

**J.J. ROUSSEAU AND JOHANN G. HERDER:
THE CREATORS OF THE FRENCH AND GERMAN CONCEPTS OF NATION**

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***Abstract:** The national idea is one of the great ideologies specific to modernity. With a history of two centuries, the national ideology continues today to be a true paradigm. We can only conceive of our life within a nation. The nation is par excellence the formula of solidarity and identity specific to the modern world. The creators of the national idea are two important names in modern philosophy: J.J. Rousseau and Johann G. Herder. Rousseau is the creator of the French concept of nation, based on man's will to belong to a community of citizens. Herder is the founder of the German concept of nation, based on the common history, language and culture of a people.*

***Key words:** modern philosophy, national paradigm, nationalism, European history*

INTRODUCTION

Most researchers of this concept talk about the modernity and artificiality of this concept.[2, 4] The British Benedict Anderson states about the nation that “it is an imagined community, because even the members of the smallest nation will never know most of their compatriots, they will not meet them, but in the minds of everyone lives the image of their communion.” [1] We find a similar idea in Ernest Gellner's anthropology studies: “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist.” [8]

A compromise solution was proposed by the British Anthony D. Smith with regards to the ethnic origin of nations, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986). “The starting point of his demonstration was the relative concordance, the significant degree of overlap between ethnicities (or linguistic spaces) and nations. Nations have formed around ethnic cores, and even if they came to represent anything else, their origin extends into the Middle Ages and into Antiquity.” [3]

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Our approach is interdisciplinary: philosophical and historical analysis has been applied to the notions under scrutiny. The materials are the two main works of the two philosophers: *The social contract* of J. J. Rousseau and J. Herder's *Ideas on the Philosophy of Human History*.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The founders of the national idea are two important names in modern philosophy: J. J. Rousseau and J. G. Herder.[12] **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (1712-1778) was the first of the modern intellectuals, their archetype and, in many ways, the most influential of all. Rousseau's influence was enormous, both on a long term and on a short term. The generation that followed his death raised him to the rank of myth. He died in the decade before the Revolution of 1789, but many contemporaries considered him responsible for it and therefore for the overthrow of the old regime in Europe [10].

Rousseau was a Swiss, born in 1712 in Geneva and educated in the Calvinist spirit. His father, Isaac, was a watchmaker, but he did not prosper in the business. His mother, Suzanne Bernard, came from a wealthy family, but died of fever shortly after Rousseau's birth. Neither of the parents came from the small circle of families that made up the ruling

oligarchy of Geneva, but they had full electoral and legal privileges, and Rousseau was always extremely aware of his superior status. In 1728, at the age of fifteen, Rousseau ran away from home and converted to Catholicism to obtain the protection of a certain Madame Francois-Louise de Warens, who lived in Annency. In the meantime, she had met him and befriended Denis Diderot, the central figure of the Enlightenment, who would later become the editor-in-chief of the Encyclopedia [10].

For Rousseau it was necessary for the society of his time to be replaced by something entirely different and essentially egalitarian; but once this was accomplished, revolutionary disorder could not be allowed. The rich and the privileged, as the leading force, will be replaced by the state, the embodiment of the general will, to which, by contract, they all undertook to submit. Such obedience would become instinctive and voluntary since the state, through a systematic process of cultural engineering, would inoculate virtue in all. The state was the father, the homeland, and all its citizens were children of the paternal orphanage. That is why citizens must be treated like children, and their education and thoughts must be controlled, planting "social law in the depths of their hearts." Then they become "social people by their nature and citizens by their inclinations; they will be one, they will be good, they will be happy, and their happiness will be that of the Republic" [10].

Although Rousseau writes about the general will in terms of freedom, it is essentially an authoritarian instrument. Laws made under the general will must, by definition, have moral authority. "People who make laws for themselves cannot be unjust." The general will is always right. Moreover, given that the state is "well-intentioned, the interpretation of the general will can be left to the leaders without problems, because "they know well that the general will always favors the decision closest to the public interest. So any individual who is in opposition to the general will makes a mistake. In terms of the social contract, the individual was obliged to alienate himself, with all his rights, in favor of the whole community (the State). Rousseau argued for the existence of an impossible conflict to eradicate between the selfish nature of man and his social duties, between Man and Citizen, which represents the source of his unhappiness. The role of the social contract and of the state which it instituted, was to make man whole again: "Make man [to be] one, and you will make him as happy as can be." [10]

Rousseau's *Social Contract* is responsible for establishing the French concept of nation. The national ideology is based, like liberalism and socialism, on the Enlightenment principle of the sovereignty of the people, on the idea of government for and through the people.[6,7] There is no other legitimate authority than that delegated by the community of citizens.

For French philosophers, the meaning of the term "people" is not an ethnic one, but the political community of the citizens of a country. "Rousseau's theories, however, clearly contained the germs of nationalism, whose most characteristic doctrine is that different nations must be conceived as personalities. And when the French Revolution set up the people's army, based on compulsory national military service, it took a big practical step in the nationalist direction." [13]

There is a close connection between the concept of history, on the one hand, and that of nation, on the other. The past is that which legitimizes and justifies a nation and historians are called to reconstitute it.[5] In 1882, the French philosopher Ernest Renan wrote: "Forgetting history or erroneously reconstructing events is an essential factor in creating a nation." [8]

Johann G. Herder was born in 1744 in Mohrunge, a small town in East Prussia. The son of a merchant, who later became a teacher, he grew up in a religious environment. Noticing the teenager's academic success, a military doctor takes him to Konigsberg (today

Kaliningrad, Russia) to study medicine. Johann cannot stand the first dissection session and moves on to theology. A scholarship offered by his hometown allows him to support himself.

At the famous Hochschule in Königsberg, Herder meets Kant, who introduces him to contemporary philosophy. Very quickly, Herder delves into reading: Vico, Montesquieu, Leibniz, Rousseau. He is also mentored by Georg Hamann, who develops a thinking hostile to rationalism. Hamann teaches Herder English, and he would later read Shakespeare passionately. In 1764, the eminent student was appointed a collaborator of the Episcopal school in Riga. The city was under Russian rule at the time and Herder remained in the city for only five years.

In 1769 he leaves for Paris where he meets Diderot and d'Alembert. During this stay, he expresses his opinions on the sclerosis from which the French culture suffers. But in order to survive, he has to put himself in the service of the strong. He agrees to be the tutor of the son of Prince Bishop of Lübeck. Tired of princely arrogance, he decides to resign and stays for a while in Strasbourg. Here he meets a rich student, five years younger than him: J. W. Goethe. The meeting is decisive for Goethe, to whom Herder introduces his favorite authors and the principles of building a national literature. Herder's intellectual and material salvation came in 1776 in the form of an invitation to serve as a pastor and clergyman of the Weimar court, on Goethe's recommendation. Weimar was then the most powerful cultural center in Germany. [15]

Through his work, *Ideas on the Philosophy of Human History*, Johann G. Herder is the creator of the German concept of nation, of the ethno-cultural nation, a conception which was then adopted in Central and South-Eastern Europe.

According to Herder, "the most natural state is a state composed of a single people, with a single national character (...) a people is a natural product like a family, but more widespread than this (...) like all natural communities, (...) and in the case of the state the best order is the natural order, that is, the one in which everyone fulfills the function for which nature intended him." [13]

Thus, the nations gather the people and divide their world. Nothing happens outside the national framework. The German philosopher believes that people can be defined only by belonging to a certain people, apart from which they cannot develop. "Every people has its special mission, which will co-operate towards the fulfilment of the general mission of humanity. That mission constitutes its nationality. Nationality is sacred." [9]

Hans Kohn was the most influential source of both the opposition of civic to ethnic nationalism and of its association with a parallel opposition between Western and Eastern versions of modernity. [11]

Anthony Smith notices an increasing research interest in the connection between ethnicity and nationalism along the last decades, in the context of the emergence of new European nationalisms: Scottish, Catalan, Basque, etc. "The ethnic revival in the West, starting in the early 1960s, led to a reassessment of both 'ethnicity' and 'nationalism', and to the realisation that they were, both as empirical realities and fields of study, intimately related. The growth of support for Basque, Catalan, Breton, Flemish, Scots and Welsh ethnic autonomy, as well as that of a host of smaller ethnic communities, widened the concept of 'neo-nationalism' to include dimensions that had previously been taken for granted or treated as nationalist rhetoric." [14]

This does not mean that Anthony Smith does not see the nation as a social construct. "It became clear that so-called 'nation-building' which centred on the construction of national institutions by state elites, favoured the integration and ultimate assimilation of ethnic minorities by the culture of the dominant ethnic majority in each

Western state.” [14] Finally, no one was born French, German or Romanian, but receives a certain national identity through education.

CONCLUSIONS

The consequences of transposing the national ideology into reality are largely known. The watchword of modernity, “no nation without a state”, was a mirage which sparked conflict and bloodshed on numerous occasions. The nineteenth century was shaken by national liberation movements and wars between nations.

The First World War was a real civil war between Europeans. States that had a common fund of civilization were butchered in the name of national rights. The nationalist excesses of the interwar period led to the tragedy of World War II. Comparing the two concepts of nation, the French one against the German one, we can see a greater predisposition to nationalism of the German concept. Nazism, which is the culmination of German nationalism, aims to annex all German-inhabited territories in neighboring countries: Czechoslovakia, Poland, France. The inhabitants of Alsace and Lorraine were considered Germans according to the German definition of the nation and French according to the French definition of the nation.

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including Romania, have adopted the German model of nation. Romania hardly agreed to offer citizenship to the Jews at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. After 1918, Romania began to apply the French model of nation, a hyper-centralized one, erasing regional differences, but at the same time Romanians did not give up defining themselves from an ethno-cultural point of view.

What will be the future of the nation? It appears that two main trends have surfaced and may be observed today. Today, the United States is the most successful example of the implementation of the French nation model. It is true that it merged with other elements in the constitution of the American nation, such as English liberalism and Puritan Protestantism.

On the one hand, the European Union tends towards the American model of federation, where the sovereignty of the component states is limited. It remains to be seen whether all European states will agree to this deep integration: to be able to vote for a president of the European Union, to have a European army, to no longer have French, German or Romanian citizens, but only European citizens.

On the other hand, there is a renaissance of the ethno-cultural nationalisms of some regional communities, such as Scotland, Catalonia, the Basque Country, Flanders. It is not excluded that in the future they will become independent.

After 1989, unlike Yugoslavia, Romania did not fall into the trap of nationalism. So far, Romania has managed well the requirements of the Hungarian community in Transylvania. The fact that Romania and Hungary are part of the European Union and NATO matters a lot for the good relations between the two countries.

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