The Politics of National Diversity

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It is reported that Saint Stephen, first Apostolic King of Hungary, had advised his son Emmerich that he should not spare to invite foreigners into the Kingdom. His grounds were that '*unius linguae uniusque moris regnum imbecile et fragile est*': a kingdom with but one language and one custom is weak and fragile. This remark is, one notes, at odds with much recent conservative philosophical theorising. For the latter has tended to stress the virtues of social and institutional homogeneity – the virtues of the nation state as classically conceived. The present essay challenges that kind of conservatism.

National conservatism can be contested, it seems, from two complementary perspectives. The first would look as it were beneath the level of the state or nation, to social entities and forms of social organisation constituted by individuals as agents in the market or as *membra voluntativa* of corporate associations of various sorts. The second, which is the topic of this essay, looks to forms of social organisation above the level of the national unit. For it is our contention that in a heterogeneous society such as post-war Britain those moral and cultural values which are so important to the conservative can best be nurtured not by enforced homogeneity but by that kind of institutionalised heterogeneity which is characteristic of a supranational state.

The unitary nation state is not, of course, a naturally occurring form of social organisation, but is rather a product of the nationalistic purism which was typical of the 19th century. As the Hungarian philosopher Aurel Kolnai wrote:

> human society is not composed of nations . . . in the same clear-cut way in which it is composed of individuals or, for that matter, of soveriegn states. The spectrum of nationalities is full of interpenetrations, ambiguities, twilight zones. It follows that the conception of nationalism (as a universal principle), the conception of a 'just' or 'natural' order of nation-states is – in fact and in theory – pure utopia. There can be neither an order of states nor of frontiers in which there does not enter to a large extent the factor of arbitrariness, contingency and historical accident. Pretending to 'purify' the body of mankind – like other enterprises of a naturalist pseudo-rationalist sort, purporting to lay down 'evident principles' which generally prove to be illusory – means to push arbitrariness to its extreme limit. (Kolnai 1946/47, p.536)

Already the case of England (or Great Britain, or the United Kingdom) shows the extent to which lingering national allegiances may be at odds with allegiances of a more strictly political sort (allegiances to the State, for example, or to the Crown). The culture and morality of Great Britain have moreover been shaped as much by supranational allegiances – to Western or Protestant Christendom, to the British Empire, to the commonwealth of English-speaking peoples – as by political allegiances in the narrower sense.

Unfortunately the British imperial experience produced little in the way of positive philosophical theorising on its own behalf. Hence, if we are to find a framework which might be used to help us cope with or make sense of the *internal* multi-national dynastic constitution of present-day British society, we shall have to look elsewhere. Now one very clear historical example of a supranational state incorporating a multiplicity of racial, linguistic and religious groupings is of course the Danube Monarchy of Austria-Hungary, a response to the quite specific problem of overlapping nationalities in Eastern Central Europe. Thus Bohemia and the western part of Hungary had substantial German populations; there were both German and Romanian populations in eastern Hungary; the region of Trieste was populated by a mixture of Italians, Germans and Slovenes, and the story goes on. Indeed, the problems raised by these mixtures of populations (in present-day Yugoslavia, or Romania, or Hungary) have still not been finally solved.

The core of the Habsburg Monarchy was not, however, a heap of randomly accumulated territories. Its peoples shared, first of all, a common geographical region around the Danube – which had for centuries served as an important thoroughfare uniting the peoples on its banks. They shared also a common enemy in the Turk, and 200 years of warfare against the Ottoman *Porte* had contributed not a little to the development amongst them of a feeling of a common fate and history. The peoples of the monarchy shared further the presumption of belonging to a common political entity, a presumption bolstered not least by an allegiance to the Habsburg dynasty itself. And finally they were united also by a highly developed bureaucracy, and by a freedom of movement, of trade and of employment, within the frontiers of the Empire as a whole.

The movement of peoples and ideas passed especially back and forth through Vienna, whose multi-national and multi-linguistic character reflected (and still reflects) the multi-racial character of the Empire as a whole. Yet the unity of the Empire was not, it must be noted, brought about through the predominance of any one single centre, nation or race. Certainly Vienna was a centre – and not merely in the political and geographic

sense but also in the sense that it was a centre of the counter-reformation, of the German Baroque, of Christian resistance against the Turk, of absolutism, of the dynastic idea, of resistance against Napoleon, of diplomacy, of the renewal of Catholicism, of political reaction. Certainly, too, the Germanic groups within the Empire tended to arrogate to themselves positions of political power and influence, though they were in this respect at least counterbalanced by the Hungarians, who occupied positions not only in Hungary but also in the joint (Austrian-and-Hungarian, Imperial-and-Royal) ministries in Vienna. In the sphere of culture, too, German influences were never able to supplant the locally rooted traditions, whether in the realm of music, or for example in the culinary arts. Moreover it must be remembered that Prague was an older cultural and intellectual centre than Vienna, and that the civilisation of Matthias Corvinus in Hungary pre-dates any parallel phenomena on its western borders.

Efforts were made to enforce German as the only language of administration upon the peoples of the Austrian-ruled parts of the Monarchy, and still more deliberate efforts in the remainder of the Empire to enforce Hungarian as the langugage not only of administration but also of culture. This attempted linguistic subjugation was indeed one of the reasons for the growth of nationalist feelings, particularly among the Croats against their detested Hungarian rulers. But such attempts were in every case without success, in part because they were carried out with a typically Austrian half-heartedness. Thus it was for a long time compulsory for cadets in the Army officer corps to learn at least one other language of the dozen or so spoken in the Monarchy (usually in addition to French). Morever, these other languages themselves had marked effects on the German spoken in Vienna as, in the opposite direction, German, for example, had influenced the language of both the Magyars and the Slavs.

The unifying efforts of the Germans were no more successful in the field of law. Certainly the Austrian, like the Roman Empire upon which it was modelled, owed its existence in no small part to its efforts to institute a single legal system which would be applied equally to all the parts of the Empire. The codification of the Austrian Civil Law in 1811 in fact marked a significant step forward in continental jurisprudence, substituting German uniformity – and a supreme court in Vienna – on Slav and Magyar races who had hitherto enjoyed a largely customary law (the 'law of the lord'). From 1849 to 1873 however, the Viennese authorities were pressed into granting a series of reforms. These resulted for example in the establishment for all purposes of criminal law of three supreme courts (in Vienna, Pest and Verona). In addition there was established in Vienna an administrative court – making it for the first time possible for the imperial bureaucracy to be subjected to legal authority – and an imperial court (*Reichsgericht*), responsible for disputes between one provincial administration and another or between a provincial administration and the imperial administration itself. The *Reichsgericht* in particular was marked by the fact that it contained by law representatives of the different provinces and indeed, that the proceedings of the court were allowed to take place not merely in German but also in French.

The constituent parts of the ramified structure which was the Empire were not merely the various national groupings but also, for example, the court, the nobility, the bureaucracy, the church and (gradually) the urban middle classes; and each of these, too, manifested in microcosm the same complex multi-national structure as did the whole. Thus the Austrian (like the English) nobility was not a homogeneous phenomenon, set apart from the people in the manner, say, of the Prussian Junker. There were autochthonous aristocracies loyal to the imperial dynasty not only in the Austrian Crown Lands but also in Hungary and Poland. And in the course of the Thirty Years' War an aristocracy was imported into Bohemia from other areas of Europe as part of the process of re-Catholicisation. Aristocrats and noblemen would speak Hngarian, Polish or Italian among themselves, and even those members of the nobility who spoke German would do so with a specific local dialect (though often larded, of course, with bits of French).

The Danubian Empire was not, therefore, a hierarchical structure organised around any single centre. Nor either, was it an artificial federation, a pseudo-democracy on the level of equal national units. It was a much more complex web of variegated institutions whose capacity to hold itself together politically owed more to a long process of common evolution among its parts – the process of development of a whole network of interleaved spontaneous orders – than to any deliberately worked out rational plan or construction. It was in this respect much more closely allied to the English tradition than to, say, Germany or France. Thus Adam Müller, Austria's Burke, could see the *mélange* of peoples and languages in the Empire as a counterpart to the diachronous mixing together of peoples and languages in the history of England:

> Our laws, Lord Bacon says, are as mixed as our language, and it is for this reason that the latter is so rich, the former so complete. Lord Bacon seems to respect purity in politics as little as in grammar. The texture of the Austrian monarchy has a similar foundation: the most different sorts of peoples and constitutions exist here side-by-side, as they existed in Great Britain in succession. (Müller 1817, p.304, quoted in Weiler, p.35)

Thus it was not only a complex congeries of *nationalities* which made up the manifold character of that compromise which was Austria-Hungary. There were also shared customs and ways of life among different social groups which cut across the national boundaries within the Empire.[1] Austria-Hungary was therefore a political organism of a quite peculiar sort – and one expression of this fact is that it is impossible to speak of 'minorities' within the Empire. As Kolnai wrote in his essay 'Les ambiguités nationales' of 1946: 'Imperial Austria, like Switzerland, notwithstanding the numerical dispro-

portion of their different nationalities, did not have "minorities" because they had no ruling nation [*nation d'état*]' (p.544). The separate national units were not hierarchically organised or divided into dominant and subjugated groups, but rather juxtaposed, in a complicated and sometimes delicate balance, and as we have already seen, they were not 'separate units' in any strict sense but rather merged, in different ways, one into another.

In his essay on 'Nationality' of 1862, Lord Acton points to the positive consequences of this lack of centralised hegemony which is vouchsafed by the presence of different nationalities within a single state. It provides, he says, 'against the servility which flourishes under the shadow of a single authority, by balancing interests, multiplying associations, and giving to the subject the restraint and support of a combined opinion.' (p.289)

Indeed, Acton waxes lyrical about the peculiar perfection which such a supranational entity may be able to achieve:

> If we take the establishment of liberty for the realisation of moral duties to be the end of civil society, we must conclude that those states are substantially the most perfect which, like the British and Austrian Empires, include various distinct nationalities without oppressing them. Those in which no mixture of races has occurred are imperfect; and those in which its effects have disappeared are decrepit. A State which is incompetent to satisfy different races condemns itself; a State which labours to neutralise, to absorb, or to expel them, destroys its own vitality; a State which does not include them is destitute of the chief basis of self-government. (p.298)

These positive consequences of a supranational order, of an overlapping and interpenetrating of racial and national groupings, are not confined to the social and political sphere. They manifest themselves also in the spheres of intellect and culture, as a result of the fact that each of the various separate national groupings will to some extent preserve its own culture and traditions, and also its own network of cultural and intellectual relations with congenial forces and currents outside the Empire.

In a short but important essay on 'Race Purity in Music' written in 1942, the Hungarian composer Béla Bartók considered the question: is racial purity favourable or unfavourable to musical development? The essay was written in exile, and it is clear that Bartók had more in mind than mere matters of musicology. He had, as is well known, spent many years investigating the folk music of the regions of Central and Eastern Europe. The separate countries in these regions did not develop separate musical traditions. As Bartók himself wrote, 'there was a continuous give and take of melodies, a constant crossing and recrossing which had persisted through centuries' (p.30). When a melody is carried from one culture to another in this way, it is not simply transmitted whole. It is effected on its journey and on being inserted into the new cultural context by disparities as between its successive host cultures, for example by differences in habits of rhythm and dance and also by linguistic factors:

> When a folk melody passes the language frontier of a people, sooner or later it will be subjected to certain changes determined by environment, and especially by the differences of languages. The greater the dissimilarity between the accents, metrical conditions, syllabic structure and so on, of two languages, the greater the changes that fortunately may occur in the 'emigrated' melody. I say 'fortunately' because this phenomenon itself engenders a further increase in the number of types and sub-types. (*loc.cit.*)

Thus it is not merely that the migration of folk melodies from one country to another leads to an enrichment of the music of the respective host cultures. In the process of migrating, the melodies and other musical elements become themselves richer and more complex, so that there become possible new types and varieties of music and indeed new forms of musical creativity: 'as a result of uninterrupted reciprocal influence upon the folk music of these peoples there are an immense variety and a wealth of melodies and melodic types. The "racial impurity" finally attained,' Bartók concludes, 'is definitely beneficial.'

It seems, now, that Vienna and Prague, Cracow and Lemberg, Buda and Pest were able to nurture so many important developments in philosophy and psychology, medicine and economics, literature and the arts – developments which have coloured our subsequent thinking in these areas to an unparallelled extent – precisely because they enjoyed the peculiar benefits of a supranational order.

But what are the characteristic features of such an order which might be held to be particularly conducive to artistic or intellectual creativity? Before answering this question it is necessary to consider briefly what 'creativity' might mean. As Bartók's essay suggests, the value of a work of art consists in a certain kind of complexity: not in any mere multiplicity of randomly associated parts, but in a complexity which one might call 'organic'. A similar idea was put forward quite generally, in relation to all varieties of cultural and intellectual creation, by the Austrian philosopher Christian von Ehrenfels in his essay 'On "Gestalt-Qualities"' of 1890. As Ehrenfels writes, 'on the basis of combinations of given elements' – for example of tones, or of melodies – 'there is generated an inconceivable array of positive psychical qualities of the greatest significance. The mind that organises psychical elements into new combinations does more than merely displace the component elements amongst themselves: *he creates something new.*'

Ehrenfels' paper gave birth to that movement in psychology which subsequently came to be known as the theory of Gestalt. The Gestalt psychologists devoted considerable efforts to the task of elucidating the concept of aesthetic value on a Gestalt-theoretical basis, identifying degree of value as a function of *degree of complexity* and *degree of order.*[2] Thus a pattern of 1000 dots arranged in a line exhibits a low degree of complexity but a high degree of order. The same dots arranged at random exhibit a high degree of complexity but a low degree of

order. Only when the dots are arranged together in what we would naively perceive as an aesthetically pleasing way, the Gestaltists argued, do they achieve both a high complexity and a high degree of order.

The Gestalt-theorists' inquiries into aesthetic structures did not, as was initially hoped, lead to any *calculus* of value or to a theory of 'aesthetic measure'. They did, however, lead to a number of valuable insights into the nature of value, insights of a *morphological* sort. That is to say, the Gestaltists were able to establish certain specific types and dimensions of complexity and of organic unity which are of relevance in the sphere of human creativity. A work of art may be for example *inadequate* in a range of qualitatively ('morphologically') different ways: it may be *incomplete*, it may be *damaged*, it may be *inserted into an alien context*, it may be *too simple* or *too complex*, *too alien* or *too familiar*. Or it may incorporate elements too disparate to be brought together into an organic unity of any kind. One can similarly establish a range of different ways in which one cultural formation may be *derived* from another, or in which cultural formations may manifest for example relations of *dependence*, or of *complementarity*.

The relevance of such considerations to the ideas sketched above will, we hope, be obvious. For if a melody, or any other artistic or cultural element or form, is to be capable of being channelled or communicated across cultural boundaries such that it can be inserted into a new host culture in a way that gives rise to organic unity then it seems to be necessary that the cultures involved be not merely to a degree contiguous but also part of some common embracing cultural whole. A melody or rhythmic pattern originating in Moravia, or in Carinthia, could not – or at least not immediately – find itself at home in the folk music of Portugal, or of Scotland or Japan. It could at best serve as an alien element or foreign body, deliberately selected for some specific artistic purpose.

Thus there are only certain combinations of aesthetic elements which will be capable of leading to a magnification of complexity in a work of art or in an artistic style or genre *in such a way that organic unity is preserved*. It would indeed be possible to set out certain rudimentary morphological laws governing such combinations, laws relating, for example, to the contiguity of the respective host cultures or disciplines, to the existence of a comon fate among the cultures or systems combined, and to the existence of other, more all-embracing systems of customs or rules which would somehow supply an overarching unity within which such combination can occur.

A melody is, of course, conveyed from one culture to another only in virtue of the movements of individuals and groups who carry with them a given cultural stock. The fusion and interplay of artistic and intellectual traditions is in fact quite generally facilitated by a freedom of movement across national boundaries, or across boundaries of cultural and ethnic diversity. It will be facilitated also by a high degree of multilingualism, intermarriage and resettlement, and by the existence of a plurality of competing cultural and intellectual centres, no one of which – as in the case of Paris in relation to France and the Francophone colonies – enjoys a position of total hegemony.

The fusion of cultural and intellectual traditions and customs will be facilitated also where the separate cultures themselves enjoy a high degree of historical continuity, where the larger whole has come into existence not through violent political change involving qualitative and catastrophic leaps but through a gradual fusion of the respective parts. These parts, and their constituent institutions and underlying social *mores*, must *grow together*, and not be foisted upon each other from above. And the fusion of traditions that is conducive to cultural and intellectual creativity will, finally, be encouraged where the different overlapping nationalities and groups do not share equal levels of development. Such unequal development supplies, as Acton notes, a 'perpetual incentive to progress, which is afforded not merely by competition, but by the spectacle of a more advanced people'.[3] And of course the Habsburg state, which embraced not only the Vienna of Schubert and Mozart in the West but also primitive subsistence economies in Galicia and Bukovina in the East, manifested the widest extremes of poverty and wealth.

The French conservative Paul Claudel has pointed out, in an article on Austria of 1936, that the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was 'a political system based on the differences, the liberty, the harmony among natural groups instead of on a political, social and linguistic homogeneity imposed on them by coercion.' (p.1085) Indeed Claudel concludes his article by commenting on the political moral of Saint Stephen quoted at the head of this essay, transposing it to the cultural sphere: '*Pauvre et débile en verité est l'art qui ne vit que d'un seul sentiment et d'une seule idée*' (An art which draws its inspiration from but a single feeling and a single idea is truly weak and fragile, 1936, p.1088). The artistic and intellectual creativity of the monarchy was indeed to some extent encouraged not merely by differences in culture and level of development among its various groupings, but also by their various mutual enmities, enmities which prevail even today. And what is perhaps peculiarly unique about the Monarchy was that it did not seek, by drastic political and social transformations, to produce out of this mixture of peoples a single, homogeneous, national entity, with a single ethos and a single idea. It was not the purpose of the state to do away with the spark of difference, and even the spark of hate.

The dominant view amongst the Western Powers around the turn of the century was distinctly antipathetic as far as Austria-Hungary was concerned. Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and later Woodrow Wilson, could not see how such a fragile and multifariously complicated pluralistic order could have a place in a Europe of tidy nation-states. Already, then, the myth was disseminated that the Empire of the Habsburgs was in some sense weak, neurotically overwraught, that it was doomed to dissolution. This myth has been encouraged in almost all the subsequent literature on Austrian history and ideas. The undeniable artistic and intellectual creativity of the

Habsburg Monarchy in the late 19th century and since has been seen not as a symptom of the power and fertility of the Monarchy, but as the death-throws of its terminal neurosis. The creativity of the Austrian *fin-de-siècle* – as conceived on a somewhat facile picture of the creative mind – has been ascribed to the stimulatory consequences of decay and political collapse.

In the present essay we have sought to provide some sort of counterweight to this colourful and convenient fiction. It is of course true that the Empire of the Habsburgs collapsed – not least as a result of an unfortunate war – before a political solution could be found to the growing problem of the conflicts between the various nationalities of the Empire (or rather between the Imperial authorities and certain vociferous and influential minorities with nationalistic allegiances). This should not, however, be taken to imply that no such solution was possible. And nor should it be taken to imply that there is no possibility of a general political and philosophical justification of the kind of order that was manifested by the Habsburg Empire. Indeed, Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand himself, before his assassination by Serbian nationalists in Sarajevo, was engaged in working out the terms of a more sophisticated compromise between the various national groupings along the lines of the initial Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867. It is, unfortunately, the proponents of the nationalistic ideology of the 19th century, the heirs of Princip and not of Franz Ferdinand, who continue to dictate the terms within which contemporary political problems are conceived, whether in Ireland, in India, in the Lebanon, or in South Africa.

Notes

1. On these overlapping social affiliations and allegiances see Kolnai 1981.
2. *Cf.* Ehrenfels 1890, Nozick 1981, pp.415–86, and especially Rausch 1966.
3. Acton 1862, p.296. It also gives rise to an 'impossibility for the State to rule all by its own will' and thereby provides 'the fullest security for the preservation of local customs and ancient rights.' And, as Acton goes on: 'In such a country as this, liberty would achieve its most glorious results, while centralisation and absolutism would be destructive.'

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The Mecosta Mission

J. T. Ward

About 150 miles north of sprawling, violent, car-making Detroit lies the little town of Mount Pleasant, capital of Isabella County. There, on 11th October 1984, I first met Dr Russell Kirk; I can be precise about the date because a very happy evening ended with a view of CBS reports of the IRA's Brighton murders. The contrast between a civilised dinner at Central Michigan University – where the kindly Librarian placed me next to a most congenial fellow guest – and the cowardly, mindless carnage at the Imperial Hotel was unforgettably horrifying.

We had talked about Burke, the impending Presidential election, the conservative *via media*, Professor Kirk's marvellous study of St Andrews (which years ago I had given to my future wife); we discovered that we were both non-drivers and had held lowly military positions. To my delight, I was invited to visit the Kirk 'base' at Mecosta.

Russell Kirk is, of course, best known on both sides of the Atlantic for his now classic study of *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Santayana*, first published in 1953. His contributions to conservative philosophy and analysis have been legion, including such remarkable works as *Randolph of Roanoke: A Study in Conservative Thought* (1951) and *The Portable Conservative Reader* (1982). But few in Britain can imagine the enormous influence exercised by this quiet, kindly scholar on the American conservative renaissance.

State Highway 20 traverses about 25 gently undulating miles of corn and cattle country, with neat white farmhouses and great Dutch barns between Mount