

3 The Impossibility of Universal Nationalism

Universal Nationalism

Humane nationalists from Herder and Mazzini onward—liberal, republican, or otherwise—have shared a vision of universal nationalism, of a world of nationalist nations peacefully coexisting. They have shared, in Yael Tamir's provocative phrase, a nationalism of all nations. They have often been nationalists of their own nations first and foremost, as Mazzini was; but they have thought of themselves as friends to nationalisms everywhere. Those who share this vision have often spoken of a universal right of national self-determination. If nationalism is generalizable, then each nation can determine its own fate without posing any necessary danger to other nations. Nationalisms are not inherently in conflict; perhaps nationalisms—rightly-understood never are. Indeed, those who see nationalism as the enemy of imperialism and not its ally have thought that universal nationalism was necessary for peace; Woodrow Wilson seems to have thought something like this at the time of the Fourteen Points (though he was later disillusioned).⁹¹

The vision is not attainable. Nationalism cannot be universalized. One can be a nationalist of one's own nation and friendly to the nationalisms of some or many other particular nations. But even if every nation and every nationalism is liberal and humane, a nationalism of all nations is not possible. The argument to this effect takes up much of this chapter, but in essence it is this: It is well-established that there is no single criterion that marks out a human grouping as a nation. And the most plausible descriptive accounts of nationalism include a large element of self-definition and self-identification. The question of which nation, say,

⁹¹ The differences in understandings of the relationship between imperialism and nationalism sometimes rest on different uses of terms, but don't have to. When 'nation' and 'state' are elided, then 'nationalism' is simply the (sometimes aggressive and imperialistic) advancement of one state's interests. But even when the concepts of nation and state are kept separate, some states, some empires, are more national and more nationalistic than others. The Hapsburg configuration of empire against nations is not the only possibility; Prussian–German nationalism was closely related to Wilhelmine imperialism.

the Alsatians belong to is answered in part with reference to their own self-understandings. (Remember Renan and his 'daily plebiscite.')

But the nationalist—the person who holds the nationalism of one nation as a normative position—must be committed to the view that these self-understandings can be wrong. Nationalist projects are dedicated to convincing some people that they belong to this nation rather than to that one—that they are French rather than German, Turkish rather than Kurdish, Quebecois rather than Canadian (or, in each case, vice versa). The nationalist, in other words, thinks that there is an underlying right answer to the question 'What nation does this person belong to?' Recent political theorists of nationalism have apparently incorporated this element of nationhood into their theories; they all accept that nations are in part 'imagined communities' and much is made of the rejection of primordialism. But these theorists have not quite come to grips with the implications of this subjective element in the definition of the nation. It undermines the possibility of a normative nationalism in any given case, of saying to a person that he or she ought to be loyal to this community rather than to that one.

Moreover—returning to the fact that no single criterion marks out nations even setting aside self-identification—a world in which some nations are defined ethnically, others linguistically, others on the basis of a shared political history, and so on, is a world in which some groups will be claimed by more than one nation and others will be left out of all nations. The Alsatian problem—the problem of a group (and its territory) being claimed by one nation on political grounds and another on ethnic/cultural grounds—will confront us over and over again. So will the Roma problem, the problem of the group that is outside almost every nation's self-definition.

Apparently successful attempts to construct a universal nationalism typically actually justify a position that I call moderate and generalized communitarianism [MGC]. This is the position that we are morally permitted (or perhaps morally obligated) to be at least moderately morally partial to fellow members of all of the affective and cultural communities to which we belong. We may be partial to them as against the rest of humanity, and perhaps we ought to be partial to them and to the group as against our own personal interests. In short, MGC holds that all of our cultural memberships and communal affiliations are morally relevant.⁹²

⁹² MGC does not necessarily equate with communitarianism on any of the issues that divide communitarians from liberals; at least some communitarians would find MGC too pluralistic to offer the kind of shared unifying experiences they think necessary. Allen Buchanan has argued that a position very like MGC yields liberal political principles in 'Assessing the Communitarian Critique of Liberalism,' *Ethics* 99, (1989), 852–82.

This general moral relevance of cultural communities is not the same as, indeed it is contrary to, the kind of special moral relevance for one community, one cultural membership, that all arguments for nationalism and some arguments for minority cultural rights require. So some such arguments gain their plausibility because they show that we owe loyalty, or are allowed partiality, to communities larger than the self or the family and smaller than humanity as a whole; they then leap to the conclusion that special political provision for this or that cultural community is morally justified.

In Chapter 1 I argued for the moral and political significance of cultural pluralism, of the social fact of multiple cultures and ethnicities coexisting in the same state, and of the characteristic dangers of violence and cruelty that arise from that social fact. Here, however, I argue mostly against ascribing ethical significance in politics to cultural membership, preservation, or loyalty per se. Arguments for political recognition of cultural attachments rely on claims about the relationship between persons and their communities; for most persons, there exist several cultural communities with which he or she has this kind of relationship. However, the proposed political institutions or policies—national self-determination is the one I discuss at greatest length but the point is applicable to many less drastic forms of cultural protection—give one such cultural community priority, and do not recognize the comparable ties members of that community have with larger, smaller, or crosscutting communities. Nationalism and policies of minority cultural preservation gain the most plausibility when the alternative to some particular national or cultural community is imagined to be either undifferentiated humanity or alienated individualism. In fact, however, the alternative is often some other community to which persons also have some attachment. If all those attachments are morally relevant, then none can be given the kind of political priority which excludes the others.

I thus argue against duties of participation in or belonging to one particular level of cultural community; I also suggest that some kinds of arguments for cultural or national rights stand or fall with the arguments for such duties. First I argue that national identity and loyalty cannot have even the moral significance ascribed to them by theorists of moderate, liberal, or universalistic nationalism. In Part II I offer a more general critique of theories of cultures as public goods. In both sections I argue that universal, non-remedial arguments for some kinds of

cultural rights depend on the moral status of cultural membership which I am disputing.

Nationalism as a normative political view addresses two kinds of normative claims to members of the nation.⁹³

1. This unit (Quebec, or Canada, or Croatia, or Yugoslavia, or Turkey, or Kurdistan) is and rightfully ought to be considered your nation.
2. You should be loyal to your nation.
 - 2a. You ought to be willing to place the needs of your nation and of your co-nationals above the needs of outsiders, ultimately including a willingness to kill outsiders for the nation. You ought to support your nation's struggle to attain or preserve self-determination against the attempts by outsiders to make the nation a subordinate part of some state or empire.
 - 2b. You ought to be willing to place the needs of your nation and of your co-nationals above the needs of subsets of the nation, including ethnic, religious, economic, or political subgroups. You as an individual are also a subset of the nation and so ought to be willing to put its interests ahead of your own; ultimately, this includes a willingness to die for the nation.⁹⁴ You ought to support your nation's struggle to preserve its unity against factions that seek to break it up; you ought to oppose attempts to secede from the nation.

Portions of (2a) and (2b) may be combined in a familiar way:

- 2c. You ought to support your nation in its attempts to make, or to keep, the political and the national unit congruent.⁹⁵ You ought to

⁹³ It also addresses a normative claim to outsiders, which is something like 'You ought to recognize this unit as the nation,' This may entail, *inter alia*, granting the nation political independence if it is not currently independent and respecting it as an appropriate unit of self-determination and an appropriate object of its members' loyalty. Our attention here is on the internal normative claims; I take it that they are prior to the external ones logically and morally if not always chronologically.

⁹⁴ On the duty to kill and to die for the nation, see Yael Tamir, 'Pro Patria Mori!' in Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan (eds.), *The Morality of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). On its face it may seem that only very extreme nationalists would make such demands; but many moderate normative nationalists would accept that (a) nationhood is a criterion of legitimacy for statehood and (b) citizens of legitimate states have at least a moral duty to defend those states by force of arms during wartime. As noted below, the duties to kill and to die may be sharply constrained by other moral obligations; but I think Tamir is right that nations—unlike many other collectivities, like classes, professions, or even religions—are widely thought to have a moral claim over life and death in extremis.

⁹⁵ Cf. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1: Nationalism is the claim that 'the political and the national unit should be congruent.' Nothing in what follows is affected if we accept Paul Gilbert's formulation of a nation as 'a group of a kind that has, other things being equal, the right to independent statehood,' which as he notes is more moderate than Gellner's formulation, since there might be good reasons not to exercise the right. Not every nation can simultaneously have such a right. Paul Gilbert, *The Philosophy of Nationalism* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998).

support the nation's political independence from larger units while opposing the attempts of any subsets of the nation to secede or, if already separate, to remain so.

Normative nationalisms come in a very wide range of intensities, and most elements of these claims can be significantly moderated leaving a recognizably nationalist view. The moral partiality shown to members may be only *prima facie*. The duty of loyalty to the nation may be subordinated to other moral obligations; the acts members are called on to perform may be constrained by basic universal principles. Sovereign statehood may be replaced by self-government within a larger state. But for a normative view to be nationalist, it must at least identify which community constitutes a nation, and hold that members ought to be loyal to their nation above and against larger, smaller, and crosscutting human communities.

What I will argue in this section is that these claims cannot be defended simultaneously in a way that is simultaneously universalizable and plausible.⁹⁶ Arguments for generalized or universal nationalism either justify MGC and then simply skip argumentative steps to reach nationalistic conclusions; depend on a tacit assumption that we already know which units in the world are nations and which are not, that the general form of claim (1) is empirical rather than normative; or correctly treat claim (1) as normative but in so doing undermine any argument for claim (2).

These normative claims are ordinarily made simultaneously. One can imagine conceptually, but never hears in reality, 'This unit is your nation, but you really ought to be loyal to your state instead.' The word nation is so normatively loaded that who invokes it typically invokes

⁹⁶ I exclude at least one kind of claim which nationalists also make, claims about land and territory. I discuss these in Chapter 7. It of course tends to be true that nationalists make expansionist claims about land which cannot be generalized, but here I am concerned to establish that even in principle nationalistic claims cannot be universal. If nations were clearly and uncontroversially identifiable, their claims to territory in principle might be compatible or at least amenable to general compromise. Similarly, I do not mean to exclude critiques of nationalism like that offered by Jamie Mayerfeld, namely that 'nationalism is dangerous in any form because it cannot be dissociated from certain attitudes which . . . make violence more likely'; I offer a more benign account of nationalism only for the sake of showing the limits that even it encounters. Mayerfeld, 'The Myth of Benign Group Identity: A Critique of Liberal Nationalism,' *Polity* 30:4 1998, 555–78.

loyalty to it. It was not always so; Lord Acton was perfectly capable of identifying one level of community as the nation and another level as the appropriate state. Nor is it universally so; those cosmopolitans who care little for loyalty to state or for loyalty to nation can certainly call a unit a nation without demanding loyalty to it. But, for example, states that are trying to command loyalty, and to undermine nationalist movements, do not deny claim (2). Instead, they change the proper noun in claim (1). Of course you ought to be loyal to your nation; but your nation is Turkey, or Canada, or China; Kurdish is only an ethnicity, French only a language, Tibetan a nonentity. These are, in Rogers Brubaker's useful terminology, nationalizing states, seeking to shift loyalty away from state-seeking national minorities.⁹⁷

Rupert Emerson was, I think, nearly correct when he defined the nation as 'the largest community, which when the chips are down, effectively commands men's loyalty, overriding the claims both of lesser communities within it and those which cut across it or potentially enfold it within a still greater society'—but only nearly.⁹⁸ The nation is typically the unit for which the speaker thinks one ought to have that loyalty. Some analysts have been misled in looking for some universal empirical marker for that unit; Walker Connor thought he had found it in the largest unit for which people are willing to imagine a common blood ancestry. I submit that there is no such universal empirical trait, not even a universal trait on which the national imagination centers. The questions of whether Turkey or Kurdistan, France or Brittany really is a nation do not admit of empirical answers. One cannot go into the world accepting claim (2) and then engage in a dispassionate empirical analysis into which proper noun belongs in claim (1). One cannot do this because there's no true answer lurking out there; and one probably cannot as a matter of moral psychology, either. It is difficult to imagine someone who believed that he or she owed some group the kind of loyalty demanded by claim (2), but who did not know which group that was. The feelings of obligation and loyalty which persons feel to nations are intimately tied up with their feelings about particular groups and places, that is, with the particular unit they identify as their nation. In any event, what would the inquiry of the nationalist who did not know to which nation he or she belonged look like?

I do not mean to suggest that there are no wrong answers. There are

⁹⁷ Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁹⁸ Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation* (Boston, 1960), 95–6, quoted in Walker Connor, *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 1993, 156.

human communities with which a given individual has no plausible claim to membership, with which he or she does not share a language or a territory or a history or a religion or . . . (If I declare that I am Japanese, then on its face I am mistaken.) But this isn't the sort of situation we typically confront in the world. The circumstances in which nationalism has normative political work to do are usually precisely those circumstances in which there are competing communities each of which can make a plausible claim to being a nation.

It is important to note that nationalism does not only claim that one ought to be partial to some subset of humanity and that one ought to be loyal to something larger than one's family. One might be so partial and loyal to many communities simultaneously. There could be some obligations one owes to one's co-religionists, some to one's fellow citizens of a state, some to the other speakers of one's language, and so on. This kind of morality, moderate and generalized communitarianism is utterly incompatible with nationalism. MGC says that the Kurdish Turk or the Quebecois Canadian owes something to both groups, to both identities. State and ethnic group alike should be placed ahead of self, on the one hand, and the whole of humanity, on the other. Nationalism, however, makes a claim of priority. One ought to choose one's nation over one's current state, over the claims of religion, and so on. The nationalist does not ask me to choose between (Kurdistan or Turkey) and (the rest of the world) but between Kurdistan and Turkey, not between (Quebec or Canada) and (the rest of the world) but between Quebec and Canada. In each case the so-called 'civic' nationalist will tell me that the latter unit is truly my nation, the 'ethnic' nationalist the former; but both make the same kind of claim of priority. I return to the civic–ethnic distinction below. For now, the important point is that nationalism, as distinct from MGC, claims that the nation takes priority not only over self and over humanity but also over rival identities, loyalties, and group affiliations.

Isaiah Berlin characterized the four key recurrent elements in nationalist thought as

the belief (1) in the overriding need to belong to a nation; (2) in the organic relationships of all the elements that constitute a nation; (3) in the value of our own simply because it is ours; (4) and finally, faced by rival contenders for authority and loyalty, in the supremacy of their [the nation's] claims.⁹⁹

The third of these claims is fundamental for MGC; Yael Tamir paraphrases it as 'the magic pronoun "my."¹⁰⁰ The first claim is a

⁹⁹ Isaiah Berlin, 'Nationalism: Past Neglect and Present Power,' in *Against the Current* (New York: Penguin, 1979), 345, numeration added.

¹⁰⁰ Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), ch. 5 .

moral-psychological one rather than a directly normative one. The second claim, to which I give little attention because of its speciousness, is sociological, and an attempt to explain both the moral importance of nations and how we pick them out.¹⁰¹ It is the fourth claim, ‘faced by rival contenders for authority and loyalty, in the supremacy of [nations] claims,’ that I am seeking to elaborate here, the normative demand which is distinctive to nationalism and which sets it apart from MGC. In this spirit Anthony Smith characterizes one of the ‘central propositions of the ideology’ of nationalism as ‘The nation is the source of all political and social power, and loyalty to the nation overrides all other allegiances.’¹⁰²

Arguments for universalized nationalism often defend a nationalism of a moderated kind, so that the loyalty demanded is *prima facie* and constrained by other moral principles. The usual strategy in such arguments is to identify some characteristic of nations which would allow them to make moral claims which are both particularistic (that is, allowing for less than universal application, allowing for preferences for fellow nationals as against outsiders) and collective (that is, allowing for moral demands to be made on individual members, justifying giving priority to the nation over individual claims). Thus, Thomas Hurka argues for national partiality and loyalty on grounds of sharing a history of common enterprises in the collective production of valuable social goods. Jeff McMahan claims that fair play and gratitude can justify general nationalism. Kai Nielsen relies on a sense of common history and shared attachment to particular territory.¹⁰³

Assume for the moment that some such moral arguments are correct, that fair play, or gratitude, or a need for a context of choice, or a need for recognition, justify moderate moral partiality to a group larger than oneself but smaller than humanity. The difficulty is that such arguments do not uniquely pick out the nation as the sole or primary object of that partiality and loyalty. They give no grounds for believing in the supremacy of the nation's claims. Instead, they justify MGC—loyalty to and partiality to all those groups to which one belongs that cooperatively produce valuable goods, that warrant gratitude, or that have a shared sense of history and shared attachment to a piece of land.

¹⁰¹ By ‘speciousness’ I do not mean that Berlin is wrong to attribute the claim to nationalism, only that the claim itself is wrong.

¹⁰² Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 74, emphasis added.

¹⁰³ Thomas Hurka, ‘The Justification of National Partiality,’ in Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan (eds.), *The Morality of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Jeff McMahan, ‘The Limits of National Partiality,’ in *ibid.*; Kai Nielsen, ‘Liberal Nationalism, Liberal Democracies, and Secession,’ *University of Toronto Law Journal* 48 (1998), 253–95.

Yael Tamir's argument, which draws support for group attachments and loyalties from moderately individualistic premises, similarly justifies those attachments without marking out the nation as special. The groups to which such attachment is justified are those groups in which one finds oneself, those groups one can imagine joining, those in which one's loved ones find themselves, and those which one can imagine one's loved one's joining. Nothing in that argument distinguishes nation from ethnic group from language community from religion. So, if the moral argument is successful, it justifies moral consideration for all of those groups. It entirely fails to justify giving priority to one of them—even a moderate and conditional priority.

But this in turn means that Tamir's argument cannot support (2c). She has justified only a variant of MGC, a moderate moral concern for our constitutive identities and the groups that help define them. But an argument that nations should have political self-government depends on some differentiation of the nation from the other kinds of group that do that kind of thing.

Of all the claims set out above, (2c) most obviously requires that the nation be differentiated from and set above all other groups which might be the object of loyalty; it is in the demand for self-determination that the alleged priority of the nation over rival communities is made most explicit. (2c) claims that sovereignty and self-government ought to inhere in the nation, and as sovereignty is an exclusive concept, that means it cannot inhere in rival collectivities. (2a) and (2b) also require such differentiation, but in a more subtle way. After all, one might acknowledge a duty to die for one's nation (in appropriate circumstances) without forswearing a duty to die for one's faith (in appropriate circumstances). One might be partial to fellow nationals as compared with aliens, and also be partial to coreligionists as compared with nonbelievers. Perhaps the more such identities one shares with another, the more partial one ought to be toward that person. This is a coherent (and, to many, intuitively appealing) idea about the nature of our obligations.

So far, however, it is again nothing more than MGC; it is not nationalism. MGC says that one has obligations of various kinds to communities which are larger than oneself but smaller than the world. One ought to give preference to the needs of fellow members against the needs of generalized humanity, and against one's own individual needs. But nationalism does not only claim priority for the nation against the world and against the individual; it also claims priority against all other collectivities. The nation's needs have priority not only over the individual's, but also over the ethnic group's or the church's. Fellow nationals have priority not only over strangers, but also over co-religionists,

co-linguists, or fellow citizens of an existing multinational state who are not co-nationals.

For it to be generally morally true that national communities have this kind of priority over all other communities, that national identities have priority over other kinds of identity, there must be something morally distinctive about nations as such. Here we run into the problem of trying to generalize normative claim (1). For nations as such to have a distinctive moral character, nations as such must presumably share some trait or traits with each other which they do not share with other collectivities. That is, an argument for claim (2) as a universal claim must identify something which all nations and only nations have in common, something besides that they are the proper objects of the loyalty described in claim (2) itself. But if there is no general empirical attribute which marks out real nations as distinct from other communities, if 'X is your nation' is always a normative rather than an empirical statement, then how can every person's obligation to his or her nation be grounded?

But that is exactly what one needs to be able to do if claim (2) is to be coherent as a generalizable moral claim. And the generalizability of claim (2) is crucial for universalistic nationalism, the position that we all ought to be nationalists, that every nation and every state ought to be a nation-state, that everyone ought to be loyal to his or her nation and partial to his or her fellow nationals.

Claim (1) must in a sense be empirical rather than normative for claim (2) to be generalizable. For claim (2) to be generalizable, every person must be able to give a unique and determinate answer to the question 'What is my nation?' I cannot owe the kind of loyalty demanded by claim (2) to multiple communities simultaneously.

If the question 'What collectivity is my nation?' admitted of a unique, determinate, empirical answer for each of us, if 'nation' were an is word rather than an ought word, then universalistic nationalism could be credible. If, say, nations were defined exclusively by language, then one could (at least in principle, leaving aside the complications of multilingual communities) simply find out the native languages of persons or communities and know their national identities. But if some nations can be constituted linguistically, some politically, some ethnically, and so on, then claim (2) legitimizes incompatible demands of supreme loyalty. I might have a supreme political duty to Quebec and to Canada, to Kurdistan and to Turkey. As noted above, such a situation is particularly absurd since the choices being faced in conflicts over national identity and obligation are precisely between Canada and Quebec, Kurdistan and Turkey.

Rogers Brubaker has persuasively argued that even the social reality of nationalism should not lead us to treat the ‘analytically dubious notion of “nations” as substantial, enduring collectivities.’¹⁰⁴ Nationness, Brubaker says, is something that happens in discrete ways at identifiable times, ‘something that suddenly crystallizes rather than gradually develops.’¹⁰⁵ The Serbian republic turns into a nationalizing state and generates Serbian nationness. There is nothing to be gained and much to be confused by supposing that there was always, really, an underlying Serb nation waiting to express itself. This is perhaps the most promising way of dealing with what social scientists of nationalism have long known: the category ‘nation’ used by nationalists does not reliably correspond with any empirical criterion or set of criteria in the world. Nations are defined by statehood, or by language, or by religion, or by ethnicity, or by whichever other line of demarcation was locally important in helping a group to feel like a politicized ‘us’ and not part of ‘them.’ But if this is true, then claim (1) cannot be empirical; and as a normative claim it cannot be generalized. For claim (1) to be generalizable, it has to be able to tell each person what his or her nation is, without conflicts or inconsistencies.

If one is willing to say that all nations should be marked off in the same way that this nation is marked off—e.g. that all nations should be linguistically defined—then the position does appear universalizable at the cost of empirical plausibility. Universalized linguistic nationalism requires thinking that all Spanish-speaking countries should be viewed as one nation, as should all English-speaking countries and all Arabic-speaking countries, but that India should be thought of as dozens of nations. Religion marks some nations and nationalisms apart from their neighbors, as in the former Yugoslavia, but is obviously ineligible as a general criterion.

Of course, there are often good reasons for ethnic advocates not to suggest generalizing the criterion they use to demarcate their own group. Defenders of the position that there ought to be an ethnically defined Kurdish state, or a religiously/ethnically defined Jewish state, should still be nervous about saying that the rump Turkish state, or the world's Christian and Muslim states, ought to abandon whatever civic orientation they might have and define membership along the relevant ethnic or religious–ethnic lines. There are and would remain Kurdish and Jewish minorities in those states, minorities that could only stand to lose from the ethnicization of citizenship. Similarly, if Quebec secedes from Canada on the theory that nations are defined by language, that

¹⁰⁴ Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 21.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 19.

bodes ill for the Francophone minorities in the rest of Canada (now reunderstood as Anglophone Canada).

If, by contrast, the claim is made that we ought to have an ethnic nation state but you should retain or increase the civic orientation of your nation, then the position is no longer a universalistic one. In recognition of this, nationalists often argue that existing nations are really already defined along the relevant ethnic divide, even if under civic coloration—and they are sometimes right. Thus Zionists argued that Jews were not genuinely accepted by any of the nations of Europe, that those nations already defined Jews out of membership; and Kurdish nationalists say that the Anatolian state is in reality as well as in name already a Turkish state. Still, this is some distance from a generalizable rule about how nations ought to be demarcated.

One possible solution to this problem, one reminiscent of Renan's 'daily plebiscite,' is to posit that a nation just is a social collectivity whose members feel themselves to be a nation. Language, religion, shared statehood, and the rest are neither necessary nor sufficient; it is the sentiment of a nation's members that marks off a nation, and that sentiment can be sparked by any or all of these traits, or by something else entirely. Thus Tamir suggests that 'Only one factor is necessary, although not sufficient, for a group to be defined as a nation—the existence of national consciousness.'¹⁰⁶ This is the most analytically and empirically plausible kind of answer to the question 'What is a nation?'

However, it vitiates the possibility of a coherent argument about claim (1) in any particular case. When the nationalist says to me, 'You ought to view X as your nation' and I reply 'But I view Y as my nation,' the discussion must stop. By virtue of the fact that I think Y is my nation, it is. No room remains for the nationalist to say, 'But you are mistaken; X really is your nation.' I cannot be mistaken about which unit it is that I owe ultimate loyalty to, if the only defining characteristic of such a unit is that it is the one to which people think they owe ultimate loyalty. It won't do to make the nation actually plebiscitary, to say that whatever unit a majority of the people consider to be their nation is their nation, and that members of the minority are mistaken about their identity. Even if one holds with such Rousseauian thinking in other contexts, 'majority' and 'minority' cannot be specified in advance of identifying the nation. (A majority of what or whom? Canadians or Quebecois, Turks or Kurds?)

The plebiscitary model jeopardizes moral arguments for claim (2) in the same way. It is difficult to ground moral duties on a unit the distinctive

¹⁰⁶ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, 65.

character of which is that its members feel that it is the unit to which obligations are due. The plebiscitary nationalist must simultaneously say that what sets a nation apart from other communities is that its members feel themselves to owe duties to it and not to the others, and that those who feel themselves to owe loyalty to some other unit instead are mistaken.

The problem described with defining nations with reference to the feelings of their members applies even if such feeling is only one of several criteria. For David Miller the fact that a community is ‘constituted by shared belief and mutual commitment’ is only the first of five criteria; but that is enough to make his account vulnerable to the criticism described here. The other four criteria, such as connection to a particular territory, are all applicable to most or all of the rival claimants to the title of nation; Canada and Quebec both have distinct public cultures, connections to particular territory, and so on. All that can separate the valid from the invalid demand for national partiality and obligation is the shared beliefs criterion; and then persons’ obligations are defined with reference by the feelings that they or their putative compatriots have about their loyalties.¹⁰⁷ Hence, as Paul Gilbert puts it, ‘attempts to combine subjectivist with nonsubjectivist accounts seem bound to lead to disaster, for either it is, say, their belief that they share certain characteristics which constitutes people as a nation, or it is the shared characteristics themselves which do so; it cannot be both.’¹⁰⁸

Here, then, is the knot which cannot be unraveled. Arguments for (2) gain their plausibility from the assumption that the problem of identifying the nation has already been solved, and sometimes from contrasting the nation only with the self and with humanity rather than with rival collectivities. Empirically plausible general arguments about (1) leave no room for the justification of (2).

Any argument for universalistic nationalism, as opposed to MGC, must make reference to some characteristic which nations share which other communities do not. Nations cannot be defined by a plurality of characteristics, since that would put some in the position of owing ultimate loyalty to two units simultaneously. Any credible candidate for the single characteristic which all nations and only nations share must be something like ‘nations are those units which their members believe to be nations’ or ‘nations are those units to which their members believe

¹⁰⁷ David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 27.

¹⁰⁸ Gilbert, *The Philosophy of Nationalism*, 171.

they owe ultimate loyalty.' But if that is what nations are, then claim (1) becomes incoherent as a normative claim and, more importantly, there is no non-circular moral argument for claim (2).

It might be objected that this argument only has force when national identity is contested rather than clear, and that these are marginal cases. Perhaps it is true that the majority of persons in the world have neither doubt nor dispute about which nation they belong to. David Miller writes that

very often we find groups who are living side-by-side, who are largely descended from the same ancestors, who speak the same language, who share many of the same practices, and whose members think of themselves as having a common identity. Groups like that often acquire a shared national identity, and demand political autonomy, and when they do several kinds of considerations will converge to reinforce their claim. Now hypothetically we could imagine a world in which these features did not overlap, in which physical proximity and language, or language and culture, and so forth, were not connected, and in that hypothetical world we would have to ask ourselves why, for instance, the bare fact that a group of people speak the same language should give them any kind of right to their own state. But although it is contingent, it is not just accidental that in the real world group characteristics like those listed above tend to overlap, and the plausibility of nationalism, I suggest, depends in large measure on that fact.¹⁰⁹

No doubt. But precisely what these group characteristics do is overlap; they do not coincide. Geography, political history, language, religion, and so on all influence one another down through the ages. But in the here and now they leave us with overlapping, competitive claimants to the title 'nation,' and to the moral and political primacy over other communities that goes with that title. And the cases in which doubt or dispute exist are hardly marginal; they are both widespread and central to much theorizing and argument about nationalism. They are the cases in which we are most likely to find nationalist movements and sentiments. These movements and sentiments are not usually directed against the rival 'humanity' the rival 'individualism;' they are directed against some other community which also shares some of the group traits Miller mentions. If those traits stacked neatly on top of each other, nationalism would be easy—and also largely pointless, or at least invisible. But human communities migrate and intermingle, coming to live side-by-side with those with different ancestors; they share a history which then diverges because of a partial

¹⁰⁹ David Miller, review of Gilbert, *The Philosophy of Nationalism*, *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 16:2 (1999), 191–2.

conquest; they share a language but then divide on religious grounds; and so on. This is all contingent, perhaps, but it is none the less very commonly true. And so our understanding of the moral psychology of nationalism doesn't take us any closer to thinking it is a plausible normative principle. Those cases in which a particular nationalism would have normative work to do are precisely those in which there are overlapping but not coinciding communities each of which might be a nation—that is, those in which nationalism as a general principle can have nothing to say.

One reader has suggested that it is implausible to put much weight on the potential conflict of loyalties since the world is today characterized by all too many people with fanatical devotion to one and only one group identity.¹¹⁰ It might seem that the most fanatical forms of nationalism are the least vulnerable to my argument, because for their adherents the problem of identity choice and conflicting loyalties does not arise. But even in situations of intense nationalistic conflict, there are many people struggling to choose between the rival communities. Many Quebecois have struggled between loyalty to Quebec and loyalty to Canada for a generation. David Laitin has documented and modeled the process of identity choice which Russian-speakers in newly independent Soviet republics experienced beginning in 1991.¹¹¹ In Yugoslavia, there was a time when, in standard nationalist consciousness-raising fashion, nationalist leaders like Tudjman were exhorting Yugoslavs to become (in this case) Croats. Certainly some always considered Serb or Croat to be their true national identity, but—especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina and among intermarried families—there also seems to have been considerable attachment to a Yugoslav identity, attachment which had to be overcome by Tudjman and his counterparts.¹¹² There are fanatics who are far too sure of their national identities, but they have to persuade, cajole, or coerce their putative fellow nationals to feel the same way. In any event, the normative theory of generalized nationalism can hardly be shored up by pointing to the fanatics.

¹¹⁰ Jeff Spinner-Halev, in comments at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association.

¹¹¹ David Laitin, *Identity in Formation: the Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998). Laitin's work is helpfully supplemented by Timur Kuran, 'Ethnic norms and their transformation through reputational cascades,' *Journal of Legal Studies* 27:2 (1998), 623–59.

¹¹² Bogdan Denitch, *Ethnic Nationalism : The Tragic Death of Yugoslavia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Russell Hardin, *One for All* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), ch. 6 .

Civic and Ethnic Nationalism

It is often claimed that there is a significant moral distinction to be drawn between ‘ethnic’ and ‘civic’ nationalism, and that the latter is morally benign while the former is not. But the basic moral and normative claims of nationalism, and the puzzles those claims raise, do not differ between its ethnic and civic variants. What differs is the unit specified in (1). Claim (2) and its subclaims can be made more or less moderately, but there is no necessary correspondence between that moderation and the kind of unit specified in (1).

Civic nationalism could take one of two forms: morally laden civic nationalism, which makes national loyalty conditional on the justice of the state's political principles and practices, and state-nationalism, which stipulates that states are nations, and that the loyalty owed to nations is owed to states. These are sometimes confused but are quite different; it is, to simplify, the difference between, on the one hand, consent or adherence to common political principles as the principle of membership or citizenship and, on the other, and *jus soli*.

The former urges people to love their country only because, and to the degree that, it is just—liberal democratic, republican, social-democratic, or whatever the preferred conception of justice may be. Loyalty to one's fellow nationals is said to come from their shared adherence to political principles. This can have only a very dubious attachment to liberalism, for it has the necessary implication that dissent is a form of treason. The McCarthyist appellation ‘un-American’ relies on a purely civic idea of nationalism; to be an American is to hold a certain set of beliefs that are incompatible with (inter alia) Soviet Communism. As Bernard Yack puts it, ‘Were Americans, for example, to make citizenship contingent upon commitment to political principles instead of the mere accident of birth (to citizen parents or on American territory), they might become considerably more suspicious of their fellow citizens' declarations of political loyalty. Birthright citizenship can promote toleration precisely by removing the question of communal membership from the realm of choice and contention about political principles.’¹¹³

In any event this variant of civic nationalism entirely fails to solve the problem of specifying the proper noun in claim (1). It must either assume the pre-existence of a nation of some kind (‘Be loyal to America because and to the degree that it is just’) or give advice of the form ‘Be

¹¹³ Bernard Yack, ‘The Myth of the Civic Nation,’ *Critical Review* 10:2 (1996), 193–211.

loyal to the nation that is the most just' or 'Be loyal to the nation that most accords with your conception of justice'—regardless of its distance or difference from the land of one's birth or current residence. This is a position which is never actually stated or advocated; no one suggests that borders be endlessly redrawn or that persons endlessly migrate around the world in response to changes in the relative justness of states or changes in which particular conception of justice is shared by which persons. When civic nationalism is invoked in order to justify nationalism of a particular unit on any grounds other than that it is the most just, the argument must rest on a tacit assumption that the problem of claim (1) has already been resolved. When, for example, civic nationalism is used as an argument against Quebecois secession, it begs the question. Granted that one only ought to be loyal to a just state and that one ought to share a concept of justice with one's fellow citizens, how do we know that Canada is the right unit in which to do those things, as opposed to either Quebec or North America? Civic nationalism on this understanding is really nothing but a set of constraints on claim (2), and much confusion results when it is thought of as a rival to more complete accounts of nationalism which include normative claims (1) and (2).

Maurizio Viroli takes Machiavelli to have been a prototypical republican patriot or civic nationalist;¹¹⁴ but this leaves unexplained where Machiavelli discovered the idea of Italy to call for its unification. The pure civic nationalist should not have been a patriot of Italy until after the Riorgimento had already succeeded; he should only have been a patriot of (e.g.) the Florentine Republic. This is typical; civic nationalism is never only civic. Civic nationalism usually assumes some pre- or extra-political cultural nation to which people have an emotional attachment, and then puts a political gloss on it. 'Italy' or 'France' is presumed to exist; the civic nationalist then attributes some shared political doctrines, history, or destiny to that nation.

The move to shared political doctrines cannot, however, define the nation in the first place. What I have in common with my fellow nationals and not with the rest of the world can hardly ever be a set of political principles (unless political indoctrination in my nation has reached some terrifying new height). Any political principles which are broad enough and vague enough to command universal loyalty within a modern state are also so broad and vague as to cut across boundaries. Neither liberal democracy, the free market, social democracy, nor republicanism, nor even any particular conception of these concepts is

¹¹⁴ Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

the unique inheritance of any one state. If civic nationalism requires a culturally-defined pre-existing nation in order to make sense, then it cannot pose as a solution to the problems of such cultural nationalism.

The Gandhi–Nehru Indian National Congress tradition of Indian nationalism is sometimes taken to be exemplify civic nationalism in contrast with Hindu chauvinist nationalism of various kinds, today represented by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). But, just as with Machiavelli's patriotism, Indian civic nationalism must depend on some previous identification of India. An India which is tolerant of internal diversity must still be an India. Nehru's *Discovery of India*, a reconstruction of a putatively always-Indian history, is thus of a piece with his nationalism; it is not a deviation from his views. 'The continuity of Indian culture' is a necessary premise; he argues that '[w]hatever the word we use, Indian or Hindi or Hindustani, for our cultural tradition, we see in the past that some inner urge towards synthesis, derived essentially from the Indian philosophic outlook, was the dominant feature of Indian cultural, even racial development.' Despite millennia of linguistic, religious, and political fragmentation, 'I think that at almost any time in recorded history an Indian would have felt more or less at home in any part of India, and would have felt as a stranger in any other country.'¹¹⁵ If the BJP and its apologists stress the central roles of Hinduism and Hindi in that synthetic unity, so did Nehru. The difference lay in the latter's more liberal understanding of Hinduism, and in his belief that Islam did not disrupt the unity of India. But Nehru and Gandhi faced a project of political unification as well as of separation from the British Empire. Like Machiavelli and Mazzini, they insisted that there was some real underlying nation—defined in cultural terms—which ought to be unified in a single state.

Civic nationalism's other form goes to the opposite extreme, recommending to every person that he or she have nationalistic loyalty to the state in which he or she is a citizen. This nationalism abandons the object of claim (1) to the vagaries of history. The pure civic nationalist in 1988 Vilnius was a patriot of the Soviet Union; in 1992 she was a patriot of Lithuania. The civic nationalist in Charleston was a patriot of the United States in 1858, of the Confederacy in 1862, and of the United States again in 1866. The proper object of loyalty of Alsatians simply changed every time France or Germany regained control from the other. The moral justification for national obligation blurs into the moral justifications for obeying the law and for duties to the state. I share with

¹¹⁵ Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985[1946]), 87, 76, 62.

my fellow citizens, as such and regardless of the boundaries of the state, a set of political, legal, and social institutions and structures. We therefore share a duty to make them work peacefully and efficiently.

One apparent virtue of this civic nationalism, or state-nationalism, is that it does seem to be universalizable. If state-nationalism offers a general rule for correctly identifying nations—that they are to be identified with currently existing states—then several of the problems I have noted seem to dissolve. The rule that everyone ought to be a nationalist for his or her own nation is universalizable, since every person (in principle though not in practice) is a citizen of some state, and no person need be a citizen of more than one state. Moreover, civic nationalism might be thought to have the added virtue of bolstering stability. Civic nationalism calls on citizens to increase their allegiances to their states as currently constituted, whereas ethnic nationalism typically demands border changes. Changing borders is, of course, a dangerous process to begin, one that does not necessarily end easily.

The first difficulty, however, is that universal state-nationalism does not put an end to demands for border changes. At best, it might an end to demands for secession. Civic nations can, however, be expansionist, irredentist, or militaristic. The second difficulty is that pure universal civic nationalism is utterly implausible, and that anything less only contributes to the problem noted above of a world with multiple criteria for identifying nations, i.e. the lack of a unique specification for which units are nations and which persons belong to them.

Universal state-nationalism is not in fact a position with many explicit defenders or advocates. This kind of civic nationalism is invoked mainly as a putative contrast to disapproved-of ethnic nationalism, not as a coherent stand-alone theory; and it often gains plausibility only by smuggling in morally laden civic nationalism. Sometimes years of living together in the same state can generate feelings of commonality sufficient to give rise to feelings of nationalism. Benedict Anderson points to the nationalism that arose among members of creole elites in Latin American colonies with help from the shared experiences of aspiring to a common local capital and being bound by common administrative boundaries. Renan argued that the shared political history surrounding and following the Revolution helped create a sentiment that bound Alsatians, Bretons, and Basques together with Parisians. Shared state schools and shared experiences in common armed services have sometimes been powerful forces for creating national sentiment.

But it is the common sentiment and sense of shared experience, not the common statehood, that mark off the nation. As Kai Nielsen puts it,

‘All nationalisms are cultural nationalisms of one kind or another. There is no purely political conception of the nation, liberal or otherwise.’¹¹⁶ When a shared political history has created the relevant common sentiments, state-nationalism may manifest and makes sense. Indeed, those shared sentiments might be expected to survive a change in sovereignty. At least some Alsatians under German rule did not transfer national loyalty to Germany but felt themselves to be conquered Frenchmen. It could hardly be otherwise; if the sentiments were so shallowly grounded that they could switch objects immediately upon a change in sovereignty, then they provide poor support for the demands of either nation. Conversely, when shared statehood has not generated any fellow-feeling, or enough to overcome the fellow-feeling generated by some smaller or crosscutting community, it makes little sense to think of the state as a nation.

State-nationalism tries to make use of the moral psychology and emotions of nationalism. It seeks to generate emotional attachments to this state, attachments that would make the state worth fighting for (and not merely worth obeying or paying taxes to), attachments that would give its citizens an identity as members of a shared society. But moving from the state as a convenient legal fiction, like a corporation, to the state as an imagined community, requires us to admit the possibility of rival imaginings. If we owe loyalty to the state not simply because it exists and provides certain services but because it is in some sense distinctly ours, then there might be other communities which are even more ours.

To invoke state-nationalism against the ethnic or cultural nationalism of a subset of the state, for example against a secessionist movement, thus gives rise to a paradox. Attachment to Canada or Turkey which is based on shared history, culture, traditions, and experiences (such as—that most powerful of shared state-national experiences—having fought wars) can be undermined by attachment to Quebec or Kurdistan based on other, possibly more intense or important, shared history, cultural, traditions, and experiences. The loyalty generated by the former attachments cannot be used as an argument against the latter. Abandoning the idea of such emotional attachments and grounding loyalty to existing states simply on prudential concerns (as Hobbes did) is to abandon

¹¹⁶ Kai Nielsen, ‘Cultural Nationalism, Neither Ethnic Nor Civic,’ *The Philosophical Forum* 28 (1996–97), 42–52 at 50. To oversimplify the difference in our conclusions, Nielsen infers from this that incorrectly named ethnic nationalism is really no more baleful than we have traditionally thought civic nationalism to be. I infer rather that civic nationalism is no less baleful than we have traditionally thought nationalism in general to be.

nationalism, not to modify it into a 'civic' variant—and prudential calculations can go either way. The perfectly true prudential argument against secession—that state breakup is a messy and dangerous business, prone to turn violent—can sometimes be overridden by pointing to violence of the existing state against a minority, or the likelihood of interethnic violence later if the state is not divided now.

Civic nationalism at best can give an account of claim (1) or of claim (2), but not both. Any morally laden variant of civic nationalism, any theory that suggests that one ought to be loyal to one's nation because and to the extent that it is just, fails entirely to aid in the specification of nations. Such theories are indeed dependent on the prior identification of 'nations.' In turn, no theory that identifies nations with existing states can ground the kind of loyalty nationalism demands. We may owe to our extant states or to our fellow citizens of those states some duties regardless of the justness or the borders of those states; but we surely do not owe supreme loyalty to extant states as such. Any attempt to ground such loyalty turns state-nationalism into a cultural nationalism of some kind which, in turn, admits the possibility of rival cultural nationalisms.

In fairness, one contribution which civic nationalism perhaps can make—though it does nothing to solve the problem at hand—is to provide a morally preferable account of the nation's needs and interests which the loyal national is supposed to protect and advance. Recall:

- 2a. You ought to be willing to place the needs of your nation and of your co-nationals above the needs of outsiders . . .
- 2b. You ought to be willing to place the needs of your nation and of your co-nationals above the needs of subsets of the nation . . .

It is no doubt far better for members of a nation to understand their nation's needs as including the need to be virtuous, the need to be right, and the need to protect internal freedom than for them to understand it simply as the need to advance its own material and power interests. Viroli, describing the views of Richard Price, says that 'love of country means not only to give ourselves to her, but also to give her the best that human life can offer; that is, truth, virtue, and liberty.'¹¹⁷ Yet Yack's criticism is still telling; we have grounds to worry that those whose love of country and love of moral rightness are too tightly wound together will treat moral disagreements as treason. And in any event, this virtuous civic nationalism still requires prior identification of the nation (or, as Viroli would have it, 'country'). It is a moral attitude toward a

¹¹⁷ Viroli, *For Love of Country*, 98.

homeland that we already have, not an answer to the question of which community we should think of as our homeland.

David Miller has offered a compelling account of the ways in which shared statehood can sometimes generate a shared culture and sense of fellow-feeling in a way that makes plausible the claim of nationhood. In his description of the history of Scotland and England within Britain, he notes that even before the union of the kingdoms there were parallel histories and political arguments concerning the Reformation, the relationship of church and state, the idea of ancient and lost liberties, and a hostility toward Catholic foreign powers. After the union, Scots played central roles in the intellectual and political life of the United Kingdom, so that ‘interwoven history . . . is not just a matter of the two peoples being locked together in the same state for several centuries, nor is it simply a question of the two peoples having impacted on one another's development . . . What I am pointing to is the active collaboration between members of both nations in determining the course of political change, and so in defining the historic identity of the whole.’¹¹⁸

Stories similar in kind can be told about Alsace and France, Catalonia and Castilian Spain, Quebec and Canada, possibly even post-Ottoman Kurdistan and Turkey. (Turkish nationalists, at any rate, make much of the common cause Kurds and Turks made against Armenians, against Ottoman rule, and against European domination of Anatolia.) Sometimes a common political history can generate a shared culture or identity in a way that creates a civic-cultural community which can make a plausible claim on its members' loyalty. But a common political history is not the only thing that can generate such loyalty; and as borders shift communities share parts of their political history with different fellow subjects or citizens. So the civic-cultural community is rarely the only community that can make a plausible claim to nationhood and final loyalty, and we return to the problem of having to choose between competing possible nations.

Miller thinks that in such cases the underlying true answer is that both communities are nations, that Scotland and Britain are ‘nested nationalities.’ And he argues that the proper political response is something like the settlement Scotland and Britain have reached—a self-governing Scotland within Britain. Secession wouldn't do justice to British nationhood, and assimilation wouldn't do justice to Scottish. This, Miller argues, allows us to maintain that there is a universalizable principle that nationhood carries with it a moral claim to self-government, a principle

¹¹⁸ David Miller, ‘Nationality in Divided Societies,’ in *Citizenship and National Identity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000).

which sometimes has to meet the legitimate demands of nested nationalities. Moreover, it allows us to do so without thinking that there's a single objective marker of nationality and without falling into a completely subjectivist plebiscitary viewpoint.

There is no doubt much to be said for that sort of settlement, where it is available. Unfortunately, not all the communities which make plausible claims to being nations are neatly nested. Scotland is wholly within Britain and Quebec is wholly within Canada, but the Basque country straddles the French–Spanish border and Kurdistan cuts across the borders of four states.¹¹⁹

Unifying and Divisive Nationalism

Many have tried to differentiate divisive nationalism from unifying nationalism (or, sometimes, unifying ‘nationality’), a distinction that often corresponds to but is not identical with that between ethnic and civic nationalism. The Italian and German nationalisms of the nineteenth century were certainly not civic—they demanded the abandonment of actually existing states in favor of ethno-linguistically defined nations—but they are the standardly-given cases of unifying rather than divisive nationalism.

In fact, no such distinction can hold up under scrutiny. When Bosnian Serbs seek to unify politically with the Serbian-Yugoslav state, they are divisive from the perspective of Bosnia but unifying from the perspective of Serbia. Whether this looks ‘unifying’ or ‘divisive’ depends on one's perspective, on the unit that's already assumed to be the genuine nation. Proponents of unifying nationalism often speak of the need to emphasize ‘what we have in common rather than our differences;’ this is parasitic on a pre-existing definition of the relevant ‘we,’ that is, on assuming claim (1) to be a settled empirical matter rather than a disputed normative one. If we have already defined the Bosnian state as a nation, if we have defined the nationality of the Bosnian Serbs as ‘Bosnian,’ then they are emphasizing their differences from their co-nationals and are

¹¹⁹ While Turkish and Kurdish-Turkish might be nested nationalities, I don't think the same is true for Iranian and Kurdish or Iraqi and Kurdish. The Iraqi and Iranian states have no plausible claim to Kurdish national loyalty. But still, Turkish and Kurdish are not nested identities, since Turkey has no plausible claim on Iraqi, Iranian, or Syrian Kurds. A Scottish solution—a self-governing Kurdish region in Turkey—would leave the putative nation Kurdistan split between different states, a problem not faced by Scotland, Quebec, or Catalonia.

trying to divide their nation. If we have already defined Bosnian Serbs' nationality as 'Serbian,' on the other hand, then they are seeking to overcome the petty political division which separates them from their fellow nationals; they are seeking national unity just as much as the nineteenth-century Italians and Germans did. If I am right that (2a) and (2b) are both constitutive of nationalism, then this dualism is inevitable. Nationalism seeks to unify the nation and to divide it from other nations, from other communities.

'[N]ationalism was originally a force for unification in Europe,' writes Benjamin Barber, 'bringing together rival clans and tribes under the figment of a larger territorial nation bound together by language and culture if not blood and kinship. But having won its victories of integration, nationalism changed its strategy, becoming a divisive force in the territories it once helped tie together.'¹²⁰ Even leaving aside the curious anthropomorphizing of nationalism ('changed its strategy?') this comment falls into precisely the error I am describing. Nationalism was never simply a unifying force, and it is not simply a divisive force today. Even in its most republican moment, in 1848, the movement to unify Germany distinguished Germans from Poles in a way that the Prussian monarchy felt little need to. French nationalism divided French Basques from their Spanish fellows, and unifying Italian nationalism ultimately succeeded in dividing South from North Tyrolians. Croatian and Serbian nationalism in the 1990s, standard examples of divisive nationalism, sought to unite all the Croats and all the Serbs, respectively, in whatever republics they lived—just what nineteenth-century Italian and German nationalism had sought.

To put the point in terms which are closer to home: making an appeal to Americans to emphasize their commonalities rather than their differences—as is done by the nationalist critics of multiculturalism such as Michael Lind and Arthur Schlesinger¹²¹—necessarily emphasizes both what differentiates Americans from, say, Canadians as well as what divides e.g. American Catholics or Jews from their coreligionists around the world. Set aside for the moment the danger of overriding morally legitimate identification with groups smaller than and contained within the state. That is, after all, exactly what the anti-multiculturalist nationalist intends to do and he will scarcely count it as a criticism that he does

¹²⁰ Benjamin Barber, 'Multiculturalism Between Individuality and Community: Chasm or Bridge?' in D. Villa and A. Sarat (eds.), *Liberal Modernism and Democratic Individuality: George Kateb and the Practices of Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 138.

¹²¹ Michael Lind, *The Next American Nation* (New York: Free Press, 1995); Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Disuniting of America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990).

it. Uniting American to American is inextricably tied to dividing (or at least differentiating) American from Canadian and American Jew from Israeli Jew.

It so happens that right now there is little enough danger in either of these sets of divisions. There is no likelihood of war between the United States and Canada, and the gaps between American Catholics or Jews and their brethren elsewhere are large regardless of American multiculturalism or nationalism. But the United States simply happens to be fortunate in those regards. In many places at many times, emphasizing the supposed unity of one group, and thereby its differences with neighboring or overlapping groups, is dangerously inflammatory. But this is not to say that American nationalism is not divisive and these others are; American nationalism, like all nationalism, seeks or emphasizes the unity of the nation and its differentiation from the rest of humanity.

Craig Calhoun nicely summarizes the relationship between unifying and divisive nationalism. ‘If segmentary kinship urges—in the words of an Arab proverb . . .—‘I against my brothers, I and my brothers against my cousins, I, my brothers, and my cousins against the world,’ the point of nationalism is largely to say: ‘never you against your brothers, nor you and your brothers against your cousins; only members of our national family against the world.’¹²² We are now united, but we are united because of the absolute priority given to the distinction between us and all others.

Something which is true of the unifying face of nationalism is that it is characteristically democratic and in some sense egalitarian, however illiberal it may be in the suppression of smaller communities which might compete for the loyalty of members. All nationals are equal members of the nation, and all jointly rule it (or it is ruled in their name and on their behalf). Claim (2b), which demands the unity of the nation and its priority over smaller communities, is tied up with a nationalist hostility to ranks and distinctions among nationals which might set the latter against each other. As Mazzini put it, ‘There is no true Country without a uniform right. There is no true Country where the uniformity of that right is violated by the existence of caste, privilege, and inequality.’¹²³ This is something which many democrats have long found appealing in nationalism.

The dualism between egalitarian unity among members and division from the rest of humanity is characteristic of nationalism but not unique

¹²² Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Minneapolis: The Open University Press, 1998), 39.

¹²³ Giuseppe Mazzini, ‘The Duties of Man,’ in Omar Dabbour and Micheline Ishay, *The Nationalist Reader* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1995), 95.

to it. Christian thinkers have long emphasized the unity of brotherhood in Christ and the equality before God of all believers. Believers might live in different states or speak different languages, but what unites them is said to have priority over such divisions. By no means have all Christians drawn democratic or egalitarian inferences for life in this world, but many have. Much the same is true for Islam.

Yet this attractive egalitarian unity always comes at the cost of divisiveness of another kind. A renewed emphasis on the unity and priority of Christianity (or Islam) would be a divisive influence in Lebanon or Bosnia—or, for that matter, in the United States. It would stand in direct competition with other identities and loyalties, most prominently that of the state. The priority of a religious community is precisely the kind of claim that makes civic nationalists like Lind fear for the splintering and collapse of a civic nation. The egalitarian unity of one group, if combined with any kind of claim of priority, is divisive from the perspective of all other groups and loyalties.

The National Right of Self-Determination

Even if there can be no general duty of national loyalty, can there be a general right of national self-determination? A version of (2c) might stand alone, and without reference to duties of members of the nation:

- 2c. Nations have the right to self-government and self-determination, to unity and independence, and if a nation chooses to exercise this right, outsiders have a duty to respect that exercise.

Here members of a nation are under no obligation to place loyalty to it above loyalty to all other groups, and indeed they are under no obligation to seek national self-determination at all. The only duties involved are the duties involved in any exercise of rights, namely, non-interference and, under some conditions, assistance in repelling the interference of others.

Dispensing with (2a) and (2b), however, does not dispense with the need for (1), the need for identifying the nation. For (2c) to stand alone, ‘nation’ and ‘outsiders’ must already be specified. But it is no easier for outsiders to decide which rival unit claiming the right of self-determination is a nation and which is not than it is for putative members. Indeed, whenever there are two or more communities both claiming the title of nation and the right of self-determination, there are some who cannot know whether they are members or outsiders until the question

of national identity is resolved. Are non-Quebecois outsiders to the nation of Quebec who must respect whatever decision Quebec reaches, or members of the nation of Canada (which includes Quebec) who can take full part in any decision on its future? Even more pointedly, are Anglophone and indigenous residents of the province of Quebec members of the Quebecois nation or outsiders who must respect the nation's decision?

Arguments for (2c), for self-determination without nationalist obligations, vary but are similar in kind. People are better off if their states are national, either directly—e.g. because the state institutions will be more comprehensible to them, they will be better able to take part in democratic processes, etc.—or indirectly, because their respective national cultures will be more secure, or will be lived and expressed in the public sphere.¹²⁴

Such arguments seem plausible in cases in which there is a clear disjuncture between our national culture and their alien state. Tamir invokes Dutch rule over Indonesia, which (she says, quoting Clifford Geertz) made the institutions of law and state opaque to their subjects. Colonial situations, including the situations of indigenous peoples in settler states like the United States and Australia, offer this sort of stark contrast. But often we are not faced with such stark contrasts. Was the Czechoslovak state inaccessible to Slovaks? Is British law opaque to the Scots or the Welsh? There are overlapping and crosscutting communities to which people belong, but political self-determination can only be the right of one of them at a time. Croatian culture was not imperiled in the state of the South Slavs. If Breton culture is not much lived and expressed in the public sphere, then French culture is, to which today's Bretons also belong. The standard arguments for a universal right of national self-determination all suppose that the choice is between national states and states which are hopelessly alien to the national minorities. But real nationalist conflict, at least after the age of colonialism, is often between neighbors who share much culture and history

¹²⁴ See Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, ch. 3 ; Joseph Raz and Avishai Margalit, 'National Self-Determination,' in Raz, *Ethics in the Public Domain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); Nielsen, 'Liberal Nationalism, Liberal Democracies, and Secession,' 253–95; Miller, *On Nationality*, ch. 4 ; Simon Caney, 'Self-Government and Secession: The Case of Nations,' *Journal of Political Philosophy* 5 (1997), 351–72. Caney's essay is admirable in its clarity on this point. (P1) Political institutions that further people's well-being are pro tanto valuable. (P2) An individual's membership of a nation furthers his or her well-being. (P3) A nation-state can best further a nation's culture. Therefore: (C) National self-determination is, ceteris paribus, valuable' (361). My argument disputes both (P2) and (P3)—or, rather, it suggests that they both take for granted the existence of a unique and uncontroversial nation.

but differ in religion, or in speaking mutually intelligible but distinct languages or dialects, or in ancestral but not currently spoken language. In short, disputes about self-determination are often not between a clearly defined nation and a clearly non-national state, but between a state and a non-state community, both of which have some of the characteristics of nationhood. In these cases at least, secession cannot be justified with a general argument about the goods that can only be attained when states are national. Neither can resistance to secession be justified with simple reference to national unity; arguments must proceed either in instrumental terms or with specific reference to the attachments members have to the rival communities in the case at hand.¹²⁵

Nothing I have said here affects arguments for self-determination or secession as remedial rights, or indeed on arguments for the morality of secession in general. There are perfectly generalizable instrumental arguments for secession, such as that secession is justifiable when and only when the existing state treats the seceding minority unjustly in certain specified ways and the seceding group offers suitable guarantees that it will not do the same to the local minorities on its territory.¹²⁶ My critique only touches on arguments that nations as such have an intrinsic right of self-determination, that all nations and only nations have an inherent right to self-government. Moreover, nothing I have said here tells against nationalist secession any more than it counts against the suppression of secession in the name of national unity. My criticism is of the idea that nationhood per se can provide the moral grounding for much by way of political obligations or rights.

Indeed, I think that everything I say here is compatible with Margaret Canovan's view that, for all the philosophical and conceptual chaos associated with the idea of the nation, a shared belief in nationhood and in states being national is critically important, maybe necessary, for decent and stable policies.¹²⁷ Her argument goes farther than the more common (and, I think, correct) one that social democracy and advanced welfare states need the sort of fellow-feeling generated by nationalism in order to be politically stable. She suggests that the same sense of nationhood is

¹²⁵ I think this is similar in spirit to Douglas Lackey's conclusion that even if nations have a right to self-determination, neither national secession nor opposition to secession in the name of national unity justifies the use of force, in the absence of other considerations. Lackey, 'Self-Determination and Just War,' *The Philosophical Forum* 28 (1996–7), 100–10.

¹²⁶ See Allen Buchanan, *Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumpter to Lithuania and Quebec* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1991).

¹²⁷ Margaret Canovan, *Nationhood and Political Theory* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1996).

necessary even for the classical liberal rule of law, or for basic political stability and non-violent democratic politics. But she recognizes that such belief is itself politically generated and has a mythic component to it; she denies that it's based on any pre-existing truth about nationhood; and she explicitly acknowledges that this political good—nationhood—is probably not available to all simultaneously. Those not fortunate enough already to have a shared history and consensus about which unit is appropriately considered the nation may not be able to join the stable nationhood club. Shared belief contributes to shared history, and vice versa, but when two or more communities are competing to be thought of as a nation, there's no way to get the virtuous cycle started. This may not be an anti-nationalist view, but it is a long way from the vision of Mazzini and Wilson. Canovan is openly grim about what she thinks follows from her account, and my argument here suggests that she's right to be. Since those cases in which a shared sense of nationhood would be the most helpful are those in which it is least available, and since neither side in a dispute over which community is rightly understood as a nation has the right answer (there is no underlying right answer), nationhood's sometime usefulness offers no grounds for optimism.