

# THE STUDY OF NATIONALISM: A METHODOLOGICAL INQUIRY

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There have been few subjects in politics and sociology to which so much time, paper, and verbiage have been devoted as nationalism. Although the varieties of interpretation seem endless, they can easily be divided into two opposing camps, henceforth called objectivist (or structuralist) and subjectivist. These distinctions roughly correspond to the two disciplines of sociology and history, but this is more accidental and unfortunate than inherent in the nature of the disciplines themselves. Unfortunate, because most sociological analysis has, hitherto, been afflicted by the “scientific” disease, which holds that the only type of valid explanation is one that refers to general laws.<sup>1</sup> Thus it has been left to historiography — and not all historiography at that — to provide a nondeterministic, nonstructuralist account of nationalism. This is not to say that sociology is inherently incapable of analysing that doctrine, but until it rids itself of the misapprehension that human phenomena can be treated in the same mechanistic and quantifiable way as inanimate objects, it will never succeed in recovering the wellsprings of human behaviour.

In this paper I will discuss three accounts that have been offered as explanations of nationalism: Ernest Gellner’s *Thought and Change*, which contains a chapter on the subject; Elie Kedourie’s *Nationalism*; and volume one of J. R. Levenson’s *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*.<sup>2</sup> These works are representative of three types of explanation of human phenomena, which I call structuralism, idealism, and intellectual history. By comparing them, I hope to make apparent the defects of, on the one hand, explanations that are methodologically holistic, ignoring the primary existence of acting individuals who are independent centres of consciousness; and, on the other hand, explanations that are methodologically idealistic, that, while taking human consciousness as their primary datum, consider thought as abstracted from both its object (the world) and its purpose (action to change that world). This essay is, therefore, a qualified defence of intellectual history against the claims of sociology — qualified, because I will stress throughout the danger of considering ideas in isolation from their context; indeed, such an enterprise would not be intellectual *history* at all but an exercise in conceptual analysis. My comments on the general approach of an author should not be taken as approval or disapproval of that author’s actual conclusions. In this essay I am concerned only with the *manner* of attacking the problem and not with the account’s substance.

A subjectivist interpretation is so-called, not because it is arbitrary or relativist, but because it focuses on the “knowing subject” as the “causal” force in history. As Dilthey was eager to point out, the difference between the human and the physical sciences is not so much one of methodology but of subject matter. Both aim at “objectivity” in the sense of *truth*, but that aim is far more difficult to achieve in the contingent human world than it is in the determined physical world. The subject matter of the human “sciences” is *man*. Therefore it is *subjectivist* in its approach. For the historian,

subjectivism does not mean that he must analyse the psychic makeup of his actors, despite Collingwood’s doctrine of “self-knowledge of mind”.<sup>3</sup> It means merely that he should place primary emphasis on the revealed thoughts and actions of people in given historical situations — not empathetic identification, which implies that if we cannot “become” a Hitler or a Stalin we can never hope to understand them, but a close analysis of the perceptions, world views, ideologies, philosophies, and problems of the actors in question. The premise that underlies such an injunction is, in Gordon Leff’s words, individuals as the irreducible units of history ... the agents of their own creations even if not of the circumstances which occasioned them.

It follows that

since individuals acting upon one another are the irreducible unit of history, its study can never go beyond their individuality.<sup>4</sup>

Thus all good history is, to a certain extent, “idealist”, because all human beings are continually exercising judgment and choice in even the most mundane activities: “there has to be a new volition each time habit is translated into act.”<sup>5</sup> The acts of choosing and judging involve a process of evaluation, so that the more significant a historical event, the more important are the values, ideas, and ideologies that must be assumed to motivate the actors. For the historian, then, beliefs are as much historical data as are “brute facts”. Moreover, this idealism should not be interpreted as merely the history of abstract theory. People think and act in response to specific situations, and it is the recovery of the context, and hence of the *problems* facing historical actors, that the historian should be interested in. As Collingwood points out in his *Autobiography*, we do not think in simple, unprovoked propositions, but in response to specific problems to which our theories are answers.<sup>6</sup> To return to Leff’s formulation of the issue, in human action there exists a “dialectic between what happens in men’s minds and what happens outside them, between what was the case and what men took it to be”.<sup>7</sup>

Because the historian’s primary datum is the acting individual, contingency must be the guiding principle of his explanation. Given a certain situation, there is never a definite course of action that *must* be taken, but as many alternatives as there are actors pursuing different ends and as few alternatives as the nature of the situation allows. The context may provide a *necessary* cause, but it can never be *sufficient*. The individual as a responsible agent is his own “cause” and as such is not reducible to another determining force.

In what ways do these generalities about historical explanation affect our discussion of nationalism? It is because so much analysis of this ideology has been nonindividualistic and deterministic that the foregoing clarification was necessary. The study of an ideology is surely the province of the intellectual historian, not the social scientist. Indeed, sociology has much to offer to the analysis of nationalism, but it can never tell the whole story because it is forced to remain on the level of supra-individual generalities that, as we shall see, are never sufficient to explain that doctrine. Only intellectual history is able to treat nationalism as a *human* event — as volitional, contingent, and hence an individual phenomenon. Only intellectual history deals with those “causal” factors that make nationalism what it distinctively is. As Raymond Aron has pointed out, to consider an event historically is to admit the possibility that it need not have occurred and, at the very least, need not have occurred at the time it did.<sup>8</sup> Contingency is the first principle of human events, as determinism is the first principle of physical events.

Keeping this in mind, we can, first, look at Ernest Gellner’s treatment of nationalism. His analysis hinges on the two anthropological concepts of structure and culture. A society ordered on a structural basis is held together by mutually dependent roles, each involving a different function. The individual is completely sunk in the “niche” into which he is born, and his behaviour follows certain traditional and circumscribed lines. A society held together by a culture is based, not on the reciprocity of objective needs, but on a perceived similarity of habits and beliefs in the community. In contrast to the structured society, the cultural community is socially mobile, the individual possessing no fixed identity and following no fixed patterns of behaviour. Thus, such an individual faces problems of social communication. In a structured society his rela-

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tions with others are predetermined by custom, and a shared language is not necessary in order that two people understand each other. All they need know is each other's role. Hence in feudal England a lord speaking only Norman French and a peasant speaking only Anglo-Saxon could live together in complete mutual understanding. When such a rigid structure breaks down, so does social communication. A *cultural* identity is now needed to hold isolated and mobile individuals together — a common language to replace the speechless communication of a structured society. This, argues Gellner, is the negative reason for the nation-state. Modern society is a cultural community demanding a new cultural identity to replace its lost mechanical structure (Gellner seems to have in mind Durkheim's distinction between "mechanical" and "organic" solidarity). But, as Gellner recognizes, this explanation begs the question — Why the *nation*-state? Why not some other type of cultural unit, say one founded on a religious identity? Gellner's answer is his "positive" explanation for nationalism.

Cultural unity, he argues, presupposes universal literacy, which can only be achieved in a social unit of a certain size — a unit capable of supporting an educational system. Hence, through sheer utilitarian *necessity*, the administrative unit and the linguistic community coincide in the nation-state. The raising of vernaculars into languages of literacy both brings into being an expanded clerical class and at the same time limits its horizons. In medieval times, the tiny clerical class could range across vast territories because there were universal languages of literacy — Latin and Arabic. But, paradoxically, universal literacy necessarily involves linguistic parochialism. Latin and Arabic have been supplanted by a myriad of new "national" languages raised from the vernacular. Thus, we have the reverse situation of that which existed in the Middle Ages — a vastly expanded literate class of persons who cannot communicate beyond their political units. Hence the need for the nation-state: not only does it provide the means by which people can *become* literate; it also provides the boundaries within which they can *exercise* their literacy.

Gellner gives one more reason why the modern nation-state has come into being. Industrialism, he argues, has distributed its benefits unevenly, and where the underprivileged strata in a modernizing society are culturally differentiated from the rest, they raise themselves to a revolutionary consciousness by a new sense of national identity. After a war of national self-determination, they form themselves into a nation-state.

The first objection to this theory seems to scream from the narrative. For Gellner is giving an account of the rise of *nationalities*, not *nationalism*. What is the difference between the two? Nationality is an "objective" measurable datum, in the sense that it is the *fact* of belonging to what is (subjectively) defined to be a nation. Although there can be endless debate over the content of that mental construct "nation", there can be no debate over whether you are a citizen of a nation-state: it is an objective *social fact*, albeit mind-dependent. That is the paradox of social facts, which distinguishes them from natural "brute" facts: social facts are Janus-faced in that they are entirely dependent on shared meanings, yet at the same time they have a concrete existence. One need not subscribe to the idea of nationalism, but it is difficult today to escape citizenship in a nation-state. Thus, all social facts, though *facts*, are epiphenomenal to something more fundamental that gives them their factual status. Nationality, as a social formation, is brought into being by certain beliefs: the fact of nationality is dependent on the ideology called nationalism.

Thus, Gellner's analysis, by ignoring the mental activity behind the creation of a social fact, skims over the surface of the whole phenomenon. Despite his stated belief that "nationalism" (by which he appears to mean *nationality*) is contingent, he never leaves the realm of general and necessary forces. Gellner does not successfully explain why, given the loss of structural unity, uneven industrialization, and universal literacy, that nationalism rather than other possible alternatives should have given expression to these social problems. The fact that most modern states are founded on the principle of nationality reflects the history of an idea — nationalism. It is conceivable that with the gradual collapse of the *ancien regime* another unifying principle could have arisen to forge people into new political units. The rise of nationalism as a principle of political organization is, therefore, wholly contingent, even if the *need* for a new political unit of *some sort* is objective and necessary. There is no possible structuralist explanation of why, given a

certain objective situation, some people choose one course of action, and other people choose another. Ultimately, individual difference is a given, and in explaining a social fact we must recover not only general qualitative and quantitative changes in society "as a whole" but also recover the different reactions people have had to the same circumstance.

Professor Kedourie's work on nationalism is a striking contrast to Gellner's. For here we have an account of the rise of the nation-state via an account of the rise of nationalism as an ideology. Kedourie's *Nationalism* is a history of political thought. Its unstated premise is "idealism": not the epistemological theory that the world we perceive is our own creation, but the theory of action that has as its first principle the premise that human events can be explained only by reference to human beliefs.

Thus, Kedourie at no time attempts to show that nationalism is the necessary effect of a cause — unless by "cause" and "effect" we mean "thought" and "action". To call an idea a cause is contentious, however, given the common philosophical usage of these terms, whereby only objective, measurable "things" can be causes, and to dispute this would be outside the scope of this essay.<sup>9</sup>

Although Kedourie treats the rise of nationalism as the history of an idea, his idealism, because it is idealism, still does not avoid the pitfall of determinism, this time of a *logical* or *conceptual* variety. It is true that he stresses that the historical relationship between liberalism and nationalism was contingent, stemming from a perceived common enemy, and not logical, stemming from a necessary identity of ideas. But the bulk of his analysis seems to be more of an extrapolation of the *necessary* connection between, rather than the historical sequence of, ideas. Of course, logical and circumstantial connections frequently coincide in practice, but this is not always the case, and a logical congruence should not be mistaken for a historical sequence of events. Take, for instance, the historical connection between nationalism and liberalism.<sup>10</sup> Two sorts of idealist explanation are possible here. First, we could argue (as Kedourie, in fact, does not) that nationalists and liberals *had* to associate, given the natures of their respective ideologies. But this would be very difficult to demonstrate, and even if such an explanation could make its point plausibly, it still could not provide a *historical* explanation of what people actually did and why they did it. How many political alliances have been of expediency rather than ideology? Second, we could provide an alternative argument that is no less idealist than the first, by showing the beliefs and perceptions that men actually held, however illogical they seem in retrospect. For no matter how irrational an idea, as long as it is accepted, it can still provide a powerful motive for action. The nineteenth-century liberals saw nationalism challenging the *ancien regime*, and they immediately perceived a common cause. In fact, as Acton realized, nationalism and liberalism had and have nothing in common beyond a historical common enemy. One cannot even argue that they share a general common enemy. The actors in history are not omniscient; they act according to their beliefs, but these beliefs are so often contradictory and absurd. Naturally, it is a worthwhile enterprise to analyse the logical connections between ideas. In so doing, we are grouping theories into more general *archetypes*, and this can only enrich our understanding of their *timeless* aspect. But in writing the history of an ideology such as nationalism, we are not seeking this sort of understanding. We are not philosophers contemplating ideas in their perfection, but historians tracing the influence of ideas in their perversion.

Keeping these points in mind, we must ask of Kedourie's explanation: Is it really appropriate to leap from the abstract philosophy of Kant and Fichte to the terrorism of the Balkan insurrectionists or the twentieth-century African nationalists? The connection is conceptual rather than historical. How many Africans are acquainted with the problems and preoccupations of nineteenth-century German philosophy? The history of German nationalism is a different story. Most German intellectuals would have been familiar at least with the rudiments of the philosophies of Kant and Fichte, and no doubt — *but through no inexorable necessity* — these philosophies made their impact on the actions of the German nationalists. This is not to say that a conceptual identification of, for instance, Middle-Eastern terrorism and German thought in terms of a *zeitgeist* or *weltanschauung* is not valuable. Indeed, I believe it to be of primary importance. But the *historical* sequence of events may not follow conceptual necessity.

Thus, Kedourie's account suffers not only from "conceptual determinism" but from considering German nationalism as the historical mainspring of all nationalisms. The ideological identity may be there — indeed, German nationalism may be justifiably understood as the ideal type of nationalism as such — but the historical sequence of events is far more tenuous. Kedourie's idealism is too rarefied to present a historical account: it lacks that close analysis of actual motivation (apart from his general theory about alienated intellectuals) that would place ideas in the context of concrete human situations — Leff's "dialectic" between mind and circumstance. This dialectic poses a specific question to the actor, to be answered by a theory, specific or general. (I disagree with Collingwood's statement that a specific question demands an equally specific answer, a position taken up by Quentin Skinner in his essay "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas".<sup>11</sup> There is, to my mind, no reason why we cannot derive from particulars valid general propositions rather than — as Skinner believes — mere illusions of universality.) Drawing from both Leff and Collingwood, we can see that concrete circumstances intimate the questions that the mind answers and, as I have already stressed, the mind in turn re-creates the human aspects of these circumstances. In discussing the rise of nationalism as an ideology, we cannot afford to ignore the specific problems and questions to which nationalism provided an answer. To elucidate philosophical problems such as that of self-identity, is not enough for intellectual history. Such problems are expressed in the form of simple propositions, not as a dialectic of question and answer in which the question is not an abstract proposition (as in the Socratic question, What is the nature of ...?) but a concrete situation.

For example, the immediate concrete problem facing nineteenth-century thinkers could have been as follows: To what or whom do I owe allegiance and obligation now that the *ancien regime* has proved itself incapable of commanding authority? This specific question could then have been expanded into a general philosophical problem, to which thinkers like Kant and Fichte tried to provide an answer: What is the nature of self-identity? Here the relevance of philosophy is not lost, but the contemplation of abstractions is made part of the individual's interaction with the world. The vocabulary of the argument might belong to traditional philosophical problems, but the impetus to deal with these questions must come from, in Marx's terminology, the human "life process". It is perhaps because Kedourie is a conservative that he prefers to minimise the reciprocal relationship between thought and action.

An intellectual historian who provides a genuinely historical account of a nationalism is J. R. Levenson. In his treatment of the history of an idea, Levenson shows how contemporary problems might be expressed in abstract terms, whilst their inspiration lies in the concrete social life of the times. Thus, the pervasive traditionalism of all schools of Chinese philosophy prior to the nineteenth century parallels the stability of unness society: tile lack of social change limited the scope of intellectual alternatives by presenting a circumscribed range of problems. There is no smoke without fire; likewise, at a certain level of specificity ideas provide answers to problems thrown up by particular circumstances. (I am not, of course, arguing that ideas have no universal application and validity but are rooted in time and place. A range of specific problems can be encompassed by a single abstract theory: indeed, the worth of a theory lies in its "timelessness" — its ability to deal successfully with the various problems of different ages and cultures and, moreover, to unite them into a single framework and perspective. Rather, I am arguing that particular ideas are generated by the "human condition" and would not take on their peculiar characters if that condition were other than what it is or had evolved in a different direction. For instance, the theory of libertarianism would not exist in a world without any form of coercion or the possibility of coercion; more specifically, it could not exist without man's *experience* over thousands of years, of each *individual* abuse, injustice, and misery caused by collectivism and statism in all their historical forms.) According to Levenson, genuine intellectual radicalism only arose when a break in continuity faced the Chinese way of life. With social upheaval, disputes over orthodoxy gave way to fundamental dispute between traditionalists and modernists.

Levenson's study of Chinese nationalism fits into this story of continuity and change in Chinese history. His aim is to portray the interaction between intellectual change and changes in the Chinese way of life, thus showing how new circumstances posed new intel-

lectual alternatives — alternatives whose nature transformed the meaning of the answers that traditional philosophy had provided. It was a case of new wine in old bottles. The "vocabulary" remained the same, but the "language", the *significance* to the actors, was transformed. An idea considered as an answer rather than as a proposition will be understood in terms of its relation to events. As a proposition, it will remain a static self-identity without a history, extracted from the dialogue in which it belongs.

The virtue of Levenson's account lies in the way he relates intellectual change to social change, without falling into a determinism, a "sociology of knowledge". For Levenson, thought is not epiphenomenal to some reified social force, in which individuals do not act but merely react, but part of a reciprocal relationship between thought and positive action, between man and his world. We are reminded here of Leff's comment that all acts, even the most passive, are preceded by a volition, and also of Ludwig von Mises's incisive words in *Theory and History*:

to do nothing and to be idle are also action, they too determine the course of events. Wherever the conditions of human interference are present, man acts whether he interferes or refrains from interfering. He who endures what he could change acts no less than he who interferes in order to attain another result. ... Action is not only doing but no less omitting to do what possibly could be done.<sup>12</sup>

Ultimately, argues Levenson, all human phenomena are dependent on the conscious will, and thus even "the blind plodding in the footsteps of the past" is an answer to the eternal question "true or false?"<sup>13</sup> The existence of doubt is the precondition for any assertion. Thus, thinking is not only part of a "dialectic" with the external world but also a dialogue between alternative ways of viewing that world. Here we have both contextualism and contingency: contextualism without determinism and contingency without excessive abstraction. And, as we have already seen, the circle is closed by understanding intellectual alternatives as inspired by happenings in "real life". The dialectic and the dialogue are two aspects of the same thought-circumstance relationship. In this way Levenson's "idealism" avoids excessive abstraction. In his own words, he is concerned, not with "thought" in the abstract, but with the process of "men thinking" in relation to the world.

Levenson's account of Chinese nationalism follows three main themes: the changing social world, the changing intellectual problems, and the continuity with the past of the vocabulary in which new answers to these problems were couched.

The nineteenth century was an apocalyptic time for China. Western science and technology confronted traditional Chinese culture, with its conservative respect for textual learning and the wisdom of the ancients. This was the situation that provided the climate for nineteenth-century Chinese philosophy. It raised an intellectual problem that never before had faced the Chinese. Before the nineteenth century, philosophical dispute was largely over which school was "true" to the ancient learning. But with the intrusion of Western civilization, generating an awareness of a viable world outside Chinese culture, the intellectual alternatives changed. The Chinese intellectual was now faced, not with various interpretations of the classical texts, but with Chinese culture as a whole contrasted with the Western way of life. This, then, was the problem — a new set of alternatives that annihilated the relevance of the old disputes between the various schools. The Chinese intellectual in the nineteenth century, argues Levenson, was torn between an emotional attachment to Chinese culture and an appreciation of the utility of Western technology.

Nationalism was one answer to this problem, an answer that, according to Levenson, effected a complete break with the past — a break, that is, in the continuity of the Chinese outlook, but not in the vocabulary used. The nationalist argument was couched in terms handed down from antiquity. It was an example of what Levenson calls "transformation-with-preservation".<sup>14</sup> Although the outlook had changed, the conceptual framework remained the same:

And that is how the old order changed, with an old cloak for the new content, the antiquity of the alternatives covering the newness of the choice. ... Chinese tradition was challenged; but the logic of the battle was a rigorous logic in the traditional Chinese terms.<sup>15</sup>

The nationalist answer to China's problems thus cannot be understood without reference to traditional Chinese philosophy.

Traditional attachment to China had been oriented toward things Chinese — to culture. This attitude is expressed in the traditional Chinese term for their country: *t'ien-hsia*, meaning “the world”, i.e., the world of Chinese culture and values. The traditional contrast to *t'ien-hsia* was *kuo*, which meant, simply, a local political unit among other such political units. *T'ien-hsia* was the regime of value and hence universal in scope (accordingly, Confucian China was “the world”), whilst *kuo* was the regime of power, whose “value” was only relative to the brute force of other such *kuo*.

Having stated this traditional dichotomy, Levenson proceeds to describe the process of metamorphosis by which it was possible for these ideas to emerge into the nineteenth century and meet the new problems facing Chinese philosophy. One such change was the association of *kuo* with free inquiry. The regime of value, *t'ien-hsia*, was based on the absolutism of certain virtues — an absolutism that, it was believed, was not maintained by brute force but by a spontaneous social order. This is why *kuo* represented both skepticism and the regime of power. For, to the Confucian mind, in a community where disbelief was rife, only force could provide social order. Thus in the concept of *kuo*, free inquiry was equated with servility.

By the nineteenth century, Chinese intellectuals were still concerned with the traditional Chinese preoccupation with keeping China, as a distinct entity, intact. In the past this had been achieved by stressing the eternal value of Chinese culture. But now, confronted by Western technology, many intellectuals began to doubt the value of China as *t'ien-hsia*. So how could they accept Western culture without rejecting China? The answer was nationalism. Forget China's identity as a culture, the nationalists argued; in future China must preserve herself as a *kuo* — as a political power amongst other political powers, her superiority residing in her strength, not in her virtues. The fact that *kuo* had come to be associated with free inquiry smoothed the path to transformation. For now values were irrelevant to Chinese identity, and a person could be loyal to China without being a good Confucian. All that was required was a commitment to China's status as a nation-state. She was no longer to be “the world”, but a competitor in the world.

From this discussion of the work of Gellner, Kedourie, and Levenson, we can now derive some guidelines for the future study of such ideologies as nationalism. Gellner gives an account of the rise of the nation-state without discussing nationalism as an ideology; in other words, he attempts to explain a social fact without reference to the *beliefs* from which all such facts derive their existence. Kedourie discusses the development of nationalist *ideas* but omits the close analysis of the social and economic background — for example, the means employed in a society for accumulating wealth, “classes”, their interests, aims, motivations, and mores — which would provide a (praxeologically) intelligible context against which the ideology could be viewed. Man always acts to achieve ends — his ideas and beliefs are not conceived in a vacuum but serve a purpose, whether material or “spiritual”. We can understand an ideology, therefore, only in terms of what it is designed to achieve, and this information can only be provided by a study of the specific circumstances that accompanied the development of that ideology. Mises has pointed out that man acts only because he experiences a feeling of unease.<sup>16</sup> This dissatisfaction is experienced, as we have seen, as a problem (frequently expressed in abstract terms), and an ideology is an attempt to solve that problem via a “plan of action”. An ideology should be understood, therefore, not as an abstract proposition, but as a *plan of action* in response to a situation that is perceived by some members of society to be, in some respect, unsatisfactory.<sup>17</sup> In Levenson's account of nationalism we can see the dialectic between thought and the world at work. The nature of traditional Chinese alternatives changes with the problems it faces. The result is an answer, nationalism, that employs old dichotomies to articulate new solutions: “plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.” Here we have an authentic history of an idea that is “idealist” without being abstract and is contextual without being determinist. Contingency is the hallmark of the development of Chinese nationalism as Levenson describes it. It is the history of individuals reflecting on, and judging, the situations that confront them; a history of individuals *moulding* traditional terms to fit their own frame of reference, rather than passively receiving them;<sup>18</sup> it is a history, not of supra-individual forces, as in Gellner, nor of abstract ideas, as in Kedourie, but of *human action*.

## NOTES

- See Heinrich Rickert, *Science and History: A Critique of Positivist Epistemology* (Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1962); F. A. Hayek, *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies in the Abuse of Reason* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1952); and Murray N. Rothbard, “The Mantle of Science”, in *Scientism and Values*, ed. H. S. Schoeck and J. W. Wiggins (Princeton, N. J.: D. Van Nostrand, 1960).
- Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964), pp. 147ff.; Kedourie, *Nationalism* (London: Hutchinson, 1974); Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965).
- R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 107ff.
- Leff, *History and Social Theory* (London: Merlin Press, 1969), pp. 59, 54-55.
- Ibid.*, p. 54.
- Collingwood, chaps. 5, 7. Although Collingwood's theory of “question and answer” is useful, I do not subscribe to the historical relativism that he deduces from it. From the premise, All thought is a response to circumstances, it does not follow that ideas have no constant core of identity over time; this conclusion is only possible if a minor premise is inserted - that the essentials of the “human condition” themselves possess no such constant identity. On the contrary, I believe that the human condition, being subject to natural law, is essentially the same in all places and at all times; it follows that the history of thought is not in perpetual flux but reflects the circumscribed range of alternatives open to a being with a determinate nature.
- Leff, p. 60.
- Aron, *Dimensions de la connaissance historique* (Paris, 1961), p. 65, cited in Leff, p. 56.
- In England there has been considerable debate on causal explanation in the writing of history, especially on whether “reasons” can be “causes”. For the view that a valid historical explanation must refer to general laws see Carl G. Hempel, “The Function of General Laws in History”, in *Theories of History*, ed. Patrick Gardiner (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959); and “Reasons and Covering Laws in Historical Explanation”, *The Philosophy of History*, ed. Patrick Gardiner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974). For the view that reasons can be causes, see William Dray, *Laws and Explanation in History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); “The Historical Explanation of Actions Reconsidered”, in *The Philosophy of History*, ed. Gardiner; and see Donald Davidson, “Actions, Reasons, and Causes”, *Journal of Philosophy* 60 (1973), no. 23.
- Because in this essay I am not concerned with the substance of the history of nationalism, but with its study, the question of the relationship between nationalism, liberalism, and conservatism need not detain us too long. Early European nationalism was closely associated with the classical liberal movement, while the later Central and Eastern European manifestations were linked with “romantic” collectivism and statism. On these issues, see Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), and *Nationalism: Its Meaning and History* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1955); see also Carlton J. H. Hayes, *The Historical Evolution of Modern Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1948). For an attempt to deal with the libertarian significance of the confused and ambiguous history of liberalism and nationalism, see the forthcoming essay by Chris R. Tame, “The Problem of Nationalism and National Self-Determination in Classical Liberal and Contemporary Libertarian Thought”.
- Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas”, *History and Theory* 8 (1969), no. 1.
- Mises, *Theory and History* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1958), p. 13.
- Levenson, p. xviii. It is not only in *Thought and Change* that Gellner fails to see the point that Mises and Levenson express so succinctly. In a critique of methodological individualism, “Holism Versus Individualism”, in *Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, ed. May Brodbeck (New York: Macmillan, 1968). Gellner writes:  
Certain tribes I know have what anthropologists call a segmentary patrilineal structure, which moreover maintains itself very well over time. I could “explain” this by saying that the tribesmen have, all or most of them, dispositions whose effect is to maintain the system. But, of course, not only have they never given the matter much thought, but it also might very well be impossible to isolate anything in the characters and conduct of the individual tribesmen which explains how they come to maintain the system. (p. 268)  
In his own essay, “Methodological Individualism and Social Tendencies”, reprinted in the same volume, J. W. N. Watkins replies in a footnote: “The very fact that the tribesmen have never given the matter much thought, the fact that they accept their inherited system uncritically, may constitute an important part of an explanation of its stability” (p. 276).
- Levenson, p. xiii.
- Ibid.*, p. 104.
- Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (London: William Hodge & Co., 1949), pp. 13-14.
- Unlike Marxists, praxeologists do not stipulate the character of happiness, dissatisfaction, and the ultimate goals of action. These may be motivated by the desire for material gain; on the other hand, “spiritual” gratification devoid of any economic benefit has provided many individuals with a powerful motive for action.
- From a libertarian point of view there is an element of tragedy in Levenson's conclusions: the adaptation of a traditional conceptual framework to fit changing circumstances, although “active” in a formal sense, seems appallingly conservative to those who have genuinely radical solutions to social problems. History is a defective form of knowledge — a catalogue of human error and failure; its subject is “accidentia” — the contingent, individual occurrences that need not have happened when they did, or have happened at all. If, therefore, intellectual history reveals that the human imagination has, in the past, proved remarkably sterile - that major “new” ideologies such as nationalism are merely adaptations of old beliefs, so that errors are repeated century after century with tedious monotony — we should not be too despondent. For there is no reason why the past should dictate the future: if the individual is indeed a volitional being engaged in a “dialogue” between various ways of viewing the world, there is no barrier save lethargy to complete intellectual break with the dominant ideologies of the past.