

Academic conference
‘The Ethics and Politics of Nationalism’
October 17th 2016
Academy of Sciences of Latvia, the Senate Hall
Riga, Akadēmijas laukums 1

14:00 – 14:10

Opening Addresses

Beth Richardson (Chargée d’Affaires, Embassy of Canada)

Baiba Rivža (Director of the National Research Programme ECOSOC-LV)

14:10 – 14:50

Wayne Norman (Duke University)

What Can Philosophers Tell us About the Nature and Ethics of Nationalism?

Nationalism was conspicuous for its near complete absence in the work of mainstream philosophers in Western Europe and the English-speaking world during the decades that coincided with the Cold War. In 1993 the editors of the Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy explained why nationalism did not even merit a discussion within their 678-page reference work: "Nationalism - still less racism, sexism or ageism - does not figure [in the volume], on the grounds that it hardly counts as a principled way of thinking about things". (Goodin and Pettit 1993: 7) Many of their distinguished colleagues obviously disagreed, because there was an explosion of analysis and debate about nationalism by philosophers in that last decade of the 20th century and in the first decade of the new millennium. This paper will survey the evolution of this new debate in order to answer the questions in the title. What can we say about concepts like "nation", "peoples", "nationalism", or "nation-building"? What must we know about the real-world phenomena these concepts are supposed to help us to understand? Can we now argue that Goodin and Pettit were mistaken when they dismissed nationalism as an unprincipled way of thinking about, say, justice or democracy?

14:50 – 15:30

Daniel Weinstock (McGill University)

The Rise of Left-Nationalism

Thinkers on the political left have not in recent debates in political philosophy tended to be defenders of nationalism, and of nation-building policies that flow from nationalist premises. That changed with the publication of articles by David Goodhart, Philippe Van Parijs, and others, according to which cultural diversity born of immigration could deplete the motivational resources needed to support the welfare state. Immigrants should be on this view more forcefully integrated into the majority nation than liberals have tended to allow. While evidence for this thesis has been spotty, as shown by research led by Will Kymlicka and Keith Banting, I will assume it to be true for the sake of argument, and ask myself what follows normatively from it. I will make use of some

arguments deployed by G.A. Cohen in order to criticize the motivational arguments that Rawls makes to defend the Difference Principle, and argue that the thesis may be true as a matter of sociological description, but that it is very difficult to defend normatively, especially when we imagine it being formulated and expressed by members of the national majority. I will argue that while some degree of national integration is justifiable on other grounds, the argument adduced in favour of left-nationalism gives rise to policy conclusions quite different to those that have been thought to flow most naturally from it.

15:30 – 15:45

Coffee Break

15:45 – 16:05

Sergei Kruk (Rīga Stradiņš University)
Theoretical Foundations of Cultural Nationalism

Despite the popularity in Latvia, the idea of cultural nationalism was not a subject of a detailed theoretical scrutiny. How culture makes and maintains a social group called nation? A more or less consistent explanation can be found in articles by a notorious Latvian philosopher Pauls Jurevičs (1891-1981). His main concern is about the failure of selfish individuals to find a consensus on their diverging interests and opinions. Solution to the problem is cultural refinement. Ethnic culture and language stores the consensus already achieved by the ethnic group in the past. Learning the culture individuals interiorize the national consensus thereby overcoming the potential conflict of interests. Thus the conflict is to be resolved in private sphere and this is a precondition of access to the public sphere. In considering the philosopher's views however several questions come to mind. How consensual cultural items are deselected? How individual refinement is related to social interaction? How modern conflicts of interests are to be approached in the framework of traditional culture?

16:05 – 16:25

Xavier Landes (Stockholm School of Economics)
Is Culture a Public Good?

In public discourses as well as in academic world, it is often assumed that nation needs a common culture in order to secure goods like political stability, commitment to the state or to social justice, perpetuation of liberal institutions, and so forth. As the argument goes, a common national culture constitutes a public good, i.e. a good that benefits to the overall society in a direct or indirect way. In that sense, the concept mirrors its definition in economics (a public good is a non-rival and non-excludable good with a strong spill-over effect), which is problematic. The assumption that a shared culture could necessarily ensure social stability, cohesion or guarantee higher degrees of fairness could be challenged. It is not to invalidate any appeal to culture *per se* for backing particular institutions or practices. It is more to tackle the idea that a common culture is necessary a good that

benefits everyone. Because culture is a volatile concept, in its content and political uses, considering it as a public good generates legitimate questions. First, which conception of culture should the state promote, with which components? Second, what are the potential consequences for the political order to turn it into a public good? At the end, it is argued that, if something should be considered as a public good in regard to its impact on derivative goods such as the stability of the society or the inclusion of individuals, it is definitely cooperation and the institutions that sustain it rather than something like culture broadly conceived.

16:25 – 16:45

Vents Silis (Rīga Stradiņš University)

Politicians Discussing Values: Securing Social Cohesion or Performing Political Rivalry?

Latvian Constitution is a set of fundamental principles – a value system for national government. Its Preamble contains more than 30 values, some of which expressed in a single word, while others are expressed as phrases describing a whole cluster of values (e.g. "existence and development of Latvian language and culture"). Some values are mentioned more than once in slightly different formulations (e.g. "right to self-determination" and "sovereignty"). How MPs fills these abstract notions with a particular content? Computer analysis of the parliamentary sessions in 2011-2014 suggests three problems inherent to political articulation of values. First, conservatives employ the repertoire of objectivist discourse of values that stresses their foundation either in human nature, or traditions, or religion, and argue against social constructionist value discourse that instead stresses the arbitrary nature of value orientations. Second, the importance of shared values in maintaining the social order seems to be overemphasized, since their content may vary across the different groups within the same society. Third, values are employed as instruments in the struggle for symbolic power. This last one is an authentic political function of language that expands beyond the function of communication.

16:45 – 17:30

General Discussion