

**NATIONALITY AND PHILOSOPHY.
SOME PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS***

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The protean quality of nationality— the variability of its historical expressions - poses methodological and philosophical problems that likely account for much of the scholarly dispute over what and when is the nation. The primary difficulty is coming to terms with the centrality of meaning in the constitution of human associations which, in turn, poses difficulties for the historical, sociological and anthropological investigation of collective self-consciousness, requiring its own analytical approaches. Those approaches to the meaning borne by symbols include renewed attention to representation, territory, and myth.

Over the last generation or so, some clarification of the character and development of nationality has been achieved. We have a better understanding of the ethnic component of nationality, of territorial kinship, and especially of the long-term cultural and political factors that contribute to the stability of the symbolic center constitutive of a nation—a stability that seemingly distinguishes the nation from the sociologically more amorphous ethnic group. These modest advances in our understanding of nationality during this period have been a result of renewed attention to the subject, even though expressed through numerous, sharply divergent analyses, for example, in the works of Walker Connor, John A. Armstrong, Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, Pierre L. van den Berghe, John Breuilly, Eric Hobsbawm, Liah Greenfeld, Dominique Schnapper, John Hutchinson and, above all, Anthony Smith (1986, 1998, 2000). Despite these advances, differences among scholars over what is a nation and what is its place in history continue, suggesting that problems remain for advancing our understanding of nationality.

The questions what is a nation and what is its place in history are, of course, important; and they deserve to be answered. Over the years, I have attempted to answer them. However important political developments, specifically the emergence of a state, may be for the consolidation and continued existence of a nation, I have argued that the nation should not be viewed as primarily a political instrument for the exercise of power, that is, it is not to be conceptually collapsed into a state. This is because the nation should be understood as a form of kinship, albeit a territorial kinship (Grosby 2005, 2001). The nation is constituted out of a temporally deep, territorially delimited awareness of being related—a collective self-consciousness of territorial nativity. I have further argued that the nation is by no means exclusively a modern phenomenon, nor is its origin exclusively European (Grosby 2002). There is too much historical evidence that contradicts the generally unexamined assumption that nations are exclusively modern. As important as these questions are, in this paper, rather than engage them again, I wish instead to pursue a different problem of methodological and philosophical significance. How are we to understand the very continuation of the disputes over the answers to these questions? The

* A significantly different version of this paper appeared as the introduction to Athena Leoussi and Steven Grosby (eds.), *Nationalism and Ethnosymbolism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, forthcoming).