

The Morality of
NATIONALISM

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Robert McKim & Jeff McMahan

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Nationalism, For and (Mainly) Against

JUDITH LICHTENBERG

To many people, the very idea of nationalism smacks of ethnocentrism or even racism. They suspect that violence, hatred, and distrust of the Other, embodied in a sharply divided world of “us” and “them,” always lurk within the nationalist’s heart. Recent world events have done nothing to allay these suspicions. Nationalism, according to this view, is an evil to be overcome by a cosmopolitan stance that denies the significance of national boundaries.

Yet positive values have also been associated with the nationalist idea, as some recent accounts remind us.¹ Democracy, autonomy, community, pluralism—these goods have been connected with the development of nationalism over the past several centuries. Some of the values underlying nationalism also manifest themselves today in its dilute and more respectable cousin, multiculturalism. And it goes without saying that whatever its merits, nationalism exerts enormous power on the aspirations of many people around the world.

My aim here is to make explicit both the genuine attractions of nationalism and its disturbing features. I begin with some preliminary observations concerning the confusing and contested terms “nationalism” and “nation.” I then explore what I believe are the five main arguments in support of nationalism. These I call the Flourishing Argument, the Self-Determination Argument, the Reparations Argument, the Pluralism Argument, and the Intrinsic Value Argument.

The serious controversies surrounding nationalism can be understood, I believe, in terms of two main problems. One is the Territory Question. It asks whether or under what circumstances the commitment to nationalism entails the commit-

ment to a state—and thus a territory—as the nation’s embodiment. The answer bears significantly on the meaning, viability, and acceptability of nationalism as a practical phenomenon. The second problem I call the Partiality Question. Everyone acknowledges that nationalism permits—some would say it requires—members of a nation to favor compatriots over outsiders in certain respects and that certain traits and practices characteristic of the nation be given priority. The question is how these forms of partiality are to be understood and whether they can be defended morally.

Does the term “nationalism” capture a single phenomenon? Despite the antiessentialist turn now fashionable, it is hard to avoid the urge to look for something common. In so doing, we should not preclude the possibility of several fundamentally different kinds of nationalism, some more acceptable than others.

So, for example, Ernest Gellner and, following him, E. J. Hobsbawm define nationalism as the view that “the political and the national unit should be congruent.”² Yet, on the other hand, Yael Tamir has recently advocated a “liberal nationalism” that severs the connection between the national and the political. (By contrast, we cannot imagine a liberal racism.) The question dividing these approaches should not be decided by definitional fiat. Below we shall examine the reasons for and against conjoining nationalism with the political—that is, territorial—aim.

To know what nationalism is, we must first know what a nation is. The word is often used interchangeably with “state” or “country”; if you ask ordinary people what a nation is, they will point to states—those entities possessing political sovereignty, having control over their borders, eligible to join the United Nations, and the like. But this view is unsatisfactory for at least two reasons. First, groups that lack states sometimes harbor nationalistic aims; indeed, the argument for statehood often rests on the premise of nationhood. Second, many states today are multinational. A multinational state does not consist of a single group of the sort implied by the idea of a nation.

Nations are groups of a certain kind. But what kind? Much has been written about what makes for nationhood: whether it is common territory, bloodlines, ethnicity, language, religion, common belief. Hobsbawm, among others, has shown the inadequacy of any of the objective criteria if seen as definitive. Taking a plausible candidate such as language, for example, he points out that in 1789 only 50 percent of French people spoke French and that at the moment of Italian unification in 1860 only 2.5 percent of Italians spoke Italian! National languages are more often the consequence of nationalistic efforts than their foundation.³ Some deny that any such objective criteria are sufficient, or even necessary, to define nationhood and instead emphasize mutual recognition and the belief that one belongs to the group.

Yet despite the importance of subjective elements, defining “nationalism” solely in terms of them seems incomplete, perhaps because the subjective connection is usually rooted in objective ones. For practical purposes, however, we can adopt Hobsbawm’s “initial working assumption” that “any sufficiently large body of people whose members regard themselves as members of a ‘nation’” are a nation.⁴ But several further observations are important.

Our most common experience of nationalism today is of groups whose identity is connected to their ethnicity. And it is at least in part because it is not obvious how to avoid the slippery slope from ethnic identification to racism that many find nationalism troubling. It seems odd, furthermore, that ethnic identification can flourish where the distinction between “us” and “them” is hard for the outsider to observe.⁵ Perhaps the explanation is that, like adolescents rebelling against their parents, people must struggle hardest to establish their identity when it is prone to confusion with that of others.

At the same time, nationalism need not take this ethnic/quasi-racial form.⁶ The United States provides a clear example. It has no distinctive ethnic identity; indeed, its identity consists partly in its pluralistic mix. And despite its white Northern European roots, a legacy of racism, and an overwhelmingly Christian population, a certain kind of pluralism is important to its identity, and increasingly so. The United States as a nation is defined by a conjunction of its political culture and its larger culture, which possesses a distinctive character assimilable by people from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds.

The example of the United States supports the view that a nation is best understood as a culture. This is not terribly illuminating, perhaps, because it isn’t transparently clear what a culture is. (I shall not try to define it here.) Still, we have a good intuitive grasp of the concept—better than we do of “nation,” which, as I have argued, is easily confused with “state.” Cultures are often rooted in ethnic ties, but they need not be. Nationalists, we may then say, are those who aim for expression of their culture—although just what form this expression must take we shall leave open for now. When nationalists succeed in getting secure states, we tend to call the phenomenon “patriotism” rather than “nationalism.”

The defense of nationalism can be understood in terms of five central arguments, distinct although not always distinguished or easily disentangled. They are:

1. The Flourishing Argument: the belief that human beings need to belong to or identify with some group beyond their immediate family or, in any case, that they flourish when they do.
2. The Self-Determination Argument: the claim that individuals possess a moral right, or that morally it is desirable for them to be able, to form self-governing associations with others of their choosing.

3. The Reparations Argument: the idea that nationhood is a means of rectifying historical grievances, of righting old wrongs.
4. The Pluralism Argument: the view that the world is a better or more interesting place if it contains diverse cultures. Even if some cultures are correctly judged superior to others, a diverse world is better than a homogeneous world.
5. The Intrinsic Value Argument: the view that the existence of a given culture is a good that ought to be promoted. In contrast with the Pluralism Argument, here a culture ought to exist and flourish because of its *particular* value.

These five grounds constitute an attempt both to justify nationalism rationally and, in some cases at least, to explain its actual appeal to people. I shall examine them in turn.

Let us concentrate on a common understanding of the Flourishing Argument: the psychological claim, often taken as self-evident, that people need to identify with or belong to some group beyond their immediate family.⁷ Obviously, a judgment of this sort does not lend itself to straightforward empirical verification; more often than not, the judgment is rendered with nothing but anecdotes by way of support. Yet it seems to many to capture something undeniable.

Much depends on how we understand identification or belonging. I am (among other things) a woman, a mother, a wife, a Jew, a New Yorker, an American, a philosopher, a baby boomer, a teacher, a music lover, and a jogger. Only some of these groups satisfy the criteria relevant to national belonging. It isn’t helpful to say the relevant categories are *social* groups; that only begs the question. We tend to think of the relevant kind of belonging as unchosen—as gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation are conventionally thought to be—but this is more complicated than it appears.⁸ Must I take pride in such connections? Does identification mean identity—that I would not be me were I not American, Jewish, or whatever?⁹ Does it mean that I would act (even die) for my group as I would for myself? Or may it be something less than this? To what extent does the need to belong involve hostility to outsiders? Those who appeal to the centrality of belonging owe us answers to these questions.

Defenders of the Flourishing Argument must confront the question: Why not the human race as the object of identification? Humankind is too large, it seems, and presumably too indistinct to lend itself to the appropriate feelings. But are nations small and differentiated enough to serve the purpose? The idea that one can identify with 260 million Americans but not with 5 billion human beings may seem implausible. We can appreciate the significance of the line between those with whom one has face-to-face relations and those with whom one does not. Even if we expand the circle to a larger community, it is hard to see how it can be extended to many millions of people and still serve the functions the Flourishing Argument emphasizes.

One response to this skeptical line is to distinguish two features of groups conflated in the argument. One is the absolute size of the group, the second its differences from other groups. So, for example, it has been said that the invasion of Earth by alien creatures might produce that human-to-human bond that has so far been wanting. We do not identify with the human race now because it's the only race there is.¹⁰

How far does this response go in allaying doubts about the explanatory power of identification with very large groups? It is difficult to answer this question without a fuller appreciation of the ways belonging to groups is supposed to contribute to human well-being. To the extent that mere differentiation is key, identification with hundreds of millions of people could serve the purpose. But presumably belonging serves goals besides allowing people to distinguish themselves from *some* others. To that extent, the foregoing criticism stands.

So far our discussion has centered on the *object* of identification. But there are also questions about the *subject*—about the universality of the need to identify with or belong to a nationlike entity or about the extent to which such identification contributes to a person's flourishing. Surely some people feel such a need; the persistence of ethnic, religious, racial, and national loyalties perhaps serves as proof. But it is probably safe to say that others do not. Is it simply that the former so outnumber the latter? Or are they merely that much more zealous? To what extent is the need to belong alterable—subject to social influence?

Clearly, the Flourishing Argument is central and requires a deeper analysis than is possible here. We will return to some of the questions raised in this section in the discussion of Partiality toward Members. But here two points are important. First, much of the force of the argument depends on psychological claims that are difficult to make precise and to which no one has hard answers. It is easy to be dismissive, raising eyebrows at the vagueness and lack of hard evidence or arguing (as philosophers are wont to do) that these are empirical questions that normative treatments have to ignore. They *are* empirical questions, of course, but ones that no one interested in nationalism can reasonably neglect. And although the issues are not sharp, we cannot hope to resolve the political and philosophical questions without a better understanding of them.

Second, although it is hard to doubt that there is some truth in the Flourishing Argument—that most people need to belong to or identify with certain kinds of social groups—the crucial question is what follows with respect to forms of political organization. In part, this is a matter of fleshing out answers to the questions: “Belong in what sense?” and “Identify how?” However we answer these questions, there is a very large leap between the claim that people need to belong to groups and the conclusion that nationalism is either inevitable or desirable.

According to the Self-Determination Argument, individuals have the moral right, or morally ought to be able, to form self-governing associations with

others of their choosing. National self-determination can be understood both by analogy with and as deriving from individual self-determination. In the latter sense, nations are collections of individuals who are entitled to determine their individual lives; when such individuals form groups their entitlements transfer to the group. If we understand individual rights in this way, we can see the connection between national self-determination and prized liberal values such as autonomy, liberty, and democracy. On the other hand, insofar as we acknowledge the existence of groups not wholly reducible to individuals and group rights and goods not wholly reducible to individual rights and goods, then groups may be thought to possess the right of self-determination “in their own right,” so to speak. The power and plausibility of this latter view derive, I believe, from the Pluralism Argument or from the Intrinsic Value Argument. To say that the group ought to be able to determine its own course, if this is not a statement about the joint entitlements of the member individuals, is to make a judgment either about the culture's intrinsic appeal or else about the value of pluralism and diversity. I shall say more about these below.

Let us focus here, then, on the argument from self-determination rooted in the individualistic values of autonomy, liberty, and democracy. The appeal of this view can be reconstructed as follows. Individuals should be free to choose those with whom they will share their lives. If I don't want to live in a household or even in a society with certain others, I am free to leave, barring my having undertaken obligations that I may not simply renounce. If I can get others to agree to live with me—in a household or in some other voluntary association—I may do so. In the ideal case we can imagine multiple self-contained voluntary societies of self-governing individuals. This libertarian picture of human association has its attractions.¹¹ And it is, I think, part of the appeal of nationalism, despite its remoteness from many of the concrete nationalisms familiar to us.

One problem with this view is that we do not ordinarily choose our nationality in the way we choose our political affiliation or our profession. So the implication of voluntariness in self-determination does not seem to fit with the nature of national belonging. Still, one may choose to affirm one's nationality. That is precisely what the nationalist does, and this choosing may be thought to confer the appropriately voluntary character on nationalistic belonging.

Another apparent anomaly in the Self-Determination Argument is that the values it celebrates are often not upheld by nationalistic movements, which can be autocratic and oppressive. The contradiction is not as blatant as it appears, however, for insofar as people identify with their nation's leaders, they see these leaders as part of themselves, or vice versa. To that extent, this rule *is* self-rule. It is in virtue of this fact that we can explain why “men prefer to be ordered about, even if this entails ill-treatment, by members of their own faith or nation or class, to tutelage, however benevolent, on the part of ultimately patronising superiors from a foreign land or alien class or milieu.”¹²

The deeper problem with the Self-Determination Argument emerges when we

press for details. You may leave your country—but where will you go? You may form your own society—but where will you put it? Emigration is (for liberals) uncontroversial; but immigration is not. Similarly, secession may in principle seem unproblematic—“If a group decides it wants to secede, it should be able to; after all, people should be able to determine their own destiny”—until we realize that the group plans to take some land with them. The Self-Determination Argument is only as convincing, then, as the case for linking nationalism with the “territorial imperative.”

The Reparations Argument is tied to self-determination but goes a step further. When a culture has been conquered or colonized by outsiders, when it has lost land or its members have been displaced, it may assert its right to be free of the yoke of oppression. As part of determining its own destiny, it may insist on the return of “the land of our forefathers,” harking back to a time before the group was dispossessed of its rightful territory. For nationalists in quest of a state, this sense of historical grievance and the urgent need to right old wrongs is never far from the surface.

So, according to this view, at some past time the nation had land and a state and was wrongfully deprived of them. Often we can question whether such a golden age ever existed. As Ernest Renan remarked, “Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation.”¹³ But even when we agree that the nation got its history right, we might dispute the claim to reparations on the ground that too many events had intervened that extinguished or counteracted the claim. How are we to adjudicate the conflicting claims of groups to have been wronged years ago? The answer depends on whether the supposed injustice was real and significant, as well as on how much time has elapsed. Speaking generally, we can only say that sometimes reparations are appropriate and practical, sometimes not.¹⁴

In one sense, the appeal to reparations is not an argument for nationalism; it already presupposes the existence of a nation to which something is owed. Only when a group of the requisite sort exists or is believed to exist does the claim of reparations to it make sense. At the same time, insofar as we identify nationalism with the territorial aim, we might view the appeal to reparations as an argument for nationalism. We find ourselves again confronting the Territory Question.

The Pluralism Argument and the Intrinsic Value Argument lead to the same door. The virtues of these arguments can perhaps be taken as obvious. Diversity and variety are good, other things being equal; a world of diverse cultures and styles is better and more interesting than a less diverse world. Given that a culture meets certain minimum moral standards, it is better for that culture to exist than not to. Over and above the value of diversity, some cultures possess qualities that are intrinsically valuable, morally or aesthetically. Their existence enhances the world. Of course, most cultures possess negative as well as positive qualities.

When the overall worth of the culture is positive, we have reason beyond the value of pluralism to promote that culture’s existence and flourishing; the greater the overall intrinsic value of the culture, the more reason we have.¹⁵

The question, however, is what sort of entity we ought to promote if our goal is to foster the existence and flourishing of cultures. More specifically, should we promote the existence of nation-states as the embodiment of cultures that are valuable in their own right or that enhance diversity?

We saw earlier that Gellner, Hobsbawm, and others *define* nationalism as the view that “the political and the national unit should be congruent.” And others, like Tamir, arguing that “it is the cultural rather than the political version of nationalism that best accords with a liberal viewpoint,” sever the connection between nation and territory.¹⁶ Tamir explicitly rejects the suggestion that instead of nationalism she choose a “less emotionally loaded term, such as ‘people’ or the much discussed ‘community.’” She does not want to cede the concept of nationalism to conservative, reactionary, or racist political forces, she says, and she believes that rejecting the term “nationalism” means alienating oneself “from a whole set of values that are of immense importance to a great many people, including liberals.”¹⁷

What matters, finally, are not the labels we use, although battles over terminology are not insignificant, especially where explosive terms like “nationalism” are concerned. But the important question is a substantive one. Can a culture secure those values it deserves to secure in the absence of a territorial state? The answer seems to be that some cultures can and some cannot.

Michael Ignatieff, criticizing Tamir’s severing of the link between nation and territory, argues: “People seek nation-states of their own because they believe that these entities alone will protect them from the violence and the intimidation of their neighbors.” Perhaps this is a generous view of the nationalistic impulse; some nationalists probably have more ambitious, and less defensible, aims. And some who fit Ignatieff’s description may be mistaken or self-deceived in believing that a territorial state is the only way to protect their rights. Still, we can agree that a people may reasonably demand a state when they “have good reason to believe that statehood is their only security for the future.”¹⁸

Taken as necessary and sufficient for justifying statehood, Ignatieff’s criterion is at the same time demanding and modest: demanding insofar as a people must show that their very security depends on having a state; modest as it acknowledges no value more robust than security to justify statehood. But an important assumption is left only implicit in this view. For if a *people* has reason to believe that its only security lies in statehood, then it must be *as* a people that its security is threatened. It is not simply that individuals are endangered but that they are endangered *because* of their “peopleness”—because they are Bosnian Muslims or Armenians or Kurds. At the same time, Ignatieff’s view suggests that it is the basic physical security of individuals that serves as warrant for statehood.

Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz defend a more robust view. They make a case

for statehood (or what they call self-determination) when necessary to “protect the culture and self-respect” of the group.¹⁹ Here it is not just that individuals are endangered because they belong to a certain group but that the existence of the group qua group is endangered. It follows that the culture itself is valuable and deserves protection and respect. And because its members’ identity is tied up with the culture, their self-respect rises and falls accordingly.

Just what is required to protect the culture and self-respect of the group? There is no single or straightforward answer to this question. Still, we might assent provisionally to the following view: cultures have a strong claim to their own states when that is the only way they can protect their members’ basic rights and interests and valuable characteristics of the culture itself.

Claims to statehood encounter two major problems. Both are in some sense practical, as opposed to philosophical or moral, problems, but they are deep practical problems. One is that all territory on the earth is already taken. (Were this not so, claims to statehood might almost be simple—except for the second problem below.) Thus claims to territory never go uncontested. Secession and the creation of new states can never be simple matters, for the property and other claims of the existing state and its members will have their merits, even when the culture demanding statehood has right and justice on its side. Complex negotiations, compromises, and agreements will always be necessary.²⁰

The other difficulty is what Tamir aptly calls the “Russian doll phenomenon”: “Every ‘national territory,’ however small, includes among its inhabitants members of other nations.”²¹ If every culture had, by the very fact of its being a culture (however this were determined), a right to statehood, we could face a practically infinite regress of states of diminishing size. This is not merely a serious obstacle to statehood. It seems a sufficient reason to deny that cultures per se have a right to statehood. To make the case for statehood, a culture must provide very good reasons why it *needs* a state. And to persuade us, an aspiring nation-state must also give assurances that it will not do to little nations within it what was done to it when it was a little nation within some other large state. Without such assurances it should not become a state.

But what may a nation-state not do to little nations within it (and to others outside)? And what must it allow *them* to do by way of affirming *their* culture? This brings us to some of the hardest questions, morally and philosophically, about nationalism.

What I am calling the Partiality Question encompasses two related but distinct issues. One, which we can call Partiality toward Members, is expressed in the questions: In what way and to what extent does nationalism warrant a person or group’s favoring compatriots over nonmembers? Are there different conceptions of nationalism with different understandings of the meaning of partiality,

some more palatable than others? These questions were left unresolved in the discussion of the Flourishing Argument.

The other issue emerged most clearly in the last section and is prominent in contemporary discussions of multiculturalism—the form nationalism takes when stripped of the territorial component. How and to what extent may a nation—that is, a culture—privilege its own traits and practices over those of other cultures within its borders? We can call this issue Partiality toward Practices. In this and the next section, I consider Partiality toward Members; in the last section, Partiality toward Practices.

How and to what extent may one favor members of one’s nation over others? In trying to tame this question, we immediately fall back on the analogy with family. In myriad ways people favor members of their own family over nonmembers, and we cannot imagine things being different. The nationalist claims that partiality toward compatriots can be similarly grounded.

What is the grounding? In the case of the family, we might say two things. First, the emotional and psychological needs met by intimate familial relationships are among the most important we can imagine, and a form of social organization that did not allow for the flourishing of such relationships would be impoverished. Second, at least partly for this reason, a world organized into family units, in which people are committed to a small number of others with whom they have deep emotional and even biological connections, works better than other forms of organization to ensure people’s basic well-being.

Can similar things be said about the relationships among members of a culture or nation? Let us take the second point first. Does a world of nations better secure people’s well-being, on the whole, than some alternative arrangement? The blood that has been shed for the cause of nationalism is a central reason for doubting that it does. But it does not follow that all distinctions between people beyond the level of family should be abolished—that it would make sense, even in theory, to work toward a world of families, with no intermediate forms of association. For many reasons, the world demands a complex and multilevel structure of organization.

In some way, shape, or form, then, intermediate forms of association—states, cultures, tribes—must exist. They are practically necessary; they make the world a more diverse and interesting place; and—assuming some truth in the Flourishing Argument—they satisfy some important human needs. The question is what form the kind of loyalty and partiality bred by group belonging takes or must take. How great are the risks that it will degenerate into violence, xenophobia, and hatred? Obviously, this is a complex empirical question; I doubt that good answers are available. Is there anything constructive we can say about it? What weaker forms of loyalty and partiality can still be appropriately described in terms of nationalism?

Here are two different ways members of a culture might view themselves in re-

lation to outsiders: (1) “We’re superior. The world would be a better place if we dominated over others. We count more than they do.” (2) “We’re partial to our own. But we do not claim that we’re better than anybody else; we expect members of other cultures to be partial to their own, too.” Now it is clear how the first of these stances—a kind of egoistic partiality—can lead to hatred and violence and to the kind of fascism and racism with which nationalism is sometimes associated. But the second, universalized partiality could also lead to hatred and violence. People might have sufficient perspective to recognize that their commitment to their culture stems from its being *theirs* rather than from its inherent superiority, but this perspective might not moderate their zealotry. Such a stance might amount to abdicating judgment and the need for justification—to admitting that one has no justification for preferring one’s own people, that one *just does*. But it need not be simply a denial of the need for justification. A person might defend this view by appeal to the Flourishing Argument: Everyone needs to identify with or belong to a group, and this justifies partiality, even though it justifies partiality equally among all groups.

One manifestation of this universalized partiality is expressed in “my country right or wrong.” This slogan is often taken to assert the value of loyalty, which is inherent in the commitment to nationalism. But despite its familiarity, the slogan’s meaning is not clear. The usual interpretation is that one should *defend* one’s country no matter what it does. And that may seem persuasive because we imagine abandonment as the alternative. That this is a false dilemma becomes clear if we consider again the analogy of the family.

Suppose that my brother is accused of a serious crime, which he has in fact committed. Loyalty to my brother, in any sense worth valuing, does not require that I defend him—that is, insist on his innocence—no matter what the evidence or the truth of the matter. It may require that I stand by him; that I give him what resources I possess, consistent with the moral situation; that I help him to work through his guilt and suffering, help him to change himself. These demands on me may flow from my sense of identification with and connection to my brother. Similarly, loyalty to one’s country might require that one stand by it, in much the same way; that one own up to one’s connection and do what one can to set one’s country straight. But this in no way implies that one must defend one’s country no matter what it does.²² And in the rare case where one’s country, or one’s brother, shows itself to be irredeemable, then abandonment may be the only acceptable course.²³

Morally speaking, then, loyalty cannot be altogether content-neutral, blind to the nature of its object. But the hard case arises when one’s own group is (for the most part) morally good enough, but so are outsiders. What form and degree of partiality toward members over nonmembers can be justified in this case?

We can simplify by stating the case in terms of negative and positive duties. Negative duties are duties of noninterference and nonaggression; positive du-

ties are duties to aid and provide the means of well-being. One common approach is to argue that although people have negative duties to human beings in general, positive duties are incurred in virtue of particular acts, general agreements, or special relationships (of the kind one has to family members or fellow nationals).²⁴ Even many who would not defend this distinction in its pure form accept it as a rough practical guide.

Although I do not accept this view—because I believe one can have unincurred positive duties²⁵—I believe it is important to see its implications for nationalism. On the one hand, it clearly prohibits aggression—and therefore, it seems, the kind of hatred and violence often associated with nationalism. Looked at in this way, this view might seem adequate to a moderate nationalism. Yet the laissez-faire attitude to strangers it endorses can turn to hostility at the slightest provocation. (And we know that often the provocations are not slight.) In part, this is because the duty of nonaggression is compatible with the right of self-defense; when strangers threaten one’s security, or seem to, and when no positive ties bind the feuding parties, benign neglect easily turns to malign aggression. I believe that the framework of positive duties to members and only negative duties to strangers captures the psychology of a common variety of nationalism that stops short of fanaticism but nevertheless encourages a hostile and stereotyped view of outsiders.

Let me end this section with several points about the question of partiality toward members, construed in terms of negative and positive duties. The first is simply that the question whether we have unincurred positive duties is a deep and controversial one. Second, even if positive duties are always incurred by acts, agreements, or relationships, it doesn’t follow that we have none to other nations or cultures. We do, and more every day.²⁶ This is even more true when members of different cultures reside within the same state. Thus we probably have duties to nonmembers within our state that are different from, and more extensive than, those to strangers outside.

Third, even assuming the foregoing framework, there is no consensus about how much we owe to members of our *own* culture. Two people who adhere to a nationalism that distinguishes positive duties to members and nonmembers could still disagree sharply about how much is owed to each.

A final point about the relevance of Partiality toward Members to nationalism returns us to some basic questions raised earlier. Nationalism is one form of groupism involving loyalty and partiality. But many other kinds of groups produce the same result. Evidence both anecdotal and experimental strongly suggests that people will form loyalties to artificially created groups, even those without characteristics significantly different from out-groups.²⁷ To the extent that loyalty and partiality occur wherever we find groups, any system of global political organization that subdivides people into smaller units than “human being”—that is, any viable system—will produce loyalties with their attendant problems.

This need not be as depressing as it sounds. Whether it is or not depends on whether Partiality toward Members must mean genuine hostility toward non-

members or simply a differential of concern. We can assume, I think, that it does not *have* to mean hostility, even if all too often that is what we find. My special commitment to my family does not mean I dislike other families, nor even that I am unwilling to share resources with them. So even if national or other similar loyalties were inevitable, there is on the face of it no reason to think they must produce hostility or lack of concern for the welfare of other groups. The implication of the Robbers Cave experiment could be key: hostility declines where groups stand to gain by cooperation.

As we have seen, in our world not every nation—not every culture—can or ought to have its own state. But cultures that lack their own states or coexist with other cultures within a state also seek public self-expression. Questions about the legitimate constraints and powers of such cultures are therefore central.

“Culturalism,” as we might infelicitously call this view, avoids the Territory Question, but it is saddled with the Partiality Question just as traditional nationalism is. Even more so, because in the multicultural state different cultures live in closer proximity (politically if not geographically) than in the pure, if idealized, homogeneous nation-state. In multicultural societies, the need for policies concerning the practices, within the public space, of both the dominant culture and minority cultures is the norm.

This brings us to the array of questions about multiculturalism that have recently become familiar. I cannot discuss them in detail here and shall try only to tie together some of the threads left unraveled in the foregoing discussion. The problem is to find our way from claims that seem uncontroversial: that generally it is good for individuals to be able to express their cultural commitments publicly and for cultures to survive and flourish. To what extent do these apparently innocuous assumptions explode in practice? The problem expresses itself in two ways, which are two sides of the same coin. There is the nationalism of those who have succeeded in securing a state, or at least dominance within one, and the nationalism of those—within this state but having a different culture—who have not. The questions are what legitimate claims each of these groups has and what to do when they clash.

One difficult issue concerns language.²⁸ Language is central to culture and to individual identity. Does the public life of a society require *a* language—or can it manage with two? More than two? May the dominant culture insist that everyone learn its language, whatever other language they learn? Suppose we ask whether members of a minority culture have a right to keep their culture alive by having its language taught. The answer depends partly on how such a right is understood. Would it be satisfied if members of the culture sent their children to private schools that teach the language? Few would dispute the right so conceived. But perhaps the question is whether the public schools ought to teach the language,

perhaps even as the primary language. Surely not every (minority) culture has such a right as a matter of course.

Is the reason just that the acknowledgment of such a right is too impractical? At this point, the distinction between practicality and principle is hard to draw. But perhaps we can find a line. The dominant culture could have two different sorts of reasons for insisting that those within its borders who go to its schools learn, say, English. It could say: “This is an English-speaking culture, and we want to keep it that way. If you come here, you implicitly agree to participate in our culture.” In that case the reasons for insisting all learn English are in some sense culturally biased—rooted in the particular traits or virtues of that culture. But the culture could instead argue: “As a matter of fact, you can’t get along in this society without speaking English, just as you can’t get along with knowing arithmetic. Therefore, it is our responsibility to make sure that you learn English.” The latter is a neutral reason, it might be argued, that does not involve the domineering suppression of one culture at the hands of another. There’s nothing special about English; it just happens to be the language spoken here.

We may suspect that, even when only the second kind of reason is expressed and even if it is sufficient to justify the imposition of language, the first lurks in the background. U.S. school districts with large Spanish-speaking constituencies might validly argue that a person needs English to get along in this society, but the less neutral reason would probably emerge if push came to shove: “This is our society, an English-speaking society, and we want to keep it that way.”

Is this argument sound? If we admit that the minority culture has a legitimate claim to keep itself alive—if it may say, “We are valuable and want to maintain ourselves,” and if this is precisely one of the legitimate appeals of nationalism—so, too, does the dominant culture. In principle, then, it is legitimate for the dominant culture to argue that things be done its way. A central question, however, is whether public support for the minority culture’s language or other practices actually poses a threat to the dominant culture. When it does, the argument is legitimate. When it doesn’t, the issue is more complex.²⁹

Examples such as Quebec suggest that talk of the dominant culture and minority cultures needs further refining. What makes the argument for French-speaking education in Quebec plausible is that while countrywide the dominant culture is English-speaking, in a significant, well-defined region the majority culture is French-speaking.³⁰ So a great deal depends on how large a slice of the territory we look at.

How large a slice of the territory *should* we look at? And what other criteria should be required for a culture to make a successful claim? For a culture within a larger culture to make the case for the privileging of such crucial traits as language, it should satisfy several conditions: it should have majority status (and perhaps more) within its territory, some measure of self-sufficiency, and historical rootedness in the territory. But generalizations are risky; every case brings its own peculiar circumstances.

If the privileging of some cultural traits is an inescapable fact of public life, what are the consequences for the view that members of cultures or even cultures as a whole ought to be able to express themselves publicly? The latter view cannot mean, I have been arguing, that every (minority) culture in a society can claim equal footing with the dominant culture in matters such as language. What, then, does it mean?

First, we should note that the example of language is atypical both because it is absolutely central to cultural identification and because no society can be neutral with respect to it. Other cultural traits and practices—even central ones like religion—are less domineering, allowing for greater equality and diversity among cultures coexisting in a society. I would argue that insofar as the dominant culture can reasonably avoid privileging its peculiar traits and practices, it ought to do so. Now clearly this raises questions, currently much debated, about the extent to which a society (or a liberal society) can, or ought, to be neutral toward conceptions of the good. I do not mean to presuppose an answer to these questions here. But many of the issues confronting us about the survival and flourishing of cultures do not go so deep as to reach conceptions of the good in any interesting sense, even if some of them do. (There are enough mountains without making molehills into them.)

Let me make two further suggestions about how the claims of cultures to survive and flourish can be met, short of secession and statehood, in the face of a dominant culture. One is that in many cases negative duties—here in the form of nonpersecution—go a long way. To be allowed to practice one's culture, in the small and quasi-public ways most people typically do, and not be mistreated for belonging to a certain group is more than many peoples have enjoyed and as much as they would ask for. There are places where these seemingly modest goals cannot be met without statehood. But in many multicultural societies, nonpersecution is a possibility, even a fact.

Still, even in those societies, something more than the absence of persecution may be wanted. People, and peoples, want not simply to be allowed to practice their culture; they want its virtues to be recognized as valuable and its contributions represented in the public life of the society. How these desires can and should be met is a source of much discussion and disagreement. It is worth pointing out, however, that insofar as we incorporate the contributions of minority cultures into our public life (for example, in public education), we erode the boundaries between cultures—often artificial to begin with—that ground discussions of nationalism. We are then in the process of creating new cultures out of old ones. This should not be surprising; despite the grooves that the idea of nationalism has etched in our thinking, cultures are not static entities impervious to change.

Seen in this way, multiculturalism might be said to take from nationalism what is good, and turn it to cosmopolitan purposes.

NOTES

I have benefited from the comments and criticisms of many people on earlier drafts of this essay, among them participants in the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Conference on the Ethics of Nationalism, the Yale Political Theory Workshop, and the New York University School of Law International Jurisprudence Colloquium, and colleagues at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy. In particular I would like to thank Lea Brilmayer, Robert Lane, David Luban, Stephen Nathanson, my commentator at the Illinois conference, and Jeff McMahan and Robert McKim, the organizers of the conference.

1. See, for example, Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, "National Self-Determination," *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990); and Stephen Nathanson, *Patriotism, Morality, and Peace* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1993).

2. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 1; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 9.

3. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, pp. 51–63.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

5. Among those who have made this point are Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1994).

6. Some, like Walker Connor, define nationalism as ethnonationalism. His reasons are interesting and illuminating but not, I think, decisive. See *Ethnonationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). For the distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism, see Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, pp. 9–12, and Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), a study of two exemplars: French civic nationalism and German ethnic nationalism.

7. For a discussion of this view and its roots in the thought of Johann Gottfried Herder, see Isaiah Berlin, "The Bent Twig: On the Rise of Nationalism," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas* (New York: Knopf, 1991), esp. pp. 243–47. This sort of "groupism" or "tribalism" is of course much broader than nationalism, encompassing other phenomena as well. See further discussion of this issue later in this chapter. I suspect that moral philosophers are primarily interested in this larger question of group identity, while more historically minded thinkers are concerned with those features of nationalism peculiar to the modern period when nationalist movements developed. This may sometimes lead to misunderstandings and talking at cross-purposes, as became clear at the conference out of which this collection of essays grew.

For a discussion of the "modernist" and "perennialist" understandings of nationhood—and the defense of a middle ground—see Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), chap. 1.

8. For an interesting discussion, see Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). The dilemmas faced by blacks and members of other minorities for whom "passing" is an option illustrate the complexities of this issue.

9. For a defense of this view, see Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Against it, see David Luban, "The Self: Metaphysical Not Political," *Legal Theory* 4 (1995): 401–37.

10. Jeff McMahan helped me to clarify some of the ideas in these paragraphs.

11. See Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), the last section especially, for a utopia of this kind.

12. Berlin, "The Bent Twig," p. 251.

13. "Qu'est ce que c'est une nation?" Conference at the Sorbonne, March 11, Paris, 1882, pp. 7–8, quoted in Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*, p. 12.

14. For an argument attempting to show that plausible nationalist claims are commonly claims of reparations for past injustice—colonialism and other illegitimate appropriation of territory—see Lea A. Brilmayer, "Is Nationalism Irrelevant?," paper presented at the American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division Meetings, March 1995, and "Secession and Self-Determination: A Territorial Interpretation," *Yale Journal of International Law* 16, no. 1 (January 1991).

15. Obviously, this is a vast oversimplification. I have not said how we decide which qualities are good and which are bad or how we weigh the good against the bad. In addition, there are questions about whether or when you must take the good with the bad or whether you can purge the bad and keep the good without destroying the culture. I shall not elaborate on these questions here. These are enormous issues in their own right, but I do not think that different answers affect the course of my argument.

16. Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 58.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

18. Michael Ignatieff, "Boundaries of Pain," *New Republic*, November 1, 1993, p. 38. Statehood, he continues, must be justified prospectively, not as reparations for past suffering.

19. Margalit and Raz, "National Self-Determination," p. 457. Their criterion applies to what they call "encompassing groups," which correspond closely to what I have called "cultures" and what can also be called "peoples." See pp. 442–47 for a discussion of the characteristics of encompassing groups that illuminates the concepts of culture and people. Margalit and Raz qualify the case for statehood in two ways. The new state must be "likely to respect the fundamental interests of its inhabitants" (presumably minorities as well as its own people), and measures must be taken to "prevent its creation from gravely damaging the just interests of other countries" (p. 457).

20. For a discussion of these problems, see Allen Buchanan, *Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991), esp. chap. 3.

21. Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 158.

22. It has been observed that a near-universal response among Jews to the Hebron massacre was shame, which implies this kind of identification: it is impossible to feel shame without feeling that you are connected to the person or group committing the act, so that in some sense when the person or group acts, you act. The same can be said of pride. But suppose I am an American who opposed the Vietnam War. Ought I to have felt shame at my country's actions? Embarrassment would be understandable, but shame seems to suggest some element of responsibility. This much, at least, seems plausible: to feel shame is to feel partly responsible; whether that feeling is well founded is another question.

For a persuasive defense of "moderate patriotism," which rejects "my country right or

wrong" and justifies the sort of criticism described here, see Nathanson, *Patriotism, Morality, and Peace*, chaps. 3 and 4.

23. One might ask whether abandonment is even a possibility. Is it possible to disown the connection between oneself and one's family or one's nation? We might say that there is a sense in which one cannot, that these identities are not chosen and cannot be unchosen. But of course in another sense one can; one can renounce one's citizenship, for example.

24. Of course, we can imagine an even stronger view: that one owes nothing at all to people in general; that to strangers one does not even bear the negative duty of nonaggression. There are, no doubt, nationalists who hold this view. With them, discussion is pointless.

25. See my "The Moral Equivalence of Action and Omission," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, supplementary volume 8 (1982), reprinted in *Killing and Letting Die*, ed. Bonnie Steinbock and Alastair Norcross, 2d ed. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1994).

26. I have made this argument in more detail in "National Boundaries and Moral Boundaries: A Cosmopolitan View," in *Boundaries: National Autonomy and Its Limits*, ed. Peter G. Brown and Henry Shue (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981).

27. The anecdotal evidence includes loyalty to sports teams, residential colleges within a university, and fraternities and sororities. For interesting experimental evidence, see, for example, Muzafer Sherif et al., *The Robbers Cave Experiment: Intergroup Conflict and Cooperation* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1988), originally published in 1961. Two in-groups, not significantly distinguishable, were formed in a boys' summer camp setting. After relationships developed within each in-group, groups were brought together under competitive conditions where one group's victory meant loss for the other. The results were frustration, hostile acts, and derogatory stereotypes against the other group. In a third stage, conflict was reduced by the introduction of "superordinate goals": goals that both groups shared and that could be achieved only through cooperation.

28. My thinking about these questions was stimulated partly by Charles Taylor's discussion of language questions in Quebec in *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992). For a good discussion, see Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), esp. chaps. 7–9.

29. So, for example, American culture is not threatened by the cultural practices of the Amish, and for that reason we may be sympathetic to Amish arguments for cultural protection. A relevant question concerns the minority culture's alternatives. The legitimacy of the argument: "This is my . . . [house, land, country]; if you don't want to do things my way, you can get your own . . ." depends partly on whether the person, or culture, addressed has such options. In a world where all land is spoken for, the argument possesses less force.

30. And, furthermore, as the Quebecois argue, the risk to French language and culture comes not just from Anglophone Canada but also from the behemoth of U.S. culture that threatens to swallow up North America.