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The Keene Lectures 2007

1. Who Are We Now?

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In 1941, with enemy bombers flying overhead, George Orwell wrote down his thoughts on the English identity that he was confident would survive all attempts to destroy it - with the exception, he was prudent enough to add, of prolonged subjugation by a foreign power, which in 1941 was still a distinct possibility. Those thoughts became one of his most famous essays, *'England, Your England'*. I looked again at it a while ago, having first read it at a time when it told me, accurately and movingly, what it was to be English, as I then thought I was. What is left of Orwell's analysis of England's enduring character? What is left of England, his England?

> 'Yes, there is something distinctive and recognizable in English civilization [he writes]. It is a culture as individual as that of Spain. It is somehow bound up with solid breakfasts and gloomy Sundays, smoky towns and winding roads, green fields and red pillar boxes'.

Anyone - like me and like most of you, I assume, for whom that sentence is a snapshot, a sudden glimpse out of the corner of the eye, of something they knew in childhood is likely to be momentarily deceived by it. Yes, we think, that's quite good; there *is* something specially English about the atmosphere it evokes. But look again and you realize that almost all the real

physical facts to which it appeals have changed. The red pillar-boxes are still just about there, though not I think as many as there used to be, and their kindred, evoked by association, the red telephone kiosks and red double-decker buses, are only just holding their own against two determined attempts to destroy them. But as for the rest: ‘solid breakfasts’ long ago gave way to muesli, so that 'full English breakfast' is now a term of art in catering with about as much relation to England as Kentucky fried chicken has to Kentucky; ‘gloomy Sundays’ were brightened up by the introduction by Messrs. Thatcher and Major of the seven-day shopping week; the ‘smoky towns’, praise be, became smokeless thanks to the legislation of the fifties and sixties, and as the spread of oil and natural gas invalidated the opening sentence of another of Orwell's essays - 'Our civilisation, *pace* Chesterton, is founded on coal', he wrote in *'Down the Mine'*; and the ‘winding roads’ may still be there as unimproved B roads, but the motorway network and the dual carriageways have entirely changed our relation to the landscape so that we no longer wend our way through it or in it, but travel over, across, or past it. You might think that the fields are still green - except that they are more probably yellow with rape - but they are not the small patchwork fields which Orwell had before his mind's eye, divided up by hedgerows, but large tractor-friendly sweeps of standardized crops.

In 1941 Orwell thought, no doubt rightly, and no doubt he was in agreement with most English people that England was different from abroad:

> 'When you come back to England from any foreign country, you have immediately the sensation of breathing a different air . . . The beer is bitterer, the coins are heavier, the grass is greener, the advertisements are more blatant . . . However much you hate it or laugh at it, you will never be happy away from it for any length of time. The suet puddings and the red pillar-boxes have entered into your soul.'

The green grass we can allow again - though it is, and was in 1941, greener still in Ireland - but the bitterer beer has taken second place to the world-conquering lager, for which the advertisements too are world-wide and not really culturally distinctive; curry, hamburgers and paella are more familiar to most English families than suet puddings, and not only is the coinage only marginally heavier than the European, if at all: it has been altered so often in the last forty years that no one can now experience that immediate contact with the England of a century or more ago that came from discovering in your change a bun penny or a silver threepenny bit.

What we have witnessed since Orwell wrote his essay is not, I think, the attrition of a few symbolic and atmospheric details of our lives which happened to be those he pitched on in order to give a picturesque appeal to his definition of Englishness. What has happened is that an entire *Gesinnung,* as Hegel would call it - an ethos of Englishness - has passed away. Hegel believes, reasonably enough, that the sense of personal identity, of who morally speaking, one is, is intimately bound up with the identity of the political, cultural and indeed religious collectivity of which one is a member. Even the poorest Englishman, he says in 1820 in the *Philosophy of Rights*, still feels himself to be an Englishman and as such to have rights and freedoms of which he can be proud. The highest possible degree of self-awareness is achieved, Hegel believes, when one becomes aware of oneself as a citizen of one's state, and conversely the state itself can only be said to exist when there are individuals who have towards it the 'ethos' of patriotism. There is only a state in so far as there are people who recognize their society as something they have a duty to die for, if necessary.

It is important to be clear however that in saying this Hegel is not speaking for some sort of inflated or bellicose nationalism - he is only thinking through the implications of the very idea of identity. If identity, the real content of your life, is what you give up only when you die, and if collective and individual identity are inseparably linked, then a collectivity's identity is inseparably linked to what its individual members will die for rather than give up. Patriotism, Hegel remarks, is an everyday virtue: not the humbug of occasional ostentatious emotionalism, but the confidence with which one walks the streets in security at night, "the fundamental feeling of order, common to all".

That, I think, is precisely the sort of self-awareness that Orwell was attributing to the English, as he called them; and 1940 was surely the moment in English history when that self-awareness reached its highest possible point. It is surely evident that as the thing which Orwell called England has faded away so too has the willingness to die for it - British soldiers who have died in Iraq have more usually been described as doing a job they loved than as laying down their lives for their country - and this parallelism is exactly what Hegel's theory of *'Gesinnung'* would lead us to expect.

So I have two questions to put before you this evening:

1. What has caused the passing away of that sense of English identity which Orwell described in what someone else at the time called its "finest hour"? And

2. What is the likely or possible future for the sense of identity of those who once called themselves English?

My answer to the first question is to suggest that what Orwell describes as 'England' is the objective correlative not of a sense of *national* identity, but of a sense of *imperial* identity. Of course it doesn't look like that - but hypocrisy about the Empire is, Orwell notes, one of the defining features of Englishness, and indeed in at least one important respect he shares it himself, as we shall see in a moment. With great percipience he compares England to

> 'a family, a rather stuffy Victorian family, with not many black sheep in it but with all its cupboards bursting with skeletons. It has rich relations who have to be kowtowed to and poor relations who are horribly sat upon, and there is a deep conspiracy of silence about the source of the family income'.

What that conspiracy of silence is concealing is that what are thought of as permanent and characteristic features of English life are in reality mainly respects in which an antiquated and vestigially feudal society is insulated from processes of modernization which have already overtaken other European states, not to mention America.

In 1940, and thanks to victory even after 1945, Britain was still a pre-revolutionary society; the last in Europe. The medieval institutions had been adapted but were largely intact. Britons were still not citizens of a state, but subjects of a monarch, a hereditary class still exercised significant political power, the church retained many features of its medieval predecessor, as did other ecclesiastical successor bodies, such as colleges and schools whose inhabitants, like those of prisons, were, as Orwell noted, still regularly flogged. Barristers still ate their way to learning at inns of court and livery companies still administered vast fortunes on behalf of the supposed descendants of fifteenth-century tradesmen. The continuing corporate autonomy of these medieval models had also moulded the great nineteenth-century institutional creations: the reformed civil service and universities, the professional organizations, the trade union successors to the old guilds, the county councils, the clubs. Only in the late 20th century have British institutions learned what it felt like to be secularized by Joseph II or to receive a visit from the roving commissars of the French National Convention.

And what made possible this time warp, this preservation of a Lost World, was the Empire. That was the protective insulation, economic, political, cultural, and demographic, which accounted for that feeling of difference when Orwell stepped off his ferry from Europe and breathed the English air. Economically the Empire provided the protected markets that founded many a family fortune; politically the white and non-white inhabitants of the Empire provided a body of lesser breeds by contrast with which even the poorest Englishman could identify himself as *civis Romanus* and know he had rights and freedoms; culturally , the Empire created an entire world in which the English language and the English church, the antiquated English currency, English mensuration and English cuisine, all could establish themselves without competition and without serious question as the norm; and demographically the Empire provided a virtually unrestricted career-structure for the ambitious and a generously administered escape-route for the discontented and the criminal.

Orwell shares in the conspiracy of silence, in so far as he thinks he is defining what it is to be English when he is actually defining what it is to be a metropolitan of the British Empire. That this is so is shown by his uncertainty - an uncertainty shared by later writers on the subject - as to who the English actually are, who the term refers to. In the first instance one would have thought the English were native inhabitants of the British Isles who were neither Scottish, nor Irish, nor Welsh. It is a serious weakness of Orwell's essay that he does not consider whether there might be specifically Scottish, Welsh or, especially, Irish perspectives on the culture he is describing and on the particular emblems he uses to characterize it. It is not merely a trivial oversight that he does not notice that the grass is greener in Ireland than it is in England. He probably thinks, at a half-conscious level, that Ireland is part of England and that the real point is that 'our' grass is greener than European. Indeed he virtually says as much when he refers to 'the fact that *we* [my emphasis] call *our islands* [my emphasis] by no less than six different names, England, Britain, Great Britain, the British Isles, the United Kingdom and, in very exalted moments, Albion.' I venture to think that even in 1940 no citizen of the Irish Free State would have regarded the island of Ireland as referred to by any of these terms except possibly 'the British Isles'. The 'we' here, who lay claim to 'our islands', evidently have a distinctly Imperial attitude to Great Britain's western neighbour.

Now Orwell's 'hesitation' - his own word: perhaps 'fumbling' would be a better one – shows, I think, that the culture he is defining does not have the physical and geographical specificity that he is claiming for it. It is not the culture of a nation. It is part of the self-image of one of world-history's great ruling-classes. The English long ago gave up any local identity they might have had in order to devote themselves to that Imperial venture and if they are now seeking an historically-based identity they will have to look back not - as many still do - to 1940 and the war with Germany, but to a period before England gave up trying to be a nation and set out to turn itself into an Empire instead.

Having such an intangible and characterless past, England may have a certain advantage - the advantage of an intellectual clarity unclouded by inherited prejudice - when it comes to asking what its identity, or anybody's identity, is likely to be in the future. One thing is certain. Identity will not, for any other than touristic and sporting purposes, have much to do with being a nation. If we ask what are the forces that have rendered obsolete Orwell's emblems of Englishness, they are all forces to which national boundaries are increasingly irrelevant: trade, travel, and competition. Time does not allow me to say more on this here, but ultimately it was the growth of the global market that destroyed all the empires, the British included. And it was the growth of that global market that swept away that physical reality on which Orwell relied to define his England.

It was the imperatives of international competition that forced on Britain the renewal of the transport infrastructure - the building of the motorways and the pruning of the railways, the obliteration of Orwell's winding roads and the closing of Adlestrop. The forces of international competition that substituted imported gas and oil for home-mined coal have also rationalized away those little fields; just as the search for profitability of increasingly international business groups led the supermarkets to press for Sunday opening. The advent of mass holiday travel in the 1960s and 70s changed the eating habits of the British at the same time as the increasing volume and ease of trade made foreign beers and wines available to change their taste in drink. In the age of e-mail it requires no great prescience to doubt whether the red pillar boxes will see out another century.

What is true of culture is true of politics too. The growth and deepening of the global market turns national boundaries, and even national governments, into obstacles to trade, to the free movement of goods and services, of capital and ultimately labour too, which come increasingly to seem irrational, to be circumvented where they cannot be abolished. It is the international domain which is nowadays the home of some of the most important structures that enable, condition, and protect our collective lives; trade, capital, information - for a significant and increasing number, work itself - consumer goods provided, and even public services staffed and owned, by multinational companies; and military forces equipped by foreign powers and largely deployable only in concert with them.

Now it could be objected to this analysis that nations are the flavour of the century. Never have there been so many or so small. Palau, the smallest of all the 192 members of the United Nations, has only 15,000 inhabitants. Why is the concept of nationhood so lively, so current, and so troublemaking, *despite* the fact that so much of what is important in people's lives comes to them, and is known by them to come to them, from outside the bounds of a nation? Plainly we cannot ignore this question if we are to determine who we in England are now.

I think part of the answer to it is that nations matter to us in the global market *because* they are comfortable, convenient, deceptive self-images. They may have the appeal of nostalgia for those who think of their nation as old and they may have the appeal of a beckoning ideal for those for whom nationhood is still in the future, but it is neither nostalgia nor idealism that gives the concept of 'my nation' its urgency; its ability, when it is invoked, to rouse my feeling that something more than my well-being or security is at stake, something like my identity. My nation matters because it is a defence, perhaps an illusory defence, which stands between me and what I fear. And what I fear is - of course, it always is - the truth of my condition. And the truth of my condition is that I am an atom and much of my life - my well-being and my security — is dependent on processes of a complexity I cannot understand, involving inconceivable numbers of people I can never know, in places I shall never see. Or, alternatively, we might say that my nation is a fantasy I am encouraged to entertain by the instruments of those immeasurably complex processes, so that I shall not be tempted to enquire into their nature but shall either willingly accept their impact on my life as one of the inevitable features of my nationhood, or grudgingly suffer the impact as part of the unaccountable but unalterable machinations of incomprehensible foreigners. Or to put the same point in a neutral and unemotive way: the nation is perhaps the interface between the individual consumer-producer and the global market.

The computing analogy is both apposite and exact. It is apposite because computing is in many ways the instrument through which globalization is driven forward - the technical means by which current volumes of transnational trade and finance are made possible, and the medium in which a truly global unity is created, all information being in principle available at the same time and in one place, on the screen. But the analogy is also exact: the nation is exactly like a computing interface which adapts for different individual users' convenience and comfort the underlying and to most of us completely incomprehensible codes and processes which are what we are really using when we download a file or send an email. That underlying system is common to all communicating machines, however different the interfaces that present themselves to the different users, and - crucially for the purpose of our analogy - the repertoire of different interfaces is itself a feature of the underlying system.

The computer pretends to speak our language but in fact it speaks its own universal code. The nation pretends to be what gives us life, substance, and identity, but in fact we are increasingly dependent on, and even made by, the global economic order, the dictates of which are passed on to us - brewed under licence, so to speak - by HM Government or some other UK subsidiary.

Once upon a time, nothing defined a nation so effectively and unquestionably as its language. Language, Wittgenstein assured us, was a form of life. Like a life, language was at the same time unique and infinite - it was a unique way of experiencing and articulating absolutely everything. For that reason it was worth studying another language, for nothing could ever substitute for it as a means of sharing and understanding the experience of others. One of the features of the last thirty years that has greatly puzzled me is the decline of interest in foreign languages at a time when life has in so many respects become so international.

The conventional explanation of this phenomenon is that economic globalization has gone along with the advance of English to the status of global language. I think, though, that the explanation is different, for the real global language is not English but the operating code of computers. And as more and more of our communication takes place through computers, or has to be in a form that is at least manipulable by computers, so languages become increasingly reduced to optional interfaces between users of the same universal code. There

is less incentive to learn foreign languages to talk to sceptical foreign bank clerks when the hole-in-the-wall cash machines in Prague and Barcelona equally display as their first message the choice of languages in which you can give and receive your instructions. Microsoft regularly makes new issues of its software available in upward of 35 languages. Language in this sense is no longer an ultimate determinant of an identity its users cannot escape but an optional style. What we can't escape in the global market is Microsoft.

What is happening to languages is happening to the nations that in the 19th century (but not before then) languages defined. The global network does not make languages or nations obsolete, on the contrary, it preserves them. They are useful and comfortable points of contact, interfaces, between the global system and the individual. Nations and languages survive, indeed become the object of fierce and explicit loyalty, like football teams, but they have been instrumentalized, they serve the purposes of, are the medium and channel for, something else, something that more deeply gives us what we want and makes us what we are. Nations won't go away. But equally they won't give us what we promise ourselves from belonging to them. We mustn't let ourselves be fooled into thinking that investigating national differences, or even tensions between nations, is going to tell us much about the reality of our present situation or our likely future.

So what about the future? There are of course many reasons to rejoice at our liberation from a nineteenth, or early twentieth, century concept of all-determining and linguistically defined nationhood. In the post-modern world, in which nations are no longer entirely serious entities, there is even the prospect of international relations being fun. Admittedly that is only because, as I have been arguing, true seriousness attaches from now on to the forces and factors that make the world one, rather than pluriform - factors such as the internet, carbon emissions, the unequal distribution of food and energy consumption, nuclear fallout, the capital, and increasingly the labour, markets. But since nations will continue to exist - though it will be ever more obvious that they do not between them exhaust the possible ways of human living on this planet - it may well be worthwhile thinking about their future interrelationship and about national identities in so far as they are dependent on that interrelationship.

If we interrogate our past we shall see that there are, after a fashion, precedents for our present condition, from which we can learn, and draw a kind of comfort. I have argued in *Who Are We Now?* that over the last 130 years or so we have seen the rise of numerous colonial empires as attempts to give political shape to the nascent global market, and that in the 75 Years' War from 1914 to 1989 we saw the destruction of those empires by the same global market. But the processes which came to a climax and a catastrophe from 1870 onwards had their origins in much earlier phases of European history.

In the case of England, the process of empire-building started no later than the 16th century, when a number of the developments which culminated in the late 19th century took their origin: the new definition of the nation through the breaking of religious ties with Rome; the triumph of the central bureaucracy, at first peaceably under Henry VII, then with Maoist savagery through the cultural revolutions of Henry VIII and Edward VI; the establishment of a colonial relation with Ireland and, at first less successfully, with Scotland as well of course as overseas; and consequently the first beginnings of that uncertainty about the national identity which continues down to our own day as the question: 'are we English? Or British?' If we are to answer that question appropriately for the 21st century, and if we are to answer the related question - what can any nation be in the 21st century? - then we have, I think, to cast our eyes back to the stage before these processes began.

Part at any rate of the answer to the question: what can nations be in the post-imperial world? is to be found in the pre-imperial world, that is, in the later Middle Ages. It is here, I think, that we shall find the nearest thing to a historical precedent for the world that began to reveal itself to us in 1989. A Europe made up of an extraordinary variety of political units, from kingdoms and duchies to cities and bishoprics, corresponding to neither cultural nor linguistic divisions, and coexisting with larger-scale economic and juridical entities, such as the

Hanseatic League or the Holy Roman Empire. 'Nation' in the 15th century was a term which probably applied to no single political entity in Europe. Far from applying to some basic unit of human association, which provided an aboriginal definition of those who belonged to it, 'natio' was a word naturally used in the context of universities or of the Church, to refer to a group, loosely united by geographical or linguistic connections, who made up a part of some larger whole — the nations were, for example, the constituent fractions of the delegates to the Council of Constance. That sense that the nations are subsidiaries of, derivative from, some larger underlying unity is, I have suggested, a feature of the post-modern and post-imperial world, yet it was also a feature of European life 600 years ago when the underlying unity was not Microsoft but Christendom. That world of mercenaries and wandering scholars, when French was still written in England and Latin was spoken everywhere, can provide us with an example of how it is possible to live, and think of yourself, both as originating in a particular place or culture and as a member of a universal order, ecclesiastical or even, in the case of the Empire, secular.

So am I suggesting that the global process is heading for a world-state? I don't think so, though there is much pointing in that direction, and not so long ago Will Hutton and Tony Giddens published a book, *On the Edge*, arguing precisely that. Increasingly, when we say 'we', 'we' means the human race. Increasingly, 'we' are aware of ourselves as a finite natural unity, with finite natural resources. (Hegel would say, our 'we' has the 'moment' of individuality).

Increasingly, 'we' are aware of ourselves as a community which has to find ways of reincorporating those whom the economic system, the system for satisfying our mutual needs, threatens to exclude. (Hegel would say, our 'we' has the 'moment' of universality). However, what 'we' do not and cannot have is that identity which comes to a community through defining itself over against others of the same kind. (In Hegelian terms, our 'we' lacks the 'moment' of particularity). We cannot constitute ourselves into a world-state, in the full Hegelian sense of the term 'state', because there is, and can by definition be no other world-state in war with which we would feel under a duty to die for our own. (This is one reason for the enduring popularity of science-fiction fantasies of some extra-terrestrial threat to the whole world.) World-citizens could not have a sense of patriotism: they could not therefore have a sense of complete identity with the political institutions that represented them, however directly these emerged from global economic life.

As we all become less different from one another, we all become less certain of our identity. Patriotism, the readiness to die for an *existing* state, is virtually extinct throughout the world. (Perhaps the Swiss possess it.) The cynics who ask how many are prepared to lay down their lives for Brussels or the UN should be more cynical: how many *more* are prepared to lay down their lives for the land of their birth? Of course there are many prepared to die, and very many prepared to kill, not, however, for states but for causes and ideas, for religions, for groups (including animals) and for what is called nationalism, that is, the erection or consolidation of states which are at present non-existent or only partially established. That is not patriotism, as Hegel understands it. Loyalty in life and death to a 'feeling of order common to all' has little to do with current events in Iraq, Chechnya, or Sudan. The world political unit, in which our search for collective and personal identity could finally be satisfied, in which we could be freely self-determining citizens, is an idea or cause too, not a state. It is not, and cannot become, completely real, for in war against whom could its citizens lay down their lives? The only war that an idea or cause can generate is a religious war, and that is why a certain form of theocratic Islam feels so profoundly threatened by the process of globalization that it has declared a war of terror against it.

Not that major wars of the old-fashioned variety, between states and their armies, have ceased to be a possibility. It is, for example, a very serious question whether China will be able to claim its share of world resources and the world economy without a Third World War. And if we envisage such a war, or the steps that would be necessary to avoid it, and the tectonic plates into which that military or - preferably - political process would break up the human race, then it is clear that particularity has not lost all its power. There are potential

large-scale political units in the world - units, that is, of a size commensurate with the global economic process - which are capable of developing into something like states in the Hegelian sense, with limited interests of their own and capable of giving their citizens the opportunity to choose their identity freely for themselves. The development of the political institutions in both China and the European Union over the next decades is a matter of as much importance for world peace as the future of such global bodies as the United Nations or the World Trade Organization. Under the pressure of economic globalization the political world is developing two sets of structures whose future interrelationship will determine how many human beings are still alive at the end of the twenty-first century: regionally supranational bodies capable of developing into something like Hegelian states, and world institutions, coextensive with the global market but lacking the authority that comes from fully representing their constituents' sense of who they are (as anti-globalization protesters frequently remind us).

Hegel has still much to tell us about the mutual dependency of selfhood and statehood in the regional units into which the world order is coalescing, but to the global entities our only philosophical guide is Kant. Hegel did not have Kant's understanding of the possibility of a world political system that would be unified but something short of a state in the full sense of the term. Kant believed that you could not understand the past unless you had a vision of the future; that the only coherent vision of the human future was that all states should bind themselves into treaty relationships which would prevent war between them, and that in the end only those states which had 'republican' (as we now say, 'democratic') constitutions would be willing to enter on such treaties.

Kant's analysis may be said to have been given at least negative confirmation by events, since the two most destructive wars of the twentieth century were launched by his own nation when it was autocratically ruled - on the second occasion by a tyrant who in 1934 demonstrated his contempt for consensualism by withdrawing Germany from the League of Nations. Kant certainly did not think that a world of democratic and peaceable states was a probable future for humanity or even perhaps a goal attainable within a specifiable period of years, but he did think that the only foreseeable alternative is mutual mass-destruction - the 'perpetual peace' of the cemetery - and that we need such a goal to define the direction in which we are going, to make sense of our moral lives, that is, of our personal and collective history.

The notion that we could at the same time conceive of a goal and know that we cannot attain it - what Kant called having 'ideals' - was anathema to Hegel. Yet this refusal of the future and of what we might call the incompleteness of human life is the weakest point in Hegel's system and the source of all in it that seems unrealistic or objectionable. More than any other of the great philosophers, except perhaps his models Aristotle and Spinoza, Hegel aims to make us feel at home in the world. But the evidence of the century and a half of world history since his death is that though we have a city to build here it is not an abiding one, and that our life has direction rather than a definable purpose. The states that have grown up since the French Revolution cannot be revered, as Hegel requires, 'as something divine on earth' (*The Philosophy of Right* Theorie-Werkausgabe7 §272), because they are plainly transcended by political or nearly-political structures, secular international bodies or supra-national religions or other causes, which do not themselves amount to states, but which point us, in more or less agreeable ways, towards an ideal of ever closer cooperation. For all Hegel's insight into the unity of the manifestations of the world-spirit, Kant understood better that self-knowledge cannot be absolute or perfect but that identity always has to be projected or extrapolated from 'the series of [our completed past] actions' (Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) *On Perpetual Peace*) into a future of what we hope or ought to be. [c.f. *Who Are We Now? pp 175-9*].

The identity of the English in modern, post- and supra-national conditions is therefore I think no different from that of any other rational human beings - they too are, as I believe Kant would have seen them, future citizens of the world. *(Applause)*

Questions

Peter Judd: *I wonder if the way things are going with globalization means that small identities – the Basque, the Scots, Flanders, England - might actually get some tribal power locally – and that that tendency could be actually rather dangerous 'head in the sand' sort of stuff?*

Nicholas Boyle I certainly think that that is possible – that's to say that being nationals of a nation could become 'fun'. But that's precisely what it becomes. It becomes a kind of game. It may be a game that is played with dangerous instruments.

Local political autonomy is a dangerous instrument – that means having control of the local forces of compulsion; local taxes which the forces of compulsion ensure is collected . . . It's well known that there's a tendency for local government to become more corrupt than central government – this is because people are enjoying what they're doing! Similarly, just as it's tremendous fun to support a local football team in an away fixture, so it may be fun to vie with the French, or a smaller nation elsewhere – we may start to become aware of ourselves as different from the Scots and prohibit the wearing of kilts as well as a headscarf. And as happens with away matches, the game gets a bit serious and people get hurt. So it can all be tremendous fun, but you've got to realise that what's really serious is what's going on beneath the surface or behind the screen – 'behind the computer screen' as I put it. Those really concerned with the welfare and identity of those they represent will have their gaze firmly on wider horizons.

Mike Malone-Lee: *I was thinking of some counter-examples. How do the members of the European community negotiating for their national interests fit into your model? The less serious example: the people from this country who have second homes in France but have not made the slightest attempt, as far as I can see, to learn French, and effectively live in English communities. I just wonder. It surely says something.*

Nicholas Boyle An implication of what I was saying is that identity is indeed no longer unitary because it's not longer possible to define fully watertight collective unities from which an individual might derive his or her sense of personal unity and identity. There was a time, back in 1820 when Hegel was writing *Philosophy of Right*, when an Englishman knew he was an Englishman because he knew what England was. If my argument is right and we don't any longer know what England is, then we don't any longer know what an Englishman or an English woman is – even if we know we are one ourselves. So the result of that is that we have to make do with different kinds of identity, some of which are more superficial than others.

As for your examples, it all depends how you define 'interests'. Basically there are only two kinds of interest – political and economic – and the existence of conflicts of economic interest between politically defined units is precisely the sort of thing that the European Union was founded to try to ameliorate and iron out; and indeed it has been extraordinarily successful in doing so.

To consider a serious question of interest: think of the way the European coal and steel interests over the last 50 years have coped with a very considerable reduction in the need for local production. It's virtually inconceivable that in the political structure of Europe in the 19th century such changes could have been achieved without war; that's to say, without war between the different local political units within which coal was mined and steel was manufactured. And indeed we saw something very like that in the buildup to the First World War in the competition between Britain and Germany. This enormous social change in European states has happened without a hint of international conflict; and yet it has in its nature to be something achieved in an industry which straddles national boundaries. Similarly there may be certain interests of an economic or political kind which leads to tensions within the European Union, but there are other interests which are in the background, where unity is not only necessary but also attractive – whether it's a question of counter-terrorism or energy policy in relation to providers outside the boundaries of the European Union, or whether it is world health issue – in all of these it is more and more obvious that the need for cooperation is a matter of interest for all the citizens of the area concerned, regardless of the national units into which they are politically divided. As for the Brits forming their little colonies in France, it's true that they're cutting themselves off socially and personally by talking English not French; but they bought their properties in a common currency.

Mike Malone-Lee: If I was General de Gaulle – and if I hadn't walked out – what do you think General de Gaulle would have said to you?

Nicholas Boyle: Well, presumably 'Non!' *(Laughter)* A Europe of *le patrie* is a nice idea and in one sense is exactly what I'm suggesting. But *patrie* is not the same as nation and is not a nation state ; and there I think the General and I would differ. I think the nations of which Europe can be composed

will and should continue to exist, but they certainly won't have the status that nations had in the inter-war period and that they thought they had in the pre-1914 period. Nations have become a different thing and they don't exhaust our identity now.

Simon Garfield: *You said just now that the forces that matter are political and economic. But another major force is the religious one. Does the spiritual dimension critique or undermine your account?*

Nicholas Boyle: Well, of course, nobody can be entirely defined by a religious identity any more than they can in my view be defined by a national identity. A religious devotion may be for an individual the all-consuming content of their conscious mind, but they can't get away from the fact that physically they survive and almost certainly acquire whatever weaponry they have thanks to the economic interaction between them or those with whom they're associated and the world at large, the industries in other countries, or even in their own, that procure the weapons and indeed produce the food that nourishes them.

So a religious identity is not exclusive; and that's a crucial point about it, because a religious identity is, like a world political identity, something that in principle incorporates the whole human race. Even if you belong to a radically sectarian form of religion, you are concerned for the whole human race, because you think that your group - your 144,000 - are 'the saved' and everyone else is 'the damned'. So you're actually thinking about the whole world . You divide it up in a particular way, but your identity is dependent on all but 144,000 people being damned. So religion is a universalizing factor. It is a way of thinking about the whole world. The kind of identity that religion provides for those devoted to it, opens them up to factors beyond their local nation, their local physical community and beyond their own local economic involvement in the world.

Hugh Dibbens: *You are wearing a poppy and I wonder, in the light of what you've said, what that means to you?*

Secondly, my sketchy remembrance of Hegel is that of interpretation of history in terms of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. I wonder if, instead of giving us a Hegelian interpretation of where we are now, and looking ahead and recognizing the enormous threats in the future, through climate change or nations like China hungry for resources – whether you can look into the future and identify the antithesis and synthesis?

Nicholas Boyle: I wear a poppy because I think that the two great conflicts of the 20th century were appalling and inconceivable for the individual – disasters for the human race in which was involved not only an unimaginable amount of human suffering but also an unimaginable commitment from all sorts of people of personal, collective, moral devotion and responsibility. So I wear the poppy in memory of all who died as victims, those who killed for a good cause, and those who killed and died for bad causes as well. I think that it is very important, in a corner of the world that has been at peace for longer now than at any time in its previous history, to remember that there is such a things as war and that it isn't just done to people a long way away to people, who don't quite count and we watch on our televisions; and that it is something that people have, from time to time - and rightly - felt that everything was at stake; and that that might happen again to us. We might be faced with such an issue; such a question.

As for the other question, whether there is some sort of synthetic light at the end of the antithetic tunnel, I think in one sense Yes I do believe that there is, because I think that, in one way or another, we have seen through the changes of many centuries that the forces of human cooperation are stronger than the forces of human division.

The forces of human cooperation operate through self-interest, through the desire of people for a quiet life, and to make a living for themselves and their families. That, in the end, is what economics is – and that in the end this triumphs over the attempts of all governments and those who wield the instruments of force to make them do something else.

And therefore I see the future in the continuing extension of a global market, continuing extension and deepening of transnational relationships in the provision of the goods and services by which we all live. I think that process will gradually force us to cooperate more and to control better those who have command of the instruments of violence.

But what I don't think is that there is any guarantee for the indefinite future of any particular political unit within that world system. So whether there will be an England in a hundred years time, I don't know. That the world will, in one way or another, be a better place for its inhabitants I do, I think, believe.