.¹¹ By "material continuity," McDougall means a continuous period of residence in the same territory. By "formal continuity," he means the stability and longevity of the major public institutions which structure their lives. Such continuity is said to be an "essential presupposition of all the other main conditions. . . . On it . . . depends the strengths of custom and tradition and, to a very great extent, the strength of national sentiment."¹²

Sixth, a people must also possess some *national self-consciousness*, that is, some awareness of themselves as a distinct people. "Only in so far as the idea of the people or nation as a whole is pre-

⁸McDougall, *The Group Mind*, p. 132.

⁹McDougall, *The Group Mind*, p. 135.

¹⁰McDougall, *The Group Mind*, p. 142.

¹¹McDougall, *The Group Mind*, p. 145.

¹²McDougall, *The Group Mind*, p. 145.

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sent to the consciousness of individuals and determines their actions . . . [has] a nation in the proper sense of the word existed.”¹³

Finally, a people must feel some sentiment of love or devotion toward that people they consider themselves to be. McDougall terms this sentiment *patriotism*,¹⁴ which may be considered the wellspring from which all nationalist sentiment and aspiration ultimately derives.

MAIN CONTENTIONS

With these preliminaries in place, we may now consider the degree of compatibility between nationalism and liberalism. I intend to answer this question by way of advancing and defending the following three theses.

The first thesis is that, historically speaking, far from being inherently antagonistic to or subversive of classical-liberal ideals and values, nationalism was a *sine qua non* of the initial emergence and realisation of liberal values and ideals.

Second, the same varieties of nationalism that were historically instrumental in bringing about the birth and partial realisation of classical-liberal ideals and values remain a *sine qua non* of their continued and future espousal and realisation.

Third, at present, the greatest threat facing classical-liberal ideals and values is not a hostile foreign power threatening those nation-states in which these ideals first emerged and in which, to date, they have been most fully realised institutionally. Rather, it comes from within these states, where it assumes the form of powerful political coalitions determined to undermine and ultimately destroy the citizens’ sense of common nationality by replacing it with a heightened sense of their particularity and diversity vis-à-vis each other and which, unless checked, will lead to the disintegration of these nations into a mass of contending minorities.

I shall now attempt to argue briefly for each thesis before concluding by considering and replying to objections I anticipate that classical liberals and libertarians will raise against them.

¹³McDougall, *The Group Mind*, p. 158.

¹⁴McDougall, *The Group Mind*, p. 164.

NATIONALISM AS A CONDITION FOR THE EMERGENCE OF LIBERALISM

Thesis 1: Far from being inherently antagonistic to or subversive of classical-liberal ideals and values, nationalism was, historically, a sine qua non of their initial formulation and partial realisation.

In her monumental study tracing the development of national self-consciousness and nationalist sentiment in the five leading nations of the world, Liah Greenfeld has shown in great detail and with enormous perspicacity how classical-liberal ideals first emerged parallel to and inextricably interwoven with national self-consciousness and nationalist aspiration in sixteenth-century England, achieving partial realisation there in the following century. Liberal ideals and national awareness emerged in tandem in the wake of political and religious re-forms carried out by Henry VIII as a result of his break from Rome. According to Greenfeld:

In the sixteenth century, England underwent a profound social transformation. . . . [F]irst, . . . [came] the extinction of the old nobility . . . complete[d] by 1540. . . . Simultaneously with the destruction of the old nobility, a stratum destined to replace it appeared.

The new—Henrician—aristocracy . . . was predominantly an official elite. . . . The majority . . . were people of modest birth . . . recruited from the minor gentry or even humbler strata. The aristocracy . . . became open to talent. . . . A fundamental transformation of this kind . . . required a rationalisation and justification. . . .

It is at this juncture . . . that nationalism was born. The idea of the nation—of the people as an elite—appealed to the new aristocracy. . . . In a way, nationality made every Englishman a nobleman. . . .

By the 1530s . . . entering the discourse . . . [was the] concept of England as a separate entity and as a polity which was not simply a royal patrimony but a commonwealth. . . .

[A]lso under Henry . . . another factor appeared, the implications of which for both the development and the nature of English nationalism were enormous. . . . Henry's break from Rome . . . opened the doors to Protestantism, perhaps the most significant among the factors that furthered the development of . . . English national consciousness. . . . The Protestant insistence on the

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priesthood of all believers reinforced the rationalist individualism in which the idea of the nation in England was grounded. . . . The reading of the Bible planted and nurtured among the common people in England a novel sense of human—individual—dignity, which was instantly to become one of their dearest possessions. . . .

For the newly acquired sense of dignity made masses of Englishmen a part of that small circle of new aristocrats and clergymen . . . who were already enchanted by the idea of the people as an elite, and of themselves as members of such a people.¹⁵

The Protestant English thus formed an image of themselves as a divinely chosen elite. This image gave to them, or, at least, to the relevant sections who found representation in the House of Commons, the conceptual resources as well as the motivation to embark, in the century after Henry, on a protracted struggle against their hereditary rulers. This struggle culminated in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which saw an elected parliament achieve a decisive victory over a hereditary monarch who tried to lay claim to absolute sovereignty in his own person.

As part of the constitutional settlement in which the Crown passed, via parliamentary decision, from the Catholic Stuart line to the Protestant William and Mary of Orange, and subsequently to the Hanoverians, many of the values and practices which liberals hold dear became enshrined within the English Constitution—albeit, at first, in only a limited and qualified form. These liberties and practices include liberty of religious worship, equality before the law, freedom of the press, and parliamentary representation.

Well before the English had acquired even this highly qualified religious liberty, but after their desire for it had awakened during the sixteenth century, 60,000 English Puritans, impatient for such freedom, set sail for the new world to create there a New England where they would be able to enjoy the freedom of worship denied them at home. Those Englishmen and their descendants formed the nucleus of that second great liberal people who, when awakened to their own nationhood in the eighteenth century, achieved a still greater realisation of classical-liberal ideals on the far side of the Atlantic than the Glorious Revolution had accomplished in England.

¹⁵Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 47–54, emphasis in original.

The Puritan settlers brought with them to America the same love of liberty which had become a distinctive part of the English national character. They made this love of liberty as equally a distinctive feature of the American nation as it had become of the English nation. As Greenfeld remarks, “it was through the Puritan mediation that love of liberty became the distinguishing characteristic of America.”¹⁶

Eventually, as in England, this love of liberty among the American settlers became secularised and generalised. Greenfeld writes:

As in England, godliness in the colonies gradually acquired a secular meaning, which by the eighteenth century became dominant and, even more than in England, expressed itself in devotion to the triad—liberty, equality, and reason. . . . American society was exemplary in its devotion to the English ideals: it turned them into reality. . . . The sense of exemplary devotion to and implementation of English values was shared by the colonists everywhere and became a central element in the local American identity.¹⁷

Devotion to this same liberty led the American colonists in the eighteenth century to break away from their mother country. By establishing their own independent republic, they hoped to enjoy the self-governance which the English had long regarded as their birthright, but which their mother country had denied the colonists. Greenfeld claims that the most important factor leading to American independence was

the fact that Americans had a national identity from the very start and that was the English national identity. . . . The English idea of the nation implied the symbolic elevation of the common people to the position of an elite, which in theory made every individual the sole legitimate representative of his own interests and an equal participant in the political life of the collective.¹⁸

In the course of defending the moral legitimacy of the American Revolution, Thomas Paine extended the right to liberty to all mankind, inviting lovers of liberty everywhere to join the American na-

¹⁶Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, p. 407.

¹⁷Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, pp. 408–9.

¹⁸Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, p. 420.

tion.

Europe, and not England, is the parent country of America. This new world has been the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from *every part* of Europe. . . . We claim brotherhood with every European Christian, and triumph in the generosity of the sentiment.¹⁹

Today, we might be less than fully impressed by the liberality of sentiment here expressed, but its general liberal tenor remains clear. As Greenfeld put it, the American Revolution brought into the world the idea that “self-government is mankind’s birthright, not an English liberty.”²⁰

NATIONALISM IS STILL A *SINE QUA NON* OF LIBERALISM

Thesis 2: The same varieties of nationalism that were historically instrumental in bringing about the birth and partial realisation of classical-liberal ideals and values remain a sine qua non of their continued and future espousal and realisation.

Despite spreading both eastward and westward from England, classical-liberal ideals and values never managed to take root in political thought and practice anywhere as firmly as in England and the United States. As that great student of nationalism, Hans Kohn, once observed,

Modern nationalism first took hold in England in the seventeenth century and in Anglo-America in the eighteenth century. . . . [It] respected, and was based upon, the individual liberties and self-government characteristic of these nations. The rise of nationalism in the French Revolution was different. The absolutist and centralised French monarchy had set the example for continental Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; the nationalism of the French people continued this form and set the model for the centralised European nation-state of the nineteenth century. The Napoleonic wars carried the aggressiveness of the new nationalism to the

¹⁹Thomas Paine, quoted in Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, p. 420.

²⁰Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, p. 420.

four corners of Europe.²¹

It remains true that England and America, more so than other nations, have more closely approached the realisation of classical-liberal ideals and values. This is so despite the severe erosion of the liberal credential in both countries during the twentieth century. This erosion was, of course, the result of their respective flirtations with collectivist ideologies and policies, especially those connected with social democracy and the welfare state. However, given the historic embeddedness of liberal ideals in the political constitutions and national imaginations of these two nations, the best historical prospects for liberty still remain with them, and still depend on their continued survival in at least as liberal a form as they are in.

Classical liberals, therefore, should not write nationalism off as an attitude that, in all its forms, is always and everywhere uncongenial to their own values and ideals. After all, and notwithstanding the collapse of communism, the two great nation-states of Britain and the U.S.—states in which classical-liberal values have thus far been most fully, if only incompletely and imperfectly, realised—are but islands of relative liberty in a vast ocean of far greater illiberalism.

No less a classical-liberal thinker than Ludwig von Mises claims that the best historical prospects for the eventual realisation of liberal ideals and values lie in the continued survival of these two states in a form that depends on each retaining its historic national identity. During the closing stages of the Second World War, after allied victory had become assured, Mises issued this stark warning:

It would be a fateful mistake to assume that a return to the policies of liberalism abandoned by the civilised nations some decades ago could cure the [present] evils and open the way towards peaceful co-operation of nations and toward prosperity. . . . [T]he years of antagonism and conflict have left a deep impression on human mentality, which cannot be easily eradicated. They have marked the souls of men, they have disintegrated the spirit of human cooperation, and have engendered hatreds *which can vanish only in centuries*.

Under present conditions, the adoption of a policy

²¹Hans Kohn, "Nationalism," in *Ideologies of Politics*, ed. A. De Crespigny and J. Cronin (London: Oxford University Press), p. 156.

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of outright *laissez faire* and *laissez passer* on the part of the civilised nations of the West would be equivalent to an unconditional surrender to the totalitarian nations.

Take, for instance, the case of migration barriers. Unrestrictedly opening the doors of the Americas, of Australia, and of Western Europe to immigrants would today be the equivalent to opening the doors to the vanguards of the armies of Germany, Italy, and Japan. . . .

[T]he most that can be expected for the immediate future is the separation of the world into two sections: a liberal, democratic, and capitalist West with about one quarter of the total population, and a militarist and totalitarian East embracing the greater part of the earth's surface and population.²²

Mises feared a massive immigration into the liberal democracies by peoples of vastly different ethnicity, culture, and outlook. Such immigration, he believed, could radically destabilize and ultimately imperil the political viability of such democracies. These immigrants, given the numbers in which he supposed they would enter, if able, would be not only unassimilated but unassimilable.

Without strict immigration controls, Mises thought, host populations would rapidly become national minorities in their own lands. As such, the hosts would become vulnerable to forms of oppression and persecution at the hands of new arrivals. Being unassimilated, after all, the new arrivals would not be indisposed to turning their own population advantage into the political advantage that their numeric superiority might provide them under conditions of representative democracy.

In an earlier work, Mises had identified as the most important threat facing the preservation of world peace the fear these two nations felt of being swamped by immigrants of remote outlook and nationality. He wrote:

In the absence of any migration barriers whatsoever, vast hordes of immigrants . . . would, it is maintained, . . . inundate Australia and America . . . in such great numbers that it would no longer be possible to count on their assimilation. . . . If, in the past, immigrants to America

²²Ludwig von Mises, *Omnipotent Government: The Rise of the Total State and Total War* (Spring Mills, Penn.: Libertarian Press, 1969), pp. 10–11, emphasis added.

soon adopted the English language and American ways and customs, this was, in part, due to the fact that they did not come over all at once in such great numbers. . . . This . . . would now change, and there is real danger that the ascendancy—or more correctly, the exclusive dominion—of the Anglo-Saxons in the United States would be destroyed. This is especially to be feared in the case of heavy immigration on the part of the Mongolian peoples of Asia.²³

Having identified and articulated this fear, Mises went on to endorse it as reasonable. He wrote:

it cannot be denied that these fears are justified. Because of the enormous power that today stands at the command of the state, a national minority must expect the worst from a majority of a different nationality. As long as the state is granted the vast powers which it has today and which public opinion considers to be its right,²⁴ the thought of having to live in a state whose government is in the hands of members of a foreign nationality is positively terrifying. It is frightful to live in a state in which at every turn one is exposed to persecution—masquerading under the guise of justice—by a ruling majority. It is dreadful to be handicapped even as a child in school on account of one's nationality and to be in the wrong before every judicial and administrative authority because one belongs to a national minority.²⁵

Mises's ultimate long-term solution to this problem was not the strict immigration controls which he later advocated as a temporary expedient after the War. Such barriers to labour mobility do nothing to reduce the gap in living standards between rich and poor—a gap he considered the root of the envy and rancour felt by the latter toward the former which would render unrestricted immigration so potentially dangerous. What Mises proposed as the only viable solution to the problem of the discrepancy between rich and poor nations was the universal adoption of the classical-liberal agenda of minimal gov-

²³Ludwig von Mises, *Liberalism in the Classical Tradition* (Irvington, N.Y.: Foundation for Economic Education, 1985), pp. 141–42.

²⁴Bear in mind that Mises is commenting on the reasonableness of public opinion relative to the size of government as it was in 1927, not 1947 or 1997.

²⁵Mises, *Liberalism*, pp. 141–42.

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ernment:

It is clear that no solution of the problem of immigration is possible if one adheres to the ideal of the interventionist state, which meddles in every field of human activity. Only the adoption of the liberal program could make the problem of immigration, which today seems insoluble, completely disappear.²⁶

It was with the problem of relations between rich and poor firmly in mind that, toward the end of the book, he declared that

The greatest ideological question that mankind has ever faced . . . is the question of whether we shall succeed in creating throughout the world a frame of mind . . . [that] can be nothing less than the unqualified, unconditional acceptance of liberalism. Liberal thinking must permeate all nations, liberal principles must pervade all political institutions, if the prerequisites of peace are to be created and the causes of war eliminated.²⁷

In Mises's view, for the U.S. or U.K. to remove all immigration barriers, as certain libertarians have recently advocated,²⁸ even after such governments had first been minimized, would still not be enough to prevent the danger he foresaw attendant upon mass immigration into these countries by peoples of different culture and ethnicity from that of majority. According to Mises, even policing and the judicial process are capable of being turned against minorities by members of majorities who perceive the minorities as alien and foreign. As Mises put it,

Large areas of the world have been settled, not by the members of just one nationality, one race, or one religion, but by a motley mixture of many peoples. As a result of the migratory movements that necessarily follow shifts in the location of production, more new territories are continually being confronted with the problem of a mixed population. . . .

To be a member of a national minority always means that one is a second class citizen. . . . The citizen who speaks a foreign tongue . . . must obey the law; yet

²⁶Mises, *Liberalism*, p. 142.

²⁷Mises, *Liberalism*, p. 150.

²⁸See, e.g., Julian L. Simon, *Population Matters* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1990).

he has a feeling that he is excluded from effective participation in shaping the will of the legislative authority or at least that he is not allowed to cooperate in shaping it to the same extent as those whose native tongue is that of the ruling majority. And when he appears before a magistrate or any administrative official as a party to a suit or petition, he stands before men whose political thought is foreign to him because it developed under different ideological influences. [T]he very fact that the members of the minority are required . . . to make use of a language foreign to them already handicaps them, seriously in many respects . . . when . . . on trial . . . At every turn, the member of a national minority is made to feel that he lives among strangers and that he is, even if the letter of the law denies it, a second-class citizen. . . .

All these disadvantages are felt to be very oppressive even in a state with a liberal constitution in which the activity of the government is restricted to the protection of the life and property of the citizens. But they become intolerable in an interventionist or a socialist state.²⁹

What would, and should, become of nationalist sentiment and immigration barriers in a world in which all inhabitants share classical-liberal ideals and values can doubtless be the subject of fruitful discussion, and surely has a part to play in classical-liberal debate. However, the answer to this question should not determine what attitude classical liberals should adopt toward nationalism in an only partially liberal world. Such a decision process would be analogous to concluding that, since individual states in a liberal world would have no need for a nuclear deterrent, individual states also have no need for one in a deeply illiberal world in which many states already possess such weapons.

HOSTILITY TO NATIONALISM AS THE CURRENT THREAT TO LIBERALISM

Thesis 3: At present, the greatest threat facing classical-liberal ideals and values is not a hostile foreign power threatening those nation-states in which these ideals first emerged and in which, to date, they have been most fully realised institutionally. Rather, it comes from

²⁹Mises, *Liberalism*, pp. 117–20.

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within these states, where it assumes the form of powerful political coalitions determined to undermine and ultimately destroy the citizens' sense of common nationality. Such coalitions seek to replace it with a heightened sense of their particularity and diversity vis-à-vis each other and which, unless checked, will lead to the disintegration of these nations into a mass of contending minorities.

We might term the current threat facing liberal regimes *liberal death wish number two*, the first having been the attempt to make themselves socialist, a danger which seems to have abated since the collapse of communism. The political tendency currently threatening liberalism often goes today under the name “multi-culturalism.” In the case of Britain, *liberal death wish number two* extends beyond the encouragement and cultivation of separate cultural identities for the various ethnic and cultural groups that make up its citizenry. It includes calls for the dissolution of the body politic itself into the several historic principalities and regions from which it was formed. In addition, it calls for the United Kingdom to relinquish its status as a sovereign state through becoming part of the emerging federal European Union, the illiberal credentials of which become more apparent every day.³⁰

Many commentators have pointed out that the implementation of the programme favoured by multi-culturalists in the U.K. and U.S., from encouraging separate schooling to affirmative action in the workplace, would not lead to any greater autonomy for the minorities on whose behalf it is ostensibly pursued.³¹ Indeed, the accentuation of ethnic difference at the expense of common culture and common nationality threatens the liberal character of each nation.

Rather, these policies would lead to a fragmentation and dissolution of the civic bonds that unite the diverse constituent peoples who comprise these two great nations. In the absence of these common bonds, civility would rapidly break down, and the diverse ethnic groups would no longer be able to live together harmoniously under the same government. In short, the policies of cultural auton-

³⁰For an elaboration of this thesis, see David Conway, “The Future of Liberty in the European Union,” *The European Journal* 8, no. 6 (May 2001).

³¹See, e.g., Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1992); and S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Touchstone Books, 1996).

omy favoured by many multi-culturalists would lead not to the pluralist utopia which their starry-eyed proponents promise, but, more likely, to British and American equivalents of the burning streets of Sarajevo.

CONCLUSION

Classical liberals should neither ignore nor underestimate the value to their cause of American and British nationalism. The political order to which classical liberals aspire—worldwide minimal government—has no chance of seeing the light of day unless the populaces of Britain and the United States remain as liberal as they have long been. The populace of neither nation-state can do so unless each preserves its own unique and distinct national identity and status. This will be a hard saying for some, since, to many, it will seem overly restrictive, and, moreover, historically false.

I anticipate that some will object that the U.S. and the present-day U.K. are not only not today's most liberal societies, judged in classical-liberal terms, but also, in terms of the ethnic composition of the citizenry of each, are already manifestly multi-national or multi-cultural or multi-ethnic. Neither the U.S. nor the U.K., however, can be cited as examples of a stable and robust multi-national liberal polity; thus, their viability cannot serve to counter-instantiate the claim that each needs to preserve its national homogeneity to maintain its viability.

This is so for two reasons. First, neither state is genuinely multi-national in the relevant sense. Second, to the extent that each has become multi-national today, so is its liberal character under severe threat. It is imperative to realise that, notwithstanding the rhetoric of multi-culturalists and devolutionists, neither state has been anything but mono-cultural since its inception, and the viability of each has rested on this fact. In fact, certain cultural hegemonic traits—such as the use of English as the standard language in each country—are not optional extras that can be safely discarded. Rather, the loss of such cultural hegemony is, perhaps, the greatest threat that would accompany any expansion of liberalism in either nation.

There is a danger that even classical liberals may be led astray here by misinterpreting the scope of certain remarks made by Mises about what is appropriate liberal policy for polyglot territories, and coming to suppose his prescriptions apply in the case of the U.S. and

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the U.K., given their current multi-cultural composition. In writing about what obtains under polyglot conditions, Mises claimed that the state should withdraw completely in terms of what it demands of its citizens vis-à-vis the linguistic competence of their children. Specifically, the state should not insist on any one language being official, nor even insist on schooling being compulsory. Classical liberals might suppose that this policy should also carry over to present-day U.S. and U.K. But the conditions which obtained in the former Hapsburg Empire, which was where Mises had in mind when making this proposal, do not obtain in Britain and America, and what is true of it does not apply to them.

In fact, quite the opposite holds. In the case of both the U.K. and U.S., the viability of their liberal institutions reduces in such proportion as the state encourages and supports cultural and linguistic diversity. John Stuart Mill, whose views on this subject are as valid today as when he advanced them more than one hundred years ago, explains why:

Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist. The influences which form opinions and decide political acts, are different in the different sections of the country. An altogether different set of leaders have the confidence of one part of the country and of the other.

The same books, newspapers, pamphlets, speeches, do not reach them. One section does not know what opinions, or what instigations, are circulating in another. The same incidents, the same acts, the same system of government, affect them in different ways; and each fears more injury to itself from other nationalities, than from the common arbiter, the State. Their mutual antipathies are generally much stronger than jealousy of the government. . . .

For [this] reason, it is in general a necessary condition of free institutions, that the boundaries of government should coincide in the main with those of nationalities.³²

“But”—I can anticipate the objection—“are not minorities hampered or oppressed by this demand for national homogeneity? How

³²Mill, “Considerations on Representative Government,” pp. 428–30.

can such a demand be liberal?" The answer is: minorities are not hampered or oppressed by such a demand, provided—but only provided—that the governments of the states in which they reside remain minimal in function, or, at least, are strictly limited. In proportion as government becomes more than minimal, so what might be involved by its demand for national homogeneity becomes oppressive of minorities. The more extensive government is, the greater the scope for political power to be used by ethnic majorities against minorities.

This is the great teaching of Mises's study of nationalism. It is not that liberal polities should not aspire after and seek to maintain national homogeneity. It is, rather, that where there are substantial minorities within a territory, to be liberal, government should and must become minimal. As Mises observed,

If the administrative authorities have the right to intervene everywhere according to their discretion, if the latitude granted to judges and officials in reaching their decisions is so wide as to leave room for the operation of political prejudices, then a member of a national minority finds himself delivered over to arbitrary judgement and oppression on the part of the public functionaries belonging to the ruling majority.³³

It is not illiberal for Britain and the United States to keep English the official national language, and to demand of parents enjoying permanent residence or citizenship within these countries to ensure that children raised there be fluent in English. It would be illiberal for a state to make similar demands which favoured one natural language in territories which were genuinely polyglot, such as the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, which neither Britain nor the United States has ever been.

In genuinely—but only genuinely—polyglot territories, it would be illiberal for the state to make such a demand of its citizens. To do so would alienate children from their parents, the children being instructed in a language different from that their parents speak. As Mises also observed,

[I]n those extensive areas in which peoples speaking different languages live together side by side intermingled and in polyglot confusion, . . . [t]he question of which

³³Mises, *Liberalism*, p. 120.

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language is to be made the basis of instruction assumes crucial importance. A decision one way or the other can, over the years, determine the nationality of a whole area. The school can alienate children from the nationality to which their parents belong and be used as a means of oppressing whole nationalities. . . . In all areas of mixed nationality, the school is a political prize of the highest importance. It cannot be deprived of its political character as long as it remains a public . . . institution.³⁴

However, those who choose to emigrate to and have been admitted into Britain and America have no right to be granted citizenship, or even permanent residence, while refusing to acquire for themselves, or ensure that their children acquire, the wherewithal to be of that nation. Acquiring fluency in the native tongue is the minimal condition of being able to be such. This is what is so potentially dangerous and divisive about the current multi-cultural movement in both Britain and the United States. In seeking to disunite the citizenry of these two nations, through fostering or even permitting linguistic apartheid, multi-culturalism is sowing the seeds of future disunion and anarchy.³⁵

My overall conclusion, therefore, is that nationalism of the Brit-

³⁴Mises, *Liberalism*, p. 116.

³⁵Some might wonder whether the cause of liberty is not best served today by the U.S. and U.K. taking the path of ever-greater cultural and political regional autonomy, eventually issuing in the dissolution of these political unions through secession from them of whichever constituent states or confederations chose, through referenda, to secede. My view is that the cause of liberty remains unaffected one way or the other, no matter how zealously cultural or even political regional autonomy might be pursued in these political confederations. This is provided that the manner of its pursuit and the exercise of any such autonomy acquired remains, as is conceivable but unlikely, consistent with upholding the civil and political rights of any dissenting cultural minorities resident within those regions.

However, it is highly anachronistic to suppose that secession today in either state is anywhere desired by any regional majority, or, if, say, as in Northern Ireland, it was, it is capable of coming about without a form of “ethnic cleansing” that renders it unconscionable to classical liberals. This issue is as huge as it is important, and I cannot here give it the extended attention it merits. For an interesting set of discussions on the subject, many of which express views different from my own, see David Gordon, ed., *Secession, State, & Liberty* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1998).

ish and American varieties, far from being incompatible with or hostile to liberalism, is the best friend of liberty and the best guarantor of its future survival. This being so, citizens of each who are friends of liberty should affirm and be proud of their liberal and national traditions. They should seek to reverse the terrible decline in national self-esteem that has recently occurred in both nations through the ascendancy that has been gained in each of an ideology designed to undermine national pride and self-esteem out of a misbegotten concern for supposedly disadvantaged minorities.

Lovers of liberty in both nations should be aware and proud of their own liberal national heritage and of the common source from which both spring. So struck was Mises by the affinity between the American and English peoples that, in 1919, he went so far as to describe them as forming “a single nation . . . bound by a national bond that will show its binding force in days of great political crisis.”³⁶

Accordingly, I shall conclude by articulating a sentiment which I like to think he would have been glad to endorse were he alive today. Long may these two great nations continue to be divided by their common language but united by their distinct, but equally liberal, nationalities.

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³⁶Ludwig von Mises, *Nation, State, and Economy* (New York: New York University Press, 1983), p. 19.

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