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OLD ENEMIES AND NEW:  
A PHILOSOPHIC POSTSCRIPT TO NATIONALISM\*

*The manifestos of an illiterate Cossack who followed an absurd religious faith, signed with the forged name of an idiot whom nobody knew (Peter III), contained more vital social principles, more solid promises, more threatening and certain prophecies for the future, than those contained in all the humanitarian 'codes' of Catherine II, and even in all the liberal and radical prophecies against throne and altar, that echoed along the banks of the Thames, the Seine and the Delaware.*

Piotr Lavrov on Pugachev

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Nationalism is treated sometimes alongside other political doctrines such as liberalism and socialism. Therefore it would seem quite strange that there is no real theoretical version of nationalism offering the mandatory answers to questions usually tormenting political philosophers. There is no specifically nationalist view of liberty and justice, there is no intrinsically nationalist view of a good society — nor can there be. There have been philosophers who were personally inclined to be nationalists, but this is marginal to their philosophy. Even the man who was purportedly the philosophical founder of modern nationalism, Fichte, was a philosopher of socialism rather than of nationalism when he pronounced his *Discourses to the German Nation*. Still, his work offers an understanding of the phenomenon more profound and incisive than anything written since. It is possible to be a nationalist philosopher, though, since Heidegger changed the rules of the philosophic game: but the possibility of a nationalistic philosophy may mean the end of philosophy as we knew it.

In this essay I shall not speak of republican patriotism, only as a contrast to my subject-matter. Allusions to our parochial East European nationalism will be abundant merely because this variant is, I believe, exemplary (or, if you wish, 'paradigmatic') for the post-republican or

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ethno-cultural nationalism that is both the most characteristic and the most contemporary form of this body of political feeling. Why I think that the ethno-cultural variant, therefore the main East European version, of nationalism is the closest to its 'pure' embodiment, will be perhaps clear a few pages later but, at any rate, this is the one I shall endeavour to investigate. I guess nationalism has been so intractable in the recent past because of the sometimes not entirely conscious parallel drawn between it and the 'normal' political doctrines (liberalism, socialism and the like). I shall close my observations with a brief analysis of the similarities of nationalism with a certain kind of utopian thought, Enlightenment liberal, socialist or other.

#### (1) PHILOSOPHY VS. NATIONALISM

Philosophy, before the onset of its possibly terminal crisis in the twentieth century, used to be seen by the community of the learned and by respectfully distant admirers as a pursuit of certain knowledge as opposed to mere opinion. Philosophers were regarded as bold rippers of the veil of appearance, seekers for the truth eternal, foremost representatives of that secular clerisy that was, all the same, reminiscent of a caste dedicated to something sacred, even if exotericism and worldly good taste prevented writers and readers of philosophy from indulging in a predilection for religious metaphor. Thus, adherence to the beliefs of the common man was never before a sign of philosophical excellence — beliefs can be mistaken. Nor was the philosopher supposed to partake of the usual fare of passion and confusion, the favourite menu of political society. Philosophers were expected to be aloof and detached: that was deemed to be the mark of their sagacity. Until the devastating critique of Kant inaugurated this most important of doubts, liberty was equated with rationality. Even in Spinoza, liberty is still liberation from the servitude of passion (and, of course, of the senses), that is, freedom is possible only under the reign of reason. From Kant to Max Weber the conviction grew that liberty was freedom of choice (rather than an intellectual condition), whatever the reasons for that choice — and nobody really disbelieved Hume when he hinted that those reasons were bound to be passionate anyway. Whatever else

this shift in European moral thought did to mankind in general, it changed unobtrusively our idea of philosophy and philosophers.

Still, even for Hume or Kant, in spite of their doubts about the power and scope of human reason, the ideal of philosophic deportment and inquiry remained the same: a striving for objective (i.e., impartial, unbiased) knowledge. It is rather amusing how nowadays this ideal is equated with Enlightenment 'naïveté.' However, the ideal originated with the pre-Socratics and the prophets of the Old Covenant. The latter, impassioned leaders as they were of their flock, thought that their patriotic commitment could entail castigating and berating one's own people, nay, praying for its destruction. Fear of God (the beginning of wisdom, as we know) transcended allegiance and loyalty. No nationalism can do that. Bias is its life-blood. It is not necessary that nationalists be uncritical of their lot — many nationalists were moralists of unremitting strictness, practising merciless self-examination. But any criticism, be it demanding to the point of cruelty, is not philosophic if it is exercised in the interest of something else than truth (or God) alone. National self-criticism of which we know majestic examples serves the national interest (that includes the nation's moral well-being) and, although attractive and useful, is at odds with the commitment of the traditional philosopher to *theory*, that is, impartial contemplation. The aim of self-critical nationalism (surely the highest instance of the phenomenon I am trying to comprehend) is action, moreover, an action aiming at triumph in the *agon* or noble contest among nations.

A nationalistic philosophy was made conceivable by Heidegger's notorious *Rektoratsrede* in 1933. Let us consider the most favourable interpretation of that address, to be found in Jacques Derrida's *De l'esprit* (translated into English as *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question* by Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby).

Each word of the title, *die Selbstbestimmung der deutschen Universität*, is traversed, steeped, illuminated (*bestimmt*) — I mean both defined and destined — called for, by spirit. Self-affirmation, first of all, would be impossible, would not be heard, would not be what it is if it were not of the order of spirit, spirit's very order. The word 'order' designating both the value of command, of leading, duction or conduction, the *Führung*, and the value of mission: sending, an order given. Self-affirmation *wants* to be (we must emphasize this wanting) the affirmation of spirit through *Führung*. This is a spiritual conducting, of course, but the *Führer*, the guide — here the rector — says he can only lead if he is himself led by the inflexibility of an order, the rigour or even the *directive*

rigidity of a mission (*Auftrag*). This is also, already, spiritual. Consequently, conducted from guide to guide, the self-affirmation of the German university will be possible only through those who lead, while themselves being led, directors directed by the affirmation of this spiritual mission. Later, we shall have to recognize a passage between this *affirmation* and a certain thinking of consent, of commitment in the form of a reply, of a responsible acquiescence, of agreement or confidence (*Zusage*), a sort of word given in return. Before any question and to make possible the question itself.

The *German* character of this university is not a secondary or contingent predicate, it cannot be dissociated from this affirmation of spirit. As the highest agency of the institution thus erected, of this “high school” (*hohe Schule*), directed upwards from the heights, spirit can do nothing other than affirm itself — and this . . . in the movement of an authentication or identification which *wish themselves to be properly German*.

And he quotes Heidegger:

‘To take over the rectorship is to oblige oneself to guide this high school *spiritually* (*die Verpflichtung zur geistigen Führung dieser hohen Schule*). Those who follow, masters and pupils, owe their existence and their strength only to a true common rootedness in the essence of the German university. But this essence comes to the clarity, the rank and the power which are its own only if first of all and at all times the guiders (*Führer*) . . . are themselves guided — guided by the inflexibility of this spiritual mission (*jenes geistigen Auftrags*), the constraining nature of which imprints the destiny of the German people with its specific historical character.’

This final sentence speaks, then, of the imprint (*Gepräge*) marked in the destiny of the German people. A typological motif, and even an onto-typological motif, as Lacoue-Labarthe would put it.

Then Derrida identifies the four ‘headings’ of the Rectorship Address thus:

1. First there is *questioning*, *Fragen*, which manifests here — and manifests *itself* — as will: will to know and will to essence. Even before the definition of spirit, which reaffirms it, this will had been reaffirmed earlier in the Address:

‘To will the essence of the German university is to will science, in the sense of willing the spiritual historical mission of the German people (*Wille zum geschichtlichen geistigen Auftrag des deutschen Volkes*) as a people that knows itself in its State. Science and German destiny must, in this will to essence, achieve power (*Macht*) *at the same time*.’

2. Next there is the *world*, a central theme of *Sein und Zeit*. Like the renewed quest of *Fragen*, it marks the profound continuity between *Sein und Zeit* and the Address.

3. Further, and still linked to force, there is the theme of *earth-and-blood*: “*erd- und bluthaften Kräfte als Macht . . .*”

4. Finally, and above all, still in essential and internal continuity with *Sein und Zeit*, there is *Entschlossenheit*: *resolution*, determination, the decision which gives its possibility of opening to *Eigentlichkeit*, the authentic property of *Dasein*.

And for Derrida's political judgment:

On the one hand, Heidegger thus confers the most reassuring and elevated *spiritual* legitimacy on everything in which, and on all before whom, he commits himself, on everything he thus sanctions and consecrates at such a height. One could say that he spiritualizes National Socialism. And one could reproach him for this, as he will later reproach Nietzsche for having exalted the spirit of vengeance into a "spirit of vengeance spiritualized to the highest point" (*ein höchst vergeistigter Geist der Rache*).

But, on the other hand, by taking the risk of spiritualizing Nazism, he might have been trying to absolve or save it by marking it with this affirmation (spirituality, science, questioning, etc.). By the same token, this sets apart Heidegger's commitment and breaks an affiliation. This Address *seems* no longer to belong simply to the 'ideological' camp in which one appeals to obscure forces — forces which would not be spiritual, but natural, biological, racial, according to an anything but spiritual interpretation of "earth and blood."

Both Heidegger and Derrida are controversial, sometimes despised or derided thinkers; they are certainly very far from my way of thinking. Nevertheless — if, according to the Hegelian adage, *Philosophie ist ihre Zeit, in Gedanken erfasst* — Derrida's only apparently quirky interpretation of Heidegger's *Rektoratsrede* can help us understand the predicament of contemporary philosophy that can go as far as to make possible the hitherto inconceivable merger of philosophy and nationalism. Obviously, Derrida's interpretation is a defense: a defense of Heidegger against the terrible, sometimes unspoken reproach of his having been a Nazi at least from 1933, arguably until his death. Nobody can deny that Heidegger was a Nazi, our problem is rather, are there any illuminating or, indeed, redeeming features in Heidegger's particular version of National Socialism — or, was he perhaps right in being one of its supporters?

At first glance, Derrida's apology is little different from those clichés, repeated ad nauseam, according to which the essence of the Nazi *Weltanschauung* was biologism (racism) while Heidegger was a spiritualist, *ergo* he could not have been a true Nazi in spite of his purging and denouncing zeal and other misdemeanours. But 'spirit' is redefined by Derrida in a highly interesting manner. Spirit becomes a synonym for Will. But surely, 'spirit' in any customary 'spiritualist' sense (the customary defense for Heidegger) is closer in meaning to 'reason', 'intellect', 'mind' and the like. Equating Spirit with Will is certainly

possible in the sense of *Volksgeist*, where a nation's mind is guided by the collective will, *la volonté générale*. 'Spirit's very order' is assimilated through a tired pun to an 'order' as command or *Führung*. But if a command, says Derrida, comes from or is identical with an inflexible order, that makes it both missionary and spiritual. Thus, 'spirit's very order' is an immovable Will that is nothing more than *Zusage*, acquiescence or, rather, assent. But what *is* an inflexible Will? An inflexible Will will motivate repetitively the same actions always; it is, therefore, rather like a *habitus*, a moral attitude become character through custom (repetition). *Voilà*, a good definition of nationalism.

And indeed, as we could see, 'the *German* character of this university is not a secondary or contingent predicate', it is therefore the 'reified' expression (*habitus*, 'character') of the inflexible Will, reified again where 'authentication or identification' act as abstract persons who '*wish themselves to be properly German*,' a classical example of groundless hypostasis. In the Heidegger quote, the teachers and the students of the University 'owe their existence and their strength only to a true common rootedness in the essence of the German university.' What superficially seen might appear as high-falutin nonsense, and in its grandiloquent pseudo-Hegelianism not very attractive either, is much more than that. But after all, in Heidegger, all existence is rooted in essence (*pace* Jean-Paul Sartre). The essence here is *being led* (by an immutable spiritual task, another unwarranted hypostasis). The inflexible Will is made inflexible by 'the constraining nature' of that 'spiritual task' that *leads*, and it is after all the *Führung* ('guidance', yes, but less romantically translated, 'leadership' or even 'steering committee') that here 'imprints the destiny of the German people with its specific historical character.' And this is 'onto-typological' to boot. The root of the (university) existence, the (university) essence (spirit = will) can be 'willed', but not individually; the volitional agency here is the as yet nebulous group that wills its own historical mission, that act of volition being grounded on a knowledge, to wit, the self-knowledge of the German people in its State. 'Science and German destiny must, in this will to essence, achieve power,' *uno eodemque actu*. This dizzying vicious circle is then propped up by '*earth-and-blood*' and resolution (determination, a kind of philosophical bloody-mindedness), feebly echoing Carl Schmitt and his jurisprudential/political 'decisionism'.

According to Derrida, spiritualizing Nazism and perhaps even *Blut und Boden* (colloquially known under the Third Reich as *Blubo*) is the source of both danger and hope in Heidegger. But Derrida decisively — and, I think, convincingly — tells us himself that ‘spirit’ *chez* Heidegger means Will, which for everyone ever so faintly familiar with the history of German philosophy, is a clear sign of a theory directed *against* spiritualism, albeit not necessarily of ‘biological’ nature, no: simply of a voluntaristic nature, the doctrinal explanation of which — regarding the present case — can be found in Heidegger’s book on Kant. Heidegger is thus not spiritualizing, but voluntarizing Nazism, back to Georges Sorel, Roberto Michels, Ernst Jünger, that is, the Fascist, quasi-Nietzschean, non-racist early version of (one sort of) National Socialism, where the all-pervasive anti-Semitism of the period was more politically anti-liberal than downright racist in the Himmler/Eichmann sense. It was an ‘activist’ redefinition of National Socialism that could have been liked by the Prussian National Bolshevik Ernst Niekisch and his pupils in the Schwarze Front and, of course, by their transalpine counterpart, Il Duce himself.

But apart from the fascinating cautionary tale of Heidegger’s notorious affair with Hitler, the philosophical importance of the *Rektoratsrede* lies elsewhere. In the Address, philosophy is subordinated to an assent to something given — given, that is, by a pre-determined will to an historical mission of a people. This is clearly a quasi-religious notion; but this is a religion without God; election is not effected by God, but by the will of the people itself, contingency constituting divinity. Choosing oneself — this is the foundation of the new philosophy and, unavoidably, of the new community. Traditional or classical philosophy was inaugurated by the sighting of the possibility that one may chose something or someone else, different from one’s contingent or accidental *habitus*, truth necessarily transcending oneself, one’s estate or one’s condition. Heidegger obviously thinks that truth can be hit upon by the resolution or determination of choosing one’s own estate or one’s own human condition, whereby proving himself to be the true heir of radical German humanism.

For after all Goethe left us three main injunctions: dare to be yourself; be either hammer or anvil; in the beginning was the deed. The Grand Tradition, on the contrary, asserts that you ought to be like your

father; that you ought to strive for justice rather than for triumph; and that in the beginning was the Thought or *logos*. In this story, Heidegger is the Third Man, after Marx and Nietzsche, to affirm the mystique of immanence. Activism, 'self-choice', 'self-affirmation' (*Selbstbehauptung*) is the precise contrary of classical philosophy that traditionally stood for repose, serenity, mastery of passion and for impartial intellect rather than our empirical self. In modern anti-philosophy, universality is sought elsewhere. Plato thought that the intuitive preliminary idea of justice was division of labour, difference between people of various callings obeying the variegated ethics of their station or estate. Universality was granted by the divine and by contemplation. By reversing Plato's 'communist' utopia, Marx — who was in other ways as well an adversary of 'communism' — considered division of labour and the resulting diversity of social roles to be the supreme evil, and the unified, undifferentiated human species (unified *and* represented in each and every specimen of the human race) to realise in its *praxis* the universality previously lodged in contemplation or *theoria*. The unending quest of human activity or *praxis* that is accompanied only by open-ended, limitless, therefore perennial questioning (*Fragen*) means that, paradoxically, permanence can be established by the fickle Will alone made stable ('inflexible') by the group character (*habitus*) anchored in a 'historical mission' (of the nation, of the proletariat or whomever).

Goethe's ambiguous insistence on authenticity, *agon* or competition and human action makes it comprehensible that *l'existentialisme, c'est un humanisme*: it is, of course, the completion of human immanence philosophy used to despise. Philosophy as a bare expression of human immanence, especially if it is pre-ordained in the rigidity of an 'inflexible will', the character of the group, will be nothing more than the celebration of a contingent *habitus* formed by the practice of specific custom transformed into activity by the intellectual ploy of 'mission'. Anyway, if philosophy is demoted to being just an expression of something being already there, inquiry will necessarily be reduced to the self-affirmation of a group that is 'spiritually' defined by *Führung*. No doubt, this can be of high cultural quality as a kind of this-worldly, godless religion (and that is what nationalism is), but is, as it were, a *double break* with philosophic tradition: it parallels the natural antipathy of revealed religion for philosophy and it reflects the distaste



for speculation/contemplation of modern radical humanism and anti-philosophy from Rousseau to our day. If a nationalistic philosophy is possible, philosophy *per se* is impossible. But it is plausible that there are more important things than philosophy (democracy is one such according to Professor Rorty). The classical philosophic tradition was found wanting even where contemplation was thought to be in its own element, aesthetic *Betrachtung*. In apophthegm 154 of *Daybreak* (translated into English by R. J. Hollingdale), Nietzsche describes the moral failing of contemplation thus:

*Consolation of the imperilled.* — The Greeks, in a way of life in which great perils and upheavals were always present, sought in knowledge and reflection a kind of security and ultimate *refugium*. We, in an incomparably more secure condition, have transferred this perilousness into knowledge and reflection, and we recover from it, and calm ourselves down, *with our way of life*.

Magnificent words; are they true? Well, one wonders whether in ancient Greece, a place apparently full to the brim with the numinous, knowledge and reflection of the philosophic kind were so secure. The fate of Socrates seems to recount a different tale and the *dramatis personae* in Plato's dialogues had a tendency to be exiled or assassinated. And they were not, to the best of our knowledge, pursuing philosophy in an 'escapist' frame of mind. In the late nineteenth century thoughts might have been bolder than deeds, however, and the mindless routine of everyday life has a happily numbing quality that makes it the most widely abused hallucinogenic drug of the contemporary world. If classical thought was for Nietzsche a paltry sum of daydreams apt to make up for the roughness of heroic Greek life — and he believed this at least of Platonism and Christianity —, the Goethean primacy of action is immediately denounced as illusory in a Christianised, philistine, democratico-plebeian, unheroic age where life itself is little more than an escape from the threatening tragic truths. The new philosophy, that of the 'future', is naturally not contemplative or reflective, it is philosophising with the hammer, it is prophetic action. This is why, in spite of the nullity of modern life, contemplation is not rehabilitated, and the classical aesthetic repose decried. Derrida puts this very sharply in his *Spurs/Éperons* (translated into English by Barbara Harlow; in the chapter called 'History of an error'). The alternative is

... production, just as much for Nietzsche as for all of tradition, and a productive mother is a masculine mother. In this matter Heidegger cites a second fragment: "Our aesthetic was a feminine one (*eine Weibs-Ästhetik*) in that only those natures which were receptive to art (*die Empfänglichen*) formulated their experience of 'what is beautiful?' Throughout all of philosophy and even to the present time the artist has been lacking (*fehlt der Künstler*)." Stated (or rather translated, since Heidegger doesn't put it in so many words) in another way, there has been, until now, only a philosopher of art. And this philosopher of art, who, face to face with art, never abandons his positions in front of art, who never actually lays his hands on it (*qui n'y touche pas*), who, even though he at times fancies himself an artist producing works, is content merely to gossip about art, he is a woman — and what is more he is a sterile woman and certainly not the *männliche Mutter*. Before art, the dogmatic philosopher, a maladroit courtesan, remains, just as did the second-rate scholar, impotent (*impuissant*), a sort of old maid.

Never mind that this passage is redolent of the most over-used journalistic commonplaces on criticism, with a tinge of Oscar Wildeish, Alfred Kerrish half-decadent feuilletons enamoured of the 'crude force' of unreflective creation and impatient with reason of any kind. Heidegger must have read this every day of his life in the newspapers. What is important here — excluding the Weiningerian nonsense about masculinity and femininity: how can women be impotent? Even the similes are all wrong — is the contention that the good philosopher (as opposed to the dogmatic or traditional, anti-sceptic variety) ought to drop his 'positions' (views, convictions) in 'front of' art, *whatever those 'positions' are?* This is a truly remarkable statement.

You drop your guards, abandon your 'positions' in the face of what ultimately is nothing else but solidified human design (intention, 'project' or 'projection') and thus you abandon yourself voluntarily to someone else's will — this is not exactly what had been traditionally called masculine, but these definitions are hilariously inadequate anyway. This is not the serene contemplation of beauty (that is barren, awkward, anerotic), but the obedient acceptance of the inflexible will, separated from the *fauteur*, the author (an individual soul) by (and through) the medium of the work of art; just like those participating in a *culture* will have had to acquiesce in or assent to the *habitus* or historical/'spiritual' character of their cultural group via self-affirmation that is collective, culturally determined rather than a personal or individual act of faith.

Philosophical nationalism is bound to be relativistic. It need not

be sanguine or intolerant, witness the new-fangled theories of multiculturalism and post-modernism where the new nationalism of the West is hibernating under an alias. (It is small wonder that they are exacerbating black racism in the United States and Muslim militancy in England. Soon the attitudes thus ennobled and sanitized will spread to the ethnic majorities there as well; the cultural wars will not be less destructive than those in Bosnia, the Caucasus and the Carpathians.) The new nationalism that does not dare to speak its name is championed by relativists like Professor Rorty. The common enemy of both old and new nationalists and relativists is classical philosophy. The new ones do not want to murder anybody and that is — immensely — to their credit. They are ‘liberal ironists’ (Rorty) or ‘consumerist unbelievers’ (Gellner), in their thinking ‘multi-culturalism’ and ‘ethnocentrism’ will unreservedly coincide. ‘Clinging together in the dark,’ Professor Rorty’s poignant and moving account of the ‘position’ of the ‘liberal ironist’, moves one to a self-conscious, shy, modest self-affirmation, whereby the ‘inflexible will’, the *habitus* of the ethno-cultural group is acknowledged without any fuss. Others (members of the ‘out-group’) will not be forced to see the point. Universalist discourse or the quest for truth (particularly moral truth) will be discouraged because they are seen as specific to one set of cultures (thus ‘ethnocentric’), but they might gain limited recognition if they assimilate relativistic *Kulturkritik* wherein the classical philosophic (‘rational’) approach is construed as an attempt at dominance over nature and man by people conditioned to believe in intellectualistic and aristocratic ‘values’. In the absence of a universalist discourse (in which telling right from wrong is not supposed to be obedience to ‘values’ culturally assembled, conditioned and so of limited validity, if any) the common decency (the ‘lack of cruelty’ propounded by Professor Rorty) will have to be achieved not by rational moral debate and education, but by setting up rules that *will* aim at a certain notion of good (like common decency); however, since they will not be established by argument, but arrived at by consent (Platonism vs. democracy), they will not have to be justified by argument either: they will be apodictically demonstrated by pointing at the immutable fact of original consent (the group’s inflexible will) and by voicing here utilitarian beliefs about the goodness of those rules that may be shared by outsiders through mere assent, without coercing them

into accepting *our* discourse masquerading as impersonal moral truth. The 'priority of democracy over philosophy' (to quote Professor Rorty again) reveals an ideal of non-deliberative democracy.

Establishment of rules through consent and their ulterior justification by assent smacks strongly of (evidently atheistic) religion. And it coincides precisely with the point of view of ethno-cultural nationalism, the main contemporary version of nationalism. 'Liberal ironists' in Massachusetts, in the South of England or in Amsterdam may be surprised if it is pointed out to them that their attitude shows a marked structural similarity with the attitude of grim tribal warriors in Bosnia, Azerbaijan or at the North-Western Frontier; nevertheless this is the case.

## (2) NATIONALISM AS A POLITICAL DOCTRINE

The causes of the structural similarity mentioned above are not trivial. The case appears to be rather more than less decisive if one considers the obvious discrepancy between the detectable intentions of liberal ironists and tribal warriors. This discrepancy presumably goes beyond the simple sociological fact that liberal ironists wish to defend minorities, while tribal warriors want to carve out majority dominions, invoking the same *mentalité* of ethno-cultural determinism elevated to quasi-religion (which might be, and sometimes is, *Ersatz* religion as well). The problem (if not its solution) is rooted in our theories concerning human will and the human group. Once upon a time, thinkers analysed two human groups. One group was the household and the other the body politic. Xenophon and Vergil on the one hand, Plato and Cicero on the other, gave us the classical picture of these two human groups: the first given by nature, the second united teleologically by the transcendent aim of the common good, but held together nonetheless by the links of *philia*, the involuntary sympathy embedded in human nature.

For the ancients, any community was — to use an anachronistic term — a kerygmatic community. The ancients did not much investigate its origins: nature saw to that and mythology supplied its paradigmatic moral history. The existence of the community itself was not question-

able or 'problematic': the question appeared to be which *kind* of political arrangements within the community will serve better man's kerygmatic calling (since man serves God), in other words, which arrangements will make the community more just, i.e., truer to man's nature. These are questions of moral theology and moral philosophy, made impossible ('unaskable') after Rousseau, Marx, Nietzsche and especially Heidegger changed the rules of the philosophic game. For the ancients, human will could not be constitutive of communities: communities had as their source nature, and teleologically seen, they aimed at transcendence (the good), carried a *kerygma*, perhaps only partially revealed to them. If the community is seen as being constituted by *la volonté générale*, the inflexible will, the essential difference between the household and the body politic is blurred. As we can see in the Greek tragedies or in the Torah, the destiny shaped by someone's will is *inherited* following the blood-line, because families are *natural*. But bodies politic are artefacts put together by circumstance and the idea of justice; the character of a community is not 'naturally' inherited, but rather handed down according to the nature of *information*, via contestable and contested *tradition*. There is nothing inflexible about tradition. If communities are constituted by will (or should we call it desire?), to preserve their unity and recognisably independent being, we must make that will inflexible by, as it were, *training*, even coaching: we shall, through custom, 'reify' it into a historical character or *habitus*. This is why we have, particularly from the 1920s, this futile and hopeless theorizing on 'national character' always contradicted by capricious empirical evidence. One must suspect that the imposition of the supremacy of an inflexible will means an effective ban on philosophy. After all, the 'maxim' of the will (to use Kant's fateful term) can be either good or evil. But through the hypostasis of the natural link (the family bloodline) into the negated artificiality ('createdness') of the community, the *transcensus* enabling us to debate good and evil (surely a universalist discourse or 'meta-language') becomes, if not downright impossible, at best ineffable. *Morals becomes a possession, an attribute*, 'the good of the community.' The Ought will not be inferred from the Is, nor will it be permitted to be indeterminate (that is, *free*); we speak here *de servo arbitrio* in a secularised Jansenist-Calvinist sense. *Willkür* (*arbitrium*, 'decision', individual will) disap-

pears to give room to *das Wollen* (volition). Volition would be empty of substantive content if it were not filled as something immutably natural with the character of the group. After all, *Willkür* can go in any (good or bad) direction and *der Wille* is just our psychic energy to decide; the former is moral, the latter is natural. *Das Wollen*, on the contrary, is artefact made nature (in my opinion, the main thrust of Heidegger's philosophy) where nature is unaccountably, but necessarily — I am speaking here of a logical-rhetorical-poetic 'necessity' — redefined as being always *partial*, an arbitrary sum of human natures, described ethnically and culturally. In these 'human natures' (plural) our beliefs cannot point heavenwards or outwards, they will have to point at themselves. This self-reference, however, is not self-reflective but apodictic. Self-reflection is derived from the assumption of a universalist discourse, of a 'view from nowhere' (Thomas Nagel) confronting the collective or cultural self. In other words, it entails the traditional practice of philosophy or at least, of its domesticated and modernised form, the philosophy of history. A variety of inflexible wills (plural), unreflected and unexplained, will stand next to each other, isolated, in a non-reflective *parataxis* where the enemy cannot really be the paratactic neighbour, only the Peeping Tom of the universalist discourse, peering into our little *intermundia* from beyond the boundaries of the inflexible will, a breaker of secrets, someone who should not exist at all. Other paratactic groups, i.e., ethno-cultural 'nations', will not be true rivals because the 'maxim' of their collective *Wollen* will not be visible or comprehensible from our isolated *intermundium* ('worldlet', *Weltchen*). They should be kept out rather than defeated. 'Ethnic cleansing', better translated, 'ethnic purge' is the necessary conceptual consequence of nationalistic philosophy: *others ought to be elsewhere*; there is no universalistic, overriding, trans-contextual principle 'legitimising' mixture, assimilation or diversity within the same politico-symbolic 'space'. Nineteenth-century liberal nationalism proposed assimilation because it tended to believe that one republic was better than another and regarded citizenship as allegiance to the tenets of a given republican faith. The contemporary breakers of bodies politic into warring ethno-cultural enclaves do not regard the older bodies politic as republics, they came to believe that anything beyond racially and

linguistically defined ethno-cultural groups equals *imperial* cosmopolitanism, concealing some occult aristocratic supremacy.

The middle course — institutional patriotism — recommended by the British Right and the German Left at least leaves open the possibility of political judgment about constitutions and the resulting institutional order, although unthinking fidelity to them is clearly preferred (in both cases).

But ethno-cultural nationalism, particularly in the extreme shape it had taken in Eastern Europe, cannot and does not want to answer political questions. It is mostly a repetitive reaffirmation of identity. Nineteenth-century nationalism strengthened the state; twentieth-century ethno-cultural nationalism is contemptuous of institutions; it is anarchic, that is, it is anarchic in regard of institutions and especially in regard of supreme state authority, but it is no lover of freedom regarding individual desires and critical ideas. Civic duty or political obligation cannot be explained in cultural terms alone. The notion of ethno-cultural (or class, or gender) identity is descriptive and anthropological, not normative or politically exhortative. ‘Be what you are’ — the rallying cry of radical humanism cannot explicate why we should pay taxes or defend our country or obey the law. But this is the only precept proffered by present-day nationalism.

To understand this phenomenon, let us, for the sake of a parallel, briefly consider Marxism. Marxism is the only important social teaching that does not have a political doctrine (this is, by the way, why the accusations that communism has ‘over-politicised’ Eastern Europe are so risible). Why not? Marx, like all anti-philosophers, believed that politics (the state) was but a cloak hugging the shape of essence, the essential injustice expressed by the class struggle and the division of labour (considered by Plato to be the essence of justice). Once the essential injustice is removed, no politics — which is quintessentially mendacious and manipulative — will be necessary, and until then, any old politics will do. If politics is *epiphenomenon* to the *ousia* (essence/being) of class or culture, then liberty, duty, obeisance to something flimsily inessential will be pretexts to reinforce the hidden reality of exploitation and oppression. Real liberty is freedom *from* politics. People sometimes wonder how can ‘brown’ and ‘red’ chauvinists and

racists embrace one another so breezily and easily in Eastern Europe. The explanation is that they do not care about institutional politics at all; their common goal is to keep out the Peeping Toms of the universalist discourse and other *sippenfremd* aliens; revolutionary socialism is no bulwark against identity politics as it can be seen in Southern California, in Abkhazia, Chechenya, Moldova and Punjab. The contemporary ethno-cultural nationalism is strongly anti-political, and Marxism has prepared the terrain astonishingly well.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to think that the ethno-cultural nationalism of today is nothing else but warmed-up *Blubo*. Apart from being a sequel to the general decline of modern institutions and the worryingly speedy demise of time-honoured political beliefs, it is, as said before, a consequence of the conflict of individual *Willkür* with collective *Wille* and cultural *Wollen*. The citizens' nation is becoming 'culture' (incorporating, of course, Ezra Pound's '*Kulchur*'); 'culture' — seen 'anthropologically' — is artefact made nature, the incontestable human reality described by Georg von Lukács as *Gerade-So-Sein* ('being-just-that') in a characteristic Heideggerian fit. Believing in an imperious 'being-just-that' is certainly a quasi-religious attitude, different from modern quasi-morals. Believing something to be good is different from finding the Zeus/swan's shenanigans with Leda significant or hearing, like King Midas, Dionysus saying that the best thing is not to be born.

Dostoevsky says in *The Possessed* (translated into English by Constance Garnett, Part II, Chapter I: 'The Night', vii), in Shatov's monologue to Stavrogin:

Science and reason have, from the beginning of time, played a secondary and subordinate part in the life of nations; so it will be till the end of time. Nations are built up and moved by another force which sways and dominates them, the origin of which is inexplicable: that force is the force of an insatiable desire to go on to the end, though at the same time it denies that end. It is the force of the persistent assertion of one's own existence, and a denial of death. It's the spirit of life, as the Scriptures call it, "the river of the living water," the drying up of which is threatened in the Apocalypse. It's the aesthetic principle, as the philosophers call it, the ethical principle with which they identify it, "the seeking for God," as I call it more simply. The object of every national movement, in every people and at every period of its existence, is only the seeking for its God, who must be its own God, and the faith in Him as the only true one. God is the synthetic personality of the whole people, taken from its beginning to its end. It has never happened that all, or even many, peoples have had one common god, but each



has always had its own. It's a sign of decay of nations when they begin to have gods in common. When gods begin to be common to several nations the gods are dying and the faith in them, together with the nations themselves. The stronger a people the more individual their God. There never has been a nation without a religion, that is, without an idea of good and evil. When the same conceptions of good and evil become prevalent in several nations, then these nations are dying, and then the very distinction between good and evil is beginning to disappear. [. . .]

I reduce God to the attribute of nationality? — cried Shatov. — On the contrary, I raise the people to God. And has it ever been otherwise? The people is the body of God. Every people is only a people so long as it has its own god and excludes all other gods on earth irreconcilably; so long as it believes that by its god it will conquer and drive out of the world all other gods. Such, from the beginning of time, has been the belief of all great nations, all, anyway, who have been specially remarkable, all who have been leaders of humanity.

This is perhaps the most magnificent enunciation of nationalism and possibly Russia's grandest attempt at overcoming nihilism. Still, questions abound. It cannot be a mere accident that the people most profoundly exercised by the problem of modern nihilism — Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Heidegger — should have been themselves the modern nihilists *par excellence*, or at least the main usufructuaries of nihilism. First, Dostoevsky seems to misunderstand the very nature of religion (I am aware of the formidable implications of such a charge against one of the greatest religious thinkers that ever lived). He appears to have forgotten that the great religious peoples of the ancient times were at least ambivalent about their own religious beliefs. You cannot very well believe in a God whose realm coincides with your tribal turf. Tradition was not conceived by the ancients to be just *Gerade-So-Sein*, they believed in their tradition because they thought that it contained the truth (this is what I called elsewhere *the canon*: tradition as truth opposed to tradition as tradition, the modern *Ersatz* for faith). The concept of *election* (inherent in most religions, most conspicuously of course in Judaism and Christianity) mediated between parochial religion and a universalist claim for moral truth (also inherent in all religions). For example, Creation, Miracles and Revelation may be received only by one people, but it is there for all the righteous to partake of. It is true that all religions have been exclusive and intolerant, but not because they thought to represent a people, on the contrary, because they transmitted the word of the living God. Even if

the substance of religion would be national or racial self-affirmation, this was necessarily invisible for the religious nations; even if religion is nothing else than a vehicle for racial grandeur, at the moment when it is seen as such, it is doomed. The belief in the universal mission of one's faith is what enables religions to be the foundations upon which great civilizations are built. Dostoevsky/Shatov says in the same monologue:

The Jews lived only to await the coming of the true God and left the world the true God. The Greeks deified nature and bequeathed to the world their religion, that is, philosophy and art. Rome deified the people in the State, and bequeathed the idea of the State to the nations.

Alas, this is the point of view of the Grand Inquisitor. The Grand Inquisitor was prepared to crucify Christ again if Christian rebellion was to jeopardize the achievements (*die Errungenschaften*, as German communists would say) of Christian civilization. Trivialising and relativising the substantive content of religion in order to have 'results' of one's liking is nothing else but the Grand Inquisitor's frightening nihilism. One cannot have the energy to drive out of the world all other gods only to aggrandize one's own nation. Therefore national gods will not help. It is true that without that kind of belief civilizations cannot be grandiose; but you cannot will a universalist faith in order to enhance particularist greatness; if the 'just-so' precedes God, it will remain just that.

The ultimate consequences of these dilemmata were seen by the interesting Rumanian fascist thinker, E. M. Cioran (known nowadays as a bittersweet Chamfortian French essayist, for whatever this is worth) in his book published in the late 1930s, *Schimbară la față a României* ('The Metamorphosis [or: The Conversion] of Rumania'; the original expression is a late heir to the *koine* Greek notion of *metanoia*):

Rumania (he says) is a country without prophets, that is, a country where nobody has lived future realities as effective presences, as living and immediate actualities, where nobody vibrated for the obsession of a mission for Rumania. Within this solemn thought we ought to swear that we are going to be different, that we shall burn with a blind fanaticism, to be inflamed by another vision and that the thought of Rumania should be our only thought. [. . .] We shall have to renounce our lucidity that reveals to us so many impossibilities, in order to conquer light blindly, the light estranged from us by our own lucidity.

The book (which the author does not permit to be reprinted, let alone translated into Western languages, and that has recently been shamefully withdrawn from all public libraries by the red-brown Rumanian authorities) is an enthusiastic apology for mass murder, of voluntary blindness, and expresses with wonderful clarity the substance of East European ethno-cultural nationalism: self-imposed blindness is the only way to believe in 'just that' as though it were God.

And this is why the nationalism of Fichte is hardly a nationalism at all. In the *Discourses*, Fichte avers that being German is to conform to a certain idea of German liberty (which, as defined in *The Closed Commercial State* and elsewhere, is socialism in Hébert's and Babeuf's sense); the German idea is a universal idea you can be converted to and which not all ethnic Germans share; roughly, the conversion rules of the Old Covenant apply. You can ascend to Germanness or Germanity; but then everybody can — assimilation through civic faith. But why should Germanness mean *enragé* socialism? Simply, because Fichte happens to be an *enragé* socialist. Any given peculiar doctrine can be assimilated into ethno-cultural nationalism; it only needs consent. Ethno-cultural nationalism is impervious to politics, although it would have been impossible without the twin influence of liberalism and revolutionary socialism. Both view the state as a necessary evil at best; both are consequently inimical to citizenship in the classical republican sense. The invisible hand, the management of things rather than the management of people, the coincidence of subject and authority through participation — all this requires the replacement of the transcendence of the common good by the immanence of activity and will. So does the new nationalism that seems to be our fate.

Resisting fate does not make much sense for the philosophy that we practise and learn these days. Fate is just cultural determination writ large. There you go.

#### NOTE

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