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Continuities and shifting paradigms: A debate on Caspar Hirschi's 'The origins of nationalism'

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Steven Grosby / Joep Leerssen / Caspar Hirschi

CONTINUITIES AND SHIFTING PARADIGMS

A DEBATE ON CASPAR HIRSCHI'S

THE ORIGINS OF NATIONALISM

Caspar Hirschi, *The origins of nationalism. An alternative history from ancient Rome to early modern Germany* (Cambridge - New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) xiv + 241 pp., ISBN 9780521764117.

1. Introduction (p. 2)
2. Steven Grosby, Nationality and constructivism (pp. 2-13)
3. Joep Leerssen, The baton and the frame: or, tradition and recollection (pp. 13-23)
4. Caspar Hirschi, Duck or quack? On the lack of scholarly soundness and decorum in Joep Leerssen's review (pp. 24-35)
5. Joep Leerssen, Response to Caspar Hirschi (pp. 35-48)



'Continuities and shifting paradigms. A debate on Caspar Hirschi's *The origins of nationalism*', in: *Studies on National Movements*, 2 (2014).

<http://snm.nise.eu/index.php/studies/article/view/0210ri>

1. Introduction

During the NISE Annual Gathering in 2013, at the Herder-Institut in Marburg, one of the debates focused on a publication by Swiss historian Caspar Hirschi looking for proof in cultural history for the pre-modernity of nations and nationalism. That discussion, following a presentation by the writer himself, has now spawned this roundtable review.

The review by Joep Leerssen (University of Amsterdam, Netherlands) and the subsequent riposte by Caspar Hirschi (University of St. Gallen, Switzerland), as well as the response to that by Leerssen, together boil down to the fundamental question whether the texts, ideas etc. presented here, are evidence of a nationalist mindset before modernity or are retrospectively instrumentalised into a nationalist frame in modern times.

You will find here also a review published earlier by Steven Grosby on the *Reviews in History* website from the Institute of Historical Research (University of London, United Kingdom).

2. Nationality and constructivism (Steven Grosby)¹

The study of nationality (a term used to designate historically and constitutively diverse nations) poses a number of acute methodological, historical, and philosophical problems. One problem, that of moral philosophy, is how to come to terms with the complexity of our existence, specifically, the ethical consequences of acknowledging both the individual *qua* individual as moral agent and the accepted obligations and

¹ This review was originally published on the *Reviews in History* website of the Institute of Historical Research (University of London). NISE would like to thank the journal and its editorial board for granting permission to reprint this text. See <http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/review/1281> [last accessed in January 2016].

preferences of the individual as a member of a nation. Although this ethical problem – long recognised by different analysts, ranging, for example, from Adam Smith in Part IV, Chapter II, of *The theory of moral sentiments* (see his discussion of approbation which ‘involves in it a sense of propriety quite distinct from the principle of utility’) to Otto von Guericke’s lecture of 1902, *Das Wesen der menschlichen Verbände* – is of pressing importance, it will not be addressed here as it is not taken up at any length in Caspar Hirschi’s book under review.

A second problem is methodological, the principle of methodological individualism. Even though we rightly accept – to use Hans Freyer’s felicitous characterisation from *Theorie des objektiven Geistes: eine Einleitung in der Kulturphilosophie* – a ‘natural liberalism’ of the social situation, that is, action is self-dependent or self-centered, such that there is a natural sovereignty of the individual and not a ‘group mind’, we also recognise that human action is often influenced by ideas that are by no means unique to the individual. The recognition of this problem is also not new. It is the problem of how, given the principle of methodological individualism, to understand the ‘sharing’ of ideas between individuals; it is the problem of culture for the historical and social sciences; and it has often been formulated as the problem of national culture. I remain convinced that the problem of understanding national culture is legitimate. Thus, the works of Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt ought not to be subjected to facile criticism, as is too often the fashion; rather, their works deserve not only, of course, a critical but also a generous engagement, as the objects of their concern are also our own. How to understand a national culture, given the principle of methodological individualism, is a problem that confronts every work on nationality.

A third problem has to do with temporal depth as a factor in the constitution of certain social relations. The nation necessarily contains meaningful references to the past and yet it is constituted in the present, that is, ‘under [specific] political and cultural conditions’ such that ‘it becomes possible to conceive and create [nations]’ (p. 24). This, if you will, domination of the present, characterised by Hirschi throughout this book as ‘constructivism’, should not be lost sight of, as that temporal depth is not a mechanical reception of the past into the present; it is not the lifeless

hand of the past on the present. On the contrary, all traditions are, in varying degrees, subject to modification in their reception over time, for example, the continual changes in Roman law in, among others, the works of Johann Apel (1486-1536) as a significant factor in the formation of a territorially uniform law of the land that, as such, undermined the previous bodies of 'special law' – a process underway before the Reformation.

The change of tradition in its reception – both its adaptation to, and contribution to the formation of, the present – has been observed often enough, both in the philosophy of history, for example, by Michael Oakeshott, and in works on tradition, for example, by T.S. Eliot and Edward Shils. The change, usually contested, can be radical, even when there is a premium placed on preserving tradition, as in religion; for example, the strikingly odd metaphor of the 'circumcision of the foreskin of the heart' (Deuteronomy 10:16, 30:6, Jeremiah 4:4) which, because of its oddness must be a critical, expansive commentary on the commandment to circumcise the foreskin of the penis; Paul's wildly and self-admittedly allegorical interpretation of the two covenants (Galatians 4: 24-25); and the conception of the 'new Jerusalem' (Revelation 3:12,21:2), let alone, as is well known, the various chosen peoples of their respectively 'new Israels' in the late medieval and early modern history of Europe and America.² And, in this regard, we ought to remember Luther's desire to excise the Epistle of James from the Bible. One should not view the hermeneutic principle of *sola scriptura* of Luther and especially Calvin, whose interpretations of the Bible earned him the opprobrium of being a 'Judaizer', as biblical literalism. Nevertheless, however opportunistic and transformative the reception of tradition might be and often is, it presupposes already existing attachments and conceptions. These latter

² For recent discussions of the latter, see A.D. Smith, 'Nation and covenant: the contribution of ancient Israel to modern nationalism', in: *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 151 (2007) 213-55, and S. Grosby, 'Hebraism: the third culture', in: J.A. Jacobs (ed.), *Judaic sources and Western thought. Jerusalem's enduring presence*, (Oxford, 2011) 73-96.

two problems of the 'sharing' such that a culture exists and tradition and its reception bring us to the book under review.

Caspar Hirschi's *The origins of nationalism. An alternative history from ancient Rome to early modern Germany* is a worthy contribution to the scholarly literature on nationalism as its analysis of the constitution of the nation of Germany during the medieval and early modern period properly and productively complicates our understanding of what Hirschi asserts is 'the protean nature of the nation' (p. 13). The protean nature of nationality, recognised explicitly as such by Herder in his youthful *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*, raises a predictable paradox of difficulties for the historian.

On the one hand, what Frederic Maitland said in his Sidgwick Lecture of 1903, 'Moral personality and legal personality' about English history, 'We are not logical enough to be elementary', may rightly be expanded beyond his defense of the tradition of common law against the Roman law doctrine of corporations to apply to the historian's investigation into the specific, idiosyncratic processes of most social relations. One consequence of this recognition is Hirschi's justified skepticism of 'the macro-sociologist approach of most modernist theories' of nationality (p. 13); and his criticism of Ernest Gellner's (and for that matter Benedict Anderson's) so very logical, functionalist, and materialist analysis of nationalism in Chapter Two, 'The modernist paradigm: strengths and weaknesses', is a tour de force. The manifest weaknesses of the modernist theories of nationality have been observed often enough, for example, by John A. Armstrong, Anthony Smith, Aviel Roshwald, and others, so that their criticisms and those by Hirschi need not be repeated in any detail here. Suffice it to say that the modernist theories suffer from a theoretically antiquated, unequivocal historical distinction between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, as Hirschi also rightly observes (pp. 26-27).

However, on the other hand, in dealing with myriad facts specific to a particular context implied by the use of the description 'protean', the historian cannot avoid employing analytical categories of generalisation. Herein lies the paradox; and so, despite Hirschi's misgivings about 'using "objective" criteria, such as language, customs, etc.' that 'have never been

specific enough' in formulating a definition of the nation (p. 35), he understandably can not avoid, in his own definition, as developed in Chapter 3, 'Foundations of a new nationalism theory', and subsequently, reference to such categories,

The nation can be understood as an abstract community formed by a multipolar and equal relationship to other communities of the same category (i.e. other nations), from which it separates itself by claiming singular qualities, a distinct territory, political and cultural independence and an exclusive honor (p. 47).

Natio came to mean a political, cultural and linguistic community, inhabiting a territory of its own and sharing an exclusive honor among its members (p. 88).

Even though, as Anthony Smith and others have repeatedly observed, there is no such thing as 'the' nation because there is only 'a' nation among others, the character of these 'singular qualities', for example, often a common language (even with wide variation in dialects) and, in particular, a distinct territory are of significance if the definition of the nation is to have heuristic merit. It seems to me that however much Hirschi understandably and rightly wishes to concentrate on the particulars of any historical formation, thus how nations are the historically specific 'products and producers of a competitive culture and engage in endless contests about material and symbolic values' (p. 47), about which he is surely correct, we are still compelled to distinguish between nation, city-kingdom or city-state (or in the context of the Holy Roman Empire, the free city) and empire.

In fact, Hirschi employs these categorial distinctions when he rightly and repeatedly observes throughout this engaging book that the imperialist political culture of the Holy Roman Empire co-existed with a fragmented territorial structure (the same may be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of the Roman Catholic Church). In making this observation, I am simply noting that in any analysis of nationality, these fragmented territories cannot be taken for granted for the very category of 'distinct territory' or 'defined territory' (p. 14) must be clarified. The existence of a distinct, defined

territory implies a great deal, for example, established boundaries, the jurisdiction of a law code, and a relatively stable self-conception of the collectivity. (The stability of that self-conception can only be relative, for the reasons mentioned above having to do with the reception of tradition.) It is of course the case that a territory, in contrast to an area of land, is a cultural and historical artifact (in Hirschi's parlance, 'constructed'); nonetheless, it is also the *sine qua non* for the category of nation. And it is here where one finds Hirschi seemingly sidestepping an important complication in his otherwise rich and welcomed contribution by not considering explicitly this question: in what ways was there and wasn't there a German nation during the early modern period? I have no doubt whatsoever that one finds significant adumbrations of German nationality during this period; and if any one does have a doubt, this book will or should convincingly dispel it. (My use of 'adumbrations' is because the complicated processes involved in the constitution of any nation, as expressed in the shared, layered self-conception of numerous individuals, are obscured – no, more, ignored – through a misguided attention to one particular date to indicate the existence of a nation.) However, when one turns one's attention to the 'German nation' of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation, as the Empire was called at the beginning of the 16th century, it is not the relation of the German nation to the French or the Italian that is need of careful explication, but rather: 1) the problematic eastern border (territorial and symbolic) with Poland; 2) the relation of Prussia to the German nation; and 3) the latter's relation to Austria. These three considerations call into question the 'distinctness' of the 'defined' territory, and all that is implied by that distinctness. In taking up these complicated (and, to be sure, contested) processes of the formation and development of German nationality during this period, the analyst might reasonably turn to Friedrich Meinecke's category of *Kulturnation* as laid out in *Weltbürgertum and Nationalstaat* (English translation, *Cosmopolitanism and the national state*, 1970). All that we ask of such an analyst is that he or she does so self-consciously.

The particularly noteworthy and worthwhile aspect of Hirschi's definition of the nation is its focus on the multipolarity of nationality in contrast to the bi-polarity of empire, that is, the very category of nation assumes an

ascendant 'conception of space [that] can be described as multicentric. nations are formed by their relations to other nations' (p. 39). This national, multicentric relation of equality of existential existence is in contrast to the imperial distinction between civilised and barbarian, 'based on the ancient ideal that the centre of political power had to coincide with the centre of civilization and education' (p. 43). It seems to me that there is merit to this line of argument; thus, the Roman empire's inability to transcend this conception of bi-polarity is likely a part of the answer to the problem posed by Arnaldo Momigliano in 'The disadvantages of monotheism for a universal state' (reprinted in *On Pagans, Jews, and Christians*) as to why the Empire never turned to some kind of federal structure. According to Hirschi, the decisive developments of this new discourse of the multipolarity of nationality that 'gave rise to Europe's unique inner dynamic, both politically and culturally' (p. 44) were the consolidation of the previously fragmented territorial legacy of the Roman empire into competing, multipolar territorial structures beginning with the aftermath of Charlemagne's reign, subsequently abetted by the reception of Roman law as a vehicle for patriotism (here, Hirschi, in Chapter 4, 'Killing and dying for love: the common fatherland', rightly draws upon Kantorowicz's analysis of the development of the conception of *pro patria mori*); the realisation or simulation of that patriotism at the Council of Constance (1414-18) such that one finds 'a national competition or honour' (p. 15, 81-88), as presented by Hirschi in Chapter 5, 'Competing for honour; the making of nations in medieval Europe'; and the further extension and deepening of that discourse by the humanist nationalism during the 15th through 17th centuries, one example of which was the discovery in the mid-1450s and subsequent exploitation of Tacitus' *Germania* (pp. 168-71).

There is much to commend in this analysis of the emergence of a multicentric discourse of nationality, not least of which is its drawing attention to factors long before what is too often and too simply viewed to be the decisive moment in the creation of nations, the Peace of Westphalia (1648). Nonetheless, one already finds repeatedly in Genesis 10 (verses 5, 20, 31) a classificatory distinction revolving explicitly around language, territory, and descent; and surely a multicentric equality is implied in the

Septuagint's Deuteronomy 32:8, 'When the Most High divided the nations (ἔθνη), when he separated humankind, he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the gods' (literally, 'according to the angels of God'). Furthermore, although the Vulgate's translation of Deuteronomy 32:8 does not follow the Septuagint, it still implies the same, 'When the Most High divided the nations (*gentes*), when he separated humankind, he fixed the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel.' Thus, while Israel in the Vulgate is usually referred to as a *gens*, it is not quite right to state unequivocally that 'Jerome's Latin translation of the Bible in the late fourth century led the way to [an imperial bi-polarity by] calling all peoples outside the Judaeo-Christian world *nationes*' (p. 79); for, in both Deuteronomy 17:14 and 1 Samuel 8:5, Israel pleads to become a *natio* among *nationes*.

Of course, Israelite self-conception, as conveyed in the Old Testament, can not be put on the same plane as competing with a dominant, imperial discourse; but an analysis of nationality outside the context of early modern German history would note an apparent, to be sure tamed and partial, multipolarity of the imperial Persian 'Cyrus cylinder': the rebuilding of other people's temples, the implied recognition that the worship of the gods of those other peoples was legitimate, and the return of exiles to their respective lands. Certainly the Jews understood Cyrus' edict that way (Ezra 1:1-4, Isaiah 44:28).

The relevance of the reference to ancient Israel here is because, as many have observed, the reception of its image, as a designation for both a particular people and its bounded land, from the Bible has been one factor in the early formation of European nations. And Hirschi notes how the image of ancient Israel contributed to the self-understanding of, among others, the French, Czechs, and Swiss (pp. 66-68, 212-214). Although I applaud Hirschi's insistence on distinguishing nationalism from religion and he is surely correct that the relation between nationalism and religion requires a nuanced analysis (p. 213), the cultural significance of the retrieval of the image of ancient Israel deserves to be pondered. Doing so is surely a difficult matter; but it seems to me that understanding further the significance of the 'turn' to the Old Testament is a pressing task for analysts of Occidental nationality; for within a monotheistic civilisation

that emphasises, at least doctrinally, the universal brotherhood of the individual, as the New Testament does, the image of ancient Israel has been the vehicle that conveys, however tension-ridden, a symbolic intertwining of the particular and the universal. In contrast, the tradition of Rome, analysed well by Hirschi, can not avoid being burdened by three problems: i) polytheism; ii) imperial ambition (consider, for example, Plutarch's description of Cato's 'bi-polar', if you will, hatred for all things Greek and his demand that Carthage be utterly destroyed), and iii) the Roman Church's dogmatic rejection of this world. No doubt, recognition of this burden accounts in large measure for the turn to the Old Testament as a way to legitimate, within monotheism, territorial fragmentation, including that of the Church that long predates the conciliarism of the Council of Constance. The careful and often subtle analysis of this book indicates that Hirschi is capable of taking on this task of elucidating the significance of this turn; the earlier *de facto* territorial divisions within the Church; and the conceptual groundwork laid for both the conciliar movement of the Council of Constance and the consolidation of national states as exemplified by the previous controversies, bearing within them the problem of clarifying the 'self' of self-government, over the *Lex Regia* of the *Corpus Iuris* (for example, whether or not the *translatio* was only a *concessio*) and the early 14th century work of individuals such as John of Paris (*Tractatus de regia potestate et papali*), not surprisingly concurrent with the outcome of the conflict between the 'royal religion' of Philip the Fair and Boniface VIII: the formulation of the *Rex glorie* (1311) that 'like the people of Israel . . . the kingdom of France, as a peculiar people chosen by God to carry out divine mandates, is distinguished by marks of special honor and grace.'³

Taking on this task will require a more expansive survey of the humanist intellectuals than what appears in what I take to be the most important chapter and contribution of this book, the lengthy Chapter 7, 'Humanist nationalism' (pp. 119-179). Hirschi is spot on to emphasise the humanists' retrieval of earlier texts, their subsequent editing, and the humanists'

³ See J. Strayer, *The Reign of Philip the Fair* (Princeton, 1980).

philological investigations for nationality (pp. 158-159), that is, the elevation of the importance of history to understand – or, as formulated by Hirschi, ‘construct’ – the present, for example, not only the discovery and editing of Tacitus’ *Germania* but also the exploitation of its various accounts such as that of Arminius to assert a temporal continuity of the past with the present, another example of which is Beatus Rhenanus’ *Three books on German history* of 1531 (pp. 207-209). The rich evidence of this excellent chapter serves to substantiate Hirschi’s argument for the crucial role played by the humanists in formulating a national discourse that, in turn, contributed decisively to the formation of nationality. Although outside the purview of the book, his argument can rightly be extended to encompass other areas, for example, the establishment and defense of the English common law by Coke, Selden, and Hale, hence the arguments over the continuity of the ‘good old law’, all of which presuppose the temporal depth of the historical outlook (and which – note well – would not have been possible without the earlier Bracton and that peculiar institution of English legal education, the Inns of Court). However, deserving of attention are those numerous humanists – for example, Carlo Sigonio, Joseph Scaliger, Isaac Casaubon, Petrus Cunaeus, Johannes Althusius, of course Hugo Grotius and John Selden, and many more – who, in the investigation of the past, looked past Rome to ancient Israel. Our problem is to ascertain the significance of why they did. When pursuing this problem we will not be content with an explanation that limits itself to the influence of the Reformation; for doing so begs the questions that are important in the investigation of Occidental nationality.

Hirschi’s admirable focus on the humanists and events of the 15th through 17th centuries clearly supports his argument that nationality is not exclusively modern. He is right. This focus also supports his argument for the decisive role intellectuals played in formulating a discourse necessary for nationality to emerge; and this is why he describes his analysis of nationality as ‘constructivist’. There is merit here, too, especially in his attention to the multipolarity of that discourse; but there is a danger to this ‘constructivist’ analysis because of the capriciousness or arbitrariness and an often unwarranted intentionality implied by the term. It is the case that all social relations, including face-to-face, involve ‘acts of the

imagination', that is, some symbolic referent *perceived* by each of the members of the relation to be adhering or inhering in each of them. Hirschi is right to observe that this perception can not be taken for granted; it has its own historical development. However, the recognition of this symbolic or imaginative factor, for example, such that a territory exists or that language achieves significance as a classificatory criterion of the self and others, does not mean that it is 'imaginary', as if the social relation were a unicorn. Take, for example, speaking a common language. Now, first, there is the standardisation of language; in the context of this book, the influence of Luther's translation of the Bible (p. 105). Too many analysts begin their investigation with nationality at this point, often because of their misguided insistence that the decisive factor for the existence of the nation can only be state-directed policies. Of course, the bearing of these policies or the work of intellectuals on the standardisation of language is not to be denied; but, as Hirschi properly notes, there is a great deal of evidence from as early as the 11th century and increasingly thereafter for Germans being distinguished from others by the language they spoke (pp. 104-108). Behind this distinction is the fact of (needless to say) an uneven linguistic differentiation from one area of land to another. However, for language to be a self-differentiating referent of a nation, crucial is the attribution of significance to that distinction; and Hirschi is, once again, correct to draw our attention to numerous intellectual and historical factors that contributed to that attribution. But also crucial is that the 'construction' or 'invention' of language as a symbolic boundary of a nation was possible because of the underlying anthropological fact of the spontaneous order of its areal differentiation. Here, I am simply exploiting Hume's observation in *A treatise of human nature* that while many of our relations are artificial, in the sense that they are the result of the intervention of our thought or reflection, they are not arbitrary, hence, my earlier distinction between 'the acts of the imagination' and 'the imaginary'.

The reference to Hume's distinction and my adaptation of it as between 'the acts of the imagination' and 'the imaginary' returns us again to the two problems confronting an analysis of nationality: the temporal depth of the reception of tradition and the sharing such that a culture exists; but they

do so now with a set of different concerns that, it seems to me, unavoidably nag historical investigations and the human sciences in general. Not all conceptual creations become traditions, and not all traditions persist, albeit with dramatic changes, over time. Furthermore, not all traditions become objects of what is important to Hirschi's analysis of nationality, honour; and not all are widely shared such that a culture exists. We would like to know why is it that some conceptual creations persist as (contested) traditions, are (unevenly) shared, and become objects of honour? These are, after all, reasonable questions to raise, if we do not lose sight of just why we are so interested in the phenomenon of nationality such that it is the subject of so many historical investigations. I think that key to addressing those problems is the recognition that the nation is one among several collectivities of existential significance. Hirschi implies as much when he refers to the 'bigger family' in his discussion of the goal of patriotism as convincing citizens or subjects 'that there is a bigger family which they belong to and which deserves an even stronger dedication than [to] their own [family]' (p. 51), earlier examples of which are found in Herodotus' *History* (8.144), Plato's *Republic* (V.470 c-d), and especially the Platonic dialogue *Menexenus* (237-244). To recognise this significance is not to gainsay the necessity of careful historical analysis of the particular processes involved in the formation of those collectivities, an analysis that ought to include their categorial differentiation from one another. If we conclude with the philological investigations of Hirschi's humanists, then to postulate the likelihood of this existential significance is by no means an audacious claim; for all that need be done is to consider the etymology of *natio*.

3. The baton and the frame: or, tradition and recollection (Joep Leerssen)

The 17th-century German language purist Schottelius rhetorically asked his fellow-Germans: 'Should you not, O German, honour the language that,

together with your mother's milk, you sucked in with her sweet murmurings?' – thereby linking the native tongue, as an instrument of social communication and collective identity, to that most intimate of transgenerational bonds. The sentiment was to be quoted two hundred years later by Jacob Grimm, both in an indictment of Danish policy in Schleswig-Holstein (1812) and again half century later in his German Dictionary.

Caspar Hirschi does not refer to this particular instance, but he refers to a good many similar ones, and for him they all point to one undeniable home truth: German nationalism has roots that go all the way back. German humanists and intellectuals of the late-medieval and early-modern period (he mentions Schottelius, and Hütten, and Beatus Rhenanus, and the ever-fascinating Conrad Celtis, and a great many others) make statements that sound like nationalism, look like nationalism, feel like nationalism. If it walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it's probably a duck.

All the interesting and important issues raised in *The origins of nationalism* are put into the service of that 'it's a duck' argument; and that is a pity. Hirschi puts his historical erudition and acumen in the service of a mere methodological skirmish against the Modernists in nationalism studies; and that mars what could have been a very good book indeed.

*

Let me begin by praising the breadth and erudition of *The origins of nationalism*, which follows on from Hirschi's *Wettkampf der Nationen*, slimmed down from its 2005 format and broadened with several forays into other historical periods and themes. From courtly prestige-jostles to humanist cultural reflections and the afterlife of Roman antiquity, mainly in the area of the Holy Roman Empire just north of the Alps, the book marshals an impressive amount of fascinating historical material, circling around what is surely one of the formative events at the close of the Middle Ages: the Council of Constance. Hirschi is right to zoom in on that crucial event. Those who look up the term 'nationalism' in the old, ultramontanist but always-interesting *Catholic Encyclopedia* of 1909 will note that that work dates the ideology back to, precisely, the Council of

Constance and its decision to have bishops vote in ‘block votes’, by church province (‘nation’), rather than as a single collective. This issue appears in Hirschi’s book, too; I will return to it.

For the wealth of historical detail from a period and corpus of documentation not easily accessible to most English-language scholars, Hirschi’s book is a gem; and that praise ought to stand unqualified by any bones I intend to pick further on. So I repeat: hats off, read this book, it brings into our purview important and intriguing personalities and authors, and for its grasp of the period it commands our respect.

*

That being said, I am deeply at odds with the mast that Hirschi nails his colours to: his insistence that nationalism is a long-term presence in European affairs, and that we see its manifestations in this late-medieval, early-modern context as clearly and unmistakably as we do in nineteenth- or twentieth-century sources. It is at this point that I take exception. Not because I am a card-carrying member of that Modernist interpretation of nationalism which Hirschi sets out to controvert. I have some familiarity with the early-modern period from my own work, on the reception history of Tacitus and on the impact of neo-Aristotelianism on national stereotypes; and I have spent much time studying documentation from this same period in a different part of Europe, Ireland. That work was done at a time (the early 1980s) when the scholarly community habitually read Gaelic sources from the period 1540-1690 with the eyes of contemporary Irish nationalism. From experience, I know distortive anachronism and retroprojection when I see it; and it has made me a stickler for trying to situate and understand the record in its own, proper epistemic frame and rhetorical setting. As Paul Veyne put it, ‘l’historiographie est une lutte incessante contre notre tendance au contre-sens anachronique.’

*

If Schottelius was a nationalist, why not Ramses II? Was Assurbanipal a totalitarian dictator, or Attila the Hun a homophobic misogynist? Such qualifications are ‘not even wrong’. They apply contemporary categories to uncongenial subjects outside their proper frame of reference, and they

misleadingly claim the power to identify and qualify subjects whom we can discern and apprehend only very imperfectly from a great distance. What from afar appears to waddle and quack like a duck, may actually be a goose. Resemblances across such enormous cultural distances are not in themselves convincing – and even without going to the *ad absurdum* lengths of Ramses and Assurbanipal, it should give us pause for thought that those Middle Ages which are here so confidently identified in modern-day terms ended more than half a millennium ago.

Hirschi makes his case largely by means of mere, iterative assertion – the application of the epithet ‘national’ or ‘nationalist’ wherever it suits his purpose. The title, resounding and apodictic as it is, already bespeaks, if we ponder it more fully, a very questionable finalism – almost as if a history of Renaissance Italy or France should be carry the title *The origins of the pizza*, or *The roots of bistro culture*. Not every 16th-century marquis quaffing a goblet of Burgundy is a forerunner of Sartre at Les Deux Magots. Time and again the word ‘nationalism’ is applied to remote centuries with cheerful insouciance as if that were wholly unproblematic, seasoning the presentation of the facts a priori and pre-empting their interpretation. An example picked at random: French humanists were ‘engaged in the nationalist re-evaluation of their mother tongue’ (p. 111); their German counterparts dislike foreign loanwords as if these are ‘illegal immigrants’ and a certain linguistic activist is positioned amidst his ‘fellow nationalists’ (p. 113). Thus loading the dice, Hirschi attempts to foreclose the case and to assume what he actually needs to demonstrate.

Hirschi is remarkably cavalier with the historical minutiae of how words have different meanings and even different ontologies at different periods. He stretches terms like ‘nationalism’ and ‘nation’ at will to suit his purpose: any sense of pride in one’s own ‘nation’ and its honour, any sense of placing it competitively vis-à-vis other nations, is seen as ‘nationalism’ by Hirschi. But in that very wide sense, the word refers to a mere affect, not an ideology, and the instances of that affect in the late Middle Ages cannot be the ‘Origins’, as the title claims, of the modern political doctrine, any more than a sense of social grievance among dispossessed peasants constitute the ‘origins’ of communism.

David Lowenthal, Harvard history professor, told me a few years ago about being interviewed by a journalist; one of the questions was about 'bussing' – the hotly contentious policy to achieve an ethnic mix in inner-city schools by bringing in children from other neighbourhoods by school-bus. What, the journalist wondered, would Abraham Lincoln have said about bussing? Lowenthal's reply: 'Lincoln would have said: "What is a bus?"'

Those who apply the word nationalism to periods antedating its actual usage, as if it were no different from 'apple' or 'shoe', should ponder that. And even when it comes to words like 'nation' and (more interestingly) 'honour', we should exercise caution. Hirschi does not. His definition of the 'nation' on p. 47 is all-embracing ('an abstract community formed by a multipolar and equal relationship to other communities of the same category (i.e other nations) from which it separates itself by claiming singular qualities, a distinct territory, political and cultural independence and an exclusive honour'). In fairness, the notion of multipolarity is a sound one, and Hirschi makes an important point in seeing this as a distinguishing feature from imperial self-aggrandisement or tribal antagonisms; but even so, this definition could apply to any almost territorially-based multi-neighbourhood human aggregate, like a city or a football team; and in the context, it amounts to little more than a definition of the state. Accordingly, any development toward state-formation, be it ancient Rome, or be it feudal or monarchical, can be interpreted by Hirschi as 'nationalism'. Yet at the same time the matter of the block-votes at the Council of Constance is equally grist to his mill, although the usage of the word 'nation' there is much less amenable to his definition.

Those block votes (Hirschi himself describes it well) were meant to break up the episcopal power base of the infamous Pope John XXII, largely concentrated in the Italian church province. The block votes were a canny gerrymander to water down that majority, and the 'nations' argument, though extremely intriguing for many reasons, reflects if anything [a] the fascination that humanists had with the tribal antecedents of Northern Europe, taken from classical authors like Caesar, Tacitus and Jordanes; and [b] the nomenclature of the divisions of the student bodies at universities like the Sorbonne or Prague – mere *Landsmannschaften*, more like the

division of Hogwart's into Houses like Griffindor and Slytherin than like the modern use of the term. The apparent superficiality of words and patterns can be misleading; but although Hirschi himself admits in a concessive clause that 'the *nationes* of medieval universities had not much in common with later nations', he cannot suppress his urge to conclude that 'they marked an important step towards them'; and in order to demonstrate that we move on to the next instance or case-example where similarities and resemblances are invoked and highlighted so as to overrule dissimilarities, discrepancies, anachronisms. But this is where the next step led: at the follow-up to Constance, the Council of Basel (1436), bishop Alfonso of Burgos claimed seniority in his 'nation' on the basis that he represented a most ancient, Visigothically-founded monarchy. In so doing, he was at odds with a similar claim by bishop Nils Ragvaldsson of Uppsala, who claimed precedence on the basis of Sweden being the aboriginal homeland of the Goths.⁴ Goths in Sweden, Goths in Spain – it is hard to see these erudite tribalisms as steps towards modern nationalism. If they were, they led along a path so tortuous and forking, so riddled with dead-end turns, labyrinthine diversions and twisted signposts, that it is downright wrong to present this as a straightforward linear trajectory.

At its worst, such a mode of reasoning could be used to show that the starving French, centuries before Marie-Antoinette told them to 'eat cake', were already in the habit of doing so, merely because we can trace the presence of an egg here, some milk and even butter over there, and sugar or flour in yet another instance. In a not too dissimilar procedure Hirschi demonstrates, over a wide area and time period, the dispersed ingredients of nationalism (state formation, centralised power, tribal appellations, dynastic rivalry and ethnocentrism) and, mixing them together, claims to have demonstrated the existence of nationalism.

⁴ O. Mörke, 'Bataver, Eidgenossen und Goten: Gründungs- und Begründungsmythen in den Niederlanden, der Schweiz, und Schweden in der frühen Neuzeit', in: *Mythos und Nation. Studien zur Entwicklung des kollektiven Bewußtseins in der Neuzeit*, 3, ed. H. Berding (Frankfurt, 1996) 104-132.

Hirschi himself feels that the coalescence of these ingredients is a historical fact, not a matter of his own *dispositio*, and he makes an interesting case to support it: it revolves around the element of *honour* as the decisive factor in binding the ingredients of nationalism into a coherent ideology. I fully agree with Hirschi on the great importance of the idea of rivalry and of the *repoussoir* of an Otherness outside the 'we'-group; and in highlighting the ethos of honour he makes an important historical point. The realisation that one's own nation stands in need of support as it faces a wider agonistic-competitive framework: this is an essential prerequisite for the articulation of national feeling. But that sense of honour, itself, is an ingredient in the historical mix, one among all the other other ingredients, not a bonding agency at the meta-level; it, too, was subject to enormous historical fluctuations in meaning and applicability. It was 'honour' that challenged, for the longest time, the modern state's increasing monopoly on legitimate violence – witness the tenacious cult of the duel.

Indeed, of all operative political *Grundbegriffe*, terms like 'honour' and 'nation' have probably gone through the most fundamental changes between 1500 and 1900. Their semantic vicissitudes faithfully trace the intervening historical and ideological paradigm shifts: the rising notion of democratic republicanism, of popular sovereignty, of the Enlightenment and of counter-Enlightenment historicism and vernacular particularism; and we can see both words, 'nation' and 'honour', playing problematic, dynamically shifting key roles in the turmoil of the American and French Revolutions and the Napoleonic conquests. That turmoil is brilliantly addressed in Lucien Febvre's classic lecture course at the Collège de France in 1945-1946, entitled *Honneur et patrie* (invoking, of course, the motto of the Légion d'Honneur).

Hirschi does not go into any of this, and that is the weakness of his 'quacking duck' case. There is no serious attempt, despite the well-established methodology of *Begriffsgeschichte*, to trace the changing meanings and functions of ideas like 'nation' and 'honour'. I have myself, inspired partly by Febvre, tried to make the case that the rise of nationalism in the proper sense of the word (i.e. the sense in which the word 'nationalism' came to be used itself by its adherents and opponents,

from the mid-19th-century onwards) was made possible precisely by the conceptual shifts around 1800, between Johann Georg Zimmermann's *Von dem Nationalstolze* and Fichte's *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, when 'honour' was rejected as the depraved, selfish arrogance of the nobility, and *amor patriae* became a matter of civic, anti-aristocratic 'virtue' instead; when the slogans *vive le roi* and *vive la patrie* were used by bitterly opposed, aristocratic and democratic, factions. Hirschi will recognise and appreciate the Ciceronian echoes in that classical republicanism – he is laudably aware of the long-standing importance of Cicero's *Nachleben* in European political philosophy; but by the same token he must admit, I think, that the aristocratic-chivalric code of honour and the classic-republican code of civic virtue and responsible engagement in the body politic cannot be simply lumped together as two related manifestations of proto-nationalism; as if eggs resemble flour, since both are used in baking cakes. 'Honour' and the 'nation' as invoked by feudal heralds-at-arms, by church prelates and by humanist scholars, over a long and turbulent period, mean, quite simply, totally different things from case to case. (Much as a word like 'character' can mean totally different things when used by a book-printer, a playwright or a psychologist.) As I think I have shown in *National thought in Europe*, intense concept-historical realignments over six or seven decades (1740-1815) were fundamental catalysts in the emergence of that political rhetoric and doctrine called nationalism, and set it off against its longer, older source-traditions of national feeling; how then can Hirschi justify seeing stable ideological and rhetorical continuities over almost as many centuries? Historical lines of continuity and discontinuity cannot be demonstrated by mere cherry picking, highlighting what suits your case, blindsiding what does not.

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Having said that, I must make sure not to overbalance into the opposite error and fetishise those discontinuities that Hirschi so cavalierly shrugged off. Schottelius was called, after all, the '17th-century Grimm'; Grimm *did* place himself under Schottelius's auspices, and it would be foolish to deny that such continuities were operative over the centuries. If Hirschi has a point in criticising Modernists, it is that they are heedless of these diachronic affiliations, and that their fixation on post-1780 events

and infrastructural processes tends to turn their gaze away from one important fact: the actors concerned were all of them sentient intellectuals with a highly developed historical consciousness. On their trajectory towards the future they were not mere ballistic projectiles, but careful drivers who regularly checked their historical rear-view mirror.

That this stands in need of being pointed out seems to me to be, not so much a conflict between a modernist and a perennialist view of nationalism, as, rather, a cleavage between sociopolitical and cultural historians; and I feel myself very much at one with Hirschi in the latter camp. Cultural processes are different from mechanical, statistical or systematic ones (such as the workings of supply and demand, or productivity and market forces, or demographic and climatological fluctuations, or how a *Strukturwandel* here triggers reactions over there). The core of that difference lies in the fact that the actors of cultural history are *people* exercising their power of self-reflection, remembering the past and from that remembrance making judgements, and extrapolating and anticipating scenarios for the future. That essential hermeneutic quality (we can follow Ricœur in this) centrally involves a diachronic, historical consciousness; at every step of their deeds and actions that consciousness informed what they tried to achieve, what they tried to avoid, what they were thinking they were doing. Those reflections, that *culture*, must be factored into our analysis of what happened in the past and why it developed as it did.

But at the same time we should realise that culture, too, went through a modernisation process. That, I put to Caspar Hirschi, is the vexed quandary in nationalism studies: Modernists think that culture does not matter, perennialists think that the modernisation process does not matter. In this symmetrical, complementary one-sidedness, each party misses the other's point.

I would have probably concurred heartily with every fact and argument in Hirschi's book if he had narrated it the other way around: not how Schottelius 'anticipated' Grimm, but how Grimm recycled Schottelius; not how the use of 'nations' at Constance marked a step in the development towards nationalism, but how nationalism, once it developed, could avail

itself of this conceptual repertoire. The distinction may seem nit-picking, but it is fundamental. It reflects Valéry's dictum that 'we march into the future backwards' – 'nous entrons dans l'avenir à reculons', blind to where we are going, with our eyes fixed on the path already travelled. That means that it makes perfect sense to see how the past informs later periods, and it makes no sense to say that the past prepares it or provides its 'origins'.

In 1517, Luther burned a papal bull excommunicating him. That gesture was picked up three hundred years later by students who, in a commemorative feast on the Wartburg, burned books critical of the new German patriotism. And the students' book-burning gesture was picked up in the 1930s by Josef Goebbels. Now, here is a continuity leapfrogging across the centuries. But while Goebbels was mindful of the 1817 students, and they were mindful of Luther, it makes no possible sense to claim that Luther 'foreshadowed' or 'anticipated' 1817, or (*pace* Daniel Goldhagen) that either he or the Wartburg students are part of a German run-up towards National Socialism.

Historical continuity often works intractably in a counter-chronological direction. Many continuities of history are, if they are in any way meaningful, retrospective in nature. They reside in the way in which the present instrumentalises the past, draws upon the past, *knows* the past the way that past could never *know* its future.

What successive periods pass on to each other looks at first sight like the baton in a relay race: words, ideas, gestures, institutions, agendas. That notion of handing on the baton is deeply ingrained in our way of viewing historical continuity; hence the notion of *tradition*, which means precisely that: 'handing on', the way we bequeath property, or names, or scientific innovations. And in some cases, it may actually work like that – in very strong institutions such as a monarchy, or a church, or family property, or an academy. But Hirschi's book convinces me that this is only half the story, and that many relay races are run *à reculons*, facing backwards. Beside that historical continuity which reaches out from the past and which is called 'tradition', there is another, altogether different one which reaches into the past and which we may call *recollection*, basing one's

actions on something recalled, received, recycled, assimilated, appropriated. What the past leaves to its successors is information; and how that heirloom shapes and in-forms the heirs is up to them.

Much as historians know that one should never monocausally explain important events from a single root cause, so too the present is not formed or in-formed by any specific single lump inherited from the past. The past is a shopping mall, a Lucky Dip, and offers us whatever we find chimes with our current concerns (allowing us to ignore other, more inconvenient elements in our inheritance). What we take from the past is very often not a baton but a *frame* – a way of schematising and cognitively arranging things. What Goebbels took from the Wartburg, and what the Wartburg students took from Luther, was not a relay baton, but, indeed, a frame, something to give historical meaning to their contemporary actions. That is what Grimm recollected from Schottelius.

If Hirschi had written his book in that retrospective mode, in the mode of frames of recollection rather than batons of tradition, – how Romans, heralds, humanists and prelates in their words and deeds left behind frames which could be picked up, appropriated and instrumentalised, and adapted to *inform* the agendas of later ages – it would all have made perfect, perfect sense. And that would raise the immensely challenging and intriguing research perspective, what role is played by ecological contingency in that process (as in the Christian parable of superabundant supply and partial survival: the sower sowing his seeds, randomly scattering them here and there, with only a small portion taking root and ripening) – and what role is played by volition, conscious anticipation and that family resemblance which makes some things in the past appear more familiar than others.

Those are, for me, the hugely engrossing reflections and questions that Hirschi's flawed, fine book leaves me with, and I would love to hear his reflections, as a fellow cultural-historian, on them.

4. Duck or quack? On the lack of scholarly soundness and decorum in Joep Leerssen's review (Caspar Hirschi)

'Keep quiet and trust your readers!' was the answer of an experienced scholar ten years ago when I had just published my first book and expressed my bewilderment about a reviewer who seemed to have misunderstood my argument deliberately. I will always be grateful for his advice because it has taught me an important lesson in scholarly decorum and it has also spared me many unnecessary disputes. After all, it does not make much sense to write books if you cannot trust your readers.

So why reply now to a review of another book of mine? When I was approached by *Studies on National Movements* in the summer of 2013, the idea presented to me was a round table review with three contributors starting the discussion and me commenting on their critiques. I accepted with pleasure. It appeared to me that this was a good opportunity to discuss key arguments of the book from various angles without running the risk of a tit for tat with a single reviewer. The situation now is a bit different. Instead of three reviews there are only two, one of which, written by Steven Grosby, was published in July 2012, and has been openly accessible ever since. When it first appeared in *Reviews in History* I declined the offer by the editor to comment because I saw no reason to break the proven rule of silence, particularly as Grosby's piece looked interesting enough by itself. It would thus be inconsistent and slightly unfair to the first publisher if I did so now.

So there remains the review by Joep Leerssen, which prompts all sorts of questions, though not many that would allow for a productive debate about my arguments. Still, some of these questions have relevance beyond the book, and this is why I decided that, despite the change of circumstance, I would keep my word and write a response.

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The first issue I would like to address has little to do with the content of Leerssen's text, but rather its pre-publication history. In early 2015 I was invited to give a keynote at a conference on 'National identity formation in early modern Europe' at the University of Nijmegen. When I arrived the

organiser of the conference told me that she had received an email with an alarming review of my book attached. It was sent by Leerssen and interpreted by the organiser as a sign of disapproval at my invitation. At the time, the editors of this journal had already sent me Leerssen's text, but I was still waiting for the other reviews. It was thus a bit odd to realise that before the planned roundtable review had even taken shape, its first and only contribution so far had already started to take on a life of its own in the nationalism research community. A few months later, amazement turned to astonishment when I attended a conference on 'Nationhood before modernity' in Oxford and was greeted by a well-known English modernist with the question: 'What do you say about Leerssen's review?' When I told him that it was not published yet, he mentioned that Leerssen had sent it to him, too. Apparently, Leerssen preferred to have the debate decided by networking his way through digital back channels before other reviewers, let alone the author himself, had anything to say. The simulation of an open debate serves the purpose of driving an unwelcome perspective on the history of nationalism out of the field before it can actually be discussed.

As far as the review itself is concerned, Leerssen accuses me of committing three cardinal sins of historiography: using 'distortive anachronism', presenting history as 'a straightforward linear trajectory' and explaining important events 'monocausally'. I will start with the motif that runs through the review in multiple variations, anachronism. Lorraine Daston once said that historians, despite all their differences, were united, among other things, by 'a huge fear of anachronism'. Leerssen plays on this fear by portraying me as a serial sinner. According to him, my book contains a 'wealth of historical detail', all presented, however, in a misleading way. The sources I quote – contracts, missives, legal opinions, chronicles, commentaries, letters, speeches, broadsheets etc. – may look as if they have something to do with nations and nationalism, but actually they have not. This is a heavy charge, and one would expect it to be supported by evidence based on a critical re-examination of at least some of my key sources. However, Leerssen does not offer a single misinterpreted document to corroborate his accusation. Instead, he refers to famous men such as Ramses II and Assurbanipal, Alfonso of Burgos and Nils

Ragvaldsson of Uppsala, Attila the Hun and Sartre, Goebbels and Goldhagen. These men do not share many characteristics, but they have one thing in common: they do not figure in my book. Even Schottelius, who is given most prominence in Leerssen's review, is only mentioned once in my book and, by the way, not labelled a nationalist. So what are all these names dropped for? They serve to entertain through ridicule (Ramses, Attila etcetera), guilt by association (Goldhagen), or mock counter-witnessing (two bishops at the Council of Basle indulging in 'erudite tribalism' – whatever that may mean – allegedly disprove my argument about the long-term significance of the Council of Constance for the construction of nations). Equally entertaining are the forays into ornithology, gastronomy and motorised mobility. However, what might work as polemic does not necessarily work as proof.

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Let's have a closer look at Leerssen's own version of the famous animal proverb. He says that something may look like a duck, walk like a duck and quack like a duck, but be in fact a goose. What should this signify exactly? Is it that something appears to be a duck at first sight, but on closer inspection turns into a goose and thus also looks, walks and quacks like a goose? Or is it that something seems to be a duck and continues to look like a duck, yet cannot be a duck because ducks have never been sighted in these areas? As Leerssen sees no need to expand, he must understand his version in the latter sense. He is absolutely certain that nationalism is a uniquely modern phenomenon, so when confronted with an abundance of sources from pre-modern periods that point to the contrary he must conclude that the content cannot be what it appears to be. In the end, this attitude deems the study of sources irrelevant in the quest for new historical knowledge and, at the same time, it reduces the possibility of adding new historical knowledge to existing conceptual frameworks.

This is exactly what Leerssen's accusation of anachronism amounts to: it is not about the interpretation of my sources, but about my use of the word 'nationalism'. Leerssen sticks to an old argument that is still used by many historians, although it is more suited to time-travel daydreams than historiographical research. He complains that I apply 'the word

nationalism to periods antedating its actual usage' and, even worse, that I do it 'with cheerful insouciance'. Of course, the idea here is that serious historians explain the past in the language of that past and not in the language of the present. As consistent as this may sound, it is neither practically possible nor theoretically desirable. Leerssen's own language is a case in point. It would be easy to argue that Leerssen's accusation is hypocritical because he is guilty of the same sin. In his book on *National thought in Europe* he speaks – shall we say, with cheerful insouciance – of 'humanism in the early fifteenth century' or of 'Tacitus's democratic primitivism'. Evidently, the word 'humanism' was not in 'actual usage' during the early fifteenth century and neither were the Romans of Tacitus' time familiar with the term 'primitivism'. But why take examples from Leerssen's book when his review contains similarly frivolous anachronisms? Surely the most ironical of them is the phrase which Leerssen – not once, but twice – sets against my concept of pre-modern nationalism. This is 'national feeling', an expression that is, be it in English, German or French, alien to medieval and early modern sources and for an obvious reason: it belongs to the language of Romanticism, which Leerssen studies in his book and, similar to Romantic authors, re-projects on pre-modern periods.

It is not my goal, though, to welcome Leerssen to the club of historiographical cardinal sinners. My point is that his inconsistent reference to anachronism is the symptom of a bigger conceptual flaw not unusual in nationalism studies. He falls victim to the essentialist fallacy. When Leerssen demands that historians should only use vocabulary available to the people they study he fails to acknowledge that even if we wrote about Tacitus in the language of the *Annals* or about Goebbels in the jargon of German Nazis, we would not cut through to the essence of history, but, by the simple process of selection and composition, build new constructions out of old constructions – just without admitting it as such. When he argues that speaking about nationalism in the Middle Ages is the same as assuming that there were buses in Lincoln's days, he regards 'nationalism' as a thing in the world, not a perspective on the world. Equally, when he speaks about 'primitivism' in Antiquity, 'humanism' in

the Renaissance and ‘republicanism’ in the early modern period he does so as if they were things in the past and not projections on the past.

Why is Leerssen able to accept certain ‘isms’ as historically sound, while rejecting others as ‘distortive anachronisms’? Why does he even condemn a phrase such as ‘illegal immigrants’ for the seventeenth century, when official travel documents had been in use for several centuries and when cities and principalities had policies in place to detect and expel strangers who had entered their territories without permission (a practice German authors alluded to when trying to expel ‘foreign’ words from the German language)? The answer, I think, is simple and can be derived from what I said above his misapprehension of conceptual frameworks: Leerssen confounds linguistic conventions within history writing with historical truths per se, and thus treats conventions as if they were sacred. Speaking of ancient primitivism, Renaissance humanism or early modern republicanism has been an established convention for a long time, whereas speaking of pre-modern nationalism has not. Conventionally, historians relate nationalism to modernity. Conventions, however, are products of routines rather than of rationality, and while some have heuristic value, others do not make much sense when being scrutinised. This is exactly the point I make about nationalism in my book.

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Conventionally, terminological distinctions between modern and pre-modern forms of nation formation are derived from nationalist language itself. A popular distinction, even accepted by a die-hard modernist such as Ernest Gellner, is the one between nationalism and patriotism. It enables various binary oppositions with both epistemic and normative dimensions: modern-pre-modern; artificial-natural; extreme-moderate; aggressive-defensive; territorial-local; western-eastern; totalitarian-democratic etc. Most of these oppositions echo the uses of the two words in everyday speech, where ‘nationalism’ is often treated as an aberration of ‘patriotism’, resulting in many self-declared ‘patriots’, but hardly any ‘nationalists’. I do not see how this normative dichotomy could be adequate to differentiate pre-modern and modern nation formation, all the more as ‘patriotism’ would ascribe a degree of stability and

homogeneity to pre-modern political culture that does no justice to the transformations of national discourses in the late medieval and early modern period. As I argue in my book, 'patriotism', as an analytical term, only makes sense when being attributed to 'fatherlands' that are not constructed as national communities of honour, as are, for instance, ancient cities, medieval kingdoms or early modern principalities. Without this clear separation, a relapse into moral tales about good old patriotism turning into bad new nationalism is hard to avoid. This, I am afraid, is what happens to Leerssen when he contrasts 'Enlightenment patriotism' (understood as 'republican' and 'democratic') with 'the nascent ideology of nationalism' (understood as 'authoritarian' and 'anti-democratic') in his book. Such judgmental language is better suited to a moral philosopher than a historian, and indeed, Leerssen's own moral tale is inspired by Jürgen Habermas' ideal of 'constitutional patriotism', according to which it is both desirable and feasible to create, in Leerssen's words, 'a sense of solidarity between taxpaying citizens' without any 'sense of cultural identity involved'. Here, again, we are in the realm of study-room daydreams.

More problematic still is the terminology used by Leerssen to reject my argument in his review. As already mentioned above, the assumption of a historical development from 'national feeling' to 'national thought' to 'nationalism' inevitably invokes the Romantic teleology of a rising consciousness of national belonging from ancient to modern times. If you want to find an exemplary linear trajectory, here it is – a historical upward movement from the guts to the brain. 'National feeling' proved to be a handy term to project nationalist notions on to heroes of the distant past even if they had never expressed any such notions themselves. After all, if they were just 'feeling' their sense of national belonging, the logic went, they could not yet speak about it. Leerssen, though, does not seem to be guided by this shaky logic, as he attributes the term 'source-traditions of national feeling' to pre-modern authors who clearly wrote about nations. So what does he mean with traditions of feeling – if this wording makes any sense at all? Did these authors only feel, but not think when they were writing about nations? As Leerssen distinguishes them from later

proponents of ‘national thought’, we would have to come to such an absurd conclusion.

Again, writing a history of nation formation that evolves from pre-modern ‘feeling’ to modern ‘ideology’ only makes sense when sticking to an essentialist attitude, according to which nations emerged as something genuine but later turned into something false. Similar problems arise with terms such as ‘national identity’ or ‘nationhood’ as pre-modern antecedents to modern ‘nationalism’. Apart from essentialist undertones, these terms rather impede an understanding of nations as ‘contested terrains’, with different groups seeking to enforce their respective constructions of the nation’s ‘true character’.

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So if the conventional language to distinguish pre-modern from modern forms of nation formation is of little heuristic value, what better alternatives are available? The answer given in my book is not, as Leerssen insinuates, that we should treat anything and everything as nationalism. First, I argue for a strictly constructivist approach that analyses nations first and foremost as products of specific forms of speech, which are in return understood as products of specific political and cultural circumstances. Secondly, I introduce ‘national discourse’ as an umbrella term that covers ‘all forms of speaking about nations’ including, for instance, anti-nationalist cosmopolitanism or academic nationalism studies; the reason why it is important to consider these forms, too, is that they also play a role in the construction of nations. Thirdly, I treat nationalism as a form of national discourse ‘that creates and preserves the nation as an autonomous value, ‘autonomous’ meaning not subordinate (but neither necessarily superior) to any other community’ (p. 47). This definition is directed against two widespread misconceptions of nationalism: a) that it claims the highest rank within a ‘hierarchy of loyalties’ and b) that it forms a ‘doctrine’ similar to the dogmas of a codified religion or even an ‘ideology’ such as communism. My point is that nationalism is best understood as less fixed and more malleable than doctrines or ideologies. So when Leerssen writes that I see nationalism bound to a ‘coherent ideology’ following the Council of Constance and then

criticises me for seeing ‘stable ideological continuities’ over many centuries, he imposes his own misconception of nationalism on my book and then blames me for prolonging it into the pre-modern past. It is a perfect straw man. Equally, if he had read my definition of nationalism closely, there would have been no need to ask why Ramses II is not to be considered a nationalist.

The only definition in my book that Leerssen discusses is that of the ‘nation’. He even cites it to demonstrate how ‘all-embracing’ and thus useless it is. In order to make his case he gives two examples of ‘human aggregate’ that would also be covered by my definition: a city and a football team. Really? Let’s re-read the definition. It starts with the term ‘abstract community’, which, for the sake of careless readers, is even specified in the same paragraph as ‘with most of its members not knowing and never seeing each other’. Does a football team fall under this category? It would, to put it mildly, be interesting to imagine a game of football between two teams whose players ‘never see’ most of their teammates. How about cities? Are they ‘formed by a multipolar and equal relationship to other communities of the same category’ (i.e. other cities)? You would only need to take a look at a modern or medieval map to see the nonsense of such a proposition. Towns and cities are – historically, legally, geographically etc. – set against the countryside. In other words, they form a bipolar and unequal relationship to the world surrounding them. Although some cities were stuck in long-lasting competitions with other cities, it would be odd to argue that the city, as a specific type of abstract community, was formed by such competitions.

Based on the definitions of nation, nationalism and national discourse, my book contains three main lines of argument as to why it is historically justified and analytically useful to speak of nationalism before modernity. First, it presents a great variety of sources – textual and visual, political and legal, scholarly and popular – whose language and content correspond to what is defined as nationalism in the book, and to what, I guess, most readers would regard as expressions of nationalist attitudes (thus Leerssen’s refuge in a parody of the duck dictum). Furthermore, it develops a long-term perspective to demonstrate that modern nationalism ‘could only become such a mobilising force because of its presence in

politics, scholarship and art of long ago'. This perspective is based on the idea that nationalism is not to be understood as a modern 'invention', but as a pre-modern product of 'bricolage' – assembled by 'pulling existing bits and pieces out of diverse contexts and putting them together in a form unknown before'. Nationalism is thus described as a discourse which could easily be rebuilt and thereby adapted to changing circumstances. In other words, my long-term perspective is quite the contrary of what Leerssen calls – in yet another display of a straw man – a 'baton of tradition' handed down through the centuries. The third line of argument is that the concept of modern nationalism needs to be recalibrated, too, in consequence of my re-evaluation of pre-modern nationalism as a discourse dominated by scholarly elites. To quote from the book again:

Most modernist theories understand nationalism as a mass phenomenon and are principally devoted to the question of how it could have become widespread. As legitimate as this is, I do not think the criterion of nationalism's mass appeal is particularly helpful to understand the historical development of nations. It might be more instructive to use nationalists' proximity to power as a leading benchmark. My point is that nationalists always spoke and acted in the name of the people but often did not need popular support to reach their goals. Even those nationalist movements which led to the foundation of nation states both in Europe and on other continents were predominantly carried out by elite minorities, who sometimes comprised a very small number of people. (pp. 15-16)

So while mass appeal can be a useful criterion to distinguish modern from pre-modern nationalism, it may be more important still to emphasise that while pre-modern nationalists had limited access to power and only rare opportunities to influence politics according to their desires, modern nationalists managed – often after long and fierce battles – to establish themselves in the centres of power permanently.

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Having discussed the issue of anachronism at great length, the two other cardinal sins I am allegedly guilty of can be dealt with more swiftly. As to

the 'straightforward linear trajectory', Leerssen is satisfied with a single sentence from my book to make his point:

Even if the *nationes* at medieval universities had not much in common with later nations, they marked an important step towards them. (pp. 80)

This sentence is indeed typical of a book such as mine, but for other reasons than Leerssen claims. If a book covers a time span of more than 1500 years, it needs an overarching narrative to hold the historical analysis of different periods and places together. In my case this narrative is concerned with the long-term process that made the nation possible. So when treating a particular moment of historical change within this process one always has to do two things: analyse the particular reasons for this change and integrate the results into the bigger picture. Otherwise, the book could not be more than the sum of its parts. This is the purpose of the sentence quoted by Leerssen. If he still thinks that speaking of 'an important step towards' something is proof enough of a 'straightforward linear trajectory' then he should be reminded that one can always take a step back or to the side or detour completely. In fact, my book contains several such non-linear movements, and even a glance at a chapter title such as 'From earth to heaven and back: the Middle Ages' would suffice to recognize this. To give another example from the conclusion, this time with reference to the early modern period:

In the previous chapter, I described the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as a time largely dominated by religious fundamentalism. My argument was that after Renaissance humanists had introduced the concept of autonomous nations engaged in a multipolar competition between equals, the Reformation quickly re-established a bipolar and unequal system, which separated believers from infidels, saved from damned. (p. 213)

Given such passages, Leerssen's accusation of a 'straightforward linear trajectory' looks like an attempt to throw mud at the wall in the hope that some of it will stick.

The same can be said about his accusation that I explain important events ‘monocausally’. Here, it is not even clear what he is referring to. I suspect it stems from my analysis of the Council of Constance, which Leerssen treats as the centrepiece of my book, even though it represents just one important transformation among many. The leading argument about the Council is that during its power struggles we can observe how ‘nationes’ turned from ‘concrete corporations’ into ‘abstract communities’ of honour for the first time. This is not exactly a causal, let alone a monocausal argument. I never suggest that the Council was the cause of nations as we know them, and neither do I claim that the new understanding of ‘natio’ replaced or even eradicated older ones. The question guiding my argument is, if you will, a Kantian one: what was the condition allowing for the possibility of nations as abstract communities of honour? The question actually helps to avoid simple cause-and-effect arguments, and the answers given are formulated accordingly:

This match of words [i.e. ‘natio inclita’ or ‘honor nationum’] only became possible through the medieval labelling of certain corporations as *nationes*. And with the new understanding of *nationes* as representative bodies and the subsequent blend of *nationes principales* and *particulares* at Constance, the collective honour of a corporation was able to flow into an abstract community that transcended the barriers of the medieval society of orders. (p. 87)

You need a lot of imagination to read a monocausal explanation into this. Expressions such as ‘became possible’ and ‘was able to’ are clearly not made for statements of cause and effect.

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Looking at Leerssen’s review in total, I cannot help but deplore a missed opportunity for a good debate. At the same time, I think it was important to respond to his sweeping charges and his pre-print, back-channel propaganda. It is one thing accepting criticism, but it is a different matter when serious academic debate is undermined to preclude unwelcome competition. The purpose of my refutation is to encourage all those

nationalism scholars who are not yet familiar with my book to read it and form an opinion of their own. The book clearly wants to provoke, but I believe it merits a higher level of debate than the one launched by Leerssen.

It seems particularly ironic to me that Leerssen fashions his criticism as a defence of serious historical scholarship but violates basic scholarly standards in several regards. He makes heavy accusations without producing solid proof, is guilty of charges he raises against me, speaks at length about men who do not appear in my book, while failing to spell one of its prominent figures, Hutten, correctly, and he misreads a simple definition just to score a cheap point.

In the end, the duck-dictum rebounds on Joep Leerssen, but in a more solid and sophisticated version than the one he invents. A few years ago, the historian of science Steven Shapin ended a review about a book on pseudo-science with the following observation: 'A rule of thumb for sound inference has always been that if it looks like a duck, swims like a duck and quacks like a duck, then it probably is a duck. But there's a corollary: if it struts around the barnyard loudly protesting that it's a duck, that it possesses the very essence of duckness, that it's more authentically a duck than all those other orange-billed, web-footed, swimming fowl, then you've got a right to be suspicious: this duck may be a quack.' Nobody doubts that Joep Leerssen is a serious historian, given his impressive publication record. If we had just this one review, though, we could not be so sure.

5. Response to Caspar Hirschi (Joep Leerssen)

My review seems to have annoyed Caspar Hirschi for a great many reasons – the indiscretions of third-party-readers (apparently engineered by me as 'back-channel propaganda', no less); clumsy metaphors and flippant analogies; and a fundamental failure to properly appreciate or understand his book, either as a result of wilful prejudice or of plain obtuseness on my

part. In his wrath he seems to have overlooked or dismissed the sincerely-felt appreciation that was also expressed, repeatedly, in that review – indeed, if I had found his book as disagreeable as he appears to think I do, I would not have bothered reviewing it.

While I cannot be expected to apologise for anything and everything that happens to annoy Hirschi – most of all the fact that he fails to convince me –, let me at the outset unreservedly state my regret at any phraseology that may have galled him. My analogies and metaphors were meant to identify, with short-hand brevity and while avoiding ponderous abstractions, a general and abstract problematic; not to mock his book or snipe at it. I would be grateful if we could enter into a measured debate on the substance, rather than a heated polemic on the style, of our disagreement. I am sure that he will, by and by, of his own accord, come to regret his vehemence.

That being said, I find that my main objections to his book still stand as I put them in my review, notwithstanding Hirschi's response, which was mainly in the mode of angry counter-accusation. So let me recapitulate and explain myself. I will avoid metaphors or analogies this time, since that appears to provoke Hirschi's temper.

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Caspar Hirschi makes his anti-modernist case, throughout the book, by dint of insistent, anachronistic labeling. Ticking me off for not being so perfect myself in avoiding anachronistic terminology does not make that go away; at least I do not rear entire 1500-year surveys on the principle. (If I apply the idea of democratic primitivism to the discourse of the Tacitus reception, I do so with anything but the cheerful insouciance that I had accused Hirschi of, and which he now seeks to turn back on me.⁵)

⁵ For the record, I relied for my use of those concepts on the classic study by A.O. Lovejoy and Franz Boas, *Primitivism and related ideas in antiquity* (which I can heartily recommend to Hirschi) and had argued its applicability to the early-modern context in a 1995 article in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* ('Wildness, wilderness and Ireland: Patterns in the early-modern demarcation of civility').

True, the author concedes (to give an example) that ‘there were no nationalists walking the streets of Rome’ (p. 50), but in the thirteen pages that follow (on ancient Rome and Cicero), the words ‘patriot’, ‘patriotic’ and ‘patriotism’ (all of them of late-medieval or later vintage) are flung around with reckless abandon – no less than sixty-eight times (I may have missed one or two). His own terminological definition of that term and its attendant discourse is elastic; at times patriotism seems to mean no more than the high-minded integrity of patriarchically-minded state officials (in which case it might be applied as much to Confucius as to Cicero); at other times it is linked to an attachment to the *patria* – which, instead of explaining his use of the word ‘patriot’, leads us from one semantic quagmire into another: *patria* shifts from the polity into which one is born to a cosy *Heimatgefühl*. All that is collapsed into the latter-day ‘patriotic’ lexeme, used insistently so as to inure the reader to its inappropriateness, and applied to ‘something’ for which the Romans themselves used a wide variety of quite different words. To be sure, Hirschi is perfectly right in arguing that the Ciceronian virtue of self-abnegating devotion to civic duties was, in early-modern and Enlightenment times, an honourable ideal for ‘Classical Republicans’ and Commonwealthmen. Indeed, it was as part of the early-modern Ciceronian revival (and no earlier) that post-Roman terms like ‘patriot’ and its derivatives gained their political meaning. Zera Fink made the case in a 1962 classic book, as did (for the 18th century) Caroline Robbins, Franco Venturi and Maurizio Viroli.⁶ To identify this republican, Enlightenment usage was a necessary historical enterprise, not just a modernist ploy to play off ‘good’ patriotism against ‘bad’ nationalism, as Dr Hirschi suspects; it was a necessary historical enterprise because that is what historians do: describing how, and

⁶ I have addressed the issue at greater length in my two books on Irish history (*Mere Irish and Fíor-Ghael* and *Remembrance and Imagination*), where the transition from patriotism to nationalism is historically analysed with reference to Fink, Robbins, Viroli, Venturi and others, and a large corpus of Irish and British sources in English and Gaelic. The reader will find that, contrary to what Hirschi sees fit to impute, the distinction between the two ideologies is by no means made for merely moralistic reasons.

analysing why, periods differ from one century to another. For the same reason, the entire historiography on the history of patriotism and Enlightenment republicanism (which was carried and brought to fruition by historians miles removed from the entire Modernism debate) started from the fundamental caveat that the meaning of the word changed drastically between its classical references, its historical deployment and its current usage nowadays. Indeed, the entire specialism of *Begriffsgeschichte* arose from such concerns, and *Begriffsgeschichte* was first and foremost applied to the history of political concepts like Freedom, Citizen and Fatherland. No lexical homophony could link the ethos of the Roman *pater patriae* to that of George W. Bush's 'Patriot Act'. Yet Dr Hirschi displays utter insouciance for such pitfalls, and indeed actively courts anachronism. Witness a statement like this: 'Fashioning themselves as defending patriots, the Romans conquered the whole Mediterranean area and most of Western Europe, and, to give just the most recent example, the Americas and British have invaded Iraq' (p. 61).

As with Roman 'patriotism', so too with late-medieval and early-modern 'nationalism', or 'humanist nationalism' (as the entire chapter 7 is called). Let us get this straight: our starting point in the understanding of nationalism must be what that word meant, and means, to those who have actually used it; and it was not used *by anyone* before 1800, let alone before 1600. In its own, proper usage, which is part and parcel of how the word has reached all of us and has made itself available to us, it is predicated on a combination of three things (which I here allow myself to summarise in latter-day analytical terms, without anachronism, because nationalism, the word and the thing, is still with us). They are: 1) popular sovereignty, 2) the modular territorialisation of culture (meaning that nation-states are mutually demarcated by the geographical faultlines of cultural differentiation, and internally bonded by a single shared culture), and 3) the historicism that traces the nation-state's citizenry from a shared descent, held together transgenerationally by a shared culture. Let Dr Hirschi take note that nothing in this definition is contentious, or inspired by moralistic disapproval of an alleged Modernist. Indeed, this is also how Dr Hirschi himself uses the word. He does not apply it randomly, but to a very specific set of discourses exhibiting some resemblance to

these intrinsic characteristics, as listed above, of the 19th-century ideology that provided the name.

Even so, Dr Hirschi claims the right to use the word nationalism (like patriotism) loosely and a-historically, and is somewhat impatient with those of us who prefer to keep our terminology specific (for all that we may occasionally stumble in the attempt). What he calls 'nationalism' is in fact 'whatever happens to remind him of nationalism'. The word, thus hijacked from its original context and emptied of its concrete signification, is used as a lens for a variable bandwidth of political assumptions and discourses, what he calls an ongoing 'bricolage' of bits and pieces which were assembled and reassembled in successive periods. Indeed I like the idea of the ongoing process, and of the *bricolage*; Dr Hirschi and I are not so far removed from each other in that view. But presenting that bricolage a priori by the specific name of the political doctrine that it morphed into after 1800, is not just anachronistic. More than that, it is finalistic (studying history only in terms of what it gave rise to). More than that, it is a massive *petitio principii*, an exercise in circular reasoning. Dr Hirschi reduces the real thing, the 19th-century political doctrine which is actually, properly called nationalism, *sensu stricto*, to a mere continuation of the *bricolage* enterprise *lato sensu*. Thus, under the header proclaiming 'The limited originality of Romantic nationalism' Leibniz, Herder, Fichte and Grimm are all name-checked as mere variations on an ongoing theme in just two pages (116-117); on p. 159, we leapfrog within a dozen lines from Einhard, Hrotsvitha, Conrad Celtis and Trithemius to Görres and Friedrich Schlegel. So 19th-century nationalism, minus its ideological substance, furnishes its mere name as an floating signifier to whatever happened to resemble it centuries earlier, and this is then supposed to offer 'a new understanding of the historical origins of nationalism' (as the opening sentence proclaims). Time and again, this procedure is applied. A fair number of admittedly intriguing examples is presented, which are asserted to be characteristic of the 'nationalistically'-minded discourse of an entire century or country; and then some analogous latter-day examples are sketchily invoked to prove the operative persistence of that mind-set beyond 1800. But one cannot but help wondering if the original examples were not selected because of their amenable resemblance to

later, nationalistic analogies. Confirmation bias is not something that seems to worry Dr Hirschi; and he is not averse to foreclosing his own argument by presenting his older historical materials from the outset in phraseological constructions such as 'humanist nationalism'.

Dr Hirschi concedes (p. 119) that the combination humanism/nationalism may strike some of us as an oxymoron, as indeed it does. Not because of the moral connotations of humanism which he then pursues, irrelevantly, but because it juxtaposes currents anchored in widely different centuries. I warrant that even Dr Hirschi would not dream of calling 19th-century figures like Fichte or Treitschke 'humanists'; why then is he so eager to commit the anachronism in the opposite direction? To claim that humanists were nationalists bespeaks a belief (stated explicitly in Dr Hirschi's rebuttal) that the nationalist ideology pre-existed the moment of its articulation, and is therefore exempt from the risk of anachronism; which means that, rather than viewing the ideology historically, one has bought into the ideology's own view of history. Nationalism itself, centrally anchored as it is in historicism and the transgenerational persistence of the nation, by definition believes the nation to be categorical and ontologically autonomous; not a by-product of history, but a transhistorical informing presence. Refusing to admit the possibility that such a belief is in itself a historically generated phenomenon is what I mean by 'buying into the ideology's view of history'. And that is not just a rigid adherence to 'linguistic conventions within history writing' on my part, but a serious shortcoming of Dr Hirschi's scholarship, and for two reasons. (Quite apart from the fact that it tends to make us heedless of the contradictions that the past consists of, within a given period as well as between periods.)

To begin with, the argument of occasional resemblance is specious. The ideology identified, and self-identifying, as nationalism was more than just the co-presence of the characteristic elements summed up above (popular sovereignty, territorialisation of culture, ethnocultural historicism) – indeed, any of those elements could by itself also form part of widely different ideologies, such as communism or racism. What identifies nationalism as such is the structural combination of those elements into a system of thought. That is what makes nationalism more than just an

attitude, makes it an ideology (an explanation of the world, a value-system, and a mobilising programme for political action). The historical presence or even co-presence of the separate elements before 1800 is not tantamount to proving the fact that they were already meshed into that ideological combination. In the bricolage, the same materials are recycled over and over again. But we cannot call that entire process by the name of the assemblage into which the materials happened to get constructed in the 19th century. You cannot be finalistic about bricolage.

The other shortcoming is that buying into the ideology we study makes us partial, and partisan. How that partiality colours Dr Hirschi's historical argument, I will indicate further down; for now let me point out that it seduces him into a failure to engage properly with the work of anyone whom he happens to disagree with. I am flattered to see my own name, 'quack' though I apparently am, lumped together with other victims of Dr Hirschi's irate dismissal: Ernest Gellner and Jürgen Habermas. I, and they, and 'modernists' in general, seem (so he imputes) to be driven exclusively by a moralistic disapproval of nationalism, arguing their case with 'judgmental language' (amusing, that, coming from him), and delivering, in the end, 'moral tales' from 'study-room daydreams'. 'Why should a history of nations and nationalism written by a nationalist be a more partisan enterprise than one by an internationalist?', Dr Hirschi asks in his introduction to his book (p. 17); as well he might. I can think of a reason or two. Identifying with the ideology one studies might seduce one into mistaking agreement for truth, disagreement for falsity, temporal phenomena for timeless conditions. It might even render one short-tempered with dissenting opinions. Be that as it may, Dr Hirschi's antagonism opens up an intriguing perspective beyond his polemic: the ingrained opposition between primordialists and modernists probably correlates strongly with those sympathetic to nationalism or critical of it. Anti-nationalists may be predisposed to argue the modernist case from a need to debunk the ideology, while the primordialist case may be more congenial to those who feel the attractive power of nationalism's invocation of the nation's long-standing traditions and ethnic continuities.

Where, so Dr Hirschi challenges me, can I demonstrate that his analysis of the sources is actually vitiated by what I denounce as an anachronistic

framing of them? I have already mentioned the phraseological loading of the dice, and the fact that he conflates the ideological system with its constituent ingredients. But the question stands, and deserves a serious response. I wish to state at the outset that I have no quarrel with the various data and documents which Dr Hirschi presents. It is the framing of the sources, not the sources themselves, that is the problem: not the dots, but the way he chooses to connect them.

Within the historical survey, there is a problematic conflation of state-formation, nation-formation and the growth of nationalism as processes that all happened conjointly. ('This book offers a new understanding of the historical origins of nationalism, combined with an explanation of the initial formation of European nations', p. 1). I can go along with an explanation of state formation from the late-medieval '[chronic failure of] would-be empires stuck in a battle to keep each other at bay' (p. 2); but folded into that agenda is a claim that the discourses involved in state formation in the same process also formed nations, and that is much, much more problematic – not just for lexical reasons. Many 'national' self-definitions were not formed until well after 1600 or even 1800 (most recently: Bulgarian, Estonian, Latvian, Belgian, Walloon), and many of the 'nations' that were formed between 1400 and 1600 were historical dead-ends, later subsumed into larger states and/or wholly different self-defining national entities. Yes, language was used as an argument in inter-state rivalry and the denunciation of wicked foreigners; but we hear nothing from Dr Hirschi about the accommodation of linguistic differences in bi- or multilingual regimes (Wales under the Tudors; the Basque *fueros*; Hungary; Burgundy⁷). Bricolage or no bricolage: things that do not fit Dr

⁷ Each of these is the subject of a respectable body of historical analysis. As regards the case of the Burgundian Duchy of Brabant, I mention my own 'Medieval heteronomy, modern nationalism: Language assertion between Liège and Maastricht, 14th-20th century', in: *Revue belge d'histoire contemporaine*, 34 (2004) 581-593. Hirschi had access to it: it is recapitulated as an appendix in *National thought in Europe*, the book which in his response he chides for endorsing something as feeble-minded as civic patriotism.

Hirschi's case do not make it into his book; as he presents them, state-formation and nation-formation are both straightforward, concurrent and interlinked processes. Historians who have argued differently are, after a wholesale denunciation of 'the Modernists' in the introduction, simply ignored. The book is back-handed in suggesting, yet not providing, a cut-off date: the subtitle leads us to early modern Germany, but the stated aim to disprove the Modernists means that time and again shortcuts are indicated to later centuries. Shifting meanings of key concepts like 'nation', 'honour' and 'freedom' are registered only in passing, if at all. The turbulences of post-1600 history hardly seem to matter: social shifts from an aristocratic to a bourgeois ethos and the rise of a public sphere and print media; intellectual shifts such as the decline of the Biblical explanation of the antiquity of nations, the rise of historicism, a new philosophy of language, the 'vernacular turn' in the human sciences and the state-organised overhaul of cultural institutions. None of this is allowed to have seriously affected the post-medieval, convergent developmental trajectory towards that nationalism-in-general whose 'historical origins' are being presented. History between 1600 and 1800 simply does not matter. Just more bricolage.

But it cannot be my role to explain the importance of entire bodies of relevant historiography (Arno Borst, Patrick Geary, Walter Pohl, Ian Wood, the Koselleck of the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* and the *Sattelzeit*) to Dr Hirschi at this point, much as his work might profit from actually engaging with it.⁸ I merely needed to restate these strictures because Dr Hirschi's rebuttal did not address them. That being done, let me now try and reboot the discussion. I want first to point out where I believe Dr Hirschi and I share common ground.

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⁸ Hirschi is certainly aware of the work of these prominent experts; but they are all omitted from his bibliography, which by his own admission selects only 'titles upon which I based an argument, relied on for information or commented on explicitly' (xii). A non-mention does therefore not indicate ignorance, but it does indicate a lack of engagement.

Dr Hirschi and I both would wish to see the history of nationalism liberated from the constraints of a modernist approach which discountenances any development antedating the Democratic Revolutions and the invention of the steam engine. Chronologically, such modernism is an artificial truncation of our historical field of vision; thematically, it tends to reduce the rise of nationalism to a mere ideological by-product of socio-economic changes, writing intellectual and cultural traditions out of the analysis. Like Dr Hirschi, I believe that nationalism cannot be understood without taking into account the tradition of intellectual and discursive reflection which informed it. Early-modern anti-absolutism and Enlightenment patriotism cannot be understood without the abiding influence of Ciceronian thought; the belief in nations' characterological individualities cannot be understood without a long, mediievally-rooted tradition of self/other-stereotyping; the German invocation of Arminius, or the Dutch one of Civilis, or even the British one of Caractacus and Boudicca, cannot be understood without the 15th-century rediscovery of Tacitus. I argued as much in my book *National thought in Europe*, which indeed Dr Hirschi seems to have picked some cherries from (though his source references are inconclusive and he misspells my name in the bibliography).

Moreover, city cultures and the aristocratic honour code both provide remarkable anticipations of what later would become nationalism; I have no hesitation in endorsing Dr Hirschi's analysis on that score. As regards the former: the city cults of *homines illustri*, the tendency for cities to adopt an 'SPQR' ideal of civic governance, can be traced back to the late Middle Ages, indeed to Humanism; cities also cherished an 'institutional memory' and a historical self-cultivation (e.g. in the form of city academies, or festivals from the Siennese Palio to the Floral Games of Toulouse) which would provide models for the nineteenth-century nation-state. As regards the latter: the dedication to maintaining one's status amidst others equally intent on maintaining their status provides a powerful linkage between the ideals of independence and honour. In state formation, the emergence of a monarch claiming a violence-monopoly amidst his feudal nobles (and cities) is an important element in state formation and the consolidation of agreed frontiers. The restored monarchies of post-Napoleonic Europe

would fall back on this heritage in the form of an intense dynastic historicism. (Disaffected ethnic minorities would, conversely, fall back on the democratic message of 1789; while in 'reduced former realms' such as Catalonia, Scotland, Poland, Bohemia and Hungary, both elements could be combined: Romantic/chivalric historicism and modern popular sovereignty.)

Nationalism studies has much to learn from work like Dr Hirschi's, mapping the pre-1800 source traditions which nationalism would later fall back on. But in thus presenting the common ground which I believe to be shared by him and myself (the ground covered by Hirschi in his excellent *Wettkampf der Nationen*, now so pitifully pressed into the service of anti-Modernism), I have, as the reader may have noted, avoided presenting the older cultural traditions as the 'origin' of their later nationalist instrumentalisation. The continuity is there, and needs to be factored in; but not, I believe, in the way that Dr Hirschi is prone to.

Here, I think, lies the core of our disagreement, such as it is. On the basis of the common ground outlined above, I would hope that a sustained debate on that point may yet inspire new insights; it may also (if we manage to keep our temper) bring us beyond the entrenchment of the anti/Modernism debate. We shall probably never agree on the *terminus a quo* of something we can meaningfully call nationalism. But I look forward to Dr Hirschi's response to what follows.

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What my review was trying to get at is a principle which underlies and informs Dr Hirschi's book – and indeed a great deal of historiography: the default assumption that traditions and causal continuities move downstream on the river of time, from the past towards the present, rather than upstream. Causes explain effects, not the other way around; right? Thus, when we wonder what 'caused' important historical phenomena or events, we construe those from the outset as an 'effect', and outcome of some run-up or other, which we can explain by retracing that run-up: its causal antecedents. *Rerum cognoscere causas*.

But that single straightforward line of from then (*causa*) towards later (*res*), is by no means the whole story. Many other lines of development fanned out from the 14-16th century; many other lines converged from different parts of the past to create modern nationalism and to make that ideology popular. Much as historians ought never to be monocausal in their explanation of events, so too they ought never to be ‘mono-effectual’, to trace the afterlives of a given phenomenon in one preconceived direction only. Singling out the simple then-to-later analogy reduces the intervening changes, contradictions, dead-ends and happenstance emergences of history into the blithe, anthropological assertion ‘that’s just how it has always been’, from Carthage to Iraq.

Let me give a neutral, non-Hirschi example. Dutch nationalism intensely identifies with the early-modern revolt against Spanish rule, under William ‘the Silent’ of Orange, *pater patriae*. Rebel songs of late-16th-century vintage denouncing the foreign tyrant and asserting the readiness of the Netherlands to defend their liberty in arms were sung in the 19th and 20th centuries with a sense of unreserved identification; they were even sung as a sign of resistance against the Nazi occupation (and, Dr Hirschi, I am prouder of that than you would allow me to be). But the historian ought to take a longer, harder look than the patriot. What such a patriotic re-singing of Dutch songs like *O Nederland, let op Uw saeck* marginalises is the overwhelming rhetorical prominence of religious argument: these are Protestant songs, about Protestant liberties, as much as they are songs in the Dutch language about political liberties in the Low Countries. Also, such political fellow-feeling as the song expresses is not necessarily a national one in the sense that the term has nowadays: political liberties at the time were primarily vested in cities and provinces – for which the term ‘Nederland’ in the parlance of those times was a mere container term. The Low Countries which are vindicated against a foreign tyranny were an open-boundaried agglomeration of cities and provinces resisting taxations and the Inquisition imposed by the Spanish monarch. Some of these were successful in their religious-cum-fiscal resistance, others (like Antwerp, Breda, Brussels and Gent) not. The successful ones became, ultimately and after many constitutional and territorial vicissitudes, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, where, after Napoleon and

the onset of modernity, a state-driven nation-building process was implemented, among a population consisting for 40% of Roman Catholics. In other words, the line from the 16th-century song to modern Dutch nationalism, from its anti-Inquisition to its anti-Nazi functionality, is there, but it is wobbly, hatched and crisscrossed by other lines and (dis)continuities. And it strikes me that the wobbles, the vicissitudes and shifts in meaning and function, should be the historian's proper challenge; something that is ill served by blanket statements to the effect that 'it was ever thus'. To be content with highlighting the analogies and similarities between the then and the now means to block the complexities of history from our view; to trace 'the' origins of Dutch nationalism to the 16th century Low Countries would prevent us from registering the impact of Herder, Rousseau, Napoleon, Romanticism and German nationalism.

What does this amount to? It is not to disprove the idea of pre-1800 origins of nationalism once and for all; that would be to prove a negative anyway. What it does mean is that, as I see it, Dr Hirschi could do either of two things. One is to face a much heavier burden of proof than he has admitted so far, showing that the intellectual similarities and discursive self-perpetuations of the period 1500-1850 indeed add up to a continuity and outweigh the massive discontinuities of those centuries. He would also have to convince readers like me that the early presence of the later ideology's elements was not *singulatim* but already in a structural and ideological linkage, and related to the country rather than to a city or a class.

Alternatively (and this is where I said before that the book would make perfect sense to all readers, including me) Dr Hirschi could reconsider the terms in which he presents historical causality, and take seriously his notion of *bricolage* – as a truly open-ended, not a teleological process. Merely asserting that there are typological similarities between early-modern and post-1800 types of discourse is not enough to prove the case that the former generated the latter. Would we not be on much firmer ground if we argued that the earlier discourses provided later nationalist bricoleurs with a repertoire? I do not suggest this as a mere reiteration of the tired and unjustly dismissive 'invention of tradition' formula, but rather with Paul Valéry's dictum in mind that 'we walk into the future

backwards', moving to an unseen future with our eyes on the past. Would it not make much more sense to trace *retrospective continuities* – humanists and Classical Republicans making use of Cicero and Tacitus, Romantics making use of that earlier usage and of the Middle Ages? That would indeed address the open-ended process of bricolage which Dr Hirschi claims to be his concern. I am unconvinced that the 'origins' surveyed by Dr Hirschi generated 'nationalism'. But we may profit enormously from his book if it were offered to the reader, not as a case against modernism, but as an analysis of the cumulative memory-repertoire of nationalists.