PATRIOTISM, COSMOPOLITANISM AND DEMOCRACY

By Daniel Johnson

Theresa May is celebrated neither for her statesmanship nor for oratory, but she has uttered three unforgettable sentences. "Brexit means Brexit," may be a tautology, but it is also her battle cry -- her equivalent of Margaret Thatcher's "the lady is not for turning". "No deal is better than a bad deal," Mrs May's second mantra, goes further -- perhaps even further than she means to go. But it too is unambiguous: if the European Union refuses to make reasonable terms, Britain will leave anyway, without obligations. Finally, and most controversially, there is her remark about citizenship: "But, if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what citizenship means." Sir Vince Cable, now leader of the Liberal Democrats, accused Mrs May of echoing Hitler: "I thought that particular phrase was quite evil. It could've been taken out of *Mein Kampf*. I think that's where it comes from, doesn't it? 'Rootless cosmopolitans'."

Well, no: "rootless cosmopolitans" is not a coinage of Hitler's, but was a phrase used by Stalin during his final years of persecution, culminating in the "Doctors' Plot". But it certainly was a euphemism for Jews and deeply anti-Semitic in intent. That, presumably, is why Theresa May did not use it. However, many Britons did feel hurt by her implied rebuke to anyone who felt themselves to be "citizens of the world" -- for example, those whose primary allegiance was to "Europe", or who disdained vulgar expressions of patriotism such as the Last Night of the Proms. The very fact that the Prime Minister said it so soon after the EU referendum suggested to some that support for Brexit had become a kind of loyalty test. Subsequent events have proved such fears to be groundless, but the normally subterranean tension between patriotism and cosmopolitanism has been brought to the surface by the vote for Brexit. It is the exercise of democracy that has given this tension a new significance in the British context, but of course it manifests itself throughout the West. The dialectic between the universal and the particular is never really resolved in politics, but we have become so used to the predominance of global institutions and the emasculation of the nation state, that a sudden reassertion of national sovereignty and identity is perceived by many as a reversal of what has come to resemble a natural order of things. Some might think it bizarre that a British prime minister should be compared to Hitler for questioning the primacy of international allegiances over national ones. But such is the disrepute into which the idiom of nationalism has fallen, at least among liberals. It is questionable whether we are wise to let the pendulum swing so far in the global, as opposed to the national, direction. That it has done so, however, goes some way to explain the populist backlash against the cosmopolitan elites across the Western world.

I want to examine the relationships between cosmopolitanism, patriotism and democracy in three countries: Germany, Israel and Britain. The histories and outcomes vary, but the problem is essentially the same. In 1907 was clearly posed, perhaps for the first time, by the German historian Friedrich Meinecke, in his *Weltbürgertum und Nationalstaat* ("Cosmopolitanism and the national state"). Meinecke traced the intellectual history of the emergence of German nationalism in the early 19th century, showing how the cosmopolitan humanism of Kant, Goethe and the other philosophers, writers and leaders of the Napoleonic era was transformed into the "national liberalism" of 1848 and ultimately the blood and iron of Bismarck. Meinecke saw no necessary contradiction: the unified Germany of 1871 was merely the imperial synthesis arising from the cosmopolitan thesis and nationalist antithesis. But in a later edition of Meinecke's treatise, published during the First World War, he takes the dialectic one step further. The war, for him, is a necessary stage in the transformation of the Germans into a nation state powerful enough to take on the global empires of France, Russia and Britain. "The double ideal of cosmopolitanism and national state, which has illuminated the German nation since its rise to new historical life, will take new forms through this war, which should finally elevate us to the status of a world people [*Weltvolke*]."

We all know how that bid for *Weltmacht oder Niedergang* ended. In 1920, soon after the German defeat and the "Carthaginian peace" of Versailles, Meinecke received a remarkable letter from his star pupil, Franz Rosenzweig, who had just published a scholarly work on *Hegel und der Staat* ("Hegel and the State") which seemed to promise a glittering career as a German professor. But Rosenzweig had news for his old teacher. Rather than follow in Meinecke's footsteps, subsuming his Jewish identity in the greater glory of the German nation, Rosenzweig had decided to return to his Jewish roots. After following the path of assimilation almost to the point of conversion, in 1913 he had undergone an existential crisis that he later called a "collapse". This led him eventually to abandon a promising academic career and to found and teach in the Frankfurt Jüdisches Lehrhaus, a kind of Jewish adult education centre inspired by his ideas. He told Meinecke that "my life has fallen under the rule of a 'dark drive' which I'm aware that I merely *name* by calling it 'my Judaism'. The scholarly aspect of this whole process -- the conversion of the historian into a philosopher -- is only a corollary, though t has furnished me with a welcome corroboration of my own conviction that the "ghost I saw" was not the devil; it seems to me that I am more firmly rooted in the earth than I was seven years ago."

The reference to roots reminds us that by reaffirming his primordial allegiance to the universality of the Jewish people, Rosenzweig was not renouncing the particularity of his German nationality. The Prussian-led drive towards the nation state was not uncongenial to Jewish patriots such as Rosenzweig, who fought for Germany during the First World War. Indeed, it was while stationed in the Balkans that he wrote his masterpiece, *Der Stern der*

Erlösung ("The Star of Redemption"), on postcards home. This visionary work proclaimed Rosenzweig's turn away from German nationalism and towards a revelatory philosophy of Judaism. This "new thinking" focused on lived experience rather than faith, and it propelled Rosenzweig to undertake the mammoth task of translating the Hebrew Bible into a modern literary German that would make the text fresh, "naked" and even alien to assimilated German Jews, familiar only with the Lutheran version. He collaborated with Martin Buber on this project, which the latter completed long after Rosenzweig succumbed to motor-neurone disease. Unlike Rosenzweig, Buber was a Zionist, albeit of an unusual kind (he wanted a binational state rather than a Jewish one), but he and Rosenzweig agreed on the crucial importance of the Hebrew Bible for any revival of Jewish consciousness. Totally paralysed for the last few years of his life, Rosenzweig communicated only by blinking. He nevertheless managed to translate all the books from Genesis to Isaiah, leaving his last cryptic message to Buber incomplete: "*und -- jetzt kommt sie, die Pointe aller Pointen, die der Herr mir wirklich im Schlaf verliehen hat: die Pointe aller Pointen für die es..."* ("and -- now it comes, the point of all points, which the Lord really has vouchsafed me in my sleep: the point of all points for which there...")

Whatever Rosenzweig may have had in mind, one point that he never accepted was the necessity of a Jewish state. He lived and died a Jew of the Diaspora. Almost immediately after his death in 1929, however, the assimilated Jews -- to whom his appeals to reinvigorate their Jewish identity by rediscovering tradition and the Bible had been directed -- found themselves increasingly excluded from German society. For a while, at least, Rosenzweig's words still resonated among those driven to fall back Far worse, of course, was to come. The catastrophe we know as the Holocaust or Shoah left those European Jews who survived with little choice but to embrace Zionism, even if they did not all choose to make aliyah. The State of Israel was the answer to the prayer of those, perhaps including Rosenzweig, for whom the universality of Jewish identity could never be wholly reconciled with the particularity of German nationhood.

If the Germans had moved from cosmopolitanism to the nation state in the century beginning in 1848, by the 1940s the "double ideal", in Meinecke's phrase, had morphed into National Socialism: a political religion which sought to impose the German racial state on the whole of Europe to create new supranational empire. The Third Reich was the nemesis of European nationalism. But it gave cosmopolitanism, driven by the German desire to exchange a national for a European identity, a new lease of life.

Israel was the great exception to the eclipse of nationalism after the Second World War. The Zionist idea, originally driven by a loose alliance of Austro-German and Russian-Polish movements, was given international legitimacy by the Balfour Declaration and the League of Nations. The British Empire established a "Jewish National Home" in Palestine on the ruins of

the Ottoman Empire; and the United Nations recognised the Jewish state that emerged in 1948, even though its Arab neighbors tired and failed to strangle it at birth. Israel, perhaps the first truly post-imperial state, was also the first truly cosmopolitan nation.

Yet the Jewish State, lacking a history as such -- though of course the Jews have the richest history of any people -- has taken time to develop a corpus of political theory that fits its unique circumstances. The many German thinkers who exercised a profound influence on the culture of the new state were peculiarly unsuited to explaining Israel's distinctive characteristics or repelling the relentless assault of its enemies. The various currents of ideas that converged into the relentless drive towards a European superstate were all inimical to Israel, which was and is a liberal nation state, albeit situated in a region where most political entities are artificial and imperialistic.

Now Israel may have found its own political theorist: Yoram Hazony. In a forthcoming book, *The Virtue of Nationalism*, Hazony makes the case not only for national states but for nationalism. He argues that only nationalism can safeguard liberal democracy, while international organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union are dangerous to liberty and democratic accountability. The villain of the piece is Immanuel Kant, whose dream of global government Hazony regards as a nightmare. He draws on a wealth of examples from history to bolster his argument that the emergence of the modern nation state in the Reformation has made possible the flowering of Western civilisation. Crucial to his case is the Hebrew Bible, which provided a blueprint for the benign form of nationalism that flourished in England, the Netherlands and other Protestant countries that defied the Catholic universalism of the Habsburgs. Hazony, who has written brilliantly on the Bible and on the intellectual origins of Israel, devotes the most coruscating section of his book to "Anti-nationalism and Hate". He turns the tables on the Left-liberal Europeans and Americans whose unceasing campaign of hatred against Israel derives, he argues, from diametrically opposing interpretations of the Holocaust. Whereas Israelis and indeed most Diaspora Jews concluded that Jews would never be safe unless they had their own nation state, Europeans decided that nationalism was the cause of what Meinecke called "the German catastrophe", and that independent states must therefore be subsumed in a supranational entity. The stubborn refusal of Israelis to think and behave like Europeans damns them in the eyes of the latter. As Hazony puts it, for Europeans "Israel is Auschwitz" -- hence the comparisons between the IDF and Nazis. Anti-Semitism has reemerged in Europe in a Left-wing, anti-Zionist form that often makes common cause with political Islam. Israel has become a standing rebuke to the leaders of the European Union, who have presided over the emergence of powerful Islamist political forces in the heart of Europe. Britain has just made a symbolic gesture by sending the second in line to the throne on the first ever official royal visit to the Jewish state. Yet the British Foreign Office feels obliged to make it clear to the

host country that when the Duke of Cambridge sets foot in the Old City of Jerusalem, including the Western Wall and the Temple Mount, which are sacred to Jews, he is entering "Occupied Palestinian Territory". There is no more important attribute of national sovereignty than the recognition of a capital city, symbolised by the location of embassies there. By not only denying such recognition to Israel, but adopting the Palestinian claim that Jerusalem -- including the Old City -- is the capital of Palestine, Britain is playing along with the Islamist agenda. To concede sovereignty over Jerusalem, holiest of holies to Jews and Christians, is dangerous because it appears to validate the universal and eschatological aspirations of Islam. Jules Monnerot's *Sociology of Communism*, published in 1949, argued that Communism was "the Islam of the 20th century". What Monnerot could not have foreseen was that Islam would become the Communism of the 21st century.

We have seen how Germany moved from the decayed cosmopolitanism of the Holy Roman Empire to an nation state whose imperial aspirations brought about two world wars, whereupon Germans have returned to the cosmopolitan ideal of a unified Europe. Israel, emerging from the cosmopolitanism of the Diaspora, has reasserted the essential unity of the Jewish people in order to build a nation state, where necessary defying the anti-nationalist Zeitgeist. How, though, does Britain fit into the picture? Although the British are a "united kingdom" of different peoples, the English monarchy at its core is one of the oldest in world. The Anglo-Saxons already had a nation state long before the Norman Conquest. Yet the nature of this nation state was bound to be transformed by the creation of the British Empire, the largest in world history. The mission of this empire, no less unprecedented, was to spread the blessings of limited government and the rule of law across the globe. And indeed, the greatest legacy of the empire -- the United States of America -- is itself both a nation state, like that of the English, and a republic with a mission to preserve and promote life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Also unprecedented was the way in which the British passed the baton to the Americans in the course of the 20th century, not only without conflict, but making common cause against those empires dedicated to the destruction of Western civilisation.

So the British present yet another trajectory, from nation state to global empire, then reverting to national status. Dean Acheson famously summed up this at times painful process by observing in 1962 that "Great Britain has lost an empire, but has not yet found a role". No wonder that British leaders were tempted to join the European project, with its promise to put an end to national conflict -- though the British people certainly did not believe that they were thereby renouncing national sovereignty. The slow realisation that this was indeed the corollary of European Union only dawned on the British when it became clear to them that they no longer had control of their borders, their laws or their destiny. Brexit marks Britain's historic decision to return to national statehood, with profound implications for Europe too. Indeed, it is uncertain

how the balance between patriotism and cosmopolitanism can be restored on the Continent in the absence of a British voice.

Yet the fact that Brexit was decided by a referendum, with the entire nation sufficiently engaged in abstract arguments about sovereignty to register a vote, does suggest that the solution to the problem must lie in more and better democracy. The nation state has been found by trial and error over the last century at least to be the largest political unit that can be governed by parliamentary democracy. The same is true, surely, for plebiscites of all kinds. The idea of democracy at a continental, let alone a global level, is nightmarish. This implies that democracy is the answer to restoring he balance between the cosmopolitan and the patriot. In a civilised discourse, there should be room for both the Rosenzweigs and the Hazonys, for those who yearn for a religious or intellectual community above and beyond the nation state and for those who find that the two are coterminous. But the only hope of reconciliation between the anywheres and the somewheres, the rootless cosmopolitans and the deplorable patriots, is for both sides to tolerate one another. And that means accepting the democratic verdict. It does not mean paralysing Congress and seeking to impeach President Trump. It does not mean using an unelected Upper Chamber to overturn Brexit. And it does not mean using executive or emergency powers to crush opposition and rewrite the rules, as Presidents Putin and Erdogan have done, and as President Macron might like to do. Democracy alone legitimises the nation state; democracy legitimises the nation state alone. International bodies, inherently non-democratic, derive their legitimacy from their national members. In order to be a true cosmopolitan, one must be a patriot first; but one can only be patriot if one is first of all a democrat.