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IN PRAISE OF EMPIRES PAST

Myths and Method of Kedourie's Nationalism

THE IRISH CASE does not figure in Elie Kedourie's *Nationalism*, except in one undeclared respect.¹ Below the book's titleface there stands a passage from Yeats's 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen':

We pieced our thoughts into philosophy,
And planned to bring the world under a rule,
Who are but weasels fighting in a hole.

The epigraph is interesting on two counts: firstly, for the way it has been selectively torn out of context. The powerful preceding lines of the stanza run:

Now days are dragon-ridden, the nightmare
Rides upon sleep: a drunken soldiery
Can leave the mother, murdered at her door
To crawl in her own blood, and go scot-free;
The night can sweat with terror as before

'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' was written, as its name suggests, in the midst of the Irish war of independence. The 'drunken soldiery' were Lloyd George's imperial forces, then brutally holding much, though not all, of Ireland against its will. The poem contrasts Ireland's sunny confidence before the Great War, when 'we dreamed to mend/ Whatever mischief seemed/ To afflict mankind', with what unfolded after: 'We, who seven years ago/ Talked of honour and of truth/ Shriek with pleasure if we show/ The weasel's twist, the weasel's tooth'.²

Who is the 'we' in this passage? I submit that it is the Irish and British Unionists who supported the maintenance of the Crown's authority in

Ireland. 'Seven years ago', in 1912, another Home Rule bill had started its passage through the Westminster Parliament, once more opposed by the Conservative and Unionist Party. With no textual violence, then, 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen' could be read as expressing the revulsion of a leading member of the Anglo-Irish cultural minority; his protest at the failure of the peaceful quest for home rule, for which he held the Unionists culpable. It is remarkable that Kedourie's *Nationalism* nowhere observes that Yeats, whom he was fond of quoting, was a cultural Irish nationalist outraged at the British Empire's failure to grant the Irish people their self-determination, and devastated by the repercussions of its refusal, despite a 'public opinion ripening for so long'. His choice of this passage might have been intended to demonstrate that a famous cultural nationalist repudiated nationalism, but Kedourie did not say so, and the poem does no such thing. Instead, I shall take this selective quotation as emblematic, evidence of some disrespect for authors and works that mars Kedourie's text—still one of the most influential Anglophone accounts of the origins of nationalism in Europe.³

Secondly: the selected lines could serve as Kedourie's endorsement of the philosophy of Michael Oakeshott, scourge of 'rationalism'—probably the reason why they were chosen.⁴ Rationalists, in Oakeshott's writings, are would-be philosopher-kings, Platonist legislators who imagine that they can bring the world of politics under the rule of coherent, foundational and transparent principles, when the most that is possible is the governance of humanity through prudent and customary wisdom, and the accommodation of necessarily conflicting interests. One can fairly surmise that Kedourie read Yeats's 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen'

¹ *Nationalism*, London 1960.

² All citations from Richard Finneran, ed., *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*, New York 1996, pp. 206–10.

³ Four decades later, Anthony Smith calls the book 'path-breaking': *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford 1999, p. 7; Oren Yiftachel describes it as 'pioneering': 'The Homeland and Nationalism', in A. Motyl, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Nationalism*, New York 2001, vol. 1, p. 365; Ronald Beiner maintains that its 'critique of nationalism . . . retains a considerable force': *Theorizing Nationalism*, Albany 1999, p. 16; and Mark Hagopian describes its author as 'the great student of nationalism': 'Ideology', in Motyl, *Encyclopaedia of Nationalism*, vol. 1, p. 398.

⁴ Oakeshott was Kedourie's colleague at the LSE and had read the manuscript of *Nationalism*. Earlier, he had helped ensure the publication of Kedourie's unsuccessful DPhil dissertation, *England and the Middle East: The Destruction of the Ottoman Empire, 1914–21*, in 1956. The Oxford examiners had referred it but Kedourie had refused to revise, preferring to withdraw the thesis altogether.

as capturing his and Oakeshott's contempt for, and fear of, intellectuals and intellectuality in politics, especially those who imagine that they can govern the world through reason, when they—and we?—are 'but weasels' fighting in a hole.

I

Nationalism is a loyal Oakeshottian essay,⁵ written by a British citizen whose formative ethnic and religious identities were those of an Iraqi Baghdad Jew—one who lamented the passing of the British Empire in the Middle East, and appeared equally detached from the claims of Zionism and Arab nationalism, both of which had left chaos and disorder in their wake (not least to his own community). The roots of *Nationalism* may, without any psycho-biographic strain, be located here. Having survived, and indeed flourished, for two and a half millennia in the city of successive empires, the Jews of 'Babylon and Baghdad' were among the century's many victims of antagonistic nationalisms—'transferred' to Israel in 1950–51.⁶ One of Kedourie's first published essays, "Minorities", addressed in part the city of his birth, in the year after his people's almost total removal. It, too, opened with an epigraph from Yeats: 'We had fed the heart on fantasies/ The heart's grown brutal from the fare'.⁷ Here, though, the choice was unquestionably more apposite to the author's theme: minorities that lose from the repercussions of national and ethnic conflict.

The essay was composed when Kedourie was no more than twenty-six, but it prefigures his future diagnoses. The unexplained quotation marks may be taken as deliberate from this master of English prose: the notion of 'minorities' makes sense only when counterposed to 'majorities' in a world saturated with nationalist and democratic assumptions. The piece

⁵ The essay shares some of the confusions of Oakeshott's epistemology, in which philosophy has no impact on the world, whereas practical ideas or ideologies do—and are dangerous. Its theses were first presented in lectures at the LSE between 1955 and 1959, given at Oakeshott's suggestion.

⁶ 'The Jews of Babylon and Baghdad', Kedourie's own moving memoir of his community, is reprinted in Sylvia Kedourie, ed., *Elie Kedourie CBE, FBA 1926–1992: History, Philosophy, Politics*, London 1998.

⁷ "Minorities", republished in *The Chatham House Version and Other Middle Eastern Studies*, Hanover NH 1984; 'Meditations in Time of Civil War', in Finneran, ed., *Collected Poems*, New York 1996, pp. 200–6.

starts with a brusque defence of colonialism in Asia and Africa: 'these areas which are said to suffer imperialism today have known nothing but alien rule throughout most of their history . . . It is not on these grounds, therefore, that the appearance of the West in Asia and Africa is to be deplored'. Indeed, insists the young man whose urban birthplace has been so brutally transformed, the unintended curse brought by the West is much worse than imperialism; it is a 'rash, a malady, an infection spreading from western Europe, through the Balkans, the Ottoman empire, India, the Far East and Africa, eating up the fabric of settled society'. At the epicentre of the disease, storm-blown from the Occident, is 'western philosophy', which, unintentionally, had wreaked havoc on the three communities he chose to highlight: the Armenians, the Assyrians, and the Jews of Iraq. The first group sought autonomy and independence and thereby made its loyalties suspect, inviting Ottoman massacre and, later, the deportations promulgated by the young Turks. The second was inspired to rise against the Ottomans by the Russians only to suffer atrocious losses; and then, having been recruited to work for the British levies, was abandoned to the tender mercies of an independent Iraq. The third was expelled, a joint victim, Kedourie makes plain, of the machinations of Arab nationalists and their monstrous complicity with Zionists, keen to maximize the number of Jews in their new state.

His obituary of these communities is simultaneously an elegy for the Ottoman empire, impervious to 'ideology and doctrinaire adventure'. Under the Porte, Moslems, Christians and Jews had been able to live in harmony in the way now exhorted by the well-thinking West, while the atrocities visited on each of the three small, frail communities discussed were 'incident to national self-determination'. The empire was far from perfect, of course, but Kedourie implied it could have been slowly reformed; if it could not have withstood the task, imperial Europe should have undertaken the required nation-building. The salutary fate of these minorities was a mirror to the future of nationalism: similar groups are 'all delivered over into the power of the legions of ill-will abroad in the world. The dangers are manifold; the remedies scant and impotent'.

These themes recur in *Nationalism*. In the crisp second Preface of 1961 Kedourie wrote that,

noticing the first edition, some reviewers have remarked that I do not attempt to discuss whether nationalists should be conciliated or resisted. A decision on such an issue is necessarily governed by the particular circumstances of each individual case, and whether its consequences are fortunate

or disastrous will depend on the courage, shrewdness and luck of those who have the power to take it. For an academic to offer his advice on this matter is, *literally, impertinent*: academics are not diviners, and it is only at dusk, as Hegel said, that the owl of Minerva spreads its wings.⁸

The passage reveals the author: a professor of Political Science should, despite the title of the discipline, resist all predictions—aside from the generalization that no such generalizations can be made. ‘Impertinent’ is (literally) a word with three different meanings: ‘rude, insolent, lacking in respect’; ‘out of place, absurd’; or, especially in law, ‘irrelevant, intrusive’.⁹ Kedourie thought discussion of whether nationalists should be resisted or conciliated impertinent in all these senses. He had no time for Centres of Ethnopolitical Conflict or of National and Ethnic Conflict Regulation, let alone Resolution. This taboo on predictive political science did not, of course, stop him from generalizing extensively on the Middle East in ways that were certainly impertinent by his own criteria—not least, his claim that democracy and Arab culture were necessarily incompatible.¹⁰ Nor did it inhibit him from providing a sociology of nationalism which, to this day, inspires conservative-instrumentalist accounts of the phenomenon in Europe and beyond.

2

Though *Nationalism* has been through four editions, there were few changes apart from an Afterword written in 1984, and a new Introduction posthumously published in 1993. It opens with a chapter headed ‘Politics in a New Style’, and with a provocative and memorable first sentence that explains the book’s fame: ‘Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century’. This was both a rejection of nationalists’ self-understanding and, as far as I know, the first assertion in English of what is now known as the modernist theory of nationalism.¹¹ Kedourie’s insistence on its historical novelty—

⁸ Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, Revised with Afterword, London 1985, p. 7, emphasis added. All subsequent references to *Nationalism* are to this edition.

⁹ Concise Oxford Dictionary, Oxford 1990.

¹⁰ Elie Kedourie, *Democracy and Arab Political Culture*, London 1994.

¹¹ It had already been articulated in French historical and anthropological thought, e.g. in Ernest Renan’s ‘What Is a Nation?’ [1881], translated in Alfred Zimmern, ed., *Modern Political Doctrines*, London 1939; Marcel Mauss, ‘La Nation’ [1920], *L’Année Sociologique*, IIIe Série, 1953–54.

shocking his readers into the realization that this was not something natural—ran counter to early and mid-twentieth-century Anglophone scholarship.¹² Each element in the opening salvo is, however, open to reasonable challenge.

1. Nationalism is, of course, a political *doctrine*, and Kedourie deserves credit for treating it as such, and for seeking to trace its intellectual genealogy in the course of an arresting history. But it is not just a doctrine; it is—or, at least, so insisted Ernest Gellner, another reader of the first manuscript—unavoidable in the modern world, both as a principle of political legitimacy, and as the heartfelt sentiment of masses of human beings in conditions of modernization. On this view—itself, of course, contested, not least by the author of *Nationalism*, as part of his disagreement with his doctoral examiners—Kedourie's emphasis is mistaken. Nationalism is not merely a political philosophy, not just politics in a new style, but an inescapable philosophy and practice in modernized societies. This is a view that one can hold without being a nationalist of any nation.

2. Nationalism may not have been *invented*. In modern times the invention of a doctrine—especially one of such resonance and impact—is unlikely to have occurred without an acknowledged progenitor, or a series of roughly simultaneous and widely accredited creators. Kedourie strikingly failed to identify one inventor, though he implicates a range of thinkers, especially German *philosophes* and theologians—notably Fichte, Schiller, Schlegel, Schleiermacher, Müller and Herder. It is symptomatic that the book fails to specify who first used the expression 'national self-determination', even though it is taken as the heading of Chapter Five.¹³ Kedourie did single out the thesis from the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*,

¹² See, for example, Carlton Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism*, New York 1931; Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism. A Study in its Origins and Background* [1944], New York 1967, and *Nationalism, Its Meaning and History*, Princeton 1955.

¹³ In his Afterword, Kedourie stated that 'In Fichte's hands, as I have tried to show, full self-determination for the individual came to require national self-determination' (p. 142). He did indeed try to demonstrate a conceptual 'affinity' and a 'filiation' between individual and national self-determination, of which Kant's successors were said to be fully aware; but not one passage using the term 'national self-determination' is cited from Fichte's writings in either chapter 2 or 5. And Fichte is nowhere said, by Kedourie, to be the first nationalist thinker.

that sovereignty resides essentially in the nation, as a prerequisite of the doctrine, but stopped short of saying that the French revolutionaries invented nationalism—although he attacked them, in the manner of Oakeshott, as rationalists, restless activists, prejudiced in favour of change.¹⁴

Schumpeter famously distinguished between an invention—something wholly novel—and an innovation: one will not generate a railway locomotive, no matter how one innovates the design of a horse-drawn coach. The second process adapts something that existed previously; it implies immediately recognizable precursors. On premises of roughly this nature Anthony Smith's *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* challenged Kedourie's thesis: nations and nationalism, while conceptually fresh and modern, have in many, if not all, cases had clear immediate precursors in historic *ethnies*.

Is this a compelling rebuttal? Darwinian theory suggests that one minor, unintended innovation after another may generate a radically different creature from the primeval ancestor. By analogy, a supporter of Kedourie might insist that modern nations and nationalism—politics in a new style—are radically different from Smith's *ethnies* and pre-modern ethnic consciousness. But this defence will not do for Kedourie. Although short-run, catastrophic change is not ruled out, in evolutionary theory adaptation generally operates over a very long time-span, and is 'blind'. Political invention may have unforeseen consequences but it is not blind in the same way. Kedourie treats the emergence of nationalism in the wake of the French Revolution as merely one of a possible set of 'activist' doctrines spawned by that upheaval. His failure to specify one inventor is revealing—as is his rather imprecise distribution of the blame for its creation across a range of near-contemporary eighteenth and nineteenth-century German thinkers, and some French publicists and philosophers. His profound unwillingness to accept that nationalism was a predictable consequence of modernization—a perspective he later called 'the sociological temptation'—was apparent.¹⁵ This rejection suggests the idealism of his own preferred method, stressing above all the history of political thought, including bad political thought. Of

¹⁴ *Nationalism*, p. 13.

¹⁵ 'Afterword', *Nationalism*, p. 141, 147. John Armstrong, Ernest Gellner and Marxists are listed as having succumbed.

course, no one disputes that ideas—bad ones included—matter; but their articulation may be rooted in, and give voice to, certain social conditions; they may also resonate because they 'fit' their times. They may, in short, be both predictable and expressive. In consequence, it may be unimportant to emphasize who first articulated them: their dissemination may be more important than their genesis. That nationalism has been so powerful these past two centuries casts at least some doubt on the merits of a resolutely idealist and intellectually genetic account of its origins.

Kedourie himself consistently claimed that the first five chapters of *Nationalism* were an essay in the history of ideas; yet a historian of political thought is obliged to provide a convincing narrative of the origins of the ideas that have subsequently governed human passions, as well as their later transmission. This Kedourie did not do, save through gestural assertion. What is at stake here is not whether or not the doctrine had a single progenitor, or founding text—it may well have had a range of nearly simultaneous inventors, as is often true in the history of ideas, ideals and ideologies. The point is that, even if better historians were adequately to demonstrate—as Kedourie fails to do—that nationalist doctrine had multiple, independent authors in the early nineteenth century, it would not prove the merits of his method since it would also suggest that the wide distribution of its catalysts, and its subsequent intellectual mushrooming, were common responses to specific but not unique historical developments. As Isaiah Berlin put it in his critical notice: 'there is no need to be a disciple of Marx, Weber or Namier, to wonder whether an enquiry into the origins or elements of an ideology that takes so little account of the circumstances and needs which called it into being, can be entirely satisfactory'.¹⁶

3. Was nationalism *European* in origin? Even the least controversial element in Kedourie's opening statement may be contested. Leaving aside the arguments of Conor Cruise O'Brien and others that the ancient Hebrews were the first nationalists (as well as the claims of the ancient Egyptians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Chinese, Koreans, Hindus, Aztecs, Mayans and Incas), a more striking challenge to Kedourie's opening declaration lies in the American Revolution, preceding and deeply influencing—see the careers of Franklin, Condorcet and Jefferson—

¹⁶ Berlin, 'Review of Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*', *Oxford Magazine*, 1960–1, I.

the French.¹⁷ There are good reasons for considering the American struggle for independence—one people dissolving the political bonds that have connected them with another—as at least partly nationalist.

Could *Nationalism's* formula be saved through the customary assimilation of 'North American' to 'European' culture? In his Afterword, Kedourie deliberately sealed off that option, stating—with Gellner as his intended target—that the areas 'where industrialism first appeared and made the greatest progress, i.e. Great Britain and the United States of America, are precisely those areas where nationalism *is unknown*'. Not only did Kedourie insist on nationalism's European genesis—the continent here excluding Britain as well as the USA—he also claimed that the major Anglophone states have remained immune to the virus down to the present day.¹⁸

The stress on European origins denies a place to South as well as North Americans in nationalism's first cohort. Benedict Anderson has famously advanced the case for these 'creole pioneers' within all the European colonies of the New World, not just among the English-speakers. It was here, he maintains, that nationalism first emerged—remarking further that 'It is an astonishing sign of the depths of Eurocentrism that so many European scholars persist, in the face of all the evidence, in regarding nationalism as a European invention'.¹⁹ The New World experience, of course, poses a stark challenge to Kedourie's contention that what we might call actually

¹⁷ For the ancient Hebrews, see Conor Cruise O'Brien, *GodLand! Reflections on Religion and Nationalism*, Cambridge, MA 1988. According to Steven Katz, 'The revolts of 66–70, 115–117, and 132–135 CE were . . . nationalist revolutions begun by the Jewish people on behalf of their this-worldly political freedom and countered and defeated by Rome on similar limited terms': *The Holocaust in Historical Context*, vol. 1, Oxford 1994, p. 153. Hans Kohn also maintained that the three traits he deemed essential to nationalism—chosen people, consciousness of national history, national Messianism—originated with the ancient Jews: *The Idea of Nationalism*, p. 36; but thought that, in antiquity, only the Jews and Greeks were nationalists. For a vigorous rebuttal in the Greek case see Moses Finley, 'The Ancient Greeks and their Nation', *The Use and Abuse of History*, London 1986.

¹⁸ *Nationalism*, p. 148, emphasis added; see also p. 74. Ireland, on this logic, must have been part of Europe, whereas Great Britain was not—a point I put to Kedourie prior to a political theory conference in Cambridge. I also asked whether Ireland's United Irishmen of the 1790s were nationalists even though nationalism on his account was not invented until the next decade. The response was silence.

¹⁹ *Imagined Communities*, London 1991 [2nd edition], pp. 47–65, 191.

existing nationalism was invariably inspired by the assumptions of German Romanticism rather than those of liberalism.

4. Lastly, the *chronology* of Kedourie's initial assertion—'invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century'—is highly questionable. It is not hard to find expressions of democratic national self-determination, if not using these exact words, well before 1800. Algernon Sidney, for example, in the 1670s declared:

It must be acknowledged that the whole fabrick of tyranny will be much weakened, if we prove, that nations have a right to make their own laws, constitute their own magistrates; and that such as are so constituted owe an account of their actions to those by whom, and for whom they are appointed.²⁰

The evidence of Kedourie's own text is problematic here. While the writings of Fichte, whom he treats as the pivotal post-Kantian, largely fit with his chronology, others cited as directly or indirectly responsible for the genesis of nationalism—Kant himself, Frederick the Great, Herder, Schiller—can scarcely be described as nineteenth-century figures. Why, then, did Kedourie insist on the later dating in his opening sentence? The answer cannot be stylistic—a reluctance to open the book with the uglier and less arresting formula, 'in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century'. Kedourie's prose style was superb; he could certainly have drafted a pithy enough sentence had he wanted to emphasize that nationalism was invented across the cusp of 1800. Nor can one accuse him of being careless with dates; he was, on matters of chronology, a disciplined historian.

The best explanation is consistent with the text. Contrary to convention, Kedourie did not wish to hold the French Revolution, or its revolutionaries—let alone their English or American precursors—to be the pivotal developers of nationalist doctrine. Instead he wanted to place the blame squarely on German Romanticism, German post-Kantianism, German philosophy—one would be tempted to say Germans, were it not for his high regard for Hegel.²¹ Although

²⁰ *Discourses Concerning Government*, Indianapolis 1996, p. 12.

²¹ Sylvia Kedourie and Helen Kedourie, eds, *Elie Kedourie, Hegel and Marx: Introductory Lectures*, Oxford 1995. Kedourie found in Hegel a happy home for his particular conjunction of traditionalism, conservatism and liberalism, and regularly admired the latter's rejection of revolutionary disorders and his emphasis on the salience of civil society in the history of Europe.

Nationalism appears to acknowledge the transformative significance of the French Revolution in its opening pages—citing, as we have seen, the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*, as well as Abbé Sieyès’s dictum that a nation is ‘a body of associates living under one common law and represented by the same legislature’—it is evident that, for Kedourie, the Revolution supplied merely one element of the doctrine, the idea of popular sovereignty. The truly pernicious consequences of nationalism only become apparent when this was re-worked by German theologians, *literati* and philosophers.²² It is in the response of the German intelligentsia to the French Revolution, and to the philosophy of Kant, that Kedourie finds the genesis of nationalist thinking.

This was not a surprising view for someone writing in the 1950s, especially one loyal to the Allies’ recent war effort. The emphasis is particularly transparent in the treatment of Rousseau, widely pilloried, or honoured, as the first major nationalist writer. Despite the strikingly nationalist advice of *The Government of Poland*—setting out a nation-building programme for the Poles that was replete with details for the creation of their own army and education system—Kedourie suggests Rousseau’s thought was ‘erratic’, and lacking in the ‘metaphysical coherence’ that nationalist doctrine would receive in the hands of the post-Kantians.²³ This tellingly brief dismissal will not do: Rousseau had a decisive influence on Kant, Fichte and the German Romantics.²⁴ His *Social Contract* was widely read, in its time and after, as a philosophical defence of democratic nationalism and, as every undergraduate learns, there is debate over the depth but not the fact of his influence on the French revolutionaries. Lastly, the idea that non-erratic ‘metaphysical coherence’ was achieved by the post-Kantians is hardly persuasive.

3

So much for the first sentence of Kedourie’s book. Its next few lines are equally assertive:

²² *Nationalism*, pp. 12–18.

²³ *Nationalism*, pp. 40–1. See *inter alia* Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Political Writings*, trans. and ed. by Frederick Watkins, London 1953.

²⁴ ‘Like his whole generation Fichte savoured Rousseau’: George Armstrong Kelly, ‘Introduction’ to Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, New York 1968, p. ix.

[Nationalism] pretends to supply a criterion for the determination of the unit of population proper to enjoy a government exclusively its own, for the legitimate exercise of power in the state, and for the right organization of states . . . [it] holds that humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations can be known by certain characteristics which can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government.²⁵

If there had been any doubt, after the quotation from Yeats and the opening sentence, it is now clear that an anti-nationalist is speaking: the doctrine 'pretends' to be a workable theory of political legitimacy. Kedourie offers no rival account until the famous final passage of the book:

The best that can be said for [nationalism] is that it is an attempt to establish once and for all the reign of justice in a corrupt world, and to repair for ever the injuries of time. But this best is bad enough, since to repair such injuries other injuries must in turn be inflicted, and no balance is ever struck in the grisly account of cruelty and violence . . . The only criterion [of governmental legitimacy] capable of public defence is whether the new rulers are less corrupt and grasping, or more just and merciful, or whether there is no change at all, but the corruption, the greed, and the tyranny merely find victims other than those of the departed rulers. And this is really the only question at issue between nationalism and the regimes to which it is opposed. It is a question which, in the nature of the case, admits of no final and conclusive answer.²⁶

It might be argued that Kedourie is merely saying here that we should judge nationalists in power by whether they are better rulers than their non-nationalist predecessors—a fair challenge. But a more substantial proposition lurks within the poetic euphemism, 'injuries of time', deployed to cover such phenomena as genocide, ethnic expulsion, imperial conquest and exploitation, partitions of homelands, coercive assimilation, organized discrimination, and no doubt many other hurts and humiliations, which nationalists have both responded to and caused. 'Time', a non-human agency, is accorded moral responsibility for historic injuries—rather than, say, empires, regimes or rulers—with the implication that such wounds are impossible to rectify; not an argument that would be well received by slaves or ex-slaves, among others. Would Kedourie include within the file of time's injuries—those that cannot be undone without equivalent injustice being inflicted—wrongs done to the holders of private property?

²⁵ *Nationalism*, p. 9.

²⁶ *Nationalism*, p. 140.

The caricatural supposition that nationalism seeks to ‘repair for ever’ historic injustices, suggesting that all nationalists must necessarily be utopian perfectionists, is of course in flat contradiction to Kedourie’s claim that nationalists prefer self-government to good government—i.e., they are persuaded that their countries are best governed by their nationals, even if imperfectly. If utopianism is essential to Kedourie’s conception of the doctrine, he must either show that ‘actually existing nationalisms’ are utopian, or stand on the tautology that ‘if x activists are not utopians, then they are not nationalists’. Finally, it should be noted that Kedourie nowhere in this passage endorses constitutionalism (let alone democracy) as a rival account of political legitimacy, or refutes the proposition that constitutionalism (or democracy) can only be enduringly established within some national framework.

4

The remainder of *Nationalism’s* opening chapter is more conventional, providing an etymological treatment of the term ‘nation’ and a display of Kedourie’s characteristic conservatism, in his warning that the politics of popular sovereignty, developed in the French Revolution, would ‘envenom international quarrels, and render them quite recalcitrant to the methods of traditional statecraft; it would indeed subvert all international relations as hitherto known’.²⁷ More startling is the second chapter, ‘Self-Determination’. Kedourie held Kant’s moral philosophy to be the (unwitting) source of the doctrine of national self-determination. What the post-Kantians, especially Fichte, had done, he argued, was to put the ‘national’ in front of ‘self-determination’. The rest, so to speak, was history. No one, as far as I know, had previously suggested that Kant was even indirectly responsible for nationalist doctrine. In Kant’s philosophy of moral self-determination—presented here as a ‘curious’ heresy, in terms of the Judaeo-Christian tradition—the good, or free, will is autonomous, or undetermined. In the hands of his successors, the struggle for moral perfection became the mark of an authentic, free person.²⁸ Through an easy and obvious perversion, Kedourie claimed, post-Kantians concluded that acting from inner conviction was the true guide to political action. The doctrine of autonomy was, in his account, a necessary condition of nationalist doctrine precisely because

²⁷ *Nationalism*, p. 16.

²⁸ *Nationalism*, pp. 141–2, 21–31.

it facilitated the rejection of established traditions and encouraged the pursuit of authenticity.

Kedourie's charge against Kant has been treated with a mixture of astonishment and disbelief: how could the advocate of cosmopolitan republicanism—albeit of multiple republics in a perpetual peace—be deemed the forefather of nationalism? Such was the response of Howard Williams's *Kant's Political Philosophy* (1983) and Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), to which Kedourie's 'Afterword' replied. The connexion, he insisted, was 'by way of the idea of self-determination'; Fichte was again cited as the key mediating figure. Kedourie did not, of course, call Kant a nationalist—on political questions he deemed him an 'amalgam of audacity and timorousness'.²⁹ But the Kantian doctrine of self-determination made God the creature of man rather than the converse. It established the view that the end of man was to determine himself, to be autonomous; and that religion, newly re-appreciated, was the perpetual quest for perfection. The struggle to be right, to be virtuous, to be free—not least of tradition—and to achieve perfection were, Kedourie reasoned, the political corollaries of Kant's teaching.

There are four very obvious objections to Kedourie's treatment of Kant and the post-Kantians which, for some reason, have not yet been spelled out. The simplest and most powerful is the question: does Kedourie's argument imply the formula 'no Kant, no nationalism'? On the face of it, the answer is yes—scarcely a compelling counter-factual. Secondly, Kedourie admits that the post-Kantians distorted Kant's thought in efforts to remedy its perceived defects, but wavers over whether or not they legitimately followed the master's path in so doing; to have it so conveniently both ways would seem to be stretching the record too far. Thirdly, Kantian moral conduct requires 'universalizability'—a moral injunction which places severe constraints on the egoism of any person or group, whether that be authentic or otherwise: 'do unto others as they would do unto you' is not a licence for particularism. Lastly, Kedourie did not quote a single post-Kantian actually making the leap from *individual* self-determination, as a moral good, to *national* self-determination, in those words—though he does cite various pantheist Romantics embracing the universe and nature as the fount of all things of value. The reason, surely, is that neither the concept of national self-determination

²⁹ *Nationalism*, pp. 142–3; p. 27.

nor 'das Selbstbestimmungsrecht der Nationen' are to be found in the writings of Fichte, let alone Herder.³⁰

A defence of Kedourie's thesis was provided by Isaiah Berlin in a lecture delivered in New Delhi in 1972, under the title 'Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Nationalism'. But although Berlin had read and reviewed *Nationalism*, as we have seen, he strangely failed to provide any acknowledgement here of Kedourie as the pioneer of his argument. Berlin's version, however, has the merit of being slightly more transparent than his source. He tells us that 'it takes but two steps to reach the Romantic position from Kant's impeccably enlightened rationalism': one, that I follow values because they are my values rather than the values made or discovered by reason; and two, that the choosing self is changed from the individual to the group, the nation. From this, he wrings the formula that 'idolization of the nation or state derives, however illegitimately, from [Kant's] doctrine of the autonomous will'. Yet even granting, for the sake of argument, that these were the two steps taken, it is apparent that those who arrived at such positions—let us call them Fichte and the usual suspects—did so by rejecting Kant; not through conceptual filiation (Kedourie), or illegitimate derivation (Berlin).³¹

A last word on the origins of the idea of 'self-determination' and its cognates. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the first non-political meaning of the term as 'determination of one's mind or will by itself towards an object'. The first examples of usage date to the 1680s, in the writings of now obscure theologians. But its most noteworthy early deployment was in a lengthy passage by John Locke, downplaying the importance of formal syllogistic capacity in the reason of human beings, in his

³⁰ Having tried for seven years, without success, to find the expressions and their closest cognates, in translations of Herder and Fichte, I have asked German-speakers for the first known use of the terms. They normally say Herder or Fichte but can report no precise citations. Ernest Gellner, fluent in German, could not answer the matter. Walker Connor can find no use of the expression 'national self-determination' in a public document before one by Karl Marx drafting a proclamation for the First International on the Polish question in 1865 (*The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy*, Princeton 1984, p. 11, citing E. H. Carr). Perry Anderson suggests that Marx may have picked up the expression from the debates in the Frankfurt assembly of 1848.

³¹ See Henry Hardy, ed., *Isaiah Berlin, the Sense of Reality: Studies in Ideas and Their History*, London 1996, pp. 232–48. Berlin claims in his *Oxford Magazine* review of *Nationalism* that Fichte took these two steps, but provides no citation.

Essay Concerning Human Understanding. Locke argues, in a manner that remarkably prefigures Kant, that God has given men minds that 'can reason without being instructed in methods of syllogizing; the understanding . . . has a native faculty to perceive the coherence or incoherence of its ideas'. He uses as an example the propositions that 'men shall be punished in another world' and that 'men can determine themselves', claiming that the linkage—between the ideas of 'self-determination' and divine punishment—is perceived immediately by the understanding without going through the iterations of Aristotelian logic.³²

We may smile at Locke's confidence in the natural Christianity of the mind but, more importantly, we may legitimately use Locke to mock Kedourie. The intellectual father of English (and the grandfather of American) constitutionalism and liberalism, the empiricist philosopher *par excellence*, the author of *Two Treatises on Government*—the anonymous defence of the Glorious Revolution—turns out to be the first major liberal political theorist and epistemologist to discuss free will through the notion of self-determination. Were we to follow the cavalier procedure of Kedourie's *Nationalism*, this would be sufficient evidence to make Locke the progenitor of romantic nationalism.

5

The remainder of Kedourie's account may be summarized more crisply, since it is less original—which is not to say that it should be accepted without qualification. He credits Fichte—correctly presented as an odd mixture of a pantheist and a proto-socialist—as providing the key synthetic moment in the development of cultural nationalism. Herder had celebrated 'the excellence of diversity' in the design of God. He had affirmed authenticity, populism, the *Volk*. In his philosophy, each culture had its distinctive role to play in the unfolding of human history, and popular cultures were treated as valuable and distinctive—in contrast to the disdain of (some) Enlightenment philosophers. Above all, he had celebrated linguistic pluralism and authenticity. But, while critical of cosmopolites, Herder had not articulated an unambiguous nationalist doctrine, not least because he was explicitly anti-statist and retained a strongly cosmopolitan as well as egalitarian ethics, arguably more universal than

³² John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1689–90], London 1964, Book IV, xvii, §4, pp. 418–9.

Kant's.³³ In Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*, on Kedourie's reading, the decisive step in nationalist doctrine was taken. For true Germans, foreign tongues should be regarded as inauthentic. Original—as opposed to hybrid—languages are recommended, as is linguistic purification. For Fichte, people who speak original languages are nations; and nations, conversely, must speak an original language. In addition, Germans are credited with special missions to perform in the coming era.

National self-determination, declared Kedourie, 'is, in the final analysis, a determination of the will'; and nationalism is, in the first place, 'a method of teaching the right determination of the will'. This indeed is the fundamental subject of Fichte's *Addresses*: the will acts rightly because it has been educated correctly.³⁴ So the story is complete: from Herder via Kant to Fichte comes the doctrine of nationalism and national self-determination. Yet Kedourie moves too quickly in asserting the existence of a coherent doctrine of national self-determination in Fichte—neither the phrase nor an articulated theory of it can be found in the *Addresses*. What he glosses over, too, is Fichte's egalitarian commitment to universal education; and he rather ungenerously treats all of Fichte's (admittedly extremely tedious) pedagogical exhortations as totalitarian socialization, when some of them are in fact defences of education *per se*. He fails to comment on the exceedingly vague political messages of the *Addresses* and, lastly, he grossly exaggerates their impact. It has 'long been a legend of German nationalism' that the *Addresses*

played a significant role in inspiring Prussian reform and liberation . . . But the weight of the evidence is against this interpretation. Contemporary diaries, memoirs and newspapers make little mention of either the delivery or the publication of the lectures. Probably they had a small but not highly influential connoisseurship.³⁵

Linguistic nationalism, 'invented . . . by literary men who had never exercised power', was to wreak havoc, politicizing language, making it an issue for which men would kill and exterminate, creating predictable

³³ 'The deluged heart of the idle cosmopolite is a hut for no one', cited in Kedourie's *Nationalism*, p. 57. As Perry Anderson has observed, Herder attacked Kant for his belief in the racial inferiority of blacks and others to Europeans: 'The Pluralism of Isaiah Berlin', in *A Zone of Engagement*, London 1992, p. 246.

³⁴ *Nationalism*, p. 81.

³⁵ Kelly, 'Introduction', *Addresses*, p. xxvii. Kelly cites Walter Simon's *The Failure of the Prussian Reform Movement*, Ithaca 1955, for 'the paucity of Fichte's influence over concrete events', p. xxxv.

frontier problems, and making 'extremely difficult the orderly functioning of a society of states'. From Fichte onwards, degenerative consequences through doctrinal dissemination inevitably followed: from linguistic to racial nationalism, according to Kedourie, is an easy slippage: 'the Nazis only simplified and debased the ideas implicit in the writings of Herder and others'. In nationalist doctrine, he claimed, there was

no definite clear-cut distinction between linguistic and racial nationalism . . . [because] a nation's language was peculiar to that nation only because such a nation constituted a racial stock.³⁶

There are serious difficulties with Kedourie's attempt to whisk us from Herder to Hitler in such short order:

- ▶ Herder and Fichte expressly insisted on language as the marker of the German nation because they were well aware of assimilation in German history—and because they wanted to avoid religious and racial divisions amongst Germans;
- ▶ both Herder and Fichte emphasized the possible future leadership missions of Germans—in contributing to world culture—but neither claimed that Germans are or should be a domineering master race;
- ▶ the story treats Social Darwinist racism as latent in German Romanticism; it is better seen as a perversion of nineteenth-century materialist rationalism, which resonated within upper and middle-class populations during the high-tide of European imperialism in Africa and Asia, and of novel immigration flows into North America;
- ▶ it does not sufficiently acknowledge the range of thinkers and politicians who embraced both liberalism and nationalism in the nineteenth and twentieth century, without paying any significant homage to German Romanticism/nationalism: Daniel O'Connell, Joseph Mazzini, J. S. Mill and Woodrow Wilson.³⁷

³⁶ *Nationalism*, pp. 70–2.

³⁷ Kedourie later argued that Mill and Wilson deployed a 'Whig theory of nationality', to be distinguished from nationalism proper since it 'assumes not so much that humanity ought to be divided into national, sovereign states, as that people who are alike in many things stand a better chance of making a success of representative government': *Nationalism*, p. 132. This seems forced. It is possible to distinguish two arguments: (a) states are more stable if they are nationally homogeneous, and (b) all states are best based on nationalist homogenization; but Mill made both of these.

At the root of these difficulties is Kedourie's essentialism. He wanted to homogenize nationalism and to define it in such a way that Nazism would flow from it. He maintained that it was misplaced ingenuity 'to try to classify nationalisms according to the particular aspect which they choose to emphasize'.³⁸ In the terminology of our peers his point may be put as follows: the essence of nationalism is its essentialism, not the particular markers chosen for identifying the essence in any case. This is insightful, but does not settle all normative and empirical matters, and threatens to achieve by definitional fiat what is far more difficult to establish in the historical record. If the essence of nationalism is, by contrast, defined as the belief that nations should be free and self-governed by their co-nationals—as one might positively gloss Kedourie's own opening definition—it is hard to see why the Nazis' racial hierarchies and genocidal exterminations should flow so easily from the doctrine's core. Freedom from empire, freedom for all nations on Kantian liberal grounds, does not warrant freedom to form empires of dominion or extermination.

6

Having presented his picture of the genesis of nationalist doctrine, Kedourie concluded by lamenting its repercussions for the world and our times. It should, he implies, have been left to wither along with many of the other doctrines of unbalanced academics, theologians and publicists. Nationalism was weak at birth, only espoused by restless and rootless malcontents; where nationalists 'found no Power effectively to espouse their cause their conspiracies and insurrections very often came to naught'.³⁹ Had it not been, he implied, for the irresponsible manipulation of Great Powers—Napoleon the Third and Cavour; Bismarck; the Tsars in the Balkans; British sponsors of Arabism in the Middle East—nationalism might never have become such a dominant feature of our world; one in which Wilson and Lenin felt it entirely natural to pay obeisance to national self-determination. He laments the baleful consequences: the breakdown of established orders and traditions; the disastrous impact of nationalist doctrine upon regions with culturally mixed populations; the conundrums posed and violence

³⁸ *Nationalism*, p. 73; see also p. 71.

³⁹ *Nationalism*, p. 99. This is the description of the Hungarian and Polish risings against the Austrians, and the Armenian insurrections against the Ottomans.

engendered by notions of national boundaries, frontiers and borders, not least in precipitating the Great War; and the inherent difficulties in assigning populations to nations, whether through 'research' or plebiscites. The book concludes by endorsing Lord Acton's defence of the multi-national British and Austrian empires, and of empires more generally against the principle of nationality, before offering the final flourish in defence of good rather than self-government that has already been discussed.⁴⁰

A final assessment of *Nationalism* must recognise that, alongside Kedourie's account of the genesis of the doctrine and its malign legacies for humanity, runs a not-so-hidden sociology. He cited his central figure of Fichte as a champion of the abolition of 'all Favouritisms'—an advocate of the career open to talents. He described late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century Germany, a region of minor principalities, as the locus of a surplus intelligentsia, where the educated and talented sons of pastors, artisans or small farmers could find little employment for their skills other than as theology students or household tutors. These redundant and over-trained intellectuals confronted a traditional and uncultured nobility. According to Kedourie these pre- and post-Kantian Romantics found in cultural nationalist fantasies some intellectual resolution for their enforced restlessness—i.e., their exclusion from responsible, gratifying and sober employment as public officials.

This accounted, in part, for their attempts to sanctify, aestheticize and moralize politics, power and states—discursive styles that had, regrettably, passed into 'current political rhetoric'.⁴¹ It also accounted for the proliferation of youth movements, such as Young Italy or Young Ireland, intent on displacing their elders. Kedourie's undeclared sociology is a combination of trite traditional conservative wisdom—the devil makes work for idle hands—with a genuine appreciation that blocked social mobility for talented people could cause serious discontent in the world after the Enlightenment. It has much in common with the vulgar instrumentalism of those—whether Marxists or rational-choice theorists—who see, behind the celebration of national and folk cultures,

⁴⁰ Acton's essay of 1862, a reply to J. S. Mill, is reprinted as 'Nationality' in J. R. Fears, ed., *Essays in the History of Liberty: Selected Writings of Lord Acton*, Indianapolis 1985, pp. 409–33.

⁴¹ *Nationalism*, pp. 42, 48.

the class interests and aspirations of a petty bourgeoisie who cannot find secure and worthwhile employment.⁴²

7

It is not universally appreciated that Kedourie in effect wrote a second book on nationalism. In fact, the Introduction to his edited collection *Nationalism in Asia and Africa* significantly exceeds in length the 140 pages of the first edition of *Nationalism*. It is often assumed that the Introduction complements the 1960 book and demonstrates the application of its arguments outside Europe. In some respects it does; but there are also significant departures—which undermine, in ways unacknowledged by Kedourie, the central claims of *Nationalism*.

That the diffusion of European ideas is the well-spring of Asian and African nationalism, and that the doctrine was an ‘importation’ to the Orient, are, of course, assumptions entirely consistent with the theses of *Nationalism*.⁴³ So is Kedourie’s account of the role of marginal men in the inception of nationalist movements. Educated to modern standards by the colonial powers, they experienced discrimination, and not just in employment, both in the imperial metropolis and at home. This made them especially receptive to nationalist doctrine, in which they could rationalize their hatreds of the European imperialists and of their old traditions. Indeed, in his treatment of the marginal intellectuals and intelligentsia, Kedourie’s tone is more sympathetic than that he had earlier displayed towards their German antecedents, perhaps because he found it easier to empathize with the lot of the Asian, African and Arab intellectual in the colonial world.

Before European imperialism Africa and Asia were, in his view, uniformly governed by great empires or tribal kingdoms, utterly void of nationalist or proto-nationalist ideas, and strikingly different in their political treatment of cultural heterogeneity. But there was a new twist in

⁴² The former is exemplified in Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1870*, Cambridge 1985; the latter in Albert Breton, ‘The Economics of Nationalism’, *Journal of Political Economy*, 72, pp. 376–86.

⁴³ The thesis that anti-colonial nationalism has been universally derivative of European thought has been subjected to some spirited challenges, cf. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, London 1986.

Kedourie's position: Europe and non-Europe differed radically because the first had frequently been subjected to attempts by its rulers to enforce religious and cultural homogeneity. Europe's disposition was to 'require and enforce uniformity of belief among the members of the body politic', a propensity that originated with the Roman Emperor Theodosius, a Christian in whose reign was founded the office of Inquisitor of the Faith. The Byzantine emperor Justinian; the Crusades, and the massacres of Jews in Europe that accompanied them; the expulsion of the Jews from Spain; the sixteenth-century European wars of religion; Louis XIV's revocation of the Edict of Nantes—all are cited as historical proof of this recurrent tendency. Kedourie advanced the thesis that the European proclivity towards the imposition of cultural homogeneity is part of what nationalist doctrine implicitly 'takes for granted and assimilates'.⁴⁴

The argument, of course, implies that nationalism has very ancient roots in Christian politics and theology, but Kedourie does not pause to consider that this might lead to a palpable contradiction in his thought: that the modernity he had claimed for nationalism—a politics of cultural homogenization—has, in his own hands, begun to look much more like a recurrence than a novelty. Islam, by contrast with Christianity—and Judaism—is praised because it, 'in spite of its warlike beginnings, never demanded religious uniformity and from the start made a place within its polity for those of a different belief'.⁴⁵ In Kedourie's vision, the world of empires has now become differentiated: the Ottoman with its millet system and the early Roman pagan and polytheistic version were, by comparison with many Christian empires, more tolerant of religious pluralism; and rulers from the other world religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, are flatly declared, before the coming of European influence, to be free of any homogenizing animus.

A second way in which the 'Introduction' undermines the theses of *Nationalism* is Kedourie's new and extended treatment of the doctrine as a species of millennialism. Both nationalism and communism are now seen as lineal descendants of those medieval heresies that sought to establish heaven on earth. The idea of progress, on which both were

⁴⁴ 'Introduction' to *Nationalism in Asia and Africa*, London 1971, pp. 29, 31–2.

⁴⁵ 'Introduction', p. 33. This might seem a fair if generous description of mature Islamic polities, notably the Porte, but hardly describes the conquests of early Islam or the efforts of Islamic adherents to erase the iconic architecture of Byzantine Christianity, Pharaonic Egypt, or Zoroastrian Persia.

said to depend, is seen as a secularized and respectable version of the millennium.⁴⁶ Through a stray remark by Lessing, Kedourie now tries to link German Romanticism back to the apocalyptic millennialism of Joachim of Fiore in the late twelfth century, Gerard of Borgo San Donnino in the thirteenth, and the Anabaptist rising in Münster under the two Jans, of Mathys and Leyden. He gestures towards a universal connexion between nationalist movements and millennialism: the Taiping rebellion is portrayed as rooted in the syncretic adaptation of Christian fundamentalism—the reader was left to see the harbinger of the horrors of Chinese nationalism and communism to come. Kedourie concluded:

This frenzied meliorism, which in its religious form was long suppressed and disreputable, in its secular form became the dominant strand of the political tradition first of Europe and then of the whole world. Nationalism as it appears and spreads in Europe is one of the many forms of this vision of a purified society in which all things are made anew.⁴⁷

In the intellectually serious history of the analysis of nationalism, there are few arguments as preposterous as this passage. It embarrassingly undermines Kedourie's earlier account of the genesis of nationalism: to spiritual forebears such as Kant we are now to add the Brethren of the Free Spirit, while nationalist doctrine has suddenly become mediaeval rather than recently rooted. No effort, other than the gestural discussion of the Taiping case, and the aside from Lessing, is made to establish actual historical linkages between medieval millennialist thought and nationalist philosophy and practice. How many nationalist movements were immediately preceded by millennial movements that prefigured and shaped them? All nationalists are here presented by Kedourie as revolutionary utopians who want to destroy the past, utterly purify the present and remove all separations between public and private life. This is indiscriminate nonsense, literally 'impertinent' to much of humanity. Nationalists have generally been this-wordly, intent on the revival or renewal rather than the eradication of their own cultural traditions;

⁴⁶ Kedourie's 'Introduction' cites two sources in the history of millennial thought: Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress*, Berkeley 1949, and Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, London 1957; and two studies linking messianism and nationalism in Africa: G. Balandier, 'Messianismes et nationalismes en Afrique noire', *Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie*, xiv, 1953, and Efraim Andersson, *Messianic Popular Movements in the Lower Congo*, Uppsala 1958.

⁴⁷ 'Introduction', pp. 104–5.

they have celebrated and sought to reinforce their own civil societies, and have campaigned for their own states, rather than abolishing the distinction between public and private; they have called for the establishment of legitimate and law-abiding regimes, rather than antinomian paradises; and have included numerous liberals, social democrats and socialists whose politics have been entirely free of utopianism—unless all of the last named are to be subsumed under Kedourie's sweeping millennial rubric.

The final noteworthy element in the 'Introduction' is the attention Kedourie pays to how African and Asian nationalists treat their own religions, their own 'dark gods'. He maintains, plausibly enough in some of the cases that he cites, that to mobilize successfully anti-colonial nationalists were obliged to work with rather than against the grain of their local cultures; in particular they often politicized the religion of their co-ethnics. These sensible observations require no criticism, but they are significantly at odds with some of the themes of *Nationalism*. They suggest that nationalism's appeal, both to intellectuals and their publics, may well be rooted in past traditions—even if these are selectively re-worked pasts.

The argument fits uncomfortably with the thesis that nationalism is wholly modern, invented, and rooted in the intellectual conjunction of post-Kantianism and secularized Judeo-Christian millennialism. For if nationalists can successfully build movements with strikingly various religious bases, and mobilize them in anti-imperial directions, then neither the genesis nor diffusion of nationalism need depend upon exposure to the storm-blown bacilli of western philosophy or Judaeo-Christian millennialism. The argument does, however, fit comfortably the temperament of an observant, quietist and educated Jew from Baghdad, outraged at Zionism and Arab nationalism. This is not just an *ad hominem* remark: Kedourie saw nationalism as a heresy that disordered the worlds of settled empires and orthodox religions, be they Judaic, Christian or Muslim. It seems only just to apply his own methods to himself, and to see in his account of nationalism the projection of the shocks occasioned to his people, his empire, and his religion, much as he decodes modern nationalists as using and abusing ideas as responses to their predicaments.

If the specific arguments of *Nationalism* do not withstand close scrutiny, are there any lasting merits to the work? One is its impact in prompting Ernest Gellner and many others to develop modernist accounts of the genesis and power of nationalism, unburdened by Kedourie's mal-idealist history of ideas. The second is its political and normative challenges, and the research agendas they imply for historians. Was the world of the European empires really a better one than that of nations—which, slow and uneven, has yet fully to take its place? If not, why not? If so, for whom, and why? Was the dissolution of those empires avoidable, as Kedourie suggested from the moment of his withdrawn doctoral thesis to his death? To the extent that nationalism as such—rather than its distortions—is implicated in the horrors of the last two centuries, could that have been avoided? Can nationalism be managed and expressed in ways that achieve stability and world order in a form compatible with constitutionalism and democracy—something Kedourie believed impossible? Was he right to suggest that cultural autonomy works only when 'it does not rest upon, or is justified by, nationalist doctrine'? The recently reformed constitutional structures of the United Kingdom, Spain and Belgium will test his argument that polyethnic and multi-national regimes that protect cultural autonomy will fail in their task if nationalism is used to found them. It is to the credit of a man who appeared to loathe much of modernity and its consequences to have proposed, within Anglophone literature, the modernity of nationalism—the thesis around which its anthropology, sociology, and history revolves; even though he provided an unconvincing account of its genesis and no answers for its management.