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HOW LIBERAL CAN NATIONALISM BE?

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Thinking about nationalism today, most people schooled in the liberal tradition think of chauvinism and violence and xenophobia, warfare that tears neighbor from neighbor and divides countries long united. It has not always been so. In the nineteenth century, for example, nationalism was associated with freedom and liberalism; John Stuart Mill was one of its staunchest defenders. It becomes clear to anyone attempting to penetrate the vast literature on and varied history of nationalism that generalizations are risky. At least in part, the problem is that we don't know what nationalism is until we know what it is being contrasted with. Writing about a different matter, J. L. Austin once put this point (politically incorrectly) by saying that the contrasting term "wears the trousers."[1] Nationalists in nineteenth century Italy wanted to unify previously independent regions; nationalism was an expansive, cosmopolitanizing force. In colonial territories, nationalists fought foreign domination; nationalism meant freedom and self-determination.

It might seem that we could reduce confusion by avoiding the term "nationalism" altogether. That appears not to be an option. The word not only refuses to die but has in fact emerged as central in contemporary political theory. Allied once more with the forces of good, it is now called liberal nationalism. The term is invoked explicitly by the Israeli philosopher Yael

[1] See J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 15. Austin's question was whether we ever perceive anything *directly*, which many philosophers deny. His point was that "perceiving *indirectly*," which means different things in different circumstances, "wears the trousers," and that perceiving

Tamir in her 1993 book *Liberal Nationalism*[2] and quite independently, it seems, by Michael Lind, whose book *The Next American Nation: The New Nationalism and the Fourth American Revolution*[3] received a good deal of attention when it appeared last year. In several works,[4] the influential Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka has also developed a view that is best described in these terms. And other contemporary philosophers fit the description as well.

Even the term "liberal nationalism" is not univocal, however. The views of Kymlicka and Tamir have a great deal in common; Lind, on the other hand -- who writes seemingly unaware of their work, and of Tamir's prior use of the term -- stands for something quite different and in some respects at odds with their views. Nevertheless, both Tamir and Lind describe themselves as liberal nationalists, and Kymlicka clearly is one as well.

The possibility of a liberal nationalism is attractive. For nationalism seems to appeal to powerful human impulses and to fulfill important values. At the same time, we may suspect that it conflicts with moral commitments central to an adequate conception of liberalism. Liberalism, of course, is hardly more clear as a concept than nationalism. But I believe that two basic elements have been central to liberal thought: first, a certain conception of the equality of human beings; and second, an emphasis on individual freedom or autonomy. From these values others

directly gets it meaning by contrast.

[2] Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

[3] New York: Free Press, 1995.

[4] See especially *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995); also *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Unless otherwise indicated, citations to Kymlicka are to *Multicultural Citizenship*, cited as *MC*.

can be inferred: tolerance, respect for individual rights, and pluralism, for example.

Two inferences seem unavoidable. First, neither autonomy nor the equality of persons is self-explanatory, and there can be disagreements among those who call themselves liberal about how these values should be understood. The meaning of equality in particular has been the focus of intense scrutiny within political philosophy at least since Ronald Dworkin named it the core liberal value.[5] Second, if human equality and individual autonomy are both central to liberalism, then there can be conflicts within liberalism itself about the weight to be accorded each, in general (if that is a sensible question) or in particular cases. On the basis of these two ambiguities, a great variety of positions calling themselves liberal is possible.

If both nationalism and liberalism are broad, complex, and ill-defined, liberal nationalism will inevitably be more so. In what follows I aim to understand what recent writers have meant by liberal nationalism and why they are drawn to it; and to explore some problems with it, in particular tensions arising between it and the universalist assumption of equality implicit in liberalism**.**

Nations as cultures

Nationalism in all its varieties is clearly a normative thesis; it advances a view about what ought to be the case. Thus the claim that there are nations, or that the United States is a nation, is not the articulation of nationalism. Nationalism can be understood as the claim that there ought to be nations, or that nations have certain rights or ought to do certain things. More commonly,

[5] See, e.g., *A Matter of Principle* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), chapters 8 and 9,.

nationalism is a particular rather than a general normative claim: that *this* group has certain rights (to political autonomy or sovereignty, for example). But the rational nationalist must at the same time acknowledge that if his nation has certain rights, others similarly situated do as well. With the nationalist unwilling to grant the universal thesis, discussion is pointless.

But what is a nation? In common parlance, the term is often used interchangeably with "state" or "country." This view is unsatisfactory for at least two reasons. First, the argument for political rights such as statehood or autonomy rests on the premise of nationhood: groups demand states by arguing that they constitute nations. Thus states cannot be identical with nations. Second, it is clear that many, if not most, states today are multinational. There is no one-to-one correspondence between nations and states.

There is perhaps no completely satisfactory synonym for "nation," but I believe that "culture" comes closest. This is clearly a view shared by Kymlicka, Tamir, Lind, and other participants in the current debate. Although the term "culture" also has a broader meaning -- we speak of a "legal culture" and a "political culture," for example -- we have a fairly well-understood conception of what Kymlicka calls a "societal culture," and that is what a nation is. A societal culture "provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres. These cultures tend to be territorially concentrated, and based on a shared language."[6]

Similarly, Lind argues that nationhood is a matter of common language, common

[6] *MC,* p. 76.

folkways, and common knowledge, "a body of material -- ranging from historical events that everyone is expected to know about to widely shared but ephemeral knowledge of sports and cinema and music."[7] For Tamir nationalism means the "right to culture";[8] it follows that a nation should be understood as a culture.

The view that nations are cultures -- "societal cultures," in Kymlicka's phrase, or "vernacular cultures," in Lind's -- leaves open several issues. I shall only mention them here; some will receive more attention below. First, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between one culture and another (the culture of the U.S. versus that of Canada, for example). Second, cultures are rarely pure; they contain elements of other cultures (chili, a staple of Indian cuisine, was brought to India by the Portuguese from the Americas[9]). Third, within cultures we find subcultures whose members have a distinct sense of identity and belonging (Jews in the U.S. and other countries); the relationship between cultures and subcultures and between the loyalties of members to each may be subtle and complicated.

What ties members of a culture together? It is often thought that common ancestry, or at least the belief in a common ancestry, binds them. Cultures united by common ancestry are sometimes called ethnic nations.[10] The nationalism they espouse seems to many people illiberal,

[7] Lind, p. 265. Lind's conception of common knowledge resembles E. D. Hirsch, Jr.'s idea of cultural literacy. See *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (New York: Vintage, 1988). Of course Hirsch's lament that not every American does know everything on his list suggests a slightly different view from Lind's, since presumably Hirsch would not deny that the ignorant Americans are Americans, partaking in American culture.

[8] Tamir, chapter 2.

[9] For this and other examples of cultural impurity and cross-cultural influence, see Amartya Sen, "Our Culture, Their Culture: Satyajit Ray and the Art of Universalism," *The New Republic*, April 1, 1996.

[10] Walker Connor, for example, thinks "nation" in its pure sense is synonymous with "ethnonation": "a group of

because it makes membership dependent on something over which people have no control. You can neither acquire nor shed your ancestry. Thus German citizenship is defined by *jus sanguinis*, the law of blood. Ethnic Germans who have lived for decades in the former Soviet Union can easily become German citizens, while Turkish "guestworkers" who have lived their whole lives in Germany may not. The common contrast with ethnic nationalism is civic nationalism, where citizenship is defined by *jus soli*, the law of the place.[11] Civic nations -- France and the United States are examples -- are assimilationist; membership is open to newcomers rather than being dependent on biological ancestry.

But neither the term "ethnic" nor "civic" is entirely satisfactory. Ethnicity need not be identified with ancestry; the same questions that are raised about nationality -- whether it is open or closed, dependent on birth or not -- can be raised about ethnicity.[12] Lind, for example, calls the U.S. an ethnic nation while explicitly disavowing either the belief in or the reality of common ancestry as an requirement. "Civic," on the other hand, implies a conception of nationhood that is more political, and less cultural, than Lind, Tamir, and Kymlicka mean to suggest. Lind, for example, explicitly rejects a conception of the American nation as defined by political

people who believe they are ancestrally related." *Ethnonationalism: The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. x.

[11] For a good discussion see Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[12] Ethnicity might be open not only in the sense that it can be acquired, as by naturalization, but that it can be consciously or semi-consciously chosen. See Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Waters interviewed white Catholic Americans from a variety of heritages, many of them from mixed backgrounds. So-called ethnic identification, she discovered, was partly a matter of choice. So, for example, a person who was one-quarter Irish and three-quarters German might think of herself as Irish rather than German. According to Waters, the primary factors determining which ethnic identity people choose are surname, looks, and the relative social rankings of the ethnic groups.

commitments or beliefs: "A nation may be *dedicated* to a proposition, but it cannot *be* a proposition."[13] Political values are only a part, and generally a small part, of a culture, which generally consists of common language, folkways, and customs.

About these matters -- what constitutes a nation, the meaning of culture -- Kymlicka, Tamir, and Lind largely agree. And it seems to me they are right.

Two arguments for nationalism

On this conception of nations as cultures, nationalism is the view that, as Tamir puts it, people have a "right to culture." Or perhaps we should say they have a right to *their* culture. Two questions immediately arise. First, why do people have a right to their culture? And second, what does such a right amount to? In this section I investigate the first question; in the next, the second.

Kymlicka, Tamir, and others, like Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, explain the right to culture in terms of the importance of cultural belonging to individual well-being. Kymlicka is particularly concerned to show that cultural belonging can be justified on purely individualist grounds, without reference to collectivist notions of the sort emphasized by some communitarians and by nationalists not known for their attachment to the liberal tradition. Cultural membership, Kymlicka believes, is crucial for two reasons. First, it "provides meaningful options, in the sense that 'familiarity with a culture determines the boundaries of the

[13] Lind, p. 5.

imaginable.'"[14] Second, cultural membership or national identity "is particularly suited to serving as the 'primary foci [sic] of identification,' because it is based on belonging, not accomplishment." But this means that "people's self-respect is bound up with the esteem in which their national group is held."[15]

Although there is something deeply plausible about the view that a sense of communal belonging is important to individual well-being, each of these arguments is flawed. Let us begin with the second. National identity, the argument goes, is well-suited as the primary focus of identification because it is based on belonging, not accomplishment. But race, gender, family membership, and genealogy (e.g., being a Mayflower descendant) are likewise not accomplishment-based. So far as this argument goes there is nothing distinctive about *cultural* belonging.

It is worth remarking at this point on the moral ambiguity of sources of identity based on belonging. When belonging is contrasted with accomplishment, the idea that, as Margalit and Raz say, identification is more secure when tied to the former rather than the latter seems plausible. Personal merit or achievement is irrelevant; you don't have to do anything to be a member of the group. (Your mother will love you no matter what you do.) Since achievement depends partly on accidents of natural and social endowment and on ordinary luck, there is an egalitarian element in the emphasis on belonging. But, as I argued earlier in describing the

[14] Kymlicka, *MC*; the second clause quotes from Margalit and Raz, "National Self-Determination," *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990). In support of this view Kymlicka also cites Ronald Dworkin in *A Matter of Principle*, pp. 228-33.

[15] *MC*, p. 89.

traditional concept of the ethnic nation, there is also something "illiberal" in basing membership on something over which people have no control. This is, after all, part of the reason we condemn racism and other forms of prejudice and discrimination; we believe that, to the extent possible, a person's fate should depend on her autonomous choices.[16]

Consider now Kymlicka's first argument for the value of cultural belonging: that familiarity with a culture "provides meaningful options," determining "the boundaries of the imaginable." On these grounds, it would seem that familiarity with more than one culture would extend those boundaries, providing a person with a broader range of options. And, however we understand options, the particular culture in which a person is raised may in fact provide fewer than a different culture would. If it is meaningful options we are after, one's inherited culture is not necessarily the best or the only one to have.

Jeremy Waldron makes a related point: "[Kymlicka's] argument shows that people need cultural materials; it does not show that what people need is 'a rich and secure cultural structure.' It shows the importance of access to a variety of stories and roles; but it does not, as he claims, show the importance of something called *membership* in a culture."[17]

[16] This question of the extent to which our identity is formed by attachments given to us, to what extent by choices we make, is of course one of the central debates dividing communitarians from their critics -- although putting the question in terms of "the extent to which" already assumes a more balanced, less either/or view that some of the discussions seem to imply. The contemporary debate begins with Michael Sandel's defense of communitarianism in *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Kymlicka rejects the view that we are identical with attachments we do not choose, and insists that we are able (although often with difficulty), and must be able, to question and revise them (*MC*, pp. 91-93). To decide whether this rejection of the communitarian view is fully compatible with the emphasis on belonging as a basis for identity would require a more extended analysis than I can provide here.

[17] "Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative," in Will Kymlicka, ed., *The Rights of Minority Cultures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 107. See also Jeremy Waldron, "Multiculturalism and Melange," in Robert Fullinwider, ed., *Public Education in a Multicultural Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

> Waldron makes a powerful case for a cosmopolitan vision at odds with Kymlicka's:
>
> The cosmopolitan may live all his life in one city and maintain the same citizenship throughout. But he refuses to think of himself as defined by his location or his ancestry or his citizenship or his language. Though he may live in San Francisco and be of Irish ancestry, he does not take his identity to be compromised when he learns Spanish, eats Chinese, wears clothes made in Korea, listens to arias by Verdi sung by a Maori princess on Japanese equipment. . ..He is a creature of modernity, conscious of living in a mixed-up world and having a mixed-up self.[18]

About this picture the critic might respond in two ways. First, even if it is attractive to some people, perhaps it is just cosmopolitan parochialness to think it attractive to or descriptive of all or even most people. Second, the possibility of the cosmopolitan self seems to presuppose the existence of distinct cultures out of which emerges the rich cultural melange that Waldron describes. If Maori and Chinese and Italian culture didn't exist in the first place, the cosmopolitan life that takes a bit of this and a bit of that would be impossible.

How might the cosmopolitan reply to these criticisms? He might acknowledge that in part he is making a virtue of necessity. (Perhaps once there were relatively pure cultures. But that was then, this is now.) If Waldron's vision describes only a tiny fraction of all the human beings who have ever lived, that will soon change. Whereas cultures used to be less permeable (although never impermeable), and cultural change was therefore slow and gradual, now in the age of instant telecommunications there is no stemming the tide. However unappealing or

[18] Ibid., p. 95.

undescriptive it may seem, at the cusp of the twenty-first century the cosmopolitan self is no longer the preserve of freethinkers and jet-setters.

The cosmopolitan might continue in this vein: as the cosmopolitan self becomes more common, the existence of pristine cultures will become less common. This is not, of course, a defense of the eradication of "monocultures," as we might call them; it is only a claim of inevitability. Nevertheless, it might also be taken as a driving force behind liberal nationalism: we should do everything we can to preserve traditional cultures, which are in danger of being swallowed up or destroyed.

Now it seems hard to argue with this view, especially if we envision the most likely alternative: the McDonaldization of everything. But imagine even that it is not McDonaldization. Picture the loveliest culture that you can -- but there is only one, which permeates the globe. This is not an attractive vision. If the contrast with liberal nationalism -- nationalism as the right to culture -- were a single worldwide culture, liberal nationalism's appeal would be hard to deny. Part of its attraction, then, is the attraction of pluralism. A world encompassing many different ways of life is better than a world with only one, no matter how good the one.

So there are really two central appeals of liberal nationalism. One is the need for some kind of communal belonging to individual well-being. Kymlicka's dual account of this need is unsatisfactory, I have argued, both because the need is not best explained in terms of providing options, and because culture is not unique among affiliations in not being based on accomplishment. Still, Kymlicka is right that for most people cultural belonging is very

important. It is hard to say a great deal about this in analytical (as opposed to poetic or literary) terms, perhaps because it is basically so very simple: for most of us, our native culture provides us with a sense of being at home in the world. This feeling goes far beyond liking or disliking, loving or hating; we can recognize the superior virtues of other cultures, but still feel the attachment bred of familiarity our own culture affords. The features of a culture that produce this sense of familiarity and well-being are its language and folkways, its sounds and smells, the innumerable subtle and, in the scheme of things, trivial customs and practices and ways of life we grow up with.

The other appeal of liberal nationalism is its implicit commitment to pluralism. There is something odd about this, for, viewed "from the inside," there need be nothing pluralistic about nationalism. The nationalist seeks political expression for her culture, and may care nothing for anyone else's. But insofar as liberal nationalism is a general creed, one of its most plausible premises is the belief that many cultures and ways of life are better than one.

Tamir's right to culture

The commitment to pluralism sounds very nice in theory; the question is what it means in practice. Let a thousand cultures bloom; let them live side by side in peaceful coexistence. Who could argue with that? Nationalism, however -- even liberal nationalism -- is a political doctrine. It concerns how states ought to behave with respect to cultures and their members, and what rights cultures have against states. We may be inclined to forget the political -- the coercive -- face of even liberal nationalism when we think in terms of the right to culture.

Many people have understood nationalism to be the view that "the political and the national unit should be congruent."[19] Taking nations to be cultures, it would follow that each culture should have its own state. But claims to statehood encounter two major problems.

One is that all territory on the earth is already taken. So claims to land never go uncontested. Secession and the creation of new states can never be simple, for the property and other claims of existing states and their members will have their merits, even when a culture demanding statehood has right and justice on its side. Complex negotiations, compromises, and agreements will always be necessary.

The other difficulty with the demand that nations be (or have) states is what Tamir aptly calls the "Russian doll phenomenon": "every 'national territory,' however small, includes among its inhabitants members of other nations."[20] If every culture had, by the very fact of being a culture, a right to statehood, we could face a practically infinite regress of states of diminishing size. This is not merely a serious practical problem. It is a sufficient reason to deny that cultures per se have a right to statehood. A culture must provide very good reason why it *needs* a state.

What constitutes a good reason? Michael Ignatieff, in a review of Tamir's book, argues that a people may legitimately demand a state when they "have good reason to believe that statehood is their only security for the future" against "the violence and the intimidation of their

[19] See, e.g., Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 1; E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 9. For further discussion of this issue see Judith Lichtenberg, "Nationalism: For and (Mainly) Against," in Jeff McMahan and Robert McKim, eds., *The Ethics of Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

[20] Tamir, p. 158.

neighbors."[21] Margalit and Raz defend a more robust view, making a case for statehood when necessary to "protect the culture and self-respect" of the group.[22] Here it is not just that individuals are endangered because they belong to a certain culture, but that the existence of the culture itself is endangered. It follows that the culture itself is valuable and deserves protection and respect. And because its members' identities are tied up with the culture, their self-respect rises and falls accordingly.

It might be said that part of what it means to be a liberal nationalist is to sever the close connection between nationhood and statehood, as Tamir does explicitly: "it is the cultural rather than the political version of nationalism that best accords with a liberal viewpoint."[23] I want to examine this claim more closely, but it is worth reminding ourselves at the outset how few liberal nationalists there are in the world. Most nationalists today explicitly seek a state, either by secession -- the creation of a new state -- or by attempting to destroy, expel, or forcibly assimilate members of other cultures within the existing state. To take only one example, India's main Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party, whose slogan is "one nation, one people, one culture," and which had a role in provoking the destruction of a Muslim mosque in 1992, calls for changes in laws on marriage, divorce, and inheritance that adversely affect Muslim practices; "repeal of constitutional autonomy for India's only majority Muslim province.

[21] "Boundaries of Pain," *The New Republic*, November 1, 1993, p. 38.

[22] Margalit and Raz, p. 457.

[23] Tamir, p. 58.

. .; and construction of a 'magnificent' Hindu temple on the site of the demolished mosque."[24] The current crop of scholarship on the subject notwithstanding, liberal nationalism has a tiny following among people who call themselves and are identified by others as nationalists.

Nevertheless, let us examine liberal nationalism on its merits. In the first place, it is a mistake for Tamir to claim that her view is not a political doctrine simply because it stops short of insisting that cultures should have states. Nationalism in all its forms is a political doctrine, as I have argued, because it concerns how cultures may express themselves publicly and thus necessarily has implications for what is politically permitted, required, and forbidden.

That Tamir's view is less innocuous than it might at first appear becomes clear when, late in the book, she asserts that "although it cannot be ensured that each nation will have its own state, all nations are entitled to a public sphere in which they constitute the majority."[25] Essentially, she advocates the withering away of the traditional state, to be replaced on the one side by autonomous national communities making decisions within, and on the other by regional organizations looking outward to the larger world. For domestic purposes, there is little to distinguish Tamir's national communities from traditional states. Her solution fails to answer the question, said to describe the various Balkan nationalists (and many others as well): "Why should I be a minority in your state when you can be a minority in mine?"[26] We need only

[24] Kenneth J. Cooper, "Hindu Nationalist Party Looks to South and East India for Future Majority," *Washington Post*, June 24, 1996, p. A 14.

[25] Tamir, p. 150.

[26] Attributed to the Yugoslav political theorist Vladimir Gligorov, "Balkan Tragedy," *Carnegie Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (Winter 1996), p. 4.

replace the term "state" with "autonomous community." If we grant that about certain matters a state or community cannot be neutral -- such as the choice of a language in which to conduct public affairs[27] -- then either some minorities will be forced to endure alien cultural practices, or else they will perpetuate the Russian doll problem by themselves becoming the majority culture in a still smaller community.

Tamir's requirement that every nation have a sphere in which it is the majority is not only unrealistic; it may also be undesirable. Being a member of a minority culture can be a defining experience; for example, to be Jewish (outside of Israel and New York) is to be a member of a minority, and that marginal status has often seemed central to Jewish identity. The same goes, I suspect, for other cultures. Minority status may not necessarily be something to overcome.

Kymlicka's arguments for national rights

Kymlicka's aims are more modest than Tamir's. He defends collective rights for minority cultures within a multinational state, without supposing that there must exist a sphere in which the minority forms a majority. Indeed, Kymlicka's project is not explicitly a nationalist one but rather the articulation of minority rights within a larger -- culturally alien -- society. Nevertheless, it shares with other nationalist projects the belief that members of a culture have a right to its public expression. Kymlicka's view is liberal in part because the group rights he

[27] For arguments defending this view see Kymlicka, *MC*, pp. 108-15. E.g.: "It is quite possible for a state not to have an established church. But the state cannot help but give at least partial establishment to a culture when it decides which language is to be used in public schooling, or in the provision of state services" (111). Even a bilingual state makes such choices, by excluding other languages; clearly no society could conduct official business, or require its citizens to be conversant, in more than a very small number of languages.

asserts are protections for members against decisions of outsiders, rather than restrictions the group may impose on its own members. These rights do not "protect the group from the destabilizing impact of internal dissent," but rather from the effects of external decisions of the larger society.[28]

These "group-differentiated rights" can be of various types: "self-government rights" (political autonomy); "polyethnic rights" (public funding of cultural practices; exemptions, based on religious practices, from certain laws and regulations); and "special representation rights" (e.g., reserving a certain number of seats in the legislature for members of disadvantaged groups).[29] Such rights clearly go beyond a policy of simple nondiscrimination; they require governments to act affirmatively in order to protect minority cultures and enable them to express themselves publicly.

Kymlicka considers four arguments for group-differentiated rights for cultural minorities. The two most important are arguments about justice, which have implications for the obligations of the majority culture. The first, summed up in a Canadian Supreme Court judgment, is that "the accommodation of differences is the essence of true equality." Since the state cannot be neutral with respect to all cultural practices, group rights "compensate for unequal circumstances which put the members of minority cultures at a systemic disadvantage in the cultural market-place."[30] The second argument is that some minority rights can be inferred from historical

[28] *MC,* p. 35.

[29] Ibid., pp. 26-33.

[30] Ibid., pp. 108, 113.

agreements, like the treaty rights of native peoples or the agreement by which two groups agreed to federate.

The latter argument obviously applies only to some cultural groups, but they happen to be groups of particular interest to the Canadian Kymlicka. An important distinction in his theory is that between genuine national minorities -- he would include in this category the Quebecois and the various indigenous peoples in Canada and elsewhere -- and ordinary immigrants, who, on his view, come to the new culture voluntarily and thereby, it seems, consent to assimilate to it. Kymlicka's argument from historical agreements tracks this distinction but does not capture all the reasons we may think native peoples have cultural rights against the majority. We may think these rights derive partly from the fact that just agreements were *not* made, and that indigenous groups were unjustly treated.

For both these reasons, then -- the existence of prior agreements as well as historical coercion and injustice -- we may think indigenous or federated groups have rights against the majority. But Kymlicka's first argument -- that group rights compensate for the systemic disadvantages and inequalities minority cultures experience -- holds also for immigrant groups, given the importance of cultural belonging and the circumstances under which immigration normally occurs. Kymlicka himself, in arguing for the importance of cultural belonging, insists that few people voluntarily choose to leave their culture.[31] When we think not only of traditional refugees -- those fleeing political persecution -- but also of people in dire or difficult economic circumstances seeking reasonable life prospects, the suggestion that such people's decisions are

[31] See esp. ibid., pp. 84-87.

rendered so freely that in moving they choose to give up their original culture seems implausible.[32]

Many such immigrants do not actively choose to maintain their native culture; to the extent that these matters are under their control, they may assimilate as far as they are capable, which may mean simply that they do not try to prevent their children from assimilating. But the question whether to retain one's native culture is a live one in some parts of the U.S., for example, where large numbers of Spanish-speaking immigrants, fleeing poverty and persecution and seeking not fortune but more modest economic opportunities, have settled. Their numbers are large enough, and concentrated enough, to make the prospect of a Latino culture or a bilingual society real.

But if the argument from equality supports extending cultural rights to immigrants and refugees, and not only to members of indigenous cultures and special groups like the Quebecois, at the same time it renders the whole conclusion less plausible. For it seems impractical to extend such rights to an indefinite number of minority cultures. Now one might take this practical consideration as a reason to limit minority rights to indigenous and federated groups, as Kymlicka does, since these groups can avail themselves of the additional argument either that they have rights founded on a prior agreement or that their ancestors were unjustly coerced in the

[32] According to the Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees agreed upon in 1967 by the United Nations, a refugee is a person who "owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." See Guy S. Goodwin-Gill, *The Refugee in International Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). Some have argued that refugee status should be extended to those fleeing dire economic straits such as famine. But however we draw the line, it is clear that many people classified as immigrants or migrants suffer serious deprivation in their home country and are "pushed" by privation as much as they are "pulled" by the attractions of the new country.

past. Yet in some ways the case is stronger for immigrant groups, whose connection to their native culture may be more immediate than the connection of members of indigenous groups to theirs. How strong the tie is between members of indigenous groups and their culture will depend in part on how vital the culture has remained, and that in turn will depend partly on whether it has received support from the majority culture. So there is a certain circularity here.

Kymlicka's arguments from justice, then, are inconclusive, for several reasons. First, they require details about particular cases (and no one is more clear than Kymlicka about the importance of such details). Second, the two arguments are distinct, each has independent merit, and they may pull in different directions. Depending on the causes of immigration and the strength of attachment to a culture by particular groups, immigrant groups might have as much or more of a claim to their culture as indigenous groups. Third, the possibility of multiple cultures each having legitimate claims to collective rights might call into question the whole thesis, depending on how much is required to satisfy these claims.

The third argument Kymlicka considers is that we should grant cultural minorities rights because doing so may advance the good of cultural diversity. Despite the plausibility of its premise, this argument, Kymlicka rightly claims, appeals to the interests of society at large and is therefore insufficient to generate minority *rights*.

Finally, Kymlicka argues that liberals are already committed to group-differentiated rights because they accept the premise that states may control their borders, and more generally may decide who possesses citizenship. The burden of proof is therefore on them, he believes, to show that group-differentiated rights within a state or among citizens is illegitimate. Kymlicka is

making a consistency argument: if you distinguish between citizens and noncitizens, there is no basis on which to refuse to distinguish among citizens.

But appeals to consistency are always double-edged, and none more than this one. This argument begs a central question in the debate about nationalism and the significance of national boundaries: viz. whether it is legitimate to favor members of a nation over nonmembers and whether the privileges of membership can rightly be denied to outsiders. Kymlicka is aware that the thrust of the argument can push the other way; as he acknowledges, although on the one hand most people, including most liberals, accept the rights of states to control admissions, liberals are also committed to the equality of persons, which cuts against the exclusionary practices of states.

Michael Walzer, expressing a communitarian view that is a defense of national communities, puts the nationalist point explicitly. He argues that "the primary good we distribute to one another is membership in some human community," and that

> Admission and exclusion are at the core of communal independence. They suggest the deepest meaning of self-determination. Without them, there could not be *communities of character*, historically stable, ongoing associations of men and women with some special commitment to one another and some special sense of their common life.[33]

Critics of this view question the moral significance of national boundaries and the rights of states to exclude.[34] They may acknowledge the "good" of communal membership, but they also

[33] *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), pp. 31, 62; emphasis in original.

[34] See, e.g., Judith Lichtenberg, "National Boundaries and Moral Boundaries: A Cosmopolitan View," in Peter Brown and Henry Shue, eds., *Boundaries: National Autonomy and Its Limits* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981), and Joseph Carens, "Aliens and Citizens: The Case for Open Borders," in Kymlicka, ed., *The Rights of Minority Cultures.*

recognize that the radical inequalities between communities mean that its "goodness" varies depending on a community's particular assets.

There is no right answer to the question whether liberals are committed to the legitimacy of exclusionary national boundaries or not -- nor, therefore, whether consistency requires them to endorse Kymlickian minority rights. "Liberalism" is just too broad a term, embracing values that may and do conflict: on the one hand, a commitment to personal as well as societal autonomy that would reject a radical restructuring of global politics and thus accepts the existing world order of nation-states; on the other hand, a commitment to the equality of persons that, if taken seriously, makes it difficult to permit the gross inequalities in the distribution of basic goods that accompanies this world order.

It is these inequalities, after all, that constitute the most powerful argument against even the milder forms of nationalism. Who would deny communities the right to exclude people, if those people had someplace just as good (or even good enough) to go instead? Liberal nationalists like Kymlicka and Tamir appreciate this point. Thus Kymlicka argues that "a country forfeits its right to restrict immigration if it has failed to live up to its obligations to share its wealth with the poorer countries of the world"[35] and Tamir makes the identical point: "it is justified for a nation to seek homogeneity by restricting immigration only if it has fulfilled its global obligation to assure equality among all nations."[36] Given the facts of national selfishness and greed, the question is only whether this demanding qualification makes nationalism in *our*

[35] *MC*, p. 224, n. 18.

[36] Tamir, p. 161.

world illegitimate.

Lind, on the other hand, who favors strong restrictions on immigration as well on trade between high- and low-wage countries to prevent corporations from taking advantage of cheap labor elsewhere, insists that "the goal of U.S. economic policy is to raise the living standards of ordinary Americans"; whether this "happens to promote global welfare is a matter of secondary importance."[37] This sounds more like good old nationalism than liberal nationalism.

In its purest version, nationalism means that the welfare of outsiders does not count at all; members care only about each other and about their collectivity. If this sounds like a caricature, we need only think of the standard view of international relations, in which nation-states are supposed to pursue their own interests. According to more moderate versions of nationalism (strains of which can also be found in the standard view), a nation may not harm outsiders but need not promote their welfare. How this differs from the purer view depends on where and how we draw the line between the infliction of harm and the failure to promote welfare. We can also imagine a spectrum of moderate nationalisms that vary according to the differential permitted between the care and feeding of members as against nonmembers. Kymlicka's and Tamir's assertions that global inequalities restrict a nation's right to exclude outsiders suggest a view far over on the liberal side of the spectrum. The question is only whether, in the absence of significant strides toward rectifying such injustices, there is much nationalism left.

Lind's egalitarian melting pot

[37] Lind, p. 323.

The liberal commitment to equality, overlaid against the nationalist tension between insiders and outsiders, is nowhere more striking than in Michael Lind's version of liberal nationalism. At first blush, it is hard to see what, aside from the label, his view shares with those of Kymlicka and Tamir. They are multiculturalists who want to reconcile the existence of various cultures within one state; he is the enemy of multiculturalism, which he regards as the misguided "orthodoxy of the present American regime" and "an aftershock of the black-power radicalism of the sixties."[38] For Lind, liberal nationalism is the opposite of the cultural pluralism implicit in the multicultural ideal; it "is the idea of the American nation as a melting pot."[39]

What in Lind's conception, then, warrants the label "liberal nationalism"? First is his view that the American nation is "a cultural melting pot, and ultimately a racial melting pot."[40] Although American culture is ultimately "Anglomorph" in its "national grammar," black Americans in particular, as well as other ethnic groups, have made enormous contributions to the "national vernacular culture."[41] American culture is therefore "mulatto" in content, and is open to "anyone whose primary, or adopted, culture is. . . [this] 'mulatto' mainstream."[42] To revert to our earlier terminology, Lind's nation is ethnic if we mean by this cultural, but not if we mean rooted in ancestral ties (or even just the belief in ancestral ties).

[38] Lind, pp. 97, 13.

[39] Ibid., p. 298.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid., pp. 271, 275.

[42] Ibid., p. 276.

Interestingly, Lind's claim about the nature of the United States -- that it is *a* nation, not two or five -- suggests that what divides him from Kymlicka and Tamir may not be so much beliefs about the value of multiculturalism (they like it, he doesn't) as beliefs about whether or where it exists. He denies that the U.S. contains five distinct cultures (as he claims most multiculturalists think).[43] Kymlicka, a Canadian, and Tamir, an Israeli, have little to say about this question. Although they are advancing general theories, they are, like all theorists, focused on certain particular cases -- specifically the circumstances of their own countries. In principle, then, they might agree with Lind that the U.S. is a single nation with a single culture.

What kind of question is the question whether the U.S. is one nation or more than one? Is it a factual question? A conceptual question? A value question? Probably some of each of these. Answering it depends on the facts: "how things are" in the U.S. It depends also on questions we raised earlier about what we mean by a culture, how we decide where one ends and another begins, how to draw the line between a culture and a subculture. But it's hard to answer this conceptual question without knowing in advance what we want to *do* with the concept of culture. And this is a question of value.

I do not have the space here to give the question "Is the U.S. one culture or more than one?" the treatment it deserves. But several points are in order. First, I think there is much to be said for Lind's view. For better or for worse, American culture is pervasive and nearly

[43] The five derive from the U.S. Office of Management and Budget's Directive 15, which since 1977 has governed the collection of census data and other federal data. Directive 15 divides people into five groups, four "racial" and one "ethnic": American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, White, and Hispanic. Respondents are supposed to check one. The status of Directive 15 is in question for the upcoming 2000 Census; OMB is currently considering changes in the categories (e.g., adding a "multiracial" category). Lind advocates abandoning them altogether (pp. 304-5), although the chance that this will happen is virtually nil.

irresistible. But second, one of the central conclusions Lind wants to draw from this view, that we should decisively abandon affirmative action policies, does not follow. The best arguments for affirmative action concern counteracting ongoing discrimination or compensating people for the disadvantages produced by past or present discrimination; these arguments do not presuppose that the beneficiaries of affirmative action belong to different cultures.

It's important to note, in this connection, that whereas Kymlicka has much to say about indigenous and federated peoples -- the cases of interest in Canada -- he sheds much less light on the question of greatest import to Americans, the situation of American blacks. The case for thinking American blacks form a distinct culture is much weaker than it is for the Inuits or the Quebecois, in part because "black culture" is so interwoven with American culture as a whole. In addition, native peoples form a much smaller proportion of the general population in the U.S. than in Canada (one percent versus three percent); there is no analogue to the Quebecois in the U.S; and Canada's much smaller population may magnify the significance of its minority cultures. Multiculturalism, then, is less plausible as a description of the U.S. than of Canada.

The other important reason for thinking Lind's nationalism is liberal, in addition to its inclusive understanding of the nature of the American nation, is its unashamed egalitarianism. Lind's attack on multiculturalism is motivated at least in part by his belief that it has divided and thereby harmed wage-earning Americans to the benefit of the "white overclass."[44] Whether or not one believes this analysis is sound, Lind's good faith is demonstrated by his calls for

[44] "As Nixon realized, the greatest beneficiary of the demise of transracial class politics has been the white overclass. Since the 1960s, the effect -- and, in the minds of at least some cynical conservative politicians, the purpose -- of racial preference and the multicultural ideology that justifies it has been to divert attention from the class divisions in American society and focus it on racial/cultural squabbles" (p. 182).

"unsubtle, crude, old-fashioned redistribution of wealth, through taxation and public spending"[45]; changes in the credentialing of professionals that would loosen the hold of organizations like the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association to permit middle-class and working-class Americans to perform some of the jobs that now require advanced degrees[46]; and federal outlawing of "by far the biggest affirmative action program" -- legacy preference, the preferential admission of children of alumni to elite colleges and universities.[47]

As inequality grows more pronounced in our society, and the distinction between what Lind calls the white overclass (with its sprinkling of nonwhite members) and everybody else becomes ever sharper, Lind's vision is, at least to an egalitarian like myself, very appealing.[48] It is, anyway, until one comes to the place (quoted above) where he calls for strong restrictions on immigration and on trade between high- and low-wage countries, arguing that U.S. policy ought to promote the interests of Americans and to consider only secondarily the welfare of other people. The commitment to equality within the nation comes at the expense of those outside its borders.[49]

[45] Ibid, p. 324.

[46] Ibid., p. 328.

[47] Ibid., pp. 170, 331.

[48] For evidence of the trend toward increasing inequality, see, e.g., Robert Frank and Philip Cook, *The Winner-Take-All Society* (New York: Free Press, 1995); and Steven Pearlstein, "Reshaped Economy Exacts Tough Toll," *Washington Post*, November 12, 1995 , p. A1.

[49] There is a vigorous debate about whether immigrants -- legal or illegal -- depress the economy for native workers. No one would deny the possibility of these harmful effects were immigration massive enough; whether they exist at present levels, as Lind seems to assume, is a much debated question. For the argument that immigrants harm native workers, see, for example, Vernon M. Briggs, Jr., *Mass Immigration and the National Interest* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1991); for the contrary view, see, e.g., Julian Simon, *The Economic*

Now of course the claim that the U.S. ought to promote Americans' interests hardly amounts to rabid ethnocentrism. It is, indeed, the expression not only of conventional wisdom but of universal practice. A politician who avowed the intention to put global welfare first would meet with disbelief, not to mention defeat. It is the recognition of how deeply entrenched nationalistic sentiment is -- the realization that "nationalism will simply not go away" -- that leads Tamir to describe liberal nationalism at the end of her book with what almost sounds like resignation: "making a virtue out of necessity."[50] Perhaps that is unfair, for Tamir, like Kymlicka, does not regard the bond among nationals as a *malum in se* (in Lind's term[51]) or even a weakness. It is a basic human need, satisfaction of which is required for a good life -- something that must therefore be accounted for in our politics. But liberal nationalists know how easily this need can turn ugly.

Liberal nationalism, equality, and social unity

Liberal nationalism -- the right to culture -- means being able to express one's culture in public and collective ways. Considered in itself, such a right seems attractive. Subjectively, it allows people to express their attachment to their culture, satisfying the need for cultural belonging; objectively, it promotes a plurality of cultures. The question is whether the right to culture conflicts with other things we care about. The threat of such conflict comes primarily

Consequences of Immigration (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989). Here I grant the assumption for the sake of argument.

[50] Tamir, p. 167. "Making a Virtue Out of Necessity" is the title of the last chapter.

[51] Lind, p. 6.

from two sources: the value of equality and the need for social unity. I shall end with a brief discussion of each.

Nationalism, even liberal nationalism, puts great weight on the distinction between insiders and outsiders, members and nonmembers. As we have seen, the importance of membership can conflict with liberalism's commitment to the equality of persons. On the one hand, it's obvious that individuals cannot be committed equally to all members of the human race. We care most about members of our family and a small circle of intimates, and the metaphor of concentric circles spreading out from there, and partly coinciding with geographic, ethnic, and national boundaries, seems roughly to describe the nature of most people's moral commitments. On the other hand, people's desire to join national communities different from their inherited ones derives largely from the maldistribution of "primary goods," in Rawls's sense: in particular material decency and freedom from persecution, oppression, and violence. Those seriously committed to the equality of persons cannot be indifferent to the radical maldistribution of these primary goods between nations (and within them as well, of course). Kymlicka and Tamir are highly sensitive to this issue; in response to it they moderate their nationalism when outsiders are deprived of an adequate share of resources. Lind, on the other hand, despite his egalitarianism within national boundaries, takes the "we take care of our own and let others do likewise" attitude we more commonly associate with nationalism.

This difference suggests that a conception of equality is prior in Kymlicka and Tamir, but not in Lind, to the commitment to communal belonging: *first* you equalize resources, then you can have your cultural belonging with its distinctions between members and nonmembers. For

the traditional nationalist, on the other hand, membership *determines* the scope of the community over which considerations of equality apply. This is an enormous difference. Lind's nationalism is of this latter sort; his egalitarianism stops at the border. Kymlicka and Tamir take the former approach. The question is only whether, given the facts of global inequality, their liberal nationalism can exist in practice as well as in theory.

The other crucial question, it turns out, is not unrelated to the tension between nationalism and equality. It is whether nationalism undermines social unity. This is hardly a question for the traditional nationalist who believes that a nation ought to have a state: the limits of the nation are the limits of the state, and nationalism produces unity by drawing a sharp legal, political, and moral boundary between those within and those outside. But for Kymlicka and others who promote diverse national sentiments and ideals within a state, the question is whether members of different cultures will have enough in common to bind them into one society. For there is no escaping the fact that, even if there are cultures within which individuals have strong loyalties, there is also a larger entity to which some sort of allegiance is necessary.

We may worry, then, that the various national groups within a society will be at odds with each other, not only lacking a shared sense but in fact experiencing conflict. This is one of Lind's concerns with multiculturalism; and it is clear that, whatever its overall benefits, the emphasis on multiculturalism can produce intergroup hostility. (Lind solves the problem of social unity by defining diversity out of the picture: the U.S. is a single culture.) Such concerns may lead us to the conclusion that if the center is to hold citizens of a state must partake of certain common practices or beliefs or attitudes no matter what their differences.

But what exactly, and how much, must they share? Kymlicka addresses this difficult question, although, by his own admission, in a sketchy and inconclusive way.[52] He offers as the best hope for unity -- albeit with some doubts -- Charles Taylor's suggestion that people might "'find it exciting and an object of pride' to work together to build a society founded on deep diversity." "Deep diversity" means that there exists not only a diversity of cultural groups in the society but a diversity of ways in which the members of these groups belong to the larger polity." Kymlicka means to distinguish here between, for example, the connections of indigenous or federated people to the larger society and those of immigrant groups (which may themselves vary).[53]

The question, then, is whether we can be different but equal -- more precisely, whether we can recognize others as different but equal. Perhaps in the end such a commitment requires that we also recognize our *un*difference; the glue that binds us to the acceptance of difference-and-equality is the recognition that "we are all human beings" or some such idea.[54]

It would be nice if the commitment to deep diversity existed, and if it were sufficient for social unity. If not, then we must confront hard questions about whether the state may or must privilege certain cultural practices, and disadvantage others, in the interests of social unity. If, on

[52] *MC*, pp. 187-91. See also Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), chapter 8.

[53] *MC*, p. 190 (quoting from Charles Taylor, "Shared and Divergent Values," in Ronald Watts and D. Brown, eds., *Options for a New Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); p. 189.

[54] One might object to this way of putting the point because it excludes animals, for example, or intelligent extraterrestrials we might someday meet. If we believe such beings ought to be treated equally, then we will say something else instead: "We are all sentient beings," for example.

the other hand, the commitment to diversity exists or can be made to exist, we might hope that it could be extended more broadly beyond state borders. If it can, then there is hope for the kind of global equality that is a moral prerequisite for liberal nationalism. It might be hard then to distinguish liberal nationalism from the cosmopolitan perspective with which it is usually contrasted. If it cannot, however -- if the belief in difference turns out to be a deep psychological stumbling block to the commitment to equality -- we will find ourselves slipping back to the nationalisms we know and hate.

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