

CONSIDERATIONS ON THE SCOTTISH REFERENDUM AND A DISCOURSE ON THE BRITISH CONUNDRUM: MILL, PRICE AND THE QUESTION OF NATIONALISM

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Abstract The recent referendum on Scottish independence was characterised by a failing on behalf of the *Better Together* campaign to articulate a positive vision and conception of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. In particular, any persuasive notion of Britishness was notable by its absence. This paper attempts to shed light on the question of nationalism, in the British context in particular, by turning to the history of political thought, and the philosophical reflections of two British liberals, Richard Price and John Stuart Mill. Their ideas are set out with reference to the civic/ethnic distinction and two main claims are presented. The first is that despite Price's emphasis on a civic patriotism and Mill's embracing of many elements of ethnic nationalism, both their accounts ultimately cohere around the centrality of a "national history". Empirical doubts about the sustainability of the civic/ethnic divide are here reflected in philosophical discussions of nationalism. The second claim is that Price and Mill's account draw attention to the historical difficulty of constructing a persuasive British nationality whilst simultaneously suggesting the only obvious prospect for its successful reconfiguration, namely the articulation of a genuinely British national history.

Keywords Scottish Referendum, British Nationalism, Richard Price, J. S. Mill, civic, ethnic

Introduction

In reflecting on the events of the recent Scottish referendum, one of the

most interesting aspects of the preceding debate was the problem faced by those campaigning for the Union, in trying to articulate a national, British identity to

inspire the electorate and foster a sense of togetherness so central to their message. This question of British identity has become far more difficult in recent years since the establishment of devolved government in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as these nations – and latterly the English – have cultivated a greater sense of political difference (Jones et al., 2012). Today data indicate that only roughly one in five British citizens identify themselves as British first, whilst almost three in five identify themselves as English, Northern Irish, Scottish, or Welsh first – and a not insignificant minority reject the British identity altogether (Easton, 2014). It is arguable that the inability of the major parties to adjust their ideas about Britain has cost them dear. The Labour Party is perhaps most guilty of this in clinging to the remnants of a collective working class identity, which they have tried to reframe for a post-industrial society, under the banner of “One Nation” (Smith and Reeves, 2014).

It is an open question whether the *Better Together* campaign would have been advised to attempt a recalibration of a united British identity highlighting shared culture and values, or instead dispense with this narrative and attempt a more dispersed idea bringing four nations together under a notion of thin civic Britishness. For the most part it appeared that the leading forces were oblivious to this conundrum, or preferred to ignore it (Stanley, 2014). This is a shame in more than one sense, and from the perspective of political theory and the history of political thought there is certainly no shortage of discussion and debate that can inform such questions.

In this paper I will look to two of the most brilliant liberal thinkers that the Union has produced. The first needs no

introduction. John Stuart Mill is perhaps most renowned for his famous tract, *On Liberty* (Mill, 1989) in which he extols the virtues of free speech and other basic freedoms. It is worth recalling two particular, perhaps obvious points, with regard to our subsequent discussion. First is that his liberalism is, of course, grounded upon a far reaching utilitarianism that separates him from more thoroughgoing libertarians. His emphasis on maximizing the general happiness leads him to extol the virtues of higher pleasures and some more perfectionist – some might venture authoritarian – elements emerge in his thought.¹ The second point of note is that Mill was of Scottish heritage, son of Angus-born James Mill, and represented the Anglo-Scottish tradition that had been at the vanguard of the new union since its inception in 1707. This will be of no small interest and significance in discussing his general ideas about nationality, and in particular the constitution of British nationality.

The second character represents an equally impressive mind, striking in the breadth of his interests – yet heremains far more obscure in terms of the recognition he receives today. In fact, it is unlikely that the average student of political philosophy will know the name. I refer to one Richard Price, a philosopher, theologian, political thinker and statistician who is perhaps most famous, or infamous, for his role in sparking the Revolutionary Controversy.² For Richard Price is the Dr Price that Edmund Burke (2014) responds to in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*. The ire with which Burke sets about his adversary is perhaps

¹ See, for example, Joseph Hamburger, 1999.

² On the controversy, see for example, Butler, 1984.

one reason for his lost legacy, Price being the representative of an increasingly influential group of dissenters and radicals that Burke so loathed and wished to put in their place (Dreyer, 1978: 465).

Price was in fact a product of the puritan tradition, which had taken root in his native Wales following the Civil War and with the personal support of the Lord Governor Oliver Cromwell. However, he soon became influenced by the more radical, Arminian and Arian teachings of some of the early figures in the burgeoning Welsh non-conformist tradition – a radicalism that would come to typify his later political thought (Thomas, 1977: 8). With the death of his parents and dispersal of his nuclear family he followed his uncle to London where he completed his training and took a post as a family chaplain. Here he embarked on his theological writings and work on moral philosophy that would bring him to fame, his *Review* (Price, 2011) published in 1758 responding directly to the empiricism of Francis Hutcheson and David Hume. In the eyes of many his moral rationalism foreshadowed Kant, and even the ethics of 20th century philosopher G. E. Moore (Gealy, 1991: 143).

Although disinclined towards public debate and fame, Price – by now the minister at the famous Newington Green Chapel where he inspired the likes of Mary Wollstonecraft³ – found himself unable to resist what he considered to be God's calling and his personal duty to intervene in public affairs (Thomas, 1971). He soon wrote influential tracts on demography and finance, influencing policy on the national debt and establishing fundamental principles of calculation for

the insurance industry. His two most famous interventions in the world of politics came in relation to the American War of Independence and the French Revolution, both of which he supported wholeheartedly. His pamphlet *Observations* (1991) provided moral justification and unstinting support for the colonists and sold over 100,000 copies. He was a close friend of Benjamin Franklin and associate of other leading Americans, and his works were celebrated on the other side of the Atlantic, where he turned down an invitation to assist in the financial administration of the states, and received his honorary doctorate alongside George Washington from Yale in 1781. Arguably he remains better known outside the UK.⁴

Shortly before his death came his most famous act, as he preached a sermon (that would later be published) entitled *A Discourse on the Love of our Country*. In this address he interpreted the French Revolution as a continuation of the same millenarian process started by the Glorious Revolution of 1688 – taking mankind a step closer to a universal, cosmopolitan order that would be divested of national chauvinism and would spread enlightenment and freedom. Contained within this sermon is also an account of patriotism that can be considered a historical exemplar of what modern day political theorists refer to as civic nationalism, and it is this account that will be assessed in the following pages. Mill's own account of nationality in the context of his thought on representative government will be considered

³ See Allardyce, 2008 for a history of this remarkable institution and environs.

⁴ While D. O. Thomas is the one British author to have written prolifically on Richard Price in recent decades, academic interest seems to lie largely elsewhere. See for example, Carl Cone, 2014; Jack Fruchtman, 1983; Martha K. Zebrowski, 1994; Rémy Duthille, 2012.

as a foil, in particular because of the elements that pertain more obviously to what is described today as ethnic nationalism.

An overarching motivation for this work is precisely to engage in a historical approach towards the question of British nationalism that provides intriguing insights into the contemporary debate (or lack thereof). The paper will have a dual purpose inasmuch as this largely theoretical discussion will also infer what implications there are for understanding those troublesome concepts of civic and ethnic nationalism – a distinction which has more recently been fundamentally questioned in practical terms by the likes of Taras Kuzio (2002). Here it will be claimed that an analysis of their two differing accounts demonstrates that despite very different aims and values – which prefigure the civic and ethnic concepts to a great degree – there is one key element that unifies their ideas. Whilst Price and Mill draw on very different principles and concepts in articulating their concepts of patriotism and nationality respectively, they ultimately overlap in their reliance on a historical narrative for unifying the nation. Whilst Kuzio suggests a false dichotomy in an empirical sense, the suggestion here is that theoretical conceptions – that may first appear to exemplify the distinction – ultimately point to the suggestion that separating forms of nationalism along such strict lines may be misguided. Civic notions of nationalism require a history to create a more substantial sense of belonging, whilst perspectives that emphasise the importance of ethnic factors (and other unifying elements of substantive identity) will have to embed them within an overarching narrative.

One final preliminary comment is offered as an attempt to negotiate the

slippage that occurs between different concepts in the following discussion and the fact that Price and Mill approach these concepts from differing starting points. When Price refers to the basis of the love of our country, I interpret this to mean that he is looking at the foundations for our identification with the nation state, and what exactly it is, or should be, which makes us take pride in it. In other words, and I hope I am not guilty of a slight of hand here, whilst using the term patriotism he is specifically tackling the question of the grounds for nationalism – where nationalism is interpreted as the feeling of being proud and loyal to one's country. Mill takes on the question of nationality, not through asking the same direct question of what *should* constitute our nationalism, but rather by taking a more sociological approach and identifying what constitutes a functional sense of nationalism that underpins representative government. As Georgios Varouxakis (2008) suggests, it is not so much the case that Mill advocated nationalism, rather that he recognised the importance of nationality for people, and set about deducing what conditions would best allow it to be a handmaiden for representative government.

Despite the differences in approach and their divergent aims, Price and Mill's discussion certainly speak to more recent discussions of civic and ethnic nationalism, which concentrate on the nature of the relationship between the individual and their nation-state, and how it underpins their allegiance to the state. In this sense it appears very close to the idea of patriotism, even if in these more cerebral days we do not necessarily think it necessary to *love* one's country. Certainly this notion of nationalism is closer to patriotism in the sense that neither Price or Mill wish to express the aggress-

sive idea of nationalism that is often associated with the word, suggesting sentiments of superiority and aggression. Rather, in contemporary parlance I venture that Price is putting forward his ideal of civic nationalism, whilst Mill analyzes nationalism, with the resulting argument that elements of ethnicity are ultimately important in accounting for the ability of nationality to underpin the state.

Price and the Love of Our Country

We begin with some of the opening words of Richard Price's *Discourse on the Love of Our Country*. According to his initial statement, its purpose is,

to explain the duty we owe to our country, and the nature, foundation, and proper expressions of that love to it which we ought to cultivate (Price, 1989: 1-2)

In other words Price wishes to explain to us not only the duties we have to the nation, but more importantly – in terms of our theme – what the grounds and correct expression of our nationalism should be. To put the point in the form of a question: why should we and how should we express our feelings of nationalism?

He continues by noting that there are incorrect assumptions about the true foundations of this relationship, and he offers us a clear and uncomplicated expression of what we would today recognise as civic nationalism:

by our country is meant, in this case, not the soil or the spot of earth on which we happen to have been born, not the forests and fields, but that community of which we are members, or that body of companions and friends and kindred who are as-

sociated with us under the same constitution of government, protected by the same laws, and bound together by the same civil polity (Price, 1989: 2-3)

Price's warning therefore is not to fall into the trap of thinking that the nation is anything other than its citizens and their political institutions. He puts to one side any ideas about land – or for that matter, other significant characteristics often associated with nationality, such as race or language – as the foundation for the nation. From the outset he disregards ideas and concepts that have been fundamental to countless others – such as his compatriot J. R. Jones (1966), who articulates in the Herderian tradition an interpenetration between land, language and state. In Price's view, it is the state and only the state – its laws, its constitution, its government – that is required as the foundation for sustaining a people and their patriotism within their civic society.

Perhaps the first response to Price is to ask what is to ignite our enthusiasm and passion for our Country? Are the rather distant or abstract concepts such as the state, or rights, sufficient to ensure our loyalty? To ask these questions, however, would be to misunderstand what Price wishes to ask of us. He is trying to rationalise and regulate our powerful, passionate feelings in this context, and he goes on to note two other assumptions that we need to reconsider: that patriotism has become synonymous with seeing exceptional value in our own country, and that patriotism is about ambition and rivalry with others (and here we return to the apparent distinction between patriotism and nationalism alluded to earlier). Pride and ambition, in his view, are two of the factors that have led to the most horrific conse-

quences in terms of conflict, war and all the immoral events one associates with international politics. Patriotism must, therefore, be purified according to Price, and connected only with respect to our political institutions.

Supervenient on this interpretation of patriotism is a cosmopolitan, Christian ideal, reflected in Price's encouragement to consider ourselves in the first place as global citizens.⁵ Given the simple and straightforward manner in which he expresses this principle, it is easily forgotten or overlooked that the perspective he offers is truly radical. He says, "the noblest principle in our nature is the regard to general justice and that good-will which embraces all the world" (Price, 1989: 10) and insists that we limit our own benefit through consideration of this wider good. In basic terms Price urges the nations of the world and their citizens to invert the perspective of a Hobbesian anarchic system of eternal competition – and to uphold instead the ideal that places the interests of the international community first. It is important to keep in mind these far-reaching elements belonging to Price's cosmopolitanism with his talk of global citizenship, articulated as they were before the publication of Immanuel Kant's famous text, *Toward Perpetual Peace*, and suggesting an international system even more radically cosmopolitan than the Prussian philosopher's vision.

The interests of each country are to be constrained by these broader interests, and the interests of the nation as described by Price further undermine any notion of competitive patriotism – interests he describes as follows: "truth, virtue and liberty" (Price, 1989: 11). Truth

relates to information and the general enlightenment of humanity, and that which allows people to live good, Godly lives. Virtue therefore follows directly from knowledge of the truth, whilst freedom completes the trinity of objects of our patriotic zeal. With sentiments that foreshadow elements of Mill's message on liberty, Price argues that without freedom there is no way the truth can manifest itself, and for virtue to flourish. Furthermore, our duty to our country requires that we obey the law and magistrates – without this obedience there will be no foundation for our freedom or security. In this context, our respect and submission to the sovereign is not an expression of submission to the person of the monarch, but a recognition that he is the foremost servant of Society, and the embodiment of the values and institutions of the country.

What we have, therefore, in the case of Price's concept of patriotism is a perspective on the foundations of nationalism that looks beyond any unique and "indigenous" features of the country in question – such as the language or land. As stated previously, there is no place for a special pride or delight in the landscape of the country or its unique traditions, culture and language, nor for incorporating these elements as the glue that binds the population to each other. What Price does is to effectively empty the nation of any distinguishing features with regard to its foundations, and offers instead an institutional concept that can essentially be the same for each country. We should not feel love for our country because of its special features, rather because of its virtues that should be the ideal for all nations: institutions that protect individual freedoms and give a voice to the majority, and which pro-

⁵ On the theme of Cosmopolitanism in Enlightenment thought, see Schlereth, 1977.

mote enlightened, peaceful, and virtuous nations.

J. C. D. Clarke (2000) is in no doubt as to the radicalism of Price's ideas about patriotism and identity, especially with respect to the prevailing notions of nationalism within the United Kingdom at the time. He regards Price's arguments as an articulation of a new trend to try and extricate national identity from history. We will return to this point later in arguing that history in fact plays an important part for Price, but Clarke's argument is certainly plausible to the extent that there is a rejection of the traditional grounds for patriotism, whilst the greatest emphasis is placed upon the *future* and the opportunity for emancipating humanity:

The wide acceptance of assumptions about the ancient origins and long continuities of Englishness made it all the more sensational when a small number of men, especially in and after 1789, began systematically to reject them. For the enthusiastic admirers of the French Revolution, the past was something from which historical or philosophical enquiry should emancipate mankind; National identity, the identity of a particular state, was an illegitimate imposition on its people. Once this strait-jacket were removed, human nature would reassert its natural beneficence, led and guided by the *bien pensants* everywhere. In England, this universalising 'religion of humanity' was given classic expression by Richard Price (Clark, 2000: 233).

Clark goes on to note that

survival and final victory in the wars against Revolutionary and Napoleonic France meant that England never had Price's version of its national identity

dictated to it by its government. Englishmen were not compelled to disavow identity or continuity by the demands of any ahistorical or anti-historical ideology (Clark, 2000: 233).

His remarks are revealing in two respects. Firstly they suggest that Price's concept, clearly more civic in modern terms, failed to take root – at least at this stage in the history of the United Kingdom of Great Britain (as it was then, prior to the formal addition of Ireland).

Secondly the use of the names England and Englishmen implies another not insignificant aspect to the discussion: although England (which included Wales, which had been annexed in 1536) had joined Scotland to form the United Kingdom of Great Britain in 1707, it was common practice then – and remains common practice now in some quarters – to conflate England and Britain and Englishmen and Britons. This is suggestive of the fact that although the "country" which Price in 1789 is discussing was an amalgamation of three distinct peoples and two separate kingdoms, it was in fact the "ancient origins and long continuities" of the one predominant nation that was to become central to the national identity of that country (such developments hint at some of the underlying tensions in trying to forge a British identity that have dogged the referendum debate – a point we will return to in the concluding section).

Such considerations might also be construed as relevant in attempting to account for why Price, as a Welshman, was so forthcoming in his "sensational" rejection of this English narrative. Before coursing this particular hare, however, it is worth trying to bare out the point made by Clark with regard to the cosmopolitan nature of Price's thought

in accounting for why Price offers us a concept that is so civically “pure”. It would seem that his ideal of international politics and his hopes for a peaceful, federal cosmopolitan regime offer the most obvious reason for his ethically pure and restrained concept of nationalism. If this is the end point of his political philosophy then the need to hold a concept of nationalism that is essentially impartial makes obvious sense. From this perspective the state is a vehicle for the realization of equal rights for individuals within a global framework, and in this respect the distinguishing elements of nations are a secondary consideration at best.

This aspect of Price’s thought draws particular attention to the religious, Christian underpinnings of his worldview. Price’s work is interpreted by some as a typical example of millenarianism (Fruchtman 1983), with a philosophy of history that interprets the passage of time towards the new millennium as a path that leads inevitably towards the imitation of the divine order on earth. There is no denying a strong utopian bent to his thought, which was to be surpassed in secular form by the early socialists such as Fourier, Owen and Saint-Simon.⁶ One can read Price’s interpretation of his country’s recent travails, stretching back to the Glorious Revolution in 1688, through this understanding of history.

This interpretation is not only important because it exemplifies Price’s religious millenarianism and his utopian

cosmopolitanism more generally, but also because it provides an additional element to his thinking on nationalism that defines its pure, civic nature to a large degree. It also demonstrates, *contra* Clark, that he is not entirely ahistorical in his thinking. He regarded the revolution as an event which established three basic principles that he believed should characterize British society: the right to freedom of conscience, the right to resist the abuse of government, and the right of the people to form a government of their own.

Indeed, his main complaint is the fact that his country is not being true to these principles and is testing her citizens’ love, and in these arguments are highlighted perhaps the most obvious motivation for Price’s sermon and his conception of nationalism. As a non-conformist who continued to suffer discrimination under what were known as the Test laws, he was convinced that the priority and precedent for any state is to ensure equal rights with regard to worship, work and politics. Here he is clearly expressing the position of his fellow dissenters. It is easy to understand from the perspective of those who had suffered because of their religious convictions why institutions, rights and civic elements in general would appeal as the basis for nationalism and provide more than enough to engender a love for their country.

In addition to the obvious appeal of such a civic perspective for a dissenter, there may also be a case, albeit more speculative, for considering the concept Price offers of (British) nationalism in terms of his Welshness. There is no explicit basis for thinking that Price was in any sense a Welsh patriot, or someone who considered Wales to be a “country” in the same sense as Britain, or that he held his homeland and its virtues in par-

⁶ Curiously, with regard to his compatriot Robert Owen, we see a similar rejection of the pessimistic Calvinist theology within which they were raised, and an evangelical enthusiasm for the possibility of creating heaven on earth. On Owen, see Powell, 2012.

ticular regard (in a manner, say, that would be at odds with his own warnings against patriotic chauvinism). There are some suggestions from Roland Thomas (1924: 152) that he maintained a strong connection with his childhood home and took pride in his Welsh identity, but it would appear fruitless to try and link any traces of Welsh *patriotism* with his broader political philosophy. However, as a Welshman Price would no doubt have been aware of Wales' cultural distinctiveness (Welsh remained the language of the majority until late into the 19th century) and the feeling among many of his compatriots – especially those indulging in a burgeoning Welsh romanticism – who regarded Wales as an entirely distinct cultural and national entity.

As one who hailed from the Celtic fringe, therefore, it is plausible that that he was attuned to the limitations of an attempt to construct British identity based around ethnic characteristics and identities tied in particular to English myth and history. We will see with regard to Mill the types of ideas that arise in relation to this way of thinking. We can maintain, at the very least, that the model of nationalism offered by Price provides a form of Britishness that promotes religious tolerance and individual liberty above everything else – and as a result, he suggests that these elements are adequate as a basis for British patriotism, without requiring any distinctive elements of identity, race or language given such importance by Mill.

Mill

To appreciate the form of a more ethnic British nationalism tied to an Anglophone culture, one need look no further than John Stuart Mill's core ideas. When taking a first look at Mill's work *Consid-*

erations on Representative Government (1991), the first tendency would be to read him as another philosopher who celebrates the civic element of nationalism by giving special attention to institutions. However, the section on nationalism in this text is at the opposing end of the spectrum to Price, illuminating how his ideas on the functioning of civic government are grounded upon what might be described as making a virtue out of strong "ethnic" foundations.

Before noting some specific elements, it is worth addressing the fact that in the first instance there is no desire to protect or restore any kind of national community in Mill's vision, rather it is the instrumental value of national identity in underpinning the state that is important. In this respect it amounts to the inverse of Price's attitude, who according to my understanding sees the foundations of nationalism in what the state offers to the individual; that is, the objectives of the civic nation should be sufficient in terms of ensuring loyalty and support amongst the population. For Mill, however, it seems that in fundamental terms he thinks that other grounds are required, broader than these ideals, to ensure the stability needed to maintain the state and its institutions. These grounds are the sense of nationhood and nationality that go beyond the simple relationship that exists between citizens and their sharing in the same civic institutions. In trying to contrast the two in straightforward terms, it can be stated that nationality is the foundation of the state according to Mill, whilst the state provides the basis for the nation according to Price (it should be noted, of course, that there is clear agreement between the two in the sense that both are supporters of greater democracy). It is worth quoting Mill at length, in

his reflections on nationality. He famously begins:

A portion of mankind may be said to constitute a Nationality if they are united among themselves by common sympathies which do not exist between them and any others – which make them co-operate with each other more willingly than with other people, desire to be under the same government, and desire that it should be government by themselves or a portion of themselves exclusively. This feeling of nationality may have been generated by various causes. Sometimes it is the effect of identity of race and descent. Community of language, and community of religion, greatly contribute to it. Geographical limits are one of its causes. But the strongest of all is identity of political antecedents; the possession of a national history, and consequent community of recollections; collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the same incidents in the past. None of these circumstances, however, are either indispensable, or necessarily sufficient by themselves... Yet in general the national feeling is proportionally weakened by the failure of any of the causes which contribute to it (Mill, 1991: 308).

It is clear from this quote the extent to which Mill places a precedent on nationality rather than the state – nationality precedes the state, as it were, and requires this fellow feeling in order to justify and preserve it. Three other elements in this quote require attention, and the first of these is what is stated in the last sentence, namely that a lack in any of these elements is likely to weaken the sense of nationality. This is worth considering in the context of Britain, with a

view to the second point of interest – namely the numerous factors Mill identifies as constituting nationality: one cannot consider race, ethnicity, language or religion as clear constituents of British nationality. Indeed, geographical limits are the most obvious and uncontroversial among them. The third noteworthy element is identified as the this most important constituent of all – national history, a factor to which we shall return.

Mill himself was of course aware of some of the problems of nationality, especially in countries that included more than one group of people with a desire to describe themselves as a nation. But he strongly believed that uniformity in terms of identity was needed in order to maximize the opportunity for state institutions to succeed. He says:

Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities. Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages, the united public opinion, necessary to the working of representative government, cannot exist. The influences which form opinions and decide political acts are different in the different sections of the country. An altogether different set of leaders have the confidence of one part of the country and of another... it is in general a necessary condition of free institutions that the boundaries of governments should coincide in the main with those of nationalities (Mill, 1991: 310).

In the context of those countries where there existed more than one nationality, he viewed it as necessary to act to undermine differences and work towards a unified sense of nationhood. His views on this problem are telling, par-

ticularly in relation to Britishness. He continues, infamously:

Experience proves that it is possible for one nationality to merge and be absorbed in another: and when it was originally an inferior and more backward portion of the human race the absorption is greatly to its advantage. Nobody can suppose that it is not more beneficial to a Breton, or a Basque of French Navarre, to be brought into the current of the ideas and feelings of a highly civilised and cultivated people – to be a member of the French nationality, admitted on equal terms to all the privileges of French citizenship, sharing the advantages of French protection, and the dignity and prestige of French power – than to sulk on his own rocks, the half-savage relic of past times, revolving in his own little mental orbit, without participation or interest in the general movement of the world. The same remark applies to the Welshman or the Scottish Highlander as members of the British nation (Mill, 1991: 314).

These comments are interesting for many reasons, but it is worth trying to provide some context from the perspective of Mill's broader philosophy in order to appreciate them more fully. We know that the aim of the social order and the political order according to utilitarianism is the maximization of general happiness. From this perspective utilitarians such as Mill will view the democratic system as an effective means of ensuring that political leaders act in accordance with this broad principle, working towards the welfare of society as a whole, rather than just their own interests. In addition it is important to recall that Mill's concept of happiness advocates the maximization of the higher pleas-

ures, and so there is an element of perfectionism relating to his philosophy. He attempts to overcome the problem thrown up by the utilitarianism of Bentham, which makes no distinction between lower and higher pleasures, thus leading to the implication that the happiness of pigs is sufficient for humans.⁷ This element of perfectionism advocated by Mill is evident in *On Liberty*. Here he generally subscribes to the idea of freedom, and freedom of the individual, because of its benefit in terms of promoting discussion and ideational conflict, that in his view leads to the development of a society, happiness of a more complex kind, and ultimately life of better quality.

In this respect, the value of freedom is ultimately instrumental, and this instrumentality is evident in Mill's discussion of nationality. In this context the problem of creating a national sense of identity sees the principle of freedom demoted to a clear second with regard to the first principle of utilitarianism. To put the point in a fairly crude way, it seems that for Mill the life of the Breton, Scottish Highlander or the Welshman is too piggish to worry about the abuse of their freedom. There is not enough utility in their lifestyle that they should persist in undermining the British or French sense of nationalism, by undermining the governing regime and reducing general welfare. In addition, these marginal peoples will benefit themselves as they are saved from their ignorance. Mill's logic is exemplary – given the initial judgement on the value of the life of the peripheral peoples.

⁷ For a defence of Mill against the accusation of promoting a 'philosophy of swine', see Gray, 1989.

It is worth reflecting for a moment, in terms of Britishness, on where the Scots are in the general picture offered by Mill. It is clear that he considers Britishness to be a nationality that should seek to assimilate the Scottish Gaels and Welsh – they are what we might describe as the Celtic “other” for Mill. However, the British nation he expounds is one that makes space for the linguistically Anglicized Scots alongside the English. Perhaps this is not surprising given his own background as well as the fact that these two “peoples” constituted the core of the Union. In this respect, it is true to say that both groups shared in a potentially overarching, supervenient British nationality. There may be an additional clue to his support for this concept of Britishness in his comments on the advantages of mixed nationality:

Whatever really tends to the admixture of nationalities, and the blending of their attributes and peculiarities in a common union, is a benefit to the human race. Not by extinguishing types, of which, in these cases, sufficient examples are sure to remain, but by softening their extreme forms, and filling up the intervals between them. The united people, like a crossed breed of animals (but in a still greater degree, because the influences in operation are moral as well as physical), inherits the special aptitudes and excellences of all its progenitors, protected by the admixture from being exaggerated into the neighbouring vices (Mill, 1991: 315).

We can interpret these words of Mill to mean that in the British context the English and Anglo-Scots have mixed to the advantage of both, whilst considering the isolation of the Celtic peoples from this hybrid to be a particular prob-

lem for them that they have to overcome. A sympathetic reading of Mill might suggest that he may have seen a contribution from the Celtic fringe, although it is unclear from the forgoing remarks what exactly this might be. In sum, what we find with Mill is a concept of nationality that identifies it as a key foundation stone for the political order, where the greater the unity in terms of that identity, the better its chances for success. This unity can be forged in many ways, and Mill gives particular attention to aspects of ethnicity, and where there are elements of disharmony in these respects steps can justifiably be taken in order to ensure greater hegemony, which removes disadvantages and obstacles and incorporates elements of strength.

The Centrality of a National History

We therefore are presented with two very different understandings of the foundation for our nation by these two philosophers. Price believes the institutions and freedoms it guarantees is that which unites people and is the focus of their national passion – an aspect which can roughly be compared to the contemporary concept of civic nationalism. On the other hand, Mill asserts that the sense of nationhood designated by the term ‘common sympathies’ is a prerequisite for any successful state, and here the emphasis on identity reflects the kind of attitude embraced by purported modern day ethnic nationalism. Yet it would fail to do justice to either account to conclude with such a crude comparison and distinction.

One important element to note is that although Mill’s concept refers to aspects readily embraced by ethnic nationalism associated with the German tradition, it constitutes a somewhat different

approach. Namely, it should be recognised that the numerous features he alludes to constitute a discrete, if connected concept, which might be broadly captured by the term “identitarian” nationalism. This reflects the fact that he places great emphasis on the importance of fellow feeling and citizens identifying with each other, and that this is based on elements that include *but are not restricted to* ethnic markers. That said, given the obvious importance attributed to language and ethnicity in his treatment of the Celtic peoples, this concept might be said to reside in practice alongside ethnic concepts of nationalism – allowing for the fact it is somewhat more capacious than a concept restricted strictly to ethnicity and language.

Bearing in mind these contrasts with Price’s approach, I would like to further suggest a perhaps less obvious point that the analysis of the two foregoing philosophical theories demonstrate: namely that extricating civic and ethnic concepts of nationalism from each other can be as complicated in theory as it is in practice. To appreciate this point it is necessary to return to this concept of a common sympathies Mill refers to. As noted above, those elements that can be described as ethnic – race, ethnicity, and language – are just some of the sources of these sympathies. Also referred to are religion and geography. However, the most important source of sympathy according to Mill is the political and cultural precedents embraced in a “national history”. I will analyze this element in the context of the contemporary UK in a moment, but first it must be noted how this element of nationality, in looking once more, can be seen to be implicit in Price’s sermon.

It seems that one of the main objectives in his address was to persuade the

congregation that the United Kingdom, since the Glorious Revolution in 1688, had been involved in a process of political reform which illustrated the providential work of God. The ultimate goal was the realization of an entirely just state that ensured the freedoms of its citizens, whilst working towards a global federation embodying a permanent Christian peace. He says,

You love your country and desire its happiness, and, without doubt, you have the greatest reason for loving it. It has been long a very distinguished and favoured country. Often has God appeared for it and delivered it. Let us study to shew ourselves worthy of the favour shewn us (Price, 1989: 43-4).

In this respect, an element of chauvinism is present even in Price’s ideal, with occasional reference to the Turk or the Spaniards as nations who are in error. There is no denying the impression that Price was trying to create exactly what Mill is referring to in relation to a national history: “collective pride and humiliation, pleasure and regret, connected with the same incidents in the past” (Mill, 1991: 308). The Union had a very short history at the time, less than a hundred years, to be precise, but the Glorious Revolution (towards the end of a hundred year period in which the separate Kingdoms of England and Scotland shared the same Monarch) marked the beginning, according to the millenarianism professed by Price, on a divine pathway. Clearly Price’s narrative is free of any of the other constituents that are linked with Mill’s account of nationality, but it suggests that Price himself was aware of the need for some kind of myth or shared memories to inspire and maintain a sense of nationhood – and add something more substantive to the

sharing of freedoms and the general tendency he notes of favoring those around us.

Indeed, it is worth noting that the concept of “common sympathies” and a national history is a cornerstone that continues to be popular in today’s accounts of nationality, and it is illustrated in the work of the most famous of analytical political philosophers, namely John Rawls. In general Rawls’ work is associated with the attempt to interpret the fundamental principles of justice that apply to the liberal state, and in this respect his is a largely ‘civic’ project about how to achieve the most just and complete state institutions. This priority in his work is illustrated in *The Law of Peoples* (Rawls, 1999: 23) by the fact that he identifies the first basic feature that belongs to a “liberal people” as a legitimate constitutional government. However, even though much of his earlier work in *Political Liberalism* (2005) attempts to demonstrate how such a constitutional arrangement can be sustained in a diverse and heterogeneous society, like his predecessors it is made clear in *LP* that he is aware of the need for some kind of unity of identity to bolster the civic element of constitutional government. To this end he sets out the Millian concept of “common sympathies” as the next basic feature of liberal peoples, before quoting lines from the above excerpts (not those, unsurprisingly, that refer to assimilation) (Rawls 1999: 23 ft.17).

I note this in most part because it reflects the fact that a notable contemporary political philosopher sees that it is necessary to acknowledge both the “civic” and “ethnic” (or “identitarian”) elements in the theoretical concept of a people he presents – drawing our attention to the appeal of mixing these ele-

ments at a philosophical level. In addition to this, I note Rawls’ use of the concept because he also borrows the idea in a direct and unreconstructed manner – seemingly overlooking what should be the troubling fact (at least from Rawls’ liberal perspective) that Mill’s chapter as a whole argues that a national history can be entirely valid in its attempt to eliminate or absorb some minority cultures within the majority. Much though there is of inspiration in the work of Rawls, this is an example of how the liberal mindset can neglect some moral questions of great importance when focused on the bigger picture. In conclusion, it is to the centrality of this national history that I turn with respect to recent events in the United Kingdom.

A British National History

It is my hope that this brief historical discussion of nationalism with regard to two British thinkers has drawn attention to some noteworthy considerations, both in the context of theoretical discussions relating to the division between civic and ethnic nationalism, and in relation to the recent, startling events during the Scottish Referendum. As noted, it is increasingly the case that civic and ethnic nationalism are seen to overlap in practice, and it has been my argument that with respect to the two accounts provided by Price and Mill that this is just as readily the case in theory.

In Price’s sermon we have an ideal of civic nationalism that claims our passion and pride for our nation-state should derive from the freedoms it provides for us, whilst rejecting chauvinistic conceptions of ethnicity and identity. However, in putting forward a national history we see that even this thin account of civic

nationalism rests to some degree on the forging of a narrative that allows citizens to identify with each other not just through their institutions, but also through their collective history – one which in some senses does resort to an element of chauvinistic pride.

Mill, on the other hand, provides an interesting account firstly in the sense that it is more sociological in approach, articulating what it is about nationalism that constitutes its utility in underpinning representative government. In moral terms, Mill begins with the conclusion that representative government is a utilitarian good that works towards maximizing the general happiness, and from there seeks (somewhat begrudgingly, perhaps) to find what a sense of nationalism requires to ensure this good is maintained in the long run. The subsequent account he presents is also interesting because of its breadth. Nationalism is constituted by a range of elements, some of which are clearly ethnic in nature. However, it is my suggestion that even though we may associate his concept fairly closely with modern day ethnic accounts, it remains the case that we should acknowledge its capacious nature and recognise that many of the sources of common identity he mentions go beyond ethnic markers – namely religion, geography and the concept of a national history.

Mill's "identitarian" nationalism, in the context of this discussion, is particularly noteworthy for its chauvinistic view of minority cultures such as that of the Celts, and that despite the emphasis on ethnicity it is in fact the historical narrative that takes precedent over all else. To this end we see how his and Price's very different approaches and accounts overlap in their emphasis on "national history". Such histories are common place in

states where ethnic and identitarian notions of nationalism are prevalent, as they often intertwine with accounts of racial and linguistic difference. It is perhaps more interesting that an analysis of Price's account draws our attention to the fact that states that are grounded on, or have moved away from more ethnic accounts towards a civic notion of nationalism, can themselves be inclined towards the creation of national histories similar to the one which Price creates for the Union. The United States of America is the obvious example of a nation-state that has had to increasingly eschew ethnic markers in its concept of nationalism, yet over the centuries has ensured that a prevalent national history has underpinned its nationalism, and ensured the element of identitarianism that is so crucial in binding a people together.⁸

Such reflections lead us ultimately to reflect on recent events in the United Kingdom. As suggested in the introduction, an important ingredient that was largely missing in the *Better Together* campaign was an attempt to articulate a common British nationalism. I suggested that this is an altogether more difficult prospect in the post-devolution era, but the two accounts presented here perhaps give us an even better sense of why it has never been particularly easy (with perhaps the exception of the post World War II years), why it has unravelled so quickly, and how it might have been articulated successfully.

Clark suggests that Price represented an abortive attempt to ground British (or English, as he calls it) identity in a narrative that rejected a historical English perspective. The suggestion that it failed is largely corroborated by the de-

⁸ On the national question in the case of the USA, see Kaufmann, 2000.

velopment of a British nationalism in the 19th and 20th century that revolved around a concept of Greater England, or perhaps one might describe it as England+. In terms of the mainstays of the Union, this was not an altogether problematic situation because, as implied in Mill's account, the predominant Scottish identity was one that had been tied to the English language ever since the reign of the Stuarts (who gave up their native Germanic tongue, *Scots*) and the union of the English and Scottish kingdoms under their crown in 1603 (one hundred years before the two would be formerly united as one state). The gentry, many literary figures, government officials, and latterly leading names of the Scottish Enlightenment such as David Hume were to follow this trend, which no doubt contributed to a broader tendency for many Scots to feel at home in the Union.⁹ Again, as Mill's account suggests, this linguistic homogeneity could serve as justification for marginalising and absorbing the peripheral Celtic identities within this Anglophone national identity.

Yet in spite of the predominance of a Greater English identity tied to linguistic dominance (amongst other arguably more important factors) Scottish and Welsh identities persisted over time, albeit in different ways. A significant majority of the Anglophone Scottish and Welsh increasingly took pride in their dual "civic" identities (although this process would happen much later in Wales) (Morgan, 1980) and other elements eschewing Anglicization and remaining wedded to identitarian national identities with various degrees of resistance. The fact that Home Rule for Scotland and Wales was still in discussion in the years prior to

the First World War indicate the simultaneous existence of the reality of England+, and the prospect of a Federal, or even separated United Kingdom. The fact that the War effort had to resort to establishing separate forces in Scotland and Wales in order to bolster recruitment speaks to the persistence of these identities – and in some senses the weakness of "British" nationalism (Ellis, 2014). Where Ireland, and later Northern Ireland fit into the picture is an even more complex discussion that has been eschewed here – for no justifiable reason other than the limits of this paper.

Northern Ireland does, however, provide us with a segue into contemporary discussions in the United Kingdom, for its absence in the referendum debate is one telling example of the broader lack of any attempt by the *Better Together* campaign to present the electorate with a telling "national history" (references to the cultural and religious links between Scotland and Northern Ireland in the mainstream British coverage were certainly been notable in their absence). As the foregoing suggests, any attempt to inspire pride in, and support for the Union grounded in a sense of ethnic, or identitarian nationalism would be problematic not just because of the recent burgeoning of national identities in the UK, or the increasing multiculturalism since the 1950s – but also because the longer historical view suggests that this would largely involve reverting to a concept of Greater English, rather than British nationalism, that has never taken root properly amongst the majority of the Scots, or the UK as a whole. The mongrel breed Mill refers to never really emerged to the extent that he might have hoped. What seems to have persisted is a nascent Scottish nationalism within a broader symbolic British identity that

⁹ For an informed study of the history of the Scots language, see Jones (1997).

once coalesced around Empire, and which more recently has found a hook on certain elements of banal nationalism evidenced by the call for “Team GB” during the 2012 London Olympics, and a civic element courtesy of the post World War II institutions – reflected most esoterically by the tribute of dancing nurses to the National Health Service, during the opening ceremony of those Olympics.

It is exactly this unstable, insubstantial yet enduring British identity that has not been articulated, or re-imagined in any convincing way since the post-war patriotic zeal and the building of the British welfare state. Price’s predominantly civic account demonstrates that

even a nationalism of this kind – which has little in the way of the identitarian elements Mill refers to – can still be articulated in way that goes beyond references to the symbolism of the National Health Service and the BBC, or the banality of Olympic Team GB. There are hundreds of years of common endeavour that could have provided ample material for a various versions of our ‘national history’ – from numerous points on the political spectrum – to try and reawaken and engage our common sympathies. The centrality of this notion in both Mill and Price’s theories speaks to its startling absence in the practical politics of the so-called ‘United’ Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

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Razmatranja škotskog referenduma i rasprava o britanskoj zagonetki: Mill, Price i pitanje nacionalizma

SAŽETAK Nedavni referendum za škotsku nezavisnost pokazao je određeni neuspjeh kampanje *Bolje zajedno* da formulira pozitivnu viziju i koncepciju Ujedinjenog Kraljevstva Velike Britanije i Sjeverne Irske. Ono što je nedostajalo je bila jasna ideja britanskog. Ovaj članak pokušava rasvijetliti fenomen nacionalizma, s naglaskom na britanski kontekst, oslanjajući se na povijest političke misli i filozofska promišljanja dvaju britanskih liberala, Richarda Pricea i Johna Stuarta Milla. Njihove ideje razmatraju se u odnosu na razlikovanje između građanskog i etničkog. Autor brani dvije tvrdnje. Prva je da neovisno o Pricevom naglasku na građanski patriotizam i Millovo zagovaranje mnogih elemenata etničkog nacionalizma, oba pristupa stavljaju u fokus ideju 'nacionalne povijesti'. Empirijske sumnje oko održivosti građanske/etničke podijele ovdje se propituju kroz filozofsku diskusiju o nacionalizmu. Druga tvrdnja je da Price i Mill upozoravaju na povijesno poteškoće u konstruiranju uvjerljivog koncepta britanske nacionalnosti, istovremeno sugerirajući jedinu očitu mogućnost njegovog uspješnog redefiniranja kroz artikulaciju britanske nacionalne povijesti.

KLJUČNE RIJEČI Škotski referendum, britanski nacionalizam, Richard Price, J. S. Mill, građansko, etničko