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Time for a Defense of Nationalism: Article Review of James Markham's "The Rise of Nationalism brings Hope and Danger." New York Times, November 27, 1988.

Abstract: This review will be an attempt to ground nationalism as both a moral and historical phenomenon. It is both a critique and affirmation of Markham's approach, which sees elite-run globalist institutions as leading to an economic backlash, and this review holds that he is correct, and that this backlash, if it is truly national and ethnic, will be democracy and ethically correct in their war with globalist empire. But the ethic content of nationalism must be dealt with before this is made clear. It is very rare for a serious article on nationalism to be featured by the world's elite media. Usually, cliché-ridden, dogmatic and pontificating pieces piously condemning the "evils of nationalism," blaming it for everything from World War I to global warming. The article under review here is no different, with errors both of fact and interpretation on nearly every page.

Nevertheless, despite this, this piece might serve as a sounding board for a serious defense of nationalism both on a factual/historical basis as well as on an ethico-philosophical one. This essay will seek to do both. First, the factual issues of the piece. Here, Mr Markham falls completely flat. Like so many other writers in this field, he holds "nationalism" to blame for both world wars. This is hard to conceive, since nearly every power in both world wars were multinational empires seeking with all their might to suppress nationalist movements within their borders. World War I saw internationalist powers such as Britain, Russia and France fighting Germany, Austria and

Turkey. The only overtly nationalist power in this six is Germany, though they were fighting hard to gain their own empire.

World War II was no different: the Nazi ideology was overtly internationalist, seeking a new world order where the Slavic and other nationalities were to be destroyed before the Aryan juggernaut. Both the US and the USSR were overtly internationalist powers, as was Japan. Only the small states in these wars, the real victims, seemed to demand the basic nationalist idea: that of self determination and the preservation of the national culture (Lafore, 1997).

The citation of the anti-nationalist writer James Billington at the Library of Congress is another problem. He holds that nationalism is a “ value neutral” phenomenon. A nationalist movement can be both liberal or conservative, depending on circumstances. This makes little sense. If nationalism is based around the preservation of a national and ethnic culture, then there can be nothing liberal about it. If nationalism be merely about the state, and state independence, then it is not a “ movement” at all, but rather a simple demand for autonomy from a larger empire. But nationalism must be more than this to become a philosophically defensible option.

Nationalism is about the defense of ethnic tradition and the resurrection of ancient ways of life that have been vitiated by foreign powers and foreign ideologies. But this is precisely what is not mentioned in the article under review. In Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and elsewhere, it is not a mere matter of state independence, which, in Billington’s definition can be a smaller

version of the empire that they have just escaped from, national and religious cultures are being reborn. Hence, this is an ethical issue: its an issue of a truly global diversity that only nationalism can provide. The basic ethical point is this: international powers, whether it be the USSR, the British empire, or global, American capitalism all conspire to reduce the world to a single cultural and economic space than can be exploited. This is the very root of empire no matter how it is defined. Hence, "internationalist" political theories exist entirely to serve one of these agendas of empire.

What should be encouraged is not the leveling of empire, but the diversity of cultural nationalism and cultural tradition, whether as autonomous parts of larger states or having states of their own is unimportant so long as the culture and its flowering is protected. This places nationalism in a completely different light, and is the only defensible element of the national and ethnic idea. (Smith, 1995; Smith, 1992, 182)What this article does positively, however, is provide the material starting point for the political articulation of the ethnic idea, that of the reaction to the new, modified form of empire that goes back to the founding of the UN. The United Nations, the European Union and other forms of empire carry their own ideological weight.

The European Union is open only to capitalist, liberal democracies. It is a form of empire for this reason alone. The European Union and all other forms of globalist organization have been created by elites, by elites, with little input from the lower classes.

Hence, these groups are rightly seen as benefitting only the wealthy and well connected and therefore, will create a backlash. But since these globalist movements all promote both capitalism and the internationalism that capitalism demands, then the reaction will take the form of both a socialist and nationalist movement of one kind or other. The major question then is the mode of self-articulation: how are the anti-EU nationalists to present themselves? Despite the inevitable distortions from the press, nationalism can only be defended in its cultural and religious form. Talk of the state is decidedly secondary since the state is but merely a formal and coercive institution that has no content. A culture is not coercive, but is saturated with content and value, precisely what the globalist institutions do not offer. These institutions offer a framework only, a framework that is designed by and will be exploited by the wealthy and well connected. The residual material benefits that the lower classes might theoretically gain from this are irrelevant, since it was not designed with them in mind. Given the current economic downturn, such fears of the globe's elite are well justified.

But if nationalism is to be defensible as an ethical doctrine, what should be emphasized? This is the second part of the article. The paper under review merely treats nationalism as exhausted by some kind of "state self determination" that is "value neutral." This says nothing and has no moral content.

But nationalism needs to present itself as a serious moral alternative to internationalism. An excellent approach is the dialectical approach to ethnic

nationalism is Prof. Johnson's 2006 work on Russian nationalism. The dialectical approach to nationalist moral grounding looks like this: 1.

Abstract unity: the nature of all social life is collective. This is a matter not of human choice but natural law. There is no individualism as anything other than a residual concept because the individual is the creating of the collective: the behavioral traits and values are imparted, for better or worse, by the social system. 2. The content: if the first entity is the form, then the form demands to have content. If social life is the primary element of life, then that social form must have content, a culture, a way of life, the very basis of tradition. Johnson writes: `class= WordSection2>` Natural law is merely the external unity of human association. The internal unity, that is, the content of the unity (any unity has to be a unity of something), is the cultural unity of the community.

What the natural law mandates, the specific needs of human beings as human beings that are met by the formation of societies, are things that develop over time. The specific areas of social life—government, economics, family life, etc—develop their own internal functioning in reference to the people and forces that created it, or, more accurately, that manifested it (Johnson, 2006). And lastly, 3.

The full unity of form and content. The ethnic, national community dedicated to distributive justice and social solidarity that alone can satisfy the yearnings of social man. The ethnic idea is not an individual one, and hence, the state and the economy cannot be individual either, but based on

solidarity and some form of socialism that binds the citizens together not as classes, but as parts of the ethnic whole, hence, bringing the economic life of the people to its full ethnic and national significance. The point of this is to hold that nationalism does have an ethical foundation. Its foundation is to satisfy the demand inherent in the human condition for social solidarity and a firm social life based around the commonalities of language and tradition. Such a view borrows heavily from Hegel (cf *Philosophy of Right*, 1821/2008, 160-174). But this strong approach to ethical life is absent in most of the work presently published on nationalism and its role in the globalized world. Of course, its role is to negate the “ globalized world” or at least manage it in their interests.

Ultimately, it is the only true diversity in the world. Therefore, several issues arise from a careful reading of the Markham piece. First, that the factual issues concerning nationalism need to be dealt with. Austria and Imperial Russia prior to World War I were not “ nationalist” powers, but empires taking to themselves hundreds of ethnic groups. It seems impossible to hold that a power is truly “ nationalist” when its purpose is to suppress individual nations in the face of some super-national ideal, whether ideological, economic or religious. Second, that nationalism is defensible, but Markham’s reduction of it to a mere matter of “ value neutral state independence” is a caricature of it. While Markham wonders why people still die for the idea of the nation, he does not bother to see that it is the content of culture that matters, not the abstract state and its equally abstract “ independence.” For

political science, it often seems that whatever cannot be easily quantified or referenced does not exist.

But individual culture needs to be understood from within, area specialists are those best placed to understand and appreciate precisely why some are willing to die for the national idea: it is the specific idea of the hearth and home" that permits this mentality and what makes it defensible: it is true democracy, the idea of the social whole as articulated through folk custom and tradition, that which binds people together through a shared history and born of suffering and occupation. This is what the alienated populations of the west lack. Lastly, a rational defense of nationalism was dealt with using Johnson's Hegelian approach to ethnic solidarity as a matter of natural law both as form and content. If nationalism is to be defended, then it must be defended on both counts, that is, the historical as well as the ethical, this is important. But Markham's approach is weak, cliched and a true caricature of nationalism as an ethical idea of ethnic self-determination and social solidarity. Nationalism is the glue that binds people together in a unity and hence, is the basis for all social reform: socialism must be a socialism of something, and that something cannot be mere economic interest, this is not strong enough and has no ethnical content. But he is absolutely right in that (especially in our 2009 economic meltdown) that globalist institutions will be seen as vehicles for the elite at the expense of both the nation and the individual. But these are the mere material conditions for a nationalist resurgence.

The failing of the idea of empire from World War I to the fall of the USSR and Yugoslavia is also important, but western capitalist aggrandizement with all its ideological baggage is also an empire in itself, and will also go the same direction as Lenin's paradise. What remains are knots of loyalty, islands of devotion to the ethic idea, an idea born of suffering, of religious devotion and an ancient tradition, decidedly "conservative" in character but seemingly non-capitalist in content, since the solidarity that those values promote does not translate well to acquisitive individualism in free market relations. Nevertheless, it seems that ethnicity is the true form of social solidarity and the source for global diversity in the true sense. It will remain as empires run by well connected elites come and go.

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" *New York Times*, Sec 4, p 3 Johnson, Matthew Raphael. (2006) *Ethnicity, State and Utopia: Essays on Social Justice and Russia's Future*. The American Journal of Russian and Slavic Studies Online Press (reprinted at www.rusjournal.com) Smith, Anthony. (1995) *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era*. Polity Press.

____. (1992) *The Antiquity of Nations*. Polity Press. The two above works by Smith are scholarly defenses of nationalism from a historical, rather than ethical, point of view and are very valuable.