



# J.J. ROUSSEAU AND JOHANN G. HERDER: THE CREATORS OF THE FRENCH AND GERMAN CONCEPTS OF NATION

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**Abstract:** *The national idea is one of the great ideologies specific to modernity. With a history of two centuries, the national ideology continues today to be a true paradigm. We can only conceive of our life within a nation. The nation is par excellence the formula of solidarity and identity specific to the modern world. The creators of the national idea are two important names in modern philosophy: J.J. Rousseau and Johann G. Herder. Rousseau is the creator of the French concept of nation, based on man's will to belong to a community of citizens. Herder is the founder of the German concept of nation, based on the common history, language and culture of a people*

## • Introduction

- Most researchers of this concept talk about the modernity and artificiality of this concept. The British Benedict Anderson states about the nation that "it is an imagined community, because even the members of the smallest nation will never know most of their compatriots, they will not meet them, but in the minds of everyone lives the image of their communion." We find a similar idea in Ernest Gellner's anthropology studies: "nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it invents nations where they do not exist."
- A compromise solution was proposed by the British Anthony D. Smith with regards to the ethnic origin of nations, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (1986). "The starting point of his demonstration was the relative concordance, the significant degree of overlap between ethnicities (or linguistic spaces) and nations. Nations have formed around ethnic cores, and even if they came to represent anything else, their origin extends into the Middle Ages and into Antiquity."

## • Material and method

- Our approach is interdisciplinary: philosophical and historical analysis has been applied to the notions under scrutiny. The materials are the two main works of the two philosophers: *The social contract* of J. J. Rousseau and J. Herder's *Ideas on the Philosophy of Human History*.

## • Results and discussions

- The founders of the national idea are two important names in modern philosophy: J. J. Rousseau and J. G. Herder. **Jean-Jacques Rousseau** (1712-1778) was the first of the modern intellectuals, their archetype and, in many ways, the most influential of all. Rousseau's *Social Contract* is responsible for establishing the French concept of nation. The national ideology is based, like liberalism and socialism, on the Enlightenment principle of the sovereignty of the people, on the idea of government for and through the people. There is no other legitimate authority than that delegated by the community of citizens.
- Through his work, *Ideas on the Philosophy of Human History*, **Johann G. Herder** is the creator of the German concept of nation, of the ethno-cultural nation, a conception which was then adopted in Central and South-Eastern Europe. According to Herder, "the most natural state is a state composed of a single people, with a single national character (...) a people is a natural product like a family, but more widespread than this (...) like all natural communities, (...) and in the case of the state the best order is the natural order; that is, the one in which everyone fulfills the function for which nature intended him."

## • Conclusions

- The consequences of transposing the national ideology into reality are largely known. The watchword of modernity, "no nation without a state", was a mirage which sparked conflict and bloodshed on numerous occasions. The nineteenth century was shaken by national liberation movements and wars between nations.
- The First World War was a real civil war between Europeans. States that had a common fund of civilization were butchered in the name of national rights. The nationalist excesses of the interwar period led to the tragedy of World War II. Comparing the two concepts of nation, the French one against the German one, we can see a greater predisposition to nationalism of the German concept. Nazism, which is the culmination of German nationalism, aims to annex all German-inhabited territories in neighboring countries: Czechoslovakia, Poland, France.