"There is nothing quite like this book in the contemporary literature. It fills a salient vacuum and would make a fine contribution to a number of debates." - Philip Pettit, Professor of Social and Political Theory, Australian National University, Canberra. "The book offers high-level philosophical analysis of a topical issue, that of nationalism. The author takes a partisan, cosmopolitan position towards his subject. His main aim is to show that cultural isolationism, hostility towards the neighbors etc. . . . are logical consequences of nationalism." - János Kis, Professor of Political Philosophy, Central European University

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# Table of Contents

**Preface**

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### Part One. Nationalism as a political program

**Chapter one. Introduction**
- WHAT THE DEBATE IS ABOUT
- THE CONCEPT OF ‘NATION’

**Chapter two. Portraying nationalism**
- A ROUGH SKETCH
- THE COSMOPOLITAN VIEW

**Chapter three. Invidious nationalism**
- MYTHOLOGIES
- WHY IS RADICALISM TYPICAL OF NATIONALISM?

**Chapter four. The even-handed nationalist: summarizing the argument**
- INTRODUCING THE NATIONALIST INTERLOCUTOR
- CAN NATIONALIST CLAIMS BE DEFENDED?

**Chapter five. The right to self-determination**
- INTRODUCTION
- SECESSION AT WILL
- THE COSTS OF SECESSION

**Chapter six. The right to self-defense**
- PREVENTING AND REDRESSING INJUSTICES
- THE LIMITATIONS OF SELF-DEFENSE

**Chapter seven. How successful is the nation-state?**
- A HISTORICAL SUCCESS STORY
- PROMISES, PROMISES

**Chapter eight. Does nationalism support liberal-democratic values?**
- A SOURCE OF DEMOCRATIC ENERGY
- EQUALITY, DEMOCRACY, AND FREEDOM

**Chapter nine. Political alternatives to nationalism**

---

### Part Two. Identity, Culture, And Tradition

**Chapter ten. Nation and culture**

**Chapter eleven. The general value of culture**
- THE IDEA OF CULTURAL TRADITIONS
- REPLYING TO THE NATIONALIST
Chapter twelve. Human flourishing and understanding of values
WHAT THE NATION HAS TO OFFER
A PLURALIST VIEW OF TRADITIONS

Chapter thirteen. National tradition as a school of morals
‘THICK’ AND ‘THIN’ MORALITY
ARE THERE NATIONAL MORALITIES?
IS PURITY OF TRADITION A VIRTUE?

Chapter fourteen. Is national identity essential for the identity of persons?
‘A STABLE NATION PRODUCES STABLE INDIVIDUALS’
TOWARDS A PLURALISM OF IDENTITIES
HOW GOOD IS THE NATION AT PROVIDING IDENTITIES?

Chapter fifteen. The value of diversity

Chapter sixteen. The anti-cosmopolitan argument

Chapter seventeen. Recapitulation: nationalism against culture

Chapter eighteen. Ultra-moderate nationalism
THE SHAPE OF THE COMPROMISE
DOES THE COMPROMISE WORK?

Part Three. Conclusion

Chapter nineteen. Why nationalism might be immoral

Chapter twenty. Pluralistic cosmopolitanism
AN ALTERNATIVE TO NATIONALISM
FROM CULTURAL TO POLITICAL PLURALISM

The beginner’s guide to the literature

Bibliography

Index
Preface

1 This book was born from my experience with nationalism and war in the former Yugoslavia. It has been further shaped by both my political experiences in Croatia under the Tudjman regime and by political and philosophical reflections on the issues of national identity, culture, and politics. It is intended to introduce the reader to the contemporary moral and political debate on nationalism, from a standpoint that is critical of nationalist views. It is thus both an introduction and a polemic with a postulated ‘thoughtful nationalist’, not a sociological investigation into causes and roots. Confrontation with this postulated ‘thoughtful nationalist’ occupies center stage; such a nationalist would defend the view that states should be organized on an ethno-cultural basis; that cultural and intellectual life should be officially organized around ‘national’ culture; that individuals have basic duties and obligations to their nation; and that such duties normally trump many other moral obligations. The book presents and attempts to answer the standard arguments of such nationalists and criticizes their views.

2 I have divided the arguments to be discussed into two groups. In the first group are the more narrowly political ones, having to do with issues of self-determination and with the alleged democratic credentials of nationalism. The second group is more philosophical, and centers around the relation between ‘national identity’ and various goods, such as the free flourishing of individuals, moral insight, and the cultural goods that traditions offer to individuals who participate in them. Does national identity really provide such goods, and is it a better provider than some alternative identities? This is the question which occupies most space in the book. The arguments addressed appear in nationalist literature and political discourse, often concealed by a great deal of rhetoric; they also make their appearance in serious philosophical literature. This brings me to a particularly important point about this book.

3 The biggest intellectual problem that I have encountered in writing the book has to do with the recent resurgence of very mild forms of nationally minded philosophical thought. A year ago, when putting together my anthology on ‘nationalism and ethnic conflict’ (Miščević, 2000), I noticed that most authors eager to write about the topic were at least sympathetic to nationalist movements, whereas philosophers who are less sympathetic simply tend not to write about nationalism at all. Now, this philosophical pro-nationalism is vastly different from anything I know as nationalism from my personal experience: it is liberal and generous, allowing all sorts of concessions that no one whom I
would classify as a political nationalist would ever accept. All of the authors who see
themselves as liberal nationalists are well aware of the painful realities of nationalist
conflicts. They react to them by trying to exculpate nationalism and dissociate it, as such,
from the aggressive forms made manifest in these conflicts. In their eyes it is not
nationalism as such that is responsible, but the fact that the nationalisms in question
were not liberally minded. Some of them go as far as claiming that nationalism is
originally, or considered in itself, liberal and democratic (whereas others see themselves
as proposing liberal limitations on nationalism). Since such mild pro-nationalism—which
I am not at all sure is ‘nationalistic’ in any real sense—seems to occupy center stage
among serious philosophical papers on the subject I was faced with an unpleasant
dilemma. I could either ‘join the club’, and put mild pro-nationalism at the center of this
book, discussing it at length and trying to show its shortcomings. In that case, the book
would have been philosophically more ‘in tune’ with the academic mainstream, but it
would not have reflected actual political life in countries with ruling nationalistic parties.
Instead, I have focused on a more typical nationalist attitude, much tougher than the one
popular in academia, but more common in everyday life. I have done so in the belief that
my debate with nationalism should reflect political realities, rather than adapt itself to
the mild climate of gentle and liberal academia. I have tried to do justice to ultra-
moderate, ‘liberal nationalist’ philosophers by discussing their views in a separate
chapter, but I am aware that the richness and variety of their positions would merit more
space, and I apologize to them for not placing their views at the center of the discussion.
I have learned a lot from many authors, and perhaps most of all from those I criticize. I
owe a special intellectual debt to Judith Lichtenberg: her paper on varieties of nationalist
arguments (listed in the bibliography) gave me the idea of organizing this book around
particular pro-nationalistic arguments. For discussion and criticism I wish to thank
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Sandra Aidara of Transeuropéennes.
Part One. Nationalism as a political program
Chapter one. Introduction

WHAT THE DEBATE IS ABOUT

1 Suppose a white male acquaintance confided to you one day his feelings about belonging to the Caucasian race:

Let me tell you how proud I am of being white; it is not that I hate other races, but I love my race, and prefer to associate with my kind. Allow me to put it more philosophically. Belonging to a given race means being within a frame that offers meaning to people’s choices between alternatives, thus enabling them to acquire an identity. We are lost if we cannot identify ourselves with some part of an objective social reality, say, a race, with its distinctive qualities. Race is found, not created, and is found in identification with others. But one should be careful! Too much interaction between races leads to the loss of the distinctive pattern of differences between men, to a bland, indiscriminate mix in which important contrasts are lost. Races should be preserved in a recognizable form. It is therefore the duty of each white man to exercise solidarity with other whites.

2 Would this brutal honesty shock you? Nowadays, almost no serious writer would endorse the above statement, and with good reason. Racism—in particular, white racism—has no place in a decent society. Now, replace the word ‘race’ with ‘nation’, and ‘white’ with almost any nationality, and you will find the above passage transformed into the typical views of a nationalist. The passage begins to sound much less exotic. In fact, the more ‘philosophical’ sounding phrases in this ‘quotation’ have been culled from the writings of prominent contemporary political thinkers, except that they spoke of nation (in the ethnic sense) where your fictional acquaintance speaks about race. You will find the original sentences quoted in the course of this book, if you look carefully enough. Is there any reason why nationalist attitudes should be judged differently from racist ones? To begin with, our thinkers might point out that ‘ethno-nation’ is a cultural matter, whereas race is a (spurious) biological concept. Fine, but these same thinkers also insist that national belonging—in their sense—is non-voluntary, non-chosen: in what does a morally significant difference with racial belonging then consist? Race is at least a partly invented category, and so is nation, as these thinkers are the first to admit.

3 I shall argue that nationalism is almost as problematic as racism: our attitude to national exclusivity should become more like our negative attitude towards the racial kind. I shall
defend my assertion by attempting to show that the best arguments for the nationalist
to the ultimate immorality of nationalism. Finally, I will
attitude—the one expressed by the above paragraph after replacing 'race' with 'nation'—
available in the literature are not valid. This systematizing presentation and criticism of
arguments constitutes the main body of the book. I shall also try to produce some
independent arguments pointing to the ultimate immorality of nationalism. Finally, I will
briefly sketch an alternative which relies upon pluralistic cultural belonging, which can
represent a much wider affiliation than the national one, and which for this reason I will
describe as 'graded culturalist cosmopolitanism'. I will recommend it to your attention
only briefly, since a detailed argument would require another volume.

Given that there are so many books dealing with nationalism, why bother with yet
another one? Let me offer an extended apology. Nation and nationalism were burning
issues of political action and debate in the 1990s and have accompanied us into the next
millennium. Attitudes to these issues seem to revolve around a dilemma. On the one
hand, atrocities are being committed in ethno-national conflicts all around the world,
from Bosnia and Ulster to Azerbaijan, East Timor, and Tibet—and most people not
directly involved in the conflicts condemn them. Also, many thoughtful people are
inclined to blame 'nationalism'—whatever it might mean—for the atrocities committed.
The rule of nationalism in its ugliest forms saps the strength of intellectual and political
life in many Central and East European countries; most drastically in the former
Yugoslavia in the aftermath of the war, but also elsewhere. On the other hand, many of us
are prone to tolerate and often endorse the struggle of oppressed peoples for ethno-
national autonomy, although the struggle is often fought in the name of the same
'nationalistic' principles which we condemn when confronted with the realities of civil
war. Can one do both in honesty and without contradicting oneself? What is the right
stance to take? This is the main dilemma for a serious, honest, and thoughtful citizen
confronted with nationalism. Of course, there are related issues that are less dramatic,
but more widespread. Take isolationism. Many small, newly self-assured countries would
like to separate themselves from their neighbors: the supporters of Jörg Haider in Austria
intensely dislike their South-Slavonic neighbors; these same neighbors living on the edge
of the Balkans do not want to be seen as 'Balkanic'; and many East Europeans prefer to see
themselves as 'Central Europeans' (with the odd result that 'Eastern Europe' in their
imagination seems to recede eastwards towards the Pacific Ocean!). Inhabitants of other,
much larger and more developed countries worry about membership of larger,
transnational communities; EU membership is the most obvious case in point. What about
immigration policy? Can a nation simply decide it does not want to live with members of
another one? If not, why not? In all these cases, values and norms are at stake, issues
about what we should or ought to do. They form the central topic of the present book.

Particularly interesting in the contemporary debate is the special role played by the
cultural underpinnings of nation and nationalism. Nationalists insist on the purity of
culture, and condemn cultural influence as the 'base imitation' of foreign cultures (the
expression is from Shakespeare's Richard II [2.1.23], a scene which will later be quoted
more extensively). Along the same lines, some intellectuals worry about modifications to
—in their view, the corruption of—their mother tongue by foreign influences, influences
from other languages or even other dialects of what is officially the same language. Many
French people worry about Anglo-American loan words from pop culture or from
computer jargon; Croatian nationalists worry about Serbian words; and some English
writers worry about the corrupting influence of American slang in all domains of culture,
from soap operas to philosophy. The French authorities have been trying for some time to forbid formally the use of foreign languages—above all, English—at scholarly conferences held in France; they gave up because of the energetic protests of the scientific community. Those who use the ‘corrupted’ language defend themselves, if they care to do so, on grounds of practicality or of the sheer appeal of the foreign idiom. How bad is the change in question? Is it just a matter of personal taste, or does it have serious moral weight? If the latter, should something be done about it, and might the offended ones use legal and political means to prevent others from ‘corrupting’ the language? These issues arise in most countries today, and in the more fortunate ones provoke moral debate.

Finally, let me mention a less widespread issue (which has actually arisen in some of the successor countries to the former Yugoslavia) which illustrates everyday nationalism in a rather graphic way. Suppose a somewhat conservative national community has ‘built its identity around a handful of historical myths, featuring, for example, a battlefield victory, a martyr, or a deep injustice perpetrated by a neighboring nation. If historians subsequently discover that the victory in question was in fact a defeat, and that the alleged martyr was in fact a cunning collaborationist, what can and should be done? One party argues that the discovery should not be made public since it threatens the most sacred values of the nation; the other opposes secrecy on the ground of respect for the truth. The first party wins: what are the historians to do?

In the moral debate the more thoughtful participants tend to appeal to general principles, besides historical and sociological facts and particular circumstances. Such principles concern the value of nation, or of tradition-bound communities in general, as compared and opposed to the value of internationalism, or perhaps of the autonomy of the individual. They are often discussed in professional ethics books and journals, often inaccessible—due to their style and assumed familiarity with the literature—to those who most need the relevant information. A standard paper on the morality of nationalism assumes that its reader is familiar with the work of authors like Rawls, Nozick, Dworkin, or Habermas, and rarely explains the general philosophical background it presupposes. As a rule, the literature on the moral aspects of nationalism is much less readable and accessible than the one on its sociological and historical aspects (which features true classics which are both profound and readable, from Gellner and Anderson to Smith). There are brilliant exceptions, which I note in the recommended reading, written from a more pro-nationalist viewpoint (Canovan, 1996; Kymlicka, 1995). The philosophical critics of nationalism, however, tend to write less accessible essays. The intellectual public in general, as well as non-philosophers who are specialists in related areas, require an accessible critical guide to normative issues on nationalism. I vividly remember a talk by a linguist friend who described, and tried to condemn, the linguistic purism in our home country, Croatia. The linguistic part was excellent, but as soon as he arrived at the evaluation and condemnation, it became painfully obvious that, in spite of his culture and erudition, he simply lacked the required conceptual and even terminological means to make his condemnation of purism really hit home. Here, then, is the intention behind the present book: to provide a readable and opinionated introduction to the moral debate. It thus has a double aim: first, to persuade the reader that the pro-national stance is ultimately morally more doubtful than the opposite, more cosmopolitan one, and might even be downright immoral; secondly, to introduce those readers who are not familiar with the philosophical debate to the concepts and principles that shape it. It is thus not a sociological analysis of nationalism, but an ethically based polemic against it.
At this juncture, an impatient, activist fellow-opponent of nationalism may raise a doubt: assuming that nationalism is to be resisted, at least in its invidious varieties, what can theoreticians, armed only with their professional skills, do about it? Obviously, as a scholar one can do little, at least directly, about primitive, visceral nationalism which is impervious to discussion, not to mention its more intellectual, but still dogmatic variant which refuses to consider evidence and arguments. But this does not mean that nothing can be done. The primary target should be the intellectual (or quasi-intellectual) justifications of nationalism; and indeed one should address oneself primarily to other intellectuals, those who produce, support and spread nationalistic discourse, thus legitimizing the action of the viscerally nationalist hangmen and henchmen. Nationalist politics needs intellectuals: to use an example from the former Yugoslavia, let me mention that some of the best-known Serbian philosophers—most prominently Mihailo Markovic—have been successfully recruited by either Milosevic or by the nationalist opposition to legitimize the war waged against other nations in the area. The ex-foreign minister of the Bosnian Republic of Srpska Krajina, Professor Aleksa Buha, is also a philosopher, specializing in German Idealism. In the mid-1990s he toured Europe in an attempt to justify the genocidal policies of his government with philosophical nationalist arguments.

Given that the use of such arguments has some political importance, one is obliged to show how shallow and misleading the arguments on the nationalist side are. This is a modest, but promising enterprise. There are a number of things which can be done in respect of nationalist discourse with a modicum of intelligence and analytic skill. First, deflating nationalist discourse by laying bare the biological, psychological, and social origins of nationalism. Recent work on the evolutionary origins of group solidarity (van der Berghe, 1983) certainly offers a deflationary, even debunking view of traditional group loyalty: making this more widely known can help to divest nationalism of some of its attractiveness, at least to some people. (I shall not be much concerned with this line in the book, leaving it to specialists in the respective areas.) Secondly, debunking nationalist appeals to historical and anthropological mythologies. In states run on nationalistic principles such mythologies are taught in schools and even at university. Teachers who refuse to teach them are often simply fired. The humanities are especially vulnerable to such pseudo-history. Thirdly, disentangling dangerous confusions. Most attempts at legitimizing nationalism use conceptual devices of varying subtlety to promote strong and dangerous nationalist claims by wrapping them up in more innocent-looking rhetoric. A typical case is the following: the speaker starts by asking for a particular right for his ethnic group, say, the right of cultural self-determination. Once the audience is persuaded, he switches to talk about 'sacred duties' to one's culture, implying that once the group is granted cultural autonomy it may freely push its members to participate willy-nilly in the construction of a nationalistic cultural life. My personal experience of living through the Balkan War years in Croatia has taught me that such conflations of right and legally enforceable obligation are the bread and butter of nationalist legitimization rhetoric. The skills of critical thinking—distinguishing and discriminating—should show their bite here and help disentangle legitimate claims to rights from the dangerous rhetoric of sacred duties. Fourthly, offering and defending alternatives to nationalism. It is often claimed that the main alternative to nationalism, cosmopolitanism—of any variety—is doomed to supporting a cheap, rootless pseudo-culture. I want to
defend it against this accusation and propose my own favorite version of it as a viable alternative to nationalism.

THE CONCEPT OF ‘NATION’

Let me conclude this introductory chapter with a few remarks on the concept of ‘nation’. In the older Anglo-American literature the dominant concept was simply the civic, state-oriented one: all citizens of a state form a nation. This was often contrasted with the Central European, ethnically oriented one, for which a special term, ‘ethno-nation’, has been coined: a group forms an ethno-nation if its members share—or, alternatively, believe they share—an origin, a language, and a culture. (This concept is sometimes further subdivided into more descent-based and more culture-based varieties.)

Most nationalists in the contemporary world do not strictly distinguish between the two concepts. At the level of both political, unreflective nationalism, and the sophisticated philosophical defense of pro-nationalist attitudes, the dominant conception is the mixed one of a cultural group, possibly united by a common descent, endowed with civic ties of some kind. Much debate concerns whether all such groups should be granted the right to a state. They are variously called ‘nations’, ‘ethnic groups’, or even ‘tribes’. Since we want to enter the debate with the nationalist, we have to accept his terms, and remain with this vague sense of ‘nation’. (Some recent commentators explicitly propose an analysis of this mixed concept: see the essays by Seymour, Couture, and Nielsen in Couture et al., 1996, and by Seymour in Miščević, 2000.) I shall remind the reader of the ethnic component by occasionally writing ‘ethno-nation’ in full.

Let me reiterate that various combinations of various underlying traits (language, common history, customs, values, common religious denomination, geographical proximity) make true for each separate group the claim that it forms a nation. For instance, Bosnian Croats distinguish themselves from Bosnian Muslims—in the sense of belonging to another nation—mainly by being Catholics; they speak the same language, live in similar conditions, and have a great deal of shared history with their Muslim neighbors. In contrast, the Quebecois distinguish themselves from their neighbors mainly through language and tradition, sharing with them most values and forms of life. (It is sometimes the case that nation forming or state building leads to a concentrated effort to create new differences: witness, for example, the separation of the Croatian from the Serbian language, the effort to Islamize Bosnia, or the spread of Islam among African Americans aspiring to some kind of political independence.) Moreover, there is no limit in principle to the kind of traits that can underlie national(ist) identification: color of skin, dietary or sexual habits, and who knows what else might one day play a legitimate role in rallying together a group of people demanding recognition as a nation.

Not even all (pro-)nationalists agree about the objectivity of even the most prominent traits in question; some demand the objective possession of a common descent and relatively pure culture; others rest content with a more subjective version. (This means that the mixed concept we proposed can be subdivided according to the degree of subjectivity in contrast to objectivity.) Here is what I regard as a sensible version of the more subjective concept, proposed by D. Miller, one of the most brilliant and most moderate contemporary defenders of pro-nationalist attitudes:

What does it mean for people to have a common national identity, to share their nationality? It is essentially not a matter of the objective characteristics that they
possess, but of their shared beliefs; a belief that each belongs together with the rest; that this association is neither transitory nor merely instrumental, but stems from a long history of living together which (it is hoped and expected) will continue into the future; that the community is marked off from other communities by its members’ distinctive characteristics; that each member recognizes a loyalty to the community, expressed in a willingness to sacrifice personal goals to advance its interests; and that the community should enjoy a measure of political autonomy, normally (but not I think necessarily) in the form of a sovereign state. Where these beliefs are widely held throughout the population in question, we have sufficient grounds for saying that a nation exists. What needs underlining is how little this definition includes. It contains no assumption that nations are, as it were, natural kinds marked off from one another by physical characteristics. It can easily accommodate the historical fluidity of national identities, and recognize the extent to which nations are brought into being by extraneous circumstances such as conflicts between states. Nor is there any assumption that people who share nationality will share objective characteristics such as race or language. It is indeed possible that people’s belief about these characteristics may form part of particular national entities. (Miller, 1992, 87)

This characterization—compatible with the absence of an objective basis for national identity—accords well with the views made prominent in social science by Benedict Anderson, encapsulated in his famous saying that a nation is an ‘imagined community’. It also has the advantage of being proposed by many serious philosophical pro-nationalists, so that it offers a common conceptual ground for moral debate with them. Philosophical pro-nationalists are mostly clear-eyed about the factual falsity of common nationalist beliefs. The costs of accepting such a subjective definition are very high for them, and it is to their credit that they embrace it: sacrificing the objectivity of nation might deprive it of most of its moral claims. I shall try to show this briefly at the end of chapter two. Why do they accept it nevertheless? One possibility is that they do not endorse it with all their heart, but only verbally. But even if this is the case, why would one do that, given the costs? I guess that they want to make the demands of various groups safe from sociological rebuttal: suppose a large group wants a state, and sociologists, together with historians, find out that dialects spoken within the group are really a rather mixed lot (and that there is no real frontier separating some of them from the closest dialect of the neighboring ‘language’), that they do not have a common origin, but really originated from three different groups, one of them indistinguishable from their neighbors, and so on. Such possibilities are very real (for example, the genetic map of France as a whole is apparently extremely heterogeneous, whereas particular French provinces are internally genetically very homogeneous). The thoughtful nationalist theoretician will want to avoid such sociology- (or history-, or genetics-) based rebuttal, and will prefer to pay the high price of making the nation a creature of subjectivity.

Given all the advantages of the definition, I propose that we go along with it. In what follows, ‘nation’ (or ‘ethno-nation’) will denote any group united through a common belief in the possession of common features, such as language, roughly common origin and history, denominational ties, and a territory.
NOTES

1. Walzer seems to use the expression with a subtle and tender irony in his Tanner Lectures.
Chapter two. Portraying nationalism

A ROUGH SKETCH

The main general questions concerning nation and nationalism that we sketched in the introductory chapter concern the value of national culture, including, prominently, language, the importance of its preservation in a (relatively) pure state, the political means of promoting the interests of an ethno-national group, and the like. Contemporary views of ethnic and national communities and their political and moral standing try to answer these questions in a reasoned and systematic way. They fall basically into two groups, a more pro-national one, which will be the main target of this book, and a more internationalist or cosmopolitan one. In this section I shall briefly present our topic; in the next I shall finesse the presentation by distinguishing two varieties of nationalism.

I want first to sketch a portrait of classical nationalism, the central, paradigmatic sort of nationalism that one can use as the standard for determining to what extent various political proposals count as nationalist or not. As an articulate political program it was born in the nineteenth century, but foreshadowed even earlier. It is centered around claims of national independence, of obligations each member of the national group allegedly has towards it, and of the strict priority of one's national culture in relation to any wider or alien cultural circle. However, the history and sociology of nations and nationalisms is extremely complex, so allow me to introduce a simplification and use a fictional example; it will help us to forget for a moment the complexities of real-life cases, and to home in on the aspects of the issue we especially want to stress (of course, the conclusions arrived at in this way should then be tested on real-life cases, and I shall be offering such examples). I therefore introduce a fictional country and people—let us call them Lavinians—as a stand-in for a real ethnic-cultural community (the English, the Slovaks, the Croats, the Germans, or the Turks). Here is how the claims already mentioned usually come to be made. The pro-national Lavinian intellectual, say a revivalist, will first try to identify the common traits of (what will be taken as) the Lavinian heritage: he or she will classify various dialects spoken on the given territory as belonging to a single Lavinian language; and identify and describe the customs of
Lavinian-speaking persons and classify them as 'Lavinian customs', proceeding then to deal with history and tradition, various episodes in which will be seen as belonging to a common causal chain of 'Lavinian history'. Next come the more specifically cultural elements: the folk ballads in the Lavinian language, belles lettres written by Lavinian authors, not necessarily in Lavinian (possibly in Latin, Swedish, or some other language), philosophy written by Lavinian priests in Latin, paintings, symphonies, and so on. They are identified as part of the Lavinian heritage. On a more speculative level, one then introduces a collective entity: in the nineteenth century it would have been the 'spirit of the Lavinians'; at the beginning of the twentieth century 'national character'; nowadays it would be rather 'cultural identity'. The sociologists discuss the issue of how much of the identification is construction and invention, and how much is the discovery of real links and affinities. Agreement is reached that much is invented; the debate concerns just how much.

The general story behind the particular moves is the following: the poetry, music, and painting done by artists of Lavinian origin (or, optionally, living in Lavinia) are seen as naturally belonging to the cultural entities 'Lavinian poetry', 'Lavinian painting', and 'Lavinian music' respectively, and both the music and the painting of any recorded age done by such individuals in turn belong to the unit or entity known as 'Lavinian culture'. In general, the views of the first group—that is, on the nation-centered side—typically assume that there are natural units of cultural and political life: for each person there is only one such unit, and it is of central moral interest to that person. Specifically, the ethno-nation is the natural unit of cultural life, both in time and in space—that is, both historically and at any given time. 'Natural' here means several things, most prominently denoting independence from an institutional and administrative framework: ethno-national culture is not the product of an ethno-national state, but a given. This assumption is then used to argue for a nation-state for the sake of further protecting the culture. Furthermore, the unique privileged group—that is, the national group—dictates a number of central moral and political duties to its members. For each Lavinian, it is Lavinia and its unitary culture that forms the primary niche. It is also repeatedly stressed that (in central cases) membership of the national group is non-voluntary—at least not entirely so—but determined by birth and early socialization. Very often this non-voluntary character of belonging is extolled as being of prime importance.

Next comes the normative task. Our Lavinian revivalist addresses his or her 'co-nationals' and enjoins them to promote—that is, preserve and transmit—the specifically Lavinian culture, and to do so because it is their national culture. He or she addresses the culture-producers, telling them to use Lavinian cultural items as raw material for their activity; possibly also to safeguard the purity of these items, embellishing them and bringing them to the level of contemporary art. He or she also addresses the consumers of the culture, urging a preference for the items identified. A sophisticated Lavinian revivalist will give reasons and construct arguments, using the alleged facts collected in the first phase, together with an appeal to some general and commonly accepted values and norms (for example, Lavinian folk songs are essentially peaceful in contradistinction to the aggressive folk songs of the neighboring 'Tribals'; peacefulness is a cardinal virtue, therefore the Lavinian folk songs are to be preferred to the neighbor's).

The normative claim about the centrality of culture then generates the corresponding political normative claim to possession of a state. Ernst Gellner famously defined nationalism as the principle that the boundaries of a culture should coincide with the
limits of the state (Gellner, 1983, 1). In chapter one I quoted Miller, who claims that a candidate national community should enjoy a measure of political autonomy, "normally (but not I think necessarily) in the form of a sovereign state" (Miller, 1992, 87). The quote sounds moderate, but it implies that not getting a state is somehow 'abnormal'. Let me quote two additional recent formulations:

If possessing a state, territory, or other institutional arrangement is necessary for a national group to flourish, then it is desirable that such a group possess a state, territory, or other suitable institutional arrangement. (Natanson, 1997, 179)

There are good reasons for cultural groups to have a political dimension... The fact that a nation has a political dimension seems to be connected to and to partially explain the fact that it is natural to think of nations as having a right to self-determination. (McKim, 1997, 259).

6 Given the political circumstances, nationalism can be expansionist and push for the enlargement of the already available state territory. To return to real-life examples, the former Serbian president Milosevic put forward the motto 'All Serbs should live in one state', which illustrates well the way in which nationalists want to bring ethno-nation and state to coincide. A more modest version is isolationism: keep your country protected from foreign influences.

7 I do not want to give the impression that nationalism is concerned only with the creation of a state; on the contrary, once the state is in place, nationalists are usually quite concerned with the kind of attitude people have to it (for a detailed study see Billig, 1995). A particularly nasty aspect is obsession with demographic 'power', which typically results in an exhortation to women to beget more children for their homeland. (Feminist writers have copiously documented this obsession: see, for example, Nira Yuval-Davis, 1997.) Another slogan that nicely captures the nationalist line is 'France, love it or leave it', bandied about by the French Front National. (Of course, one may insert the name of the country of one's choice: 'England', 'Poland', or whatever: 'love it or leave it'.) The suggestion is that love of country is not a private matter, to be left to individual choice: if you do not actively love the country you live in, you should leave it of your own accord or be thrown out. The suggestion translates the abstract moral claim that each member of the (ethno-)nation has a strong obligation to promote its culture, work for its maintenance, and attend to its purity, into an emotional language inciting to immediate action. In short, everybody should do their share: women should bear the future defenders of Lavinia, and men should die for their fatherland if necessary.

8 So much for politics proper. An equally important aspect of nationalist normative claims has to do with the preservation and transmission of culture. (I shall go on using the fictional example, but also offer illustrations from real-life.) When speaking about 'the' culture of a given ethno-national group, our intellectual usually means the recognizably ethno-national scaffolding of the culture. He or she most emphatically does not mean, and in fact excludes, the actual diversity of non-ethno-national elements within the wider culture, from the adolescent pop subculture to the sub-culture of philosophy teachers who pursue, say, the German Idealist tradition at French or Anglo-American universities. (Not accidentally, such non-ethno-national elements also fall prey to nationalist enthusiasms: for example, and famously, the Vienna Circle in the 1930s, and Lotman's school of literary theory in contemporary Estonia.)

9 Some authors speak of 'cultural' nationalism in an etiolated sense, meaning a stance which is interested in cultural ethno-national values without further specification. This sense encompasses a wide variety of attitudes. Let me again illustrate this with a fictional
example. Ianus the Lavinian, who likes the works of good Lavinian composers for their musical qualities, and Flavia the Lavinian who listens to them because they are Lavinian: both might be thought to instantiate this vague ‘cultural’ quasi-nationalism, since they are interested in cultural items that are in fact Lavinian. But Ianus is not nationalistic about culture by any pre-philosophical standards, since his attitude is not stably pro-national: he would listen to the same works even if they were not written by Lavinian composers. In short, in the domain of the arts and sciences, ethno-nationalism suggests that the highest concern should be the protection of ethno-national culture, that is, language and traditions in their pure form: artistic creation, education, and research should be dedicated to this goal. Again, the classical variant takes the relevant norm to have the status of obligation-cum-right, and the force of a trump overriding considerations of both individual interest and pragmatic collective utility. The weaker varieties limit themselves to the right without imposing an obligation. In practice, many nationalist writers—especially non-philosophers—freely and without warning oscillate between the weak and the strong varieties, which makes discussion more complex than it need be. The link between cultural ethno-nationalism and political ethno-nationalism is the claim of the ethnic nation to its own state, which would ‘belong’ to the ethnic nation, and actively protect and promulgate its culture and traditions. To borrow a phrase from Oldenquist, the members of the ethnic majority are the ‘rightful owners of the state’ (Oldenquist, 1997).

Let me now pass to the most general matters. The nationalist stance provides an answer to two crucial general questions. First, is there one kind of group (smaller than the whole of mankind) that is morally of central importance to a particular human being or not? The nationalist answer is that there is only one, namely the nation. Secondly, what is the ground of the obligation that individuals have to their community or communities: voluntary choice or involuntary belonging? The nationalist points to the latter: the nation is typically seen as essentially a non-voluntary community to which one belongs by birth and early nurture. This is linked with the general view that involuntary associations are morally more important than voluntary ones. Benedict Anderson (1991b) claims that the reason many people are ready to die for their country is precisely the fact that national belonging is not chosen. (Some rare but important authors, classics such as Renan [1931] and Weber [1970], and contemporaries such as, occasionally, Walzer [1985], define nation in a voluntaristic way as any community that strives for self-government.)
Of course, classic nationalism is not the only stance to find its place in the upper left box, since there are other candidates for uniquely important non-voluntary groups or belonging (for example, race). The box contains the ‘communitarian’ stance in general, whatever the basic community-kind is taken to be: some communitarians prefer more encompassing groups than nation.  

Let me illustrate the general tenor of the views contained in the upper left-hand box by a quotation from N. MacCormick. He starts by criticizing the view that a state results from a kind of contract between autonomous individuals. In his judgment the view relies upon: absurdly atomistic assumptions about the character of human beings. It is an untenable kind of ‘methodological individualism’. It imagines that there could be individuals anterior to any form of organised society who could intelligibly come together and agree to constitute one. Nor is it obvious why the fiction of a merely hypothetical contract can get one round the difficulty. It is one thing to make a hypothesis about what could have happened, but did not, another thing altogether to try and work through an imagining of something which could not conceivably happen. (MacCormick, 1991, 13)  

He then proposes his alternative view of cultural, ethno-national social reality:  

The truth about human individuals, and it seems to me perhaps Hegel’s greatest contribution to philosophy, ...is that they—we—are social products, not independent atoms capable of constituting Society, through a voluntary coming together. We are as much constituted by our society as it is by us. The biological facts of birth and early nourishment and the socio-psychological facts of our education and socialization are essential to constituting us as persons. We are the persons we come to be in the social settings and contexts in which we come to be those persons. (MacCormick, 1991, 13)  

Allow me one brief criticism of the line of thought put forward in the first sentence of the passage just quoted. It passes from the idea that people are ‘social products’ to the conclusion that they are not ‘independent’ individuals (‘atoms’) capable of constituting their society by some kind of implicit consent. This does not follow: an essential part of socialization is socially to produce independent persons; upbringing should be, and sometimes indeed is, an upbringing for independence. Once an adult, one can in principle freely give one’s consent—partial or total—to the society one lives in. (Note that the debate is about the principled issue: the communitarian thinks it is in principle impossible that society is, at each turn, constituted by the good will of independent individuals.)  

Let me now summarize and expand our discussion of ‘nationalism’. It is more than just a pattern of individual and collective behavior, encompassing, say, a struggle for

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independence, and other cultural and social acts such as a tendency to mingle with one’s own ethnic kin. Although some behaviors count as typically nationalist, no behavior is nationalist as such, regardless of the motives or attitudes by which it is guided. (Avoiding neighbors of foreign origin is typical nationalist behavior, but if done only from fear of the police it is clearly not nationalist.) Equally, a thoughtful and rational nationalist would tend to sacrifice short-term national interests to long-term ones when the two clash, and in doing so might endorse rather cosmopolitan-looking policies for a non-cosmopolitan purpose. The attitude behind the behavior is crucial. On the other hand, purely ‘private’ nationalistic sentiments which issue no practical directives are not really political and fall out of the discussion of nationalism as a political phenomenon. The nationalism with which we are concerned is a political attitude supported by a body of doctrine. The central place in the doctrine is occupied by directives for action: claims about obligations, duties, and rights. (I shall therefore put aside purely theoretical, coldly cognitive attitudes to one’s own and other ethnic communities in order to concentrate upon attitudes that issue in political and cultural claims and directives.)

16 Nationalist claims are typically focused upon the community of language, tradition, and culture, and upon existing state structures when these are available. For the ethno-nationalist it is ethnic belonging—which is basically unchosen, depending on accident of origin and early socialization—which determines membership of a community. As I noted in chapter one, I shall often use the term ‘ethno-nationalism’ as a reminder of the intended sense. Here is a very brief summary of the basic claims that our nationalist is supposed to defend: the preservation of a given ethno-national culture—in a relatively pure state—is a good independent of the will of members of the culture, and something which ought to be ensured by adequate means.

17 The nationalist next introduces the statist thesis: in order that such a community should preserve its identity it normally has to assume (always or at least in most cases) the political form of a state. It is the state of the particular ethno-nation, and should promote its interests and fight all the interests that oppose it, including those of its own members who happen not to coincide with the interest of the nation. The state should enjoy full sovereignty and expand if possible.

18 In short, the ethno-national community has the right in respect of any third party and of its own members to have an ethno-national state. Once a national state has been formed, and the dominant ethnic community has established itself as its ‘rightful owner’, it has to guard its full sovereignty. It has a duty to promote the ethno-national culture of its owners, in a recognizable form, defending it from spontaneous mixing with foreign influences, preferring a kind of isolationism if the purity of national tradition is threatened. The citizens of the state have the right and obligation to favor their own ethnic culture in relation to any other.

THE COSMOPOLITAN VIEW

19 Let us now briefly contrast the nationalist stance with its typical opposite, the more cosmopolitan view. The latter stresses the fact that each individual happens to belong—simultaneously—to groups and communities of various sizes and kinds; there are no privileged, natural units of the kind claimed by the nation-centered view. There are individual persons on the one hand, the basic carriers of moral worth and responsibility, and there is mankind on the other. Our ultimate obligation is the one we have to human
beings as such, regardless of their narrower belonging. Belonging to particular groups is acknowledged, but it is described differently from the nation-centered perspective. Groups differ by the degree of voluntariness: membership of some of these is purely voluntary (clubs), in others it is mixed (social classes and strata, nation-states), and some are not chosen, at least not initially (family). The cosmopolitan stresses that in the modern world voluntary belonging is often more accentuated; individuals choose what the relevant group and community or communities are. They do not deny the central place of culture in the debate, but point out that the classification of culture(s) and cultural phenomena by ethno-national criteria has many competitors; once you stop viewing cultural achievements as basically national (English philosophy, Czech music) you realize the weight of other possibilities (closeness of styles across national borders, actual transnational influences and the like). The circles one belongs to are diverse, and, to use a geometrical analogy, non-concentric: an English woman might feel solidarity with an Eskimo woman along the lines of gender belonging, and with a German working-class male along the lines of class belonging. The possibility and opportunity to switch from one group to another associated with voluntary belonging is an important acquisition whose moral importance is most obvious in the freedom of choice of profession and in social mobility in general. The loyalty one owes to each group is in principle determined by the choices one makes and by one’s past history of interaction. In this sense there is no privileged focus of loyalty, independent of an individual’s decision. Diversity makes for a balance in most normal circumstances: a Catholic, an Orthodox, and a Protestant might find themselves fans of the same football club. Narrower circles can lead one, in an almost continuous fashion, to wider ones. Micro-region, nation, and macro-region are not separated by a gulf from each other. Continuity (almost) makes for a kind of moral learning through extending one’s powers to empathize; the route from individual to mankind is paved with intermediate communities. Finally, the plurality of various potential belongings is an important asset for the individual and their ability and right to choose. We can regard the circles of belonging as natural stepping stones towards the most universal and encompassing community, that of mankind. The general perspective also has a political application, which we shall discuss in the final chapter.

To see the two perspectives at work, consider the way each of them presents and interprets ethnic conflicts: for instance, those in Ulster, Bosnia, Kosovo, or Chechnya (I apologize for a somewhat Euro-centric choice of illustrations, but I feel more comfortable discussing examples with which I am familiar). From the more cosmopolitan perspective the atrocities of such conflicts constitute a crucial piece of evidence against nationalism, underlining its deep irrationality and inhumanity. From the nation-centered communitarian perspective, ethnic conflicts are direct testimony in favor of nationalism. First, they point to the special qualities—depth, centrality, and ineradicability—of national feeling; secondly, they make obvious the crucial importance of nationalist claims themselves. Why has the war in Bosnia been so bloody? Because the normal, natural solution of forming ethno-national states was made more difficult there by contingent, tragic circumstances. If the Muslims were not so dispersed, the natural solution would be a Muslim state; were the Croats not so dispersed, the natural solution would be to annex Croat territories to the Croatian national state. We shall further discuss this contrast in the chapters on self-determination and self-defense.
It is now time to finesse the rough portrait. Not all nationalisms are the same. They differ by the specific contents of their claims (separatist nationalism, isolationism, unificationist nationalism), by the kind of grounding for the claims (more past-oriented in contrast to present- and future-oriented), and by the force and scope of the imperatives they promulgate. Sociologists and political scientists have discussed these various dimensions in considerable detail. We shall be interested in moral issues, so our classification should follow the lines of moral interest, having to do with justification of action and of the principles that govern it. Accordingly, in order to sort out different kinds of nationalism we can picture our nationalist as a would-be lawgiver aiming to shape the behavior of his or her audience and get it to concentrate upon his or her advice. We should look at what is being commanded and with what strength. To that end, we shall not impose external criteria upon nationalism, but respect the goals of nationalist discourse. It prescribes a particular course of action and exhorts the recipient to take it: for example, it enjoins those generally interested in culture to favor their own ethnic heritage over foreign ones; those who want to write poetry to make use of ethnic-national topics; everybody to pay attention to the purity of the language; and members of a given ethnic group to struggle for a state. The criteria culled from the normative standpoint of nationalist discourse are better than those one obtains from the descriptive one. Even a cursory glance at nationalist literature makes one suspicious that the descriptive, allegedly fact-stating part of it is molded by its action-guiding, normative telos. Therefore, we shall take the normative part of the discourse as its primary matrix. Once this part is understood, and its various kinds are sorted out, the descriptive part will turn out to be clearly dependent on it and easy to explain.

Let me remind you that the basic idea of the cultural nationalist is that the intellectuals and the cultured public of the given ethnic group (nation, people) are enjoined to promote the proto-cultural and cultural heritage of the group because it is its heritage; in short, to promote the national substance. His or her basic political point is that a political institutional framework is required for cultural survival and flourishing. In order that such a community can preserve its identity and support the identity of its members, it has to assume (always or at least in most cases) the political form of a state. As Kai Nielsen puts it, speaking about the need for cultural self-identity:

This secure self-identity is something they will not have if their state is controlled by foreigners, even well-intentioned foreigners, with different self-definitions and aspirations. (They would hardly be foreigners if they were not so different.)

(Nielsen, 1995)

Real nationalists go farther than Nielsen: they want the state to belong in a recognizable, perhaps even exclusive, fashion to a given ethnic community.

Here, then, is the basis for classification: we should ask how far the preservation-plus-transmission of national cultural contents and state building, followed by the maintenance of complete sovereignty, should go; how exclusive they should be; and what is the normative strength of the recommendations given. Using the fictional name ‘Lavinians’ as our stand-in for the relevant ethnic community, and indulging in fiction a little longer, we can distinguish several possibilities. For example, our Lavinian nationalist—call him Eric—might have in mind only Lavinians: they have rights (or duties) to promote Lavinian contents; others are of no concern to him. His slogan is: My people have a right (or duty) to promote Lavinian contents and to create and expand their state at least so as to encompass all regions inhabited by the core ethnic group. Once
the state is created it should jealously guard its sovereignty. He could do worse: discriminate against some non-Lavinian tribe which is particularly hated, and whose language and customs should be suppressed. Since mere carelessness is not a definite political stance, suppose that Eric is at least in principle ready to discriminate: it is his own people to which he has duties; it is his people that should have a sovereign, ethnically centered state, and if the necessity should arise he is ready to deny this right to other, competing groups. (He would then claim, if reflective enough, that there are particular people who have no right (or duty) to promote their contents and to create their state(s). Notice that in practice the stance is rarely advocated openly. Usually, the particular groups discriminated against are described as having no culture, or as being so depraved as not to merit developing one, so that the appearance of universality is preserved. Such a stance is strongly particularistic. With it, naturally goes the conviction that national values are absolute, and that national demands trump all others. Let us call Eric and his like, who refuse to universalize their nationalist demands, ‘invidious nationalists’. Anthony Smith calls such nationalists ‘ethnocentric’: “For an ethnocentric nationalist, both ‘power’ and ‘value’ inhere in his cultural group” (Smith, 1971, 158).

Contrast Eric, the radical nationalist, with his co-national John. John also believes that national values are very important, and that he has serious duties towards his people. Take culture—music, for instance. He listens to the operas of any Lavinian composer above all because she or he is Lavinian. If the same operas were written by a non-Lavinian composer, he would not care for them, at least not to the same extent. Secondly, he believes that a cultured Lavinian should favor Lavinian music over non-Lavinian, regardless of its aesthetic merits. Thirdly, he takes the ‘should’ seriously: when it comes to organizing musical life, he believes that a high priority should be given to the Lavinian musical tradition, even if young Lavinian composers prefer the pieces of Philip Glass and György Ligeti over old Lavinian luminaries. He is tough indeed. However, he also accepts the Golden Rule and claims the following: all peoples should act as Lavinians do, that is, promote their own values. A Carpathian should listen to Carpathian music and fight for a larger Carpathia, just as a Lavinian should fight for a larger Lavinia. In short, every people has a right (or duty) to promote its contents, to create a state, and possibly to expand it to all regions inhabited by the core ethnic group. The contrast between John and Eric is linked to the most important moral matter, the universality of the claim: that is, to the issue of whether the agent ascribes to others the rights and duties he ascribes to himself. John’s nationalism is not ‘invidious’: it does not withhold from other groups the rights he ascribes to his cherished Lavinians. With this universalistic attitude goes a less extreme (although still rather tough) evaluation of the nation’s demands: they are still of central importance, but do not automatically trump all other claims. For instance, human rights may sometimes defeat the interest of the nation. (Of course, one can imagine a fanatic combining universality with the extreme evaluation, but such a combination is psychologically, and thereby also politically, less stable and in practice extremely rare.) Call John and his like ‘non-invidious’ or ‘even-handed nationalists’.

This gives us two ‘ideal types’ of nationalist; we shall conduct our debate in the sequel with representatives of each type. Towards the end of the book we shall add a further category, that of the ‘ultra-moderate’ nationalist, although it is not clear whether he is a nationalist at all. He remains satisfied with a weak claim, that one is permitted to promote national contents and strive for a state or has a right to do so, in contrast with John’s tougher claim that it is one’s ‘sacred duty’ to do so.
Note that all the claims considered share the minimal core—promotion of the national cultural contents and state building—but differ in the strength and universality of the attached norm. Eric concentrates upon his own community, while John universalizes the same claims for all nations. The differences in practical consequences can be dramatic indeed. This brings to the fore the specific moral issues in contrast to those of a non-moral kind (for instance, whether more weight is given to the cultural past of a nation or to the common project to be implemented in the future).

Of course, the three types—invidious, even-handed, and ‘ultra-moderate’—do not cover all the possibilities. For example, a prominent type that only partially satisfies our description is modernizing nationalism, which tends to sacrifice a part of tradition to the imperatives of modernization: for instance, the Japanese Meiji and Turkish Kemalist movements. They do not present the preservation of all national contents as a duty, only some. Anthony Smith calls them ‘polycentric’ and opposes them to ‘ethno-centric’ ones (Smith, 1986, 159). I am not sure that Kemalists—as well as many other modernizing movements—were not ethno-centric in any sense one might care to give the term: they violently cleansed the nation, oppressed minorities, and purified the language by throwing out Arabic-Persian linguistic lore; the only thing entitling this modernizing nationalism to special status is its willingness to learn from the West, of course in the exclusive interest of the ethno-nation. I shall not pay much attention to such otherwise extremely influential varieties, however, because contemporary discussion of nationalism, and in particular its moral defense, is centered around the importance of tradition and cultural identity, so that nationalistic movements that sacrifice tradition on pragmatic grounds do not play any significant role in it (although they might be of prime interest to, say, sociologists and political scientists).

Let us expand a little on the description of the two central kinds, returning from fiction to reality. First, even-handed (but still rather tough) nationalism. In the cultural arena it claims that the intellectuals of every nation have a duty to promote its national contents as the central cultural value, even to the exclusion of all other contents. They have an obligation to struggle for the appropriate political form of their communal cultural life, and this is in principle a state. It is a coherent position, which has been immensely popular with the revivalists in both the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, particularly in East Central Europe. It combines universalism in external affairs with a rigid duty-based stance in domestic affairs, and is thus suitable for modern nation-states, and appealing to a general sense of equity. It is particularly suitable for separatist (freedom-fighter) nationalism facing an ethnically alien central power—for example, Croatians facing Pan-Germanic Austrian nationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century—since such nationalism normally has no opportunity to deny cultural development to its enemy (and often not to any other ethnic group for that matter), and so it will most profitably claim for its own group the same rights and obligations that the central power bestows upon its bearers. Still, such non-invidious, and in that sense moderate, nationalism is deeply illiberal since it places the duty to the collective higher than the individuality of the intellectual—the creativeness of the artist, the curiosity of the researcher, or the freedom of the thinker.

Consider an example of everyday nationalism from Croatia. In 1998, still under Tudjman rule, a young Croatian woman of Muslim origin, Lejla (read ‘Leyla’) Sehovic, was chosen as Miss Croatia. The authorities from Croatian TV, and possibly even from much higher up, apparently resented the prospect of Croatia being represented in the Miss World beauty
contest by a person bearing a Muslim name. An excuse was invented for repeating the contest and Lejla failed to win a second time. (After a public scandal threatened to have international repercussions, a compromise solution was found.) Pro-nationalist writers usually do not mention occurrences of this kind. They should, however, because they are very much in accordance with their principal line, which they propose as a valid model for all nations. Indeed, if the Croatian state is primarily the state of people who are ethnic Croats and culturally Croat Catholics; and if the state should give primacy to the core ethno-cultural traits, there is no reason to make an exception when it comes to female beauty. Bear in mind that Croatia is traditionally Catholic and by any standards offered by nationalistic thinkers Catholicism is a constitutive part of Croatian national identity. It is therefore, on nationalist assumptions, most unsuitable that Croatia should be represented in an international contest by a person of Muslim origin. If, on the other hand, our would-be nationalist thinks that there is no problem about Croatia being represented by Lejla, he should tell us why Lejla is being accorded special treatment. If he replies that it is culture that counts and not ethnic origin, he has to explain how a Muslim Miss Croatia fits into the general pattern of the distinctly Croatian culture.

31 To turn to the more abstract characteristics of even-handed nationalism, let me mention that the universalizing attitude that characterizes it can go to different lengths, resulting in different levels of universality. Here are two options. The lowest level is implied simply in the claim that the nationalist solution is valid for each and every (ethno-)nation. Every human being ought to be loyal to his co-nationals, and this requires that every human being believes that his community is better than the others (Oldenquist, 1982, 191). Even at this rudimentary level there is a contrast with ordinary nationalism, which is strongly group-centric: that is, it does not care about the rest of the world at best, and is invidious to particular groups at worst. The higher level of universalism, often attained by philosophers, consists in appealing to strictly universal considerations in order to defend ethno-nationalism. In chapter fifteen, on diversity, I shall illustrate this line by discussing the strategy of praising the values of diversity in defending ethno-nationalism, values that are clearly not tied to any particular set of communal values.

32 Consider now ‘invidious’ nationalism, the one that refuses to universalize. Its line is the following: ‘We Lavinians have the sacred duty to develop, promote, and defend our ethnic cultural heritage. Forget about what others should do, or even better, let them not do it.’ Let me just mention the indifferent variety (‘forget about others’) which does not state that some groups should not promote their culture, but simply does not care and is not ready to take a stand. It is typically an unreflective attitude, which becomes somewhat unstable when people begin to reflect. As already mentioned, some nationalists of this kind upon reflection accept universalization. Some end up as true invidious nationalists (‘let not others do what we do’), often of a more subtle brand, claiming that their group has particular reasons to foster its heritage since it is objectively so much more perfect than anyone else’s, and that other groups have proportionally less reason to concentrate upon their own heritage. This stance has begotten an apparently altruistic rhetoric where one’s own nation is depicted as bringing cultural salvation to others: Pan-Slavism and Pan-Germanism were noted for such fantasies. (I shall illustrate the stance further in chapter three; see also the 1999 issue of Nations and Nationalism, edited by Anthony Smith and dedicated to national messianisms.) Those radicals who reject such muddles and see clearly whither the refusal of even-handed nationalism leads, have only one option left: the openly discriminatory variety forbidding other groups to do what their own group is
enjoined to do. It forms a very stable pattern and is usually proposed only by the toughest and most clear-sighted nationalists.

33 We can now appreciate the importance of drawing distinctions between nationalists on the grounds of how general and universal they take the national imperative to be. The debate on ethno-nationalism is vitiated by misunderstandings. Contemporary reasonable defenders of ‘nationalism’ often depict their client as having the traits of a very moderate nationalism, as a group insisting on rights and not imposing duties, eager to promote its own culture but not to the exclusion of others, having an eye to universal values which shine through a particular national shell. The reasonable critics of nationalism rarely attack the same figure. Their enemy most often has the traits of radical, what we have called invidious nationalism, preferably in its discriminatory guise. Any kind of nationalism that is ready to universalize is seen by them as a transitional phenomenon, prefiguring the invidious variant, which is the ultimate target of criticism. (The French philosopher E. Balibar accuses the universalizing nationalist of a blatant contradiction; that is wrong, but contains a grain of truth, as I shall try to show later: see Balibar and Wallerstein [1992, chapter one].) Drawing distinctions and recognizing very different stable kinds of pro-national attitude could be helpful. A liberal theoretician (or journalist, or historian) wishing to come to grips with nationalism should not treat all kinds equally. There is not much to argue about rationally with the radical invidious nationalist, since he does not even start to think in universal terms which are open to rational discussion. In contrast, even-handed nationalism is an intellectually well worked-out position, which should be approached with (counter-)arguments and not just with a blank refusal, not to mention more moderate views that sometimes only call themselves nationalist, which are hard to argue against, and might be the morally correct stance.

34 The distinctions are even more important in the sphere of law. Liberal lawgivers would not aim to prevent intellectuals who wish to concentrate upon their ethnic lore from doing so, since they want to maximize freedom. Therefore, they would certainly not banish very moderate self-styled ‘nationalism’ on pain of interfering with the rights of the intellectuals concerned and their public. They should be more stern with other kinds of nationalism, but be able to distinguish the universalizing forms that fall within the moral sphere from those too unreflective, crazy, or wicked to be considered a moral stance at all.

35 Finally, I hope that the distinctions drawn here do correspond to stable political kinds of nationalism. (For instance, anybody fanatical enough to discriminate against his neighbors is also fanatical enough to replace, in relation to his co-nationals, the permission and right to promote their national culture by the sacred duty to do so. More extreme attitudes on one issue keep company with more extreme attitudes on others.) Still, I am not dogmatic about psycho-social and political stability. Conceptual investigation has to be supplemented by sociological and historical studies in order to make sure that we cut history at its joints.

36 Let me end the chapter with a brief remark about the difficulty the nationalist will have in reconciling the definition(s) proposed at the end of the first chapter with moral demands. Remember that, according to the definition, what makes a person, say Sarah, belong to a nation is simply her belief that she has special ties to others in—what she sees as—the group. Now, mere belief is usually not sufficient to generate serious obligations. Suppose, for the sake of illustration, that people have special obligations to their relatives, and Sarah believes that Helen is her relative; do any obligations follow merely
from her belief? No. If Helen is in fact not her relative, she has no special obligations to her; she might have falsely thought she had them, but in fact she did not. If Sarah’s ties to the group are only of this imagined kind, if she merely believes they exist, the group is not in a better position than Helen. Her belonging is only notional, and cannot generate special obligations. I do not remember any serious pro-nationalist writer noticing the problem, let alone offering an answer. (Perhaps some of them simply do not work seriously with the definition[s] they propose; in that case these definitions are just lip service paid to social and political science, but lie idle in their own thinking.)

NOTES

1. McKim himself has proposed ‘reduced identification’ in the face of the difficulties of an open nationalism. The nasty variants deny this right to some people, and admit it only for the chosen ones. The weaker than classical variants weaken the claim in two directions: instead of having a state they speak of having some kind of political autonomy and self-government, and instead of rights and obligations they speak of rights only.

2. Compare D. Miller: “Liberalism v. nationalism may be a specific instance of what is frequently now regarded as a more general contest between liberals and communitarians” (1995, 193).

3. Thanks go to my colleague Nenad Smokrovic for reminding me of this fact.

4. I will skip the more exotic possibilities, such as being a pro-nationalist on general utilitarian grounds.
Chapter three. Invidious nationalism

1 Invidious nationalism is nationalism without brakes: the love for country it demands is unrestrained, devoid of any kind of universalistic considerations. It appeals to the unconditional patriotic spirit which makes people “walk together, work together, fight together, and die for each other”, to quote the formulation by famous French nationalistic historian Fustel de Coulanges. Secondly, and more importantly, the patriotism recommended is a non-selective one: the fatherland is not to be loved for its qualities, for the universal values it happens to incarnate, but rather for just being what it is, one’s fatherland. (Of course, if love is to be dictated by qualities rather than by their bearer, why not sidestep the particular country, our contingent mediator between us and the universal?)

2 An unconditional love for one’s people and hatred of its enemies are political passions, glorified by national poets. Let me quote, as one example among thousands, the verses by the Parnassian Victor de Laprade deploring the French defeat by German armies:

Terre de la pitié, douce terre de France,
L’honneur que je te rends, l’amour que je te dois,
Ne m’inspirent plus rien que haine et que vengeance.

[Country of pity, sweet France, the honor I bestow upon you and the love I owe you inspire in me nothing but hatred and vengeance.]

2 As already mentioned, however, we should distinguish between a spontaneous lack of care for other people and invidiousness proper. A ‘Lavinian’ (see chapter two) peasant fighting for his people need not care about others, nor have any kind of reflective attitude about how other communities should organize their lives. But such innocence is grounded in ignorance, and is utterly irrelevant for our purposes. With a little bad luck, our peasant will have to face the question: would you expect other people from other communities to behave like you do; would you let them do the same thing for their country, or not? The unreflective nationalist then has to choose whether to become invidious or not.

3 Let me briefly remind the reader that invidious nationalism often gets very nasty in practice. To start with the least evil, culture is usually the first victim of its feverish attentions. Then comes serious violence: think of the massacres, ethnic cleansing, and
other ethno-nationalist excesses in the former Yugoslavia or Rwanda. People torture and kill their neighbors, with whom they have lived in peace for decades, apparently for ridiculous reasons: the war in Bosnia was the first religious war fought by atheists. Note that massacres of this kind are not perpetrated in an impulsive, blind manner; they are organized and planned in advance, and justified in sophisticated ways later on. Once the violence is seen as a normal matter, there is no end to further evils.

**Does the invidious nationalist really have to be so nasty?** Very often, he does. The main reason seems to be a ‘scarcity of resources’. Start with culture. Cultural values are scarce: if Swift is a great Irish writer, he is not a great English one, so if you really care about appropriating cultural goods, you should hurry up and grab him before it is too late. To go on to more vital matters, the main resource for the state-oriented nationalist is territory, and this is extremely scarce. Dozens of ethnic groups may have to compete for a territory that is large enough for one viable state. The mechanism is simple. If one of the ten groups puts in a claim for territory, it is rational for the remaining nine to do the same, otherwise the first bidder takes all, by the very nature of invidious nationalism.

This territorial bottleneck threatens the following. Consider a society ethnically divided between two (sub-)communities, say, our Lavinians and Illyrians. The competition for resources between the two communities can easily end in conflict. If Lavinians have a hunch that their neighbors, the Illyrians—with whom they share part of the territory—might want to form an independent state, it is rational for them to enter the claim first; even worse, it is rational for them to start preparing to back their claim by force. But if the Illyrians can foresee that—as they probably will—it is rational for them to hurry up. In such a situation it becomes more and more difficult even to signal good intentions, if one has them, and increasingly dangerous to believe such signals from the other side. It is also rational for both parties to try to strike first. Also, once tensions have become high, it is rational for each member of the ethnic group to identify completely with their group. In such circumstances, extremist sub-groups will easily increase their influence, at the expense of moderate sub-groups. The process has been described many times by political scientists. Let me give an example from Croatia: the election of Franjo Tudjman to the presidency at the culmination of the political crisis in the former Yugoslavia was to a great extent motivated by his image as a tough politician with a military background, and therefore capable of responding to the provocation of Milosevic. His closest competitors had better political and personal qualities—as seen from the safe perspective of the West—but they were obviously inclined to compromise: their image was not hawkish enough to guarantee to the average Croatian citizen that they would display the requisite toughness and aggressivity in response to the direct threats issued by Belgrade.

In short, starting from the initial competition for territory and other resources, both peoples can become involved in violent conflict, as a result of which each ends up worse off than if it had cooperated. Unfortunately, at each particular step, the non-cooperative attitude was more rational than the cooperative one. (You will no doubt have recognized what in the literature is known as the Prisoner’s Dilemma.) Let me illustrate the claim that the negative results of the invidious stance tend to have ramifications in all sorts of areas. The fact that the Serbian war criminal Seselj, after having led campaigns of the crudest ethnic cleansing, was appointed to the chair of Constitutional Law at Belgrade University in January 2000 would be humorous were it not so chilling, his promotion papers having been signed by respectable Belgrade law professors. Imagine the effect of
this on the promotion of human rights in Serbia, the credibility of his fellow professors, and trust in the Constitution.

MYTHOLOGIES

The invidious nationalist sometimes has to justify his attitude to his own public. After all, most people tend to know that their neighbors of different ethnic origin are human beings; most normal people are sensitive to their neighbors' needs beyond the limits of ethnic belonging; and some members of the native community might have a considerable stake—material, emotional, or otherwise—in preserving good relations with their neighbors. One of the most often used means of justification is ethno-national mythology. Most ethnic traditions contain crucially important elements—legends, stories, proverbs—characterized by at least one of two kinds of features: first, they are factually false, or, to put it kindly, 'mythological'; secondly, they are invidious to their neighbors, implying their baseness, cowardice, or lack of culture, and insisting on the contrasting virtues of their own people. They also typically mention glorious victories over neighbors and the past glories of the Great Fatherland (for example, the 'Greater Lavinia' extending over territories now 'unjustly' held and inhabited by Carpathians), presenting them as paradigms to be followed and possessions to be restored. The nationalists-in-the-street, of course, believe nationalist myths: Spanish nationalists believe in the Gothic origin and essence of the Castilian nation; Slovenian nationalists believe in the non-Slavic, allegedly old Venetian origin of the Slovenes; and so on, without end. The ultra-moderate nationalist D. Miller describes the situation in the following, in my opinion correct, terms:

national identities typically contain a considerable element of myth. The nation is conceived as a community extended in history and with a distinct character that is natural to its members. Dispassionate research is likely to reveal considerable discontinuity, both in the character of the people who have occupied a given territory, and in their customs and practices. It is also likely to reveal that many things now regarded as primordial features of the nation in question are in fact artificial inventions, indeed, very often deliberate inventions made to serve a political purpose. It appears, therefore, that national identities cannot survive critical reflection. If one applies to them normal canons of rationality, they are revealed to be fraudulent. (Miller, 1995, 35)

Let me mention one nasty example from South Slavic tradition, lest one should think of nationalist mythologies on the model of Hollywood movies. Part of the canon of literary works that my own generation was taught in school were epics about the struggle of Christian Slavic peoples—Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins—against Ottoman rule. One of them, entitled 'The Mountain Crown' (by the early-nineteenth-century Montenegrin prince and poet P. P. Njegos), glorifies the massacre of the local Montenegro Muslims, perpetrated by an ancestor of the author, himself a prince and a high-ranking cleric. The hero is far from being unsophisticated; he is even troubled by doubts about the propriety of his planned deed; however, he quickly regains his equanimity and organizes a preemptive ethnic cleansing of his small country. The justification given is in terms of faithfulness to the race and religion and abomination of religious conversion (“The seed should bring forth fruit where first it sprouted”), in spite of the admitted fact that the Muslims massacred were not recent converts, but children or grandchildren of converts. Our teachers never questioned the propriety of the massacre; it was—and still is—presented in Yugoslav schools as a perfectly normal thing for a prince to do in a situation
of crisis. (I remember how surprised I was when, at the age of eighteen, a Bosnian Muslim girl told me that she found the poem deeply offensive, so successful had my teachers been in convincing me of its value.)

9 Nationalism, especially the invidious variety, takes mythology to be constitutive of the identity of a people. Since cultural identity in its eyes trumps all other considerations, classical nationalism recommends sacrificing the recalcitrant values of truth and benevolence. Regarding factual falsity, it recommends accepting mythology as it stands and discourages further inquiry. (In the immediate post-war years in newly independent Croatia a historian could be fired for openly questioning the truth of the officially recognized national myths. It is still so in Greece, and to some extent in Bulgaria and Albania.) Regarding the negative attitude towards neighbors (including mythology-based territorial claims), it tolerates, if it does not straightforwardly recommend, sacrificing a cooperative attitude to the construction and affirmation of national identity. The Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic used the cultural myth of Kosovo at the peak of his political campaign—on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo, at the mass meeting at Kosovo Polje on 28 June 1989— and the appeal to cultural myth remained one of the most powerful propaganda weapons in the terrible war that ensued.

10 Another, closely related, means of justifying the invidious attitude is the invention of special historical and/or religious missions for one’s people, as mentioned in chapter two. The nationalist ideologues of smaller peoples tend to picture them as guardians of some more widely valued heritage (for example, in the Balkans, Christian values are presented as in need of defense against Muslims, and in Poland the values of the Catholic West are presented as in need of defense against the Orthodox-cum-Muslim East). Larger nations, such as the Germans, the Russians, and the Han Chinese, have produced ideologies of a messianic role—ethnic, racial, or religious—on a continental or global scale. Let me illustrate this with a particularly worrisome example. A central topic in Russian culture for two centuries has been the so-called Russian Idea, a syndrome of views and attitudes about the special role Russia has been called upon to play in world history. Many leading intellectuals—such as the creator of contemporary phonology, Prince Trubetzkoy, the biologist Gumilev (son of the poet Anna Akhmatova), and the art historian Losev—have invented theories about the special character of the Russian people and the beastly nature of their enemies, East or West. In keeping with the general tone of the debate, the linguist Prince Trubetzkoy describes the West—the civilization he calls ‘Romano-Germanic’—as a “wild beast greedily gnashing its teeth”. In such a perspective, cultural russification and Orthodox proselytizing are justified as bringing moral, cultural, and religious salvation to backward neighbors. Let me quote Vera Tolz on the impact of this kind of thought on the contemporary Russian intellectual and political scene: “These thinkers of the past are now viewed as if they were contemporaries and as teachers, to whom today’s intellectuals should turn in their search for spiritual and ideological inspiration” (Tolz, 1998, 994). Politicians apparently follow suit, each picking his own preferred messianic prophet. (Tolz also gives a useful guide to the range of views in her article.)

11 Such messianic myths are closely akin to historical mythologies, except that the reference to the past is replaced (or supplemented) by one to the future. Taken as a whole, mythological narratives are perhaps the most important vehicles of justification—prudential, moral, and religious—for invidious nationalism, and other kinds of radical nationalism.
It is important to bear in mind both the nastiness of typical national mythologies, and the importance of their role, if one wants to enter the contemporary debate about whether they should be tolerated. A small but distinguished group of political thinkers—Tamir, MacCormick, and, with reservations, Miller—tend to defend them. They assume both that such mythologies are benign, and that their falsehood is morally irrelevant; moreover, since they foster national solidarity, they are to be publicly supported. Miller says that "it seems to follow [from the falsity of mythology] that there can be no justification for giving national loyalties any role in our ethical and political thinking". But then he enters a caveat: "But this conclusion is too quick. Rather than dismissing nationality out of hand once we discover that national identities contain elements of myth, we should ask what part these myths play in building and sustaining nations" (Miller, 1995, 36). Other authors—for instance, MacCormick (1982)—draw a comparison between mythological belief in the common origin of a nation and the false belief an adoptive child might have about being the biological child of his or her (in fact foster) parents. The latter is morally at least neutral, although false, so why not the former?

Note that this line assumes that national mythologies are at their core benign falsehoods, to be integrated easily into a liberal ideology. This is factually wrong: mythologies come down from a savage and cruel past and bear its imprint: normally, they are far from benign in what they suggest or command. Our authors are also imprudent: the false mythologies show their bite in many real-life situations, for example when historians begin to discover their falsehood. Since national identity counts higher than mere factual truth, such historians are silenced by nationalist governments.

The theoretical problem for the would-be liberal nationalist is to formulate principles that would condemn such practices while making room for the moral centrality of community values (which include an appeal to constitutive myths). I do not see how this could be done: if you let the myths in, the nastiness obtains an ideological justification; if you leave them out, you tamper with the constitutive framework in the name of principles that you yourself see as foreign to your community.

At this juncture, the intellectual problem concerns how one might justify this narrow focusing of one’s tendresses in the face of moral universalism. The short answer, that this is how one feels and that the heart is not to be swayed by arguments, has something to it, but it is not sufficient: we would not accept this kind of excuse for racism or sexism, for example, in matters of promotion at work. It is here that a serious theoretical debate is needed.

The invidious nationalist obviously cannot justify his attitude by any kind of respectable theorizing, since theoretical justification must in principle be general. The most drastic form of invidiousness tends to be justified in the most drastic ways. The discriminatory variety is the most poisonous. It is embarrassing for nationalist intellectuals, so they often mask it behind provisos stating that a particular group is too wild, cruel, or depraved for cultural development. To quote a famous case from Hungarian lore, human beings have national rights, but 'Slovaks are not human beings' (Tot nem ember). This attitude proved very costly to Hungary after the end of the First World War (see, for instance, Gerő, 1999, and I. Bibó, 1986). There is nothing to discuss with those holding such attitudes.

This dismissal is sometimes met by a reaction based on intellectual curiosity: maybe there is a way the invidious nationalist can defend his claims. For instance, Professor Thomas Simon kindly pointed out to me in a written communication that there is "a distinction
between justifying only a particular nation and justifying all nations of the same kind”. In
the abstract world of ideas perhaps there is such a possibility, but it presupposes the
existence of superior and inferior ethno-cultural groups, such that the difference would
decisively reflect upon their right to a state (to go to extremes, there might be ethno-
ations which deemed such absolutely condemnable practices as cannibalism, child
abuse, or shooting snuff movies as essential to their identity, and others which were a
priori on the good side of the moral fence). In reality, no matter how hard I try, I see no
way of defending such discrimination.

17 Pro-nationalist philosophers sometimes try to excuse even invidious nationalism, mainly
by its allegedly valuable fruits. An ethno-national community is valuable since it is the
natural encompassing framework of various cultural traditions which produce and
transmit important meanings and values. Also, a unitary cultural framework ensures
solidarity between members. An ethno-national community is essential for the
flourishing of its members. We shall meet these excuses in the chapters to follow in a
more respectable framework, namely, the defense of even-handed nationalism, where it
will be argued that they do not succeed.

WHY IS RADICALISM TYPICAL OF NATIONALISM?

18 It would be difficult to say which of the two varieties of nationalism dealt with so far is
more typical. Radical, invidious nationalists and many critics of nationalism take the
even-handed (but still tough) variety to be atypical; the former are sometimes prone to
accuse the latter of being almost traitors to nationalist ideals. On the other hand, the
even-handed ones, and also the ultra-moderates, view the extremist, somewhat ugly
features of radical nationalism as ‘accretions’, adventitious traits foreign to the ‘essence’
of nationalism. As the ultra-moderate Miller puts it (Miller, 1992, 87), “I separate the idea
of nationality itself from various accretions that have given nationalism a bad name.”
Some authors on the opposite side even define nationalism so as to exclude the very
possibility of universalizing. The British historian John Breuilly proposes a definition of
nationalist political doctrine according to which it is “built upon three basic assertions:

1. There exists a nation with an explicit and peculiar character.
2. The interests and values of this nation take priority over all other interests and values.
3. The nation must be as independent as possible. This usually requires at least the attainment
   of political sovereignty.”
   (Breuilly, 1982, 3)

19 He is followed by the sociologist John A. Hall: “Nationalism is considered here very
conventionally. It is the belief in the primacy of a particular nation, real or constructed”
(Hall, 1995, 9). The American sociologist Michael Mann says that “[nationalism is an
ideology whereby a nation believes it possesses distinct claims to virtue—claims which
may be used to legitimize aggressive action against other nations” (Mann, 1995, 44). 5
Which side is right, if any?

20 It is good to avoid essentialist talk if possible, so let us rather ask a more practical
question: which form of nationalism is more stable, psychologically, socially, and
politically? If one is already a nationalist, which variety will be less of a headache, and
supply a more stable and credible political stance? It seems to me that radical nationalism
fits the bill: Eric (see chapter two) would have fewer problems than John when reflecting
about his own political attitudes. The self-assumed willingness of the even-handed nationalist to take an impersonal stance, and to step into another’s shoes, imposes obligations and liabilities which might cause serious worries.

First, remember that the even-handed (but still rather tough) nationalist has to perform a balancing act: he should at the same time strongly privilege his own people and culture, and, in a more impersonal vein, demand that others privilege theirs. John has to be partial to things Lavinian—say, Lavinian music—but at the same time ask Paul the Carpathian to privilege things Carpathian. Now, what reason can he give? He cannot rationally claim that Lavinian music (customs, morals) is simply better than the Carpathian variety, since he would then be asking Paul to privilege music that is of lower quality in absolute terms than the Lavinian kind. His only way out is to admit that he prefers Lavinian music (customs, morals) because, and only because, it is his own. This provides the requisite balancing, but would be psychologically difficult for many people. For some things (art, morals) it is especially hard to wholeheartedly furnish an endorsement as an object of high esteem solely on the ground that they belong to one’s community. Some people can do it, by a kind of natural instinct (like loving one’s own child simply because it is one’s own), but many tend to feel and think in more absolutist terms. In many cases, therefore, the relativized, balanced love of home-spun lore will tend to transform itself: either it will wither away (John will end up preferring Bach and Beethoven to mediocre Lavinian composers), or it will stabilize itself in an absolutist fashion (John will end up loving only Lavinian composers and claiming that they are in truth much better than those foreigners Bach and Beethoven). Let me quote D. McCabe (he is referring to an even-handed nationalist, the philosopher Oldenquist):

Patriotism requires, then, that one believe one’s nation is better, and for this reason deserves more. But how can a patriot believe this without also believing that other nations are not as good, and for this reason deserve less? This seems a decidedly negative judgment about other nations (and one about which most patriots must be in error if there do exist objective criteria for the merits of a nation). Thus, loyalty patriotism, as Oldenquist describes it, will inevitably involve a negative judgment about other nations. (McCabe, 1997, 207)

Secondly, while balancing might be merely difficult in situations of calm reflection, it often becomes impossible when it comes to action. Remember that ethno-national communities are typically in competition, sometimes rather intense. In a competitive situation, the balanced attitude (John fighting for Lavinian interests, and at the same time congratulating Paul for fighting against them, in the interest of his people) might be a chivalrous and noble one, but it is highly unstable and difficult to uphold. If I may caricature it, one is reminded of the Maharishi Yogi’s offer to make every nation invincible to all others (advertised in The Herald Tribune throughout November 1998), the kind of situation the universalizing nationalist should wish for with the universalist half of his heart, and hate with the particularistic half. His universalistic pronouncements in situations of conflict will tend to become merely lip service paid to abstract ideals, but his deeds will reveal him as a radical. Even if this does not happen, one has to admit that the overall radical attitude enables its holder to cope with the situation in a more efficient and simple way. Let me offer one historical example, from the history of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the mid-nineteenth century, after a humiliating defeat, the Austrians showed a readiness to grant Hungarians a larger portion of autonomy than ever before; Hungarian liberal politicians jumped at the opportunity, and the wise and diplomatic liberal Ferenc Deak delineated the historic Compromise of 1867, which gave
Hungarians the right to home rule over a vast area of their historical territory. When other peoples on the same territory, prominently the Croats, demanded similar arrangements, Deák was ready to grant it; however, the radical nationalists won the day, and other nationalities never got from the Hungarians the same rights the Hungarians had extracted from the Austrians. Nasty nationalism had won out over the even-handed variety (see A. Molnár’s biography of Déák [1999]).

Let me add an anecdotal observation. The main pro-nationalist line of argument we shall be dealing with has been elaborated by Isaiah Berlin, a Baltic Jew living in Britain and a deeply cosmopolitan thinker. Other prominent philosophical pro-nationalists that I know, or know about, resemble Berlin in being basically cosmopolitans, each living in a country that is not ethnically theirs (or, at least in the ethnically ‘wrong’ region within a given state), and teaching throughout their life in a foreign language. Some, such as Yael Tamir, although living in the ‘right’ country, are activists in what are basically anti-nationalist movements. None of them, I fear, would be any good as a ‘nationalist-in-the-street’ (which is, of course, intended as a compliment).

To return to our initial question, if radical nationalism is more stable and ‘natural’, given human nature, one should perhaps concede to its proponents that its typical features are not mere ‘accretions’ or ‘excrescences’, but manifest the psychological and social ‘nature’ of nationalism in a more clear and consistent way than the even-handed variety. Indeed, the universalistic bent of even-handed nationalism comes to seem a foreign, external limitation imposed upon the original nationalist sentiment in the interest of taming it. There is nothing bad about such a combination—anti-trust laws do the same thing, limiting natural greed by the requirements of minimal fairness—but it does seem to be less typical of nationalism than the pure, radical variety. Nationalism—like racism and sexism—is a form of partiality in matters cultural and political (in contradistinction to partiality in personal, private matters, usually associated with love, care for one’s family, and the like). Now, a strong, wholehearted partiality is more typical than a weak-kneed, moderate one. As already mentioned, it is the universalistic constraint that is a ‘foreign accretion’ in the pure heart of nationalism, which in itself is only a strong partiality for one’s (ethno-)nation. If this is true, our willingness to debate nationalism at length in its even-handed, more presentable variety, is something of a concession to the nationalist.

NOTES

1. This is the point of MacIntyre’s defense of serious, anti-cosmopolitan patriotism.
3. Quoted after Nicholas V. Ryazanovsky, ‘Prince N. S. Trubetzkoy’s Europe and Mankind’, in Collected Writings (Los Angeles: Charles Schlacks, 1993), p. 118. Trubetzkoy’s general ideas about the nation were quoted with approval by the moderate A. Margalit. Trubetzkoy expressed the view that in the story of the Tower of Babel the Bible demonstrated a clear preference for the variety of languages and cultures over one language and culture. The fact that they had only one language and culture brought the tower builders to the boring emptiness that ended in the
arrogant project of building the tower. In Trubetzkoy’s opinion, the “confounding of languages”—that is, the imposition of cultural variety—is not a curse or a punishment, but a solution to the problem of the sin that results from cultural homogeneity.

4. Contemporary Bulgaria, Serbia, and Croatia offer plenty of evidence of this practice.

5. None of these authors uses another term, such as ‘patriotism’, to denote a supposedly tamer kind; they just assume that any pro-national attitudes worthy of discussion are bound to be of the nasty variety.
Chapter four. The even-handed nationalist: summarizing the argument

INTRODUCING THE NATIONALIST INTERLOCUTOR

The lesson from the previous chapter is clear: there is not much to debate with Eric the Lavinian, our convinced invidious nationalist. The best one can do by way of rational argument is to appeal to his ordinary sense of justice, and to try to make him understand that the usual principles of fairness valid for individuals also hold for groups. Things stand differently with the nationalist who is ready to universalize his advice and give it in an impartial fashion to all peoples, the one we have called the ‘even-handed nationalist’ and personified as John the Lavinian, Eric’s fictional co-national. In the opinion of such a nationalist, every human being ought to be specially loyal to his or her co-nationals, and this requires that every human being believes that his or her community is better than the others (as proposed, for instance, by prominent American pro-nationalist A. Oldenquist, 1982, 191). This readiness to extend the nationalist claims to each and every people makes the view fit for serious moral debate. The possibility of such a debate presupposes only agreement about the minimal common principle, in this case the universality of rights and duties: what is valid for one nation in virtue of being a nation must be valid for all, barring weighty reasons for special treatment. The even-handed nationalist remains radical about the internal working of the national community and its state; he is ‘moderate’ only in the sense of projecting his radical views upon each and every national community. Let me remind the reader once again of the basic claims that our nationalist is supposed to defend, to the effect that the preservation of a given ethno-national culture—in a relatively pure state—is a goal independent of the will of the members of the culture, and ought to be assured by adequate means. The community therefore has to assume the political form of a full sovereign, ethno-national state. Once a national state has been formed, and the dominant ethnic community has established itself as its ‘rightful owner’, it has to guard its full sovereignty. It has a duty to promote the ethno-national culture of its owners; this duty is taken to have the value of a trump
and to override considerations of both individual interest (most dramatically with the
demand that an individual should die for his or her fatherland if necessary) and of
pragmatic collective utility.

2 Why do these claims require a defense? For one thing, many sociologists claim that
nations are ‘imagined’ or ‘constructed’ communities (Anderson, 1991), and some
thoughtful nationalist philosophers tend to agree (Miller, 1995). In ordinary life people do
not think one has special obligations towards people whom one merely imagines to be
one’s relatives or friends. (Once you discover that your self-proclaimed nephew is in fact
not a relative of yours, you also discover you do not have any kind of responsibility
towards him.) To the extent that nations are imaginary the alleged obligations they
would impose also seem to be merely imagined or constructed. This is just a beginning.

3 Even if nations are not merely imagined communities, their demands appear to clash—
some in principle, some under normal circumstances—with various values that people
tend to accept. Some of these values are considered essential to liberal-democratic
societies, while others are important for the flourishing of culture and creativity. The
main values in the first group are autonomy and benevolent impartiality. To start with
the latter, impartiality demands equal moral concern and respect—at least in morally
central matters—for each human being. Of course, exceptions can be made, but the
burden is on those who demand special treatment. As Oldenquist puts it, nationalism is a
‘group egoism’: as a group egoist I prize what benefits what is mine—my family,
workplace, ethnic group, country, and species. Consequently, group egoism, unlike
egoism proper, is social because what is mine can also be yours and therefore ours
(Oldenquist, 1997). Nationalism naturally demands partiality, so it should defend its
claims against impartiality. Furthermore, special duties towards one’s ethno-national
culture can—and often do—interfere with one’s right to autonomy (if I want to become a
Buddhist, the only one in my community where the preponderant religion is a completely
different one, I should be granted the right to do so, and not thought to violate some
special duty to the community). If these duties are construed very strictly they can
interfere with other individual rights, for example, the right to privacy. In contrast, the
contemporary moral sensibility favors individualism as the basis of morality and politics.
Political liberalism bears testimony to this, but there is also more palpable evidence in
favor of it. In many areas of social life the freedom to choose one’s identification and
belonging is seen as a sacrosanct right. Not only the choice of partner, but also those of
profession, confessional and political persuasion, and belonging are in principle a matter
of free decision.

4 An additional point can be made using the example of an important area of non-
voluntary belonging, such as gender. One is born male or female, and this belonging is
largely non-voluntary. However, some people in contemporary Western cultures think
that this biologically determined belonging needs social remodeling. This is sometimes
captured in terms of the distinction between sex, which is merely biological, and gender,
which is seen as a matter of social belonging. As Thomas Simon puts it, the assumption
that gender is a ‘natural kind’ has been questioned. Gender-specific roles and behaviors
associated with sexuality are seen by some as being in need of a radical rearrangement in
the interest of equality and freedom of choice. The givens of sexual identity and the
‘almost givens’ of gender identity are being questioned in the name of freely assumed
roles and freely chosen belonging. But if such a general and heavily influential belonging
as that of sexuality is being questioned in the name of individual rights, it seems that less
general and influential memberships should be capable of remodeling in the light of individual needs and wishes.

5 We have placed in the first group of values autonomy and impartiality. The values in the second group prominently include unconstrained creativity: telling writers or musicians or philosophers that they have a special duty to promote the national heritage interferes with the freedom of creation. (Of course, they should have the right to promote their national heritage, but the issue here is whether they have a duty to do so.) Another value is diversity, which we will discuss at length in part two.

6 Between these two groups are the values that seem to arise from the needs of people living under ordinary circumstances. Under normal circumstances, in many modern states citizens of different ethnic backgrounds live together, and very often value this kind of life. (If you need a vivid illustration, remember that the winning French football team at the World Cup in 1998 was multicultural indeed, with the Arab Zidane as the star: even President Chirac praised its ethnic pluralism!) Politically, the original nation-centered model of the ethno-national state has undergone significant changes. In the first stage, in most parts of the Western world, it has been replaced by the so-called national state that is only weakly beholden to its ethnic origin, if at all. Contemporary liberal democracies are not run on ethnic principles, despite the fact that the official language in most of them is the language of its ethno-cultural majority. As W. Kymlicka puts it in his recent work, they are national only in a very ‘thin’ sense of linguistic dominance; their political specificities are a matter of institutional arrangements and not of ethnic culture. Even this weakly or thinly ‘national’ state is being questioned by the realities of both international cooperation and sub-state communities. This very fact of cohabitation seems to be a good that should be upheld, and a means of conflict prevention, something nationalism is not very good at.

7 Nationalist claims need a strong defense in order to pass the moral test. Note that one cannot defend them just on the basis of mere attachment to one’s community or the nationalist (or patriotic) sentiment of love of one’s people and country. Of course, if such a sentiment is not coupled with hatred toward others, it is morally in the clear (I shall later argue that it would be better if it were tempered with more general cosmopolitan leanings, but in itself it is certainly morally permissible). However, one’s sentiment does not justify the demand that others should share it, that is, that it should be a norm for all members of the community (‘Lavinia, love it or leave it!’). It certainly does not even come near to justifying the demand for a specific state-organization which should transform mere attachment into a politically organized form of life. Note that nationalism is rather demanding, so that its defense requires a lot of argumentation.

8 Thoughtful pro-nationalist writers have put forward several lines of thought in defense of such nationalism. They form the main topic of this book. Of course, each proposed line of thought allows for a very wide range of variation and in the literature is often combined—or rather entangled—with others, sometimes in a single paragraph or even a phrase; I shall insist upon isolating the main lines of thought and treat each such line as a single argument, so that the debate becomes more perspicuous. I beg the reader to retain in mind the rather protean nature of their incarnations. I shall also quote the extant literature to give readers who might not have looked at all the material a feeling of what these lines of thought look like ‘in the wild’. I hasten to add that not all the writers whom I quote endorse all the nationalist claims, at least not in the form presented at the beginning of this chapter. Some replace the desideratum of the full sovereignty of the
state with a weaker demand for some kind of political autonomy; others weaken the
demand for purity of national culture to the claim that it should be preserved in a
‘recognizable form’. (I shall say more about these weaker variants in chapter eight on so-
called liberal nationalism.) Worst of all, many nationalist writers—especially in the heat
of political debate, where their rhetoric is at its most effective—oscillate, freely and
without warning, between weak and strong varieties, which makes discussion more
involved than it should be. Our even-handed nationalist is an ‘ideal type’, not to be
identified with any of the authors quoted.

CAN NATIONALIST CLAIMS BE DEFENDED?

In this chapter I shall briefly systematize the proposed lines of thought, leaving room for
many simplifications. I hope that simplifying and therefore more orderly expositions will
not only make the issue clearer, but also help the reader who is not a professional
philosopher, but who wants to find his or her way in the creative jungle of the literature.
In subsequent chapters I discuss and criticize the proposed lines of thought in the hope of
showing that they are ultimately not valid. I divide them roughly into two groups. The
arguments in the first group appeal to (actual or alleged) circumstances which
supposedly make nationalistic policies reasonable (or permissible or even mandatory),
such as the fact that a large part of the contemporary world is organized in nation-states,
so that each new aspiring nationalistic group is following an established pattern, or, to
take a more special case, the circumstances of group self-defense or the redress of past
injustice. Let me give each a name, and present a brief summary.

The first group is geared to more narrowly political (and moral) considerations.

1. The argument from (the right to) self-determination. A group of people of sufficient size has
   a prima facie right to govern itself, and decide about future membership, if the members
   of the group so wish. It is fundamentally the democratic will of the members themselves
   that grounds the right to an ethno-national state and to ethno-centric cultural
   institutions and practices. The argument presents the justification of (ethno-) national
   claims as deriving from the will of the members of the nation. (It is not very suitable for
   those typical nationalists, who see the demands of the nation as being independent of
   choices of individuals, and prior to them.)

2. The argument from the right to self-defense and to the redress of past injustices. If the
   Lavinians are oppressed by the Tribals so that every Lavinian is worse off than most
   Tribals, simply in virtue of being Lavinian, then the Lavinian nationalist claims—directed
to the preservation of Lavinian identity through the acquisition of political autonomy or
even sovereignty, and the creation of Lavinian-centered cultural life—are morally
plausible, even compelling. In this context M. Walzer rightly insists upon the role of the
state in offering security to its citizens, and points out that any imaginable successor to
the national state will have to do the same. For all state-like entities

   must guarantee the physical and cultural survival of their members. It is not
   because of some historical misunderstanding that Jews, Armenians, Palestinians,
   Kurds, Estonians, and Tibetans lay claim to and even fight for sovereign statehood.
   And once any of these peoples (or others like them) join a state, its purposes are
   bound to be the same as those of the preceding national movement: to assure the
   survival of this group of men and women and to foster and reproduce its cultural
   life. (Walzer, 1995a, 247)
The examples he gives, Jews, Armenians and the rest, are prime examples of groups of people whose members have been denied elementary human rights because of their ethnic belonging. Of course, every decent state must “guarantee the physical and cultural survival of its members” (if ‘cultural survival’ means that the members will at least be left alone and not be interfered with in their cultural pursuits). In the case of these unfortunate peoples, the struggle for a state coincides with the struggle for a minimally decent life. Groups that are on the defensive tend to have our moral sympathies. Their claims, even when strongly partial, are evaluated by us, the onlookers, in the context of the unmerited inequality, and thereby made acceptable.

3. The argument from success. The nation-state has been successful in the past, promoting equality and democracy. It also promises to be essential for the moral life of communities in the future since it is the only political form capable of protecting communities from the threats of globalization and assimilationism. End of first group.

The arguments in the second group defend the assumption that national communities have a high value (often a value that is non-instrumental, that is, not a means for some independent, valued end), independently of the wishes and choices of their individual members. They also depict the community as the source or the unique transmission device that connects members to these values. In particular, the nationalist tries to establish that the (ethno-) national state and institutionally protected (ethno-) national culture is a good independent of the individual will of the members. (In terms of the communitarianism/individualism divide that separates philosophers who write about the nation, they all thus belong to the communitarian side.) Let me illustrate the general tenor of the group with a quote from Oldenquist:

This talk about non-instrumental value is intended to characterize how a majority of thoughtful people already regard tribes and cultures, namely that they do not think of them solely in cost-benefit terms and prefer not to see their total assimilation. And thinking this way can lead one to see merit in independence when the people themselves want it. This is because independence is seen as both a safeguard and a consequence of the flourishing of a culture; when a culture is politically independent its dilution and disappearance are less likely. (Oldenquist, 1997)

The nationalist ascribes an especially high value to the ‘national culture’; more precisely, he takes culture(s) to be essentially determined by ethno-national belonging. His arguments thus center around the value of the national community and its culture, and are organized around its various aspects. For instance, he ascribes intrinsic value to each particular national community as such on grounds of the general value of culture, particularly the value it can have as a transmitter of morality. Furthermore, value is ascribed to the fact that members of a cultural community are particularly close to each other. Finally, an original value can be ascribed to the totality of ‘ethno-national’ cultures, and a particular national community receives standing from the contribution it makes to the overall diversity of the achievements of mankind. Once the high value of community is established, the line of thought leads to duties the members have to their community, precisely because it is so valuable. In short, the nationalist tries to establish that the ethno-national state and institutionally protected (ethno-)national culture is a good independent of the individual will of the members. This line of thought has a long and illustrious history, and important changes have occurred along the way. Half a century ago it was customary to link nationalistic views to organicist metaphors of society. Isaiah Berlin, writing as late as the early 1970s, proposed as part of his definition
of nationalism that it is the conviction that men belong to a particular human group, and that "the characters of the individuals who compose the group are shaped by, and cannot be understood apart from, those of the group" (Berlin, 1972, 341). Furthermore, according to Berlin, the nationalist claims that "the pattern of life in a society is similar to that of a biological organism", and that the needs of this 'organism' determine the supreme goal of all of its members. One can recognize in this combination of the idea of national character shaping the characters of individuals and the idea of organic unity, the more psychologically and biologically oriented descendants of the older discourse of the 'spirit of the people'. Contemporary defenders of nationalism, above all its philosophical defenders, do not use this language any more: these days it is hard to find the organicist metaphor, and almost impossible to find the metaphor of 'national character' so popular in the first half of the twentieth century. Where have all the metaphors gone? What has happened to them? The answer is obvious: they have all been replaced by one master-metaphor: that of national identity. As Anderson puts it, the notion of national identity is a 'moral substitute' for the ideal of national character: "The narrower conception of identity fitted this role well, suggesting a more intimate, idealized bond than the gross links of daily custom" (Anderson, 1991b, 7). The idea of organic unity shaping the life of each of its individuals-cells is easily translated into identity-talk: the national identity of the group is essential for the personal identity of each of its members. Identity-talk also inherits connotations of solidarity and extended sympathy: if belonging together with other Croats is essential for who I am, then the destiny of each of my fellow Croats seems to be a 'part' of my own destiny, and caring about it seems inseparable from caring about my own person. Let me stress that 'national' in this context does not refer primarily to statist-civic nationality, but to a cultural and/or ethnic belonging.

4. The argument from intrinsic value and cultural proximity. Each ethno-national community is valuable in itself since it is the natural encompassing framework of various cultural traditions which produce and transmit important meanings and values. It also provides a special cultural proximity between its members. Persons who are closer to the agent in this cultural sense are also morally closer: the agent has special obligations to them. The underlying traits of the ethno-nation make for considerable proximity, and thus their carriers constitute a network of mutually close agents, also in the moral sense. The network is therefore a moral community, with special, very strong ties of obligation. A prominent obligation of each individual concerns the underlying traits of the ethnic community, above all language and customs: they ought to be cherished, protected, preserved, and reinforced. From this obligation the nationalist finally derives the community's right to have its state dictate the political and cultural duties of its citizens.

5. The argument from flourishing. The ethno-national community is essential for the flourishing of each of its members. In particular, only within such a community can an individual acquire concepts and values crucial for understanding cultural life and, especially, his own life. Our nationalist assumes that an individual's choices essentially depend upon the framework of values, which is itself not chosen. The communitarian draws attention to the importance of the background circumstances and moral context which inform and make intelligible those choices, but which are themselves unchosen (as British philosophers Horton and Mendus put it, after McIntyre).

6. The argument from moral understanding. A particularly important variety of value is moral value. Rich, 'thick' moral values are discernible only within particular traditions, to those who have wholeheartedly endorsed the norms and standards of the given tradition.
As Charles Taylor puts it, "The language we have come to accept articulates the issues of the good for us"; furthermore, "we first learn our languages of moral and spiritual discernment by being brought into an ongoing conversation of those that bring us up" (Taylor, 1989, 35). The nation offers the natural framework for moral traditions, and thereby for moral understanding; it is the primary school of morals.³

7. The argument from identity. The very identity of persons depends on their participation in communal life. The communal enterprise is a process whose root is involvement with others: other generations, other sorts of persons whose differences are significant because they contribute to the whole upon which our particular sense of self depends. Thus mutual interdependency is the foundational floor of citizenship ... outside a linguistic community of shared practices, there would be biological homo sapiens as logical abstraction, but there could not be human beings. (Crowley, The Self, the Individual and the Community [Oxford, 1987], quoted by Kymlicka [1992, 174])

In chapter two, I quoted MacCormick to the effect that the biological facts of birth and early nourishment and the socio-psychological facts of our education and socialization are essential to our constitution as persons. In his view, we become what we are because of the social settings and contexts in which we are brought up. Given that identity is a precondition of morality and flourishing, prior to the individual will (which, in contrast, depends upon a mature and stable identity), the communal conditions of identity have to be preserved and developed. The fundamental claims we have already listed seem vindicated by this need.

8. The argument from diversity. Each national culture makes its contribution to the diversity of human cultures. "The 'physiognomies' of cultures are unique: each presents a wonderful exfoliation of human potentialities in its own time and place and environment. We are forbidden to make judgments of comparative value, for that is measuring the incommensurable", writes the most famous contemporary proponent of the idea, the philosopher Isaiah Berlin (interpreting Herder, who apparently first thought of it) (Berlin, 1976, 206). The carrier of basic value is thus the totality of cultures, from which each national culture that contributes to the totality derives its own value. Berlin’s disciple Avishai Margalit states that “the idea is that people make use of different styles to express their humanity. The styles are generally determined by the form of life to which they belong. There are people who express themselves ‘Frenchly’, while others have forms of life that are expressed ‘Koreanly’ or ‘Icelandicly’” (Margalit, 1997, 80). The plurality of styles can be preserved and enhanced by tying the styles to an ethno-national ‘form of life’. The argument ascribes a value—either general or particularly moral, or both—to each culture from the pluralistic viewpoint of the totality of cultures available. Assuming that the (ethno-)nation is the natural unit of culture, the preservation of cultural diversity amounts to institutionally protecting the (ethno-)national culture.

I am using both ‘arguments’ and ‘lines of thought’ because the items described really are arguments in a very vague sense; usually presented by the authors themselves as general considerations in favor of the nationalist’s claims, not as isolated, watertight arguments in the logician’s sense. As already mentioned, the lines of thought in the second group form a whole; they all start from the value of culture, moral and general, then focus upon ethno-national culture in order to derive the centrality claim; finally, they pass from the alleged centrality of ethno-national culture to the need for a statist institutional structure to protect it. Since their main points are all linked to the primacy of community life in relation to that of the individual, they all belong in the communitarian tradition
whose magic words are 'community' and 'identity'. A recurrent theme is the importance of non-chosen, non-voluntary belonging. Here is a typical quote, taken from an influential paper by A. Margalit and J. Raz:

Qualification for membership is usually determined by non-voluntary criteria. One cannot choose to belong. One belongs because of who one is. One can come to belong to such groups, but only by changing, for example, by adopting their culture, changing one’s tastes and habits accordingly—a very slow process indeed. The fact that these are groups, membership of which is a matter of belonging and not of accomplishment, makes them suitable for their role as primary foci of identification. Identification is more secure, less liable to be threatened, if it does not depend on accomplishment. Although accomplishments play their role in people’s sense of their own identity, it would seem that at the most fundamental level our sense of our own identity depends on criteria of belonging rather than on those of accomplishment. Secure identification at that level is particularly important to one’s well-being. (Margalit and Raz, 1990, 447)

I shall criticize all eight ‘lines of thought’ in the chapters to follow: this criticism will form the main part of the book. Along the way I shall sketch further and independent criticisms of nationalism, as well as the general outlines of a more cosmopolitan alternative to nationalism. I shall argue from general moral grounds, as well as from the actual plurality and interaction of different ethnic communities, that a cosmopolitan pluralist culture is the best means of actualizing the values in question. Given that a cosmopolitan pluralist culture is only possible within a broadly transnational, cosmopolitan political framework, it follows that such a framework is a good. I shall try to show that such a framework is not contraindicated on the basis of independent considerations, and that therefore there is a prima facie duty to work on the establishment of such a framework.

The format of discussion will be as follows: after a brief introduction of the main topic at the beginning of each chapter, I shall give the floor to the nationalist so that he can summarize the main pro-nationalist line on the particular topic put forward in the literature. The point of this literary device is to spare the reader the subtle distinctions between various real pro-nationalist authors, and to present a unitary nationalistic proposal. (Those who want to enter the maze of the literature, or to check the accuracy of my presentation, can find some guidance in the footnotes.) After the nationalist presentation comes the criticism. I shall first concentrate upon the narrow signification of the speech, and criticize it in a purely theoretical manner; towards the end of each chapter, however, I warn against wider, more distant, but problematic implications of the speech, if such are to be detected. Such an adversarial manner of presenting the issue should help the reader both to see the general principles at work on each side, and to form his or her own opinion.

NOTES

1. Personal communication.
2. I am following the lead of Judith Lichtenberg in her contribution to McKim and McMahon (1997). Her taxonomy of nationalist arguments gave me an idea of how to organize this book, although my own taxonomy differs slightly from hers.

3. Taylor himself is ambivalent about the national format of morality; sometimes he writes as if he is ready to endorse it, sometimes he distances himself. Many pro-nationalist writers freely appeal to his work in defense of their views.
Chapter five. The right to self-determination

INTRODUCTION

1. We now pass to the first group of considerations usually adduced in favor of nationalism. They are narrowly state-oriented, using political and legal concepts, and concentrating more upon matters of state than on matters of culture and identity. At their heart is the claim of the ethno-nation to acquire, develop, and rule the state which it sees as its rightful property. Even very moderate nationalists prefer statehood:

   It is indeed true that a people can have a sense of nation without having a nation, but what is also true is that this national consciousness, and the identities that go with it, are, under modern conditions, only secure when people with these national identities have control of the conditions of their existence by having the power that goes with having one’s own state: a state which protects and actively furthers these national aspirations. Cultural or multi-national states have not worked very well. They have not been protecting, to say nothing of enhancing, the social identities of their diverse cultures. (Nielsen, 1993, 32)

2. I hasten to add that Nielsen is a very moderate and atypical nationalist: he even describes himself as a ‘cosmopolitan nationalist’. With tougher and more typical nationalists, the underlying conception is that of a ‘state-fortress’, the fully sovereign state, recalcitrant to external influences. How far the ‘rightful property’ aspect can go depends upon circumstances. Traditionally, national states have tended to homogenize their population by all means. In recent times, newly formed states of this kind have shown considerable readiness to follow the tradition: many have denied elementary citizenship rights to at least some inhabitants, at least unofficially, and some have gone so far as to do this officially, invoking the alleged dangers that the minorities in question present to the fledging unity of the nation. (The appeal to such dangers makes one wonder whether the majoritarian community is really as united, and as dedicated to its own culture, as the nationalist claims: if it were, why would the mere presence of a cultural minority be seen as endangering its very existence?) In well-established states the nationalist argument turns around the preservation of its national ‘purity’ and full independence, or, using a more moderate vocabulary, preservation of its recognizable profile. Of course, some pro-
nationalist authors settle for less—some kind of autonomy or home rule— but regard it as a somewhat abnormal second-best solution (see, for instance, the papers by Huw Thomas and Joxeramon Bengoetxea in Twining, 1991). Also, self-determination is not reserved for ethno-national groups, but is only particularly prominent in connection with them.

**SECESSION AT WILL**

3 The issue of self-determination is very often the main point of contention in the political debate about nationalism. The reason is clear: nationalistic politics is primarily geared to the ethno-national state, and the right to acquire and run a state is fundamental for aspiring nationalists. In the legal context, one talks about external rights—that is, the rights of the ethno-national unit in respect to other units—and internal rights (that is, the right to organize and run the internal matters of the unit). The main issue here is external rights.

4 In order to make the discussion more lively (without burdening it with disagreements on actual political details) let me develop our fictional story about the country of Lavinia (see chapter two). Imagine that, before acquiring an independent state, Lavinians were living within the great Carpathian Empire together with other autochthonous ethnic groups, each speaking their own language, some of them dominated by the imperial group of ethnic Carpathians, some more independent. Let us focus upon two groups of different standing within the Empire. The first are Lavinians; they were accorded a right to their own, somewhat meager cultural life (elementary schools, local choirs and folklore bands, a few newspapers of low quality), within a cultural/religious community. However, the official language in Lavinian territory was Carpathian: all university teaching was in Carpathian, as well as the TV and radio programs; a young upstart Lavinian had to speak Carpathian fluently in order to succeed, so that ethnic Carpathian youths had a much greater chance of serious political, cultural, and business careers than those of any other group. A second group, the Illyrians, had much better conditions within the Empire: they enjoyed a kind of cultural autonomy as regards language, teaching at all levels—including university level—their own high-quality media, and so on. Usually, Lavinians and Illyrians would react to a particular Carpathian measure—for instance, introducing tougher exams in Carpathian for state officials, or demanding that Lavinians give up some custom important to them but considered offensive by many Carpathians. The play of action and reaction in which the stakes are constantly being raised can lead to demands for greater autonomy or even for one's own state. “We Lavinians have a right to determine our own future and decide our political destiny”, some of them would claim.

5 This issue of self-determination can arise for both groups: for relatively discriminated-against Lavinians and for more fairly treated Illyrians. Does either group have the right to self-determination, even to the extent of creating its own state, and on what grounds? If Illyrians just decided that they simply did not want to live with the others, would that be enough to grant them the right to secede, given that no (major) injustice has been done to them? Is the 'simple expression of their wish' sufficient to give them the right to a state? Should separation be like a civil divorce?

6 Let me give the floor to our even-handed nationalist, John the Lavinian (see chapter two). His task will be to summarize for us the main points of the nationalist argument(s) as found in the literature. Here is what he would have to say:
Let me start my defense of nationalism with the line that most often comes to mind first when speaking of new nations, that is, the one appealing to the right of self-determination. The right has been enshrined in the important documents of the international community, starting from the United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (1960) which states in the Preamble (para. 2) that “all peoples have a right to self-determination”. I take it that “all” means all, and that Illyrians as well as my own Lavinians would have the right to secede from the Empire under the terms of the Declaration. We Lavinians are a people, a nation, and we have a right to form a state if we choose to. This right depends upon nothing other than our thoughtful decision. If a majority of Lavinians decide to have a state, then we should be allowed to secede. Of course, we are going to respect the rights of minorities living on our soil, but with this proviso we need not ask permission from the central government of Carpathia in order to divorce them. Unfortunately, it is true that legal documents are ambiguous about the ground and scope of this right. The Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations of 1970 explicitly denies that the right “shall be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action which would dismember or impair, totally or in part, the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States” (quoted in Hanum, 1990, 35). However, the tendency to interpret the right more literally is gaining momentum with the events in the former Yugoslavia and with the dissolution of the USSR. The peaceful secession of Slovenia and the Baltic countries persuaded the lawyers to give in, and they were finally acknowledged as sovereign states.

To return to my Lavinians and their right to self-determination, we should distinguish two kinds of considerations: the general right of Lavinians to decide, and the injustice that is being done to them. Strictly speaking, the first issue is independent of the second, and should be separated from it for the purpose of impartial evaluation. I submit they have the right on both counts: first a general one, based on the value of community, plus the will to acquire independence; and secondly, a more particular one, as a remedy for the injustice suffered. After all, people have a right to self-defense, and the collective right to self-defense is the same right, extended to a people.

As for Illyrians, if they want to secede they may do so, in spite of the fact that they cannot point to any injustice being done to them. Their life in the state is like life in a marriage: once you have had enough of it, you can walk out without having to justify yourself. The important ground is the autonomous will of the ethnic community. In short, the right to secession is a primary right, not just a remedy for injustice (a remedial right), as anti-nationalists often put it.

Of course, I am aware that self-determination does not justify all the claims I want to propose. In particular, many writers assume that the right to self-determination flows from the free choice of a people, not from the value of the national community itself. It would thus be dependent upon choices of individuals, and not capable of dictating the choices in question. Well, I can go along with the assumption for the sake of argument, but I think that the value of community does play a role: the mere wish of an ad hoc group, united only by some short-term common interest, does not have the same weight as the will of a homogeneous community, which needs a territory to survive, fighting for its autonomy. Thus, although the right to self-determination does not justify all of my claims (the obligation of each people to have a state, duties of individuals towards their people), it fits nicely with them in a harmonious and meaningful whole.
THE COSTS OF SECESSION

10 It is good to remind ourselves of the uncertainties—practical, moral, and legal—related to the right to self-determination and of the legal limitations built into it. To start with the legal aspect, our ethno-nationalist has to interpret the right in a particular and very strong sense, if he wants to use it for his own purposes. First, as to the scope, the right has to be interpreted as a right to secede. Secondly, as to the subject, it has to be the ethno-nation, in contrast to, say, a merely territorial unit (northern Italy would not qualify), or merely a community of belief (a large Amish community would not qualify either). Thirdly, as to the ground, it is either the value of community or the (democratic) will of the majority of the members of the ethnic community in question, as illustrated by our Illyrians (consequently, the seceding community may exercise its right even if no glaring injustice is being committed against it—no systematic harassment of its members and the like).

11 The existing legal sources give no support to such a strong interpretation. Historically, they have been geared to a more territorial view of what a subject of the right is: in supporting decolonization, they have given their assent to the secession of territorially distinct entities, geographically separate from their metropolises. They were never officially interpreted as permitting the reshaping of sovereign, basically democratic states. The war in the former Yugoslavia and the dissolution of the USSR have created enormous pressure towards redefining the right, and it is now in the process of being redefined. We can represent the state of the debate by putting together three claims concerning self-determination which are often asserted together, even in official documents, such as those of the UN:

1. All peoples have a right to self-determination.
2. Self-determination involves secession, that is, a change of state boundaries.
3. State boundaries must not be changed.

12 Principles (1) and (3) have been enshrined in the documents of the international community; claim (2) is a conceptual claim about what self-determination is. Obviously, once (2) is accepted, the first two principles are difficult to reconcile. Many authors have warned about the practical confusion this difficulty engenders. To give just one example, The Report of the International Commission on the Balkans (under the presidency of Leo Tindenmans), entitled Unfinished Peace, identifies the conflict between the right to self-determination (principle 1) and the principle of the inviolability of state borders (principle 3) as one of the most important issues of the ‘unfinished peace’ in the region, and stresses the unacceptability of the nationalist interpretation of the right in question. (For an extended and principled debate, see Orentlicher, 1998.)

13 There are several principled solutions to the problem. Our nationalist John has proposed acceptance of the right to self-determination (that is, principle 1), including secession (that is, principle 2), and jettisoning inviolability. The long-standing practice of the international community has been to reject principle (2) and to reinterpret the right to self-determination, so as not to involve secession and thereby the changing of state boundaries. The most radical anti-nationalist solution would be to accept principle (2), and then to reject the right to self-determination in favor of the inviolability of state borders (principle 3). Apart from the three principled possibilities, there are also variants
allowing for massive exceptions. For instance, some jurists have argued that secession of federal units (say, Slovenia from Yugoslavia) does not ‘really’ violate state borders; this amounts to reinterpreting the principle of inviolability by redefining what counts as a state border.

14 One clear guideline that emerges from the debate is that exceptions to principle (3) should be made and that the right should be granted to communities—not necessarily only ethno-national ones—which are either living within a harshly undemocratic state, or are under a direct threat which involves violation of basic human rights. This is a far cry from what the nationalist needs (nevertheless, we shall dedicate the whole of chapter six to this under the title of ‘self-defense’). Moreover, the debate about reinterpretation of the right is itself being held partly in terms of moral and general philosophical reasons for and against. It is fair to say that there is no legal consensus from which the nationalist could justify his conclusions: the right to self-determination in the strong sense needed by the nationalist is not an established right from which he could argue, but an extremely problematic principle, which itself stands in need of justification. Buchanan rightly notes that a generalized right to self-determination “denies the legitimacy of any state containing more than one culture (unless all ‘peoples’ within it freely waive their right to their own states)” (Buchanan, 1991a, 588). The nationalist’s claim, jettisoning inviolability in order to save self-determination-cum-secession, is indeed strong, and its justification should be practical and moral.

15 However, a general practical justification for the nationalist formula, that is, self-determination-cum-secession minus inviolability, is not to be had. Many authors—most notably Gellner and Buchanan—have pointed out the practical impossibility of accommodating all existing ethnic groups—according to some estimates, there are more than five thousand of them. According to Gellner, “it follows that a territorial political unit can only become ethnically homogeneous, in such cases, if it either kills, or expels, or assimilates all non-nationals” (Gellner, 1983, 2). The argument is used by many anti-nationalists (prominently by Buchanan, 1991b, 329). But sheer number is only one problem. The next is the ‘Russian doll’ phenomenon: ethno-national groups, the usual candidates for breaking up, often share the same territory or part of it: a Carpathian majority encompasses a Lavinian minority, which encompasses another Carpathian minority, which itself has some Lavinian individuals on its territory. How do you disentangle them?

16 Some philosophical defenders of nationalism, sensitive to the plight of internal minorities—most recently Miller (1998, 276ff)—go to great lengths to deal with the issue of what to do with them; they end up justifying the ‘exchange of populations’. Miller himself recommends it only in extreme cases, but notes the positive effect of such events upon the ‘sense of national identity’, using the example of Greece; he forgets to add that this sense, acquired on the basis of brutal cleansing, has resulted in a hundred years of xenophobic nationalist zeal that has made Greece the moral pariah of the European Community, often harshly criticized by other members for its nationalism. In general, the nationalist has to face the reluctance of most people to leave their homes just because nationalists think they should, and are constrained to use threats, if not downright violence. Exchange therefore often degenerates into a somewhat milder form of ethnic cleansing.

17 What the generalized right to unconditional ethnic self-determination promises is just blood, sweat, and tears without end and without glory. Even in the case of oppressed
groups one should be cautious: given the omnipresence of internal minorities, the nationalism of the oppressed asking for secession often threatens to become as ugly as that of the oppressors. We shall discuss this point further in chapter six.

18 Let us briefly return to the impossibility of granting a state to every ethnic group. Pro-nationalists (for example, Oldenquist, 1997) point out that not all potential candidates will enter their claims (a good analogy is banks and savings; normally, all savers do not seek to withdraw their money on the same day). This is unacceptable on normative grounds for the following reasons: first, by his own views, they should do so, having a duty to preserve their national identity. Secondly, a generalized prescription cannot be defended by appealing to the possibility that it will not be obeyed. However, the reply might be factually adequate, in the sense that not many minority groups nowadays demand secession out of the blue. Then, however, a new—this time factual—question arises: Why don’t ethno-national groups rush to embrace secession if having an ethno-national state is so paramount for them, in the view of the nationalist? A plausible answer is that most people don’t care, and secondly, that members of a minority start caring only when they feel they have been discriminated against as individuals because of their ethnic belonging, which narrows the case to self-defense. This limitation confronts the nationalist with a whole nest of difficulties.

19 Remember that one important nationalist line of argument is the tough one that secession is permitted unconditionally, in the complete absence of injustice. But the less injustice the group in question suffers, the less persuasive is the secessionist claim. When there is a lot of injustice, the general public in other countries tends to side with the group; the less injustice there is, the more the will to secede appears like a whim. After all, the Illyrians have pledged their loyalty to Carpathia, entered into some sort of contract with other groups, and thereby created legitimate expectations of their internal minorities (that is, minorities living on their historical territory); individual citizens will have married co-citizens of different ethno-cultural backgrounds, expecting to live in a multi-ethnic country in which their spouses and children will not suddenly become members of a minority. All these already undertaken commitments weigh heavily against the legitimacy of an unmotivated change of heart.

20 Under normal circumstances, the price to be paid by many citizens for indulging the wish to be separated seems rather high. They might end up worse off after the separation. (Note the disanalogy with divorce after a childless marriage, where only a few persons, nowadays only two, are implicated.) Consider the situation in which there is no injustice to the minority group and the usual costs of secession. How probable is it that the minority group will really want to secede? Not very. The closer the situation comes to the one envisaged by our nationalist, the less relevant his argument becomes. Nielsen, one of the best defenders of the tough, unconditional line, actually admits the point:

I would...recognize a right to secede even under conditions in which the state is effectively, indeed flawlessly, performing all of what are usually taken to be the legitimating functions of the state. That a nation has such a right does not, of course, mean or entail that in such circumstances it should exercise that right or even that in all instances it is reasonable to do so... So it is unlikely that it will secede from a flawlessly just state. (Nielsen, 1995, 266)

21 Let us take him literally: what this line establishes, given the realities of cohabitation, is that the situation in which a state will accept the right to secession as a primary right is one in which this right will never be needed. In short, the purer and more nationalistic the grounds for secession are, the less persuasive it sounds, and the less pertinent it is in
the real world. (I leave aside situations in which a province rich in resources, such as Katanga in Congo, tries unilaterally to secede without offering recompense to the larger state, since the main motivation in this case is not germane to the issue of nationalism.) The upshot of the discussion is quite far-reaching: in a sufficiently just, multiethnic society, the network of spontaneously created expectations and obligations created in the course of living together will, under normal circumstances, tend to block the desire to secede.

Let me add a brief remark about a linguistic trap into which some defenders of the unconditional right to secession often seem to fall. Our nationalist mentioned in his speech that a community might need a territory in order ‘to survive’. This appeal to survival is important and often made, but is burdened with ambiguity: a pop group—say, The Spice Girls—is said (collectively) to ‘survive’ if it stays together as a group; on the other hand, in the case of ethnic groups, one often tacitly takes ‘survival’ to mean (in a distributed sense) the literal survival of individual members. (For instance, the sentence ‘The Tasmanians did not survive’ normally means that all the individual members of the group died, whereas the sentence ‘The Spice Girls will not survive the marriage of Posh Spice’ is more likely to mean that the group will split up.) The nationalist argument sometimes gains an undeserved appearance of strength through the confusion between the two meanings of ‘survival’. For instance, the claim ‘a group needs territory in order to survive’ can mean two things. First, taken distributively, territory is essential for the life of each individual (or at least that of most individuals) in the group; if this holds, the members are probably morally entitled to some territory. Secondly, having ‘territory’ is essential to keep the group together (for instance, buying a beautiful summer-house will keep the Bloomsbury Circle together; otherwise, they will stop seeing each other). This collective meaning normally carries with it no justified entitlement to territory. A group may need a territory or a state to survive either because otherwise its members are physically threatened (others will seriously harm them), in which case it probably is entitled to it, or because it needs it as a collective to stop the members from leaving of their own free will. The nationalist has to make clear what he has in mind: if merely the latter, his argument does not prove anything (unless the mere holding together of the group is in itself, and independently of the will of its members, of high enough value to justify the reallocation of territory, which is usually hard to prove); if the former, we are led to the issue of self-defense, to be discussed in chapter six.

Consider now the grounds for secession. All nationalists and some liberals endorse the right to self-determination (including the right to secede) for at least some communities and groups. One important difference lies in the kind of rationale each proposes. The liberal rationale is the right of individuals to decide their way of life. The particular content of their ideals—once the basic rights of the members are guaranteed—is immaterial: the liberal secessionist philosopher grants self-determination to any group, religious, ideological, or ethnic, that is large enough to be able to manage its affairs efficiently (provided the issue of harm to other groups is settled).

The collective right of self-determination is derived from the individual right of self-determination insofar as it is simply the individual right exercised by individuals in a joint effort or collectively. (De George, 1991, 4)

On the other hand, the classical nationalist is typically concerned with the intrinsic value of the ethnic content. It is the value of the nation that legitimizes the claim to self-government, not the mere ‘whim’ of interested individuals. Of course, their wishes do
count, but the primary legitimating ground is supra-individual and ethnic-national. It is therefore not clear that the nationalist can appeal merely to the will of the group as the ground of legitimacy. Such a voluntary ground is not in itself nationalistic; it depends only upon the will of actual members of a group, which might only contingently coincide with an ethno-nation, and adds little to the specifically nationalist political program. Moreover, the argument, even if valid, establishes only the right and not the obligation to form a state (as John himself states in his speech). Beyond this principled point, there are further difficulties.

As D. Copp (1997) has pointed out, one source of the trouble with the appeal to self-determination concerns the choice of the relevant group. Given the usual principles of citizenship, it is the territorial group, not the ethno-national group, whose opinion should be asked (if we keep the considerations of self-determination in their pure form). But then the issues of the ‘survival of the group’ in all cases in which there is no physical threat become irrelevant: the territorial group at any time is simply the aggregate of all people living in the territory.

The weakness is not only theoretical, since very often the limits of the territory are themselves contested. In order to avoid the limitation to territorial groups only, our nationalist has to insist upon the ethnic basis of the right to secede, hoping to prove at least that when ethnic traits are at stake, it is the will of the members of the ethnic group that counts. This is certain to backfire because of internal minorities: if Illyrians should be asked about the future of their ethnic culture, then the Carpathian internal minority living within Illyrian territory must have a say about its ethnic culture. But in that case the relevant unit will again be all inhabitants of the would-be independent Illyrian territory, and we are back at square one, in multinational, pre-secession Carpathia.

It seems that no general justification for secession on ethno-national principles will be forthcoming. The nationalist can turn to particular grounds for justification, either to situations of direct threat, or to the value of ethno-national culture. Since the most plausible ground for the exercise of the right to self-determination is a direct threat to the group in question, we shall dedicate a longer chapter to the matter. As for culture, we will discuss it throughout part two.

NOTES

1. To use the helpful analogy proposed by D. Gauthier (1994).
2. I was unable to find many examples of the pure variant in the literature. Nielsen comes close to it in some of his writings, as does Couture in ‘L’art de la separation’, when she talks about the right of a society to further its ‘project’. Gauthier comes very close to it, but on the liberal side.
Chapter six. The right to self-defense

PREVENTING AND REDRESSING INJUSTICES

1 Since the most plausible ground for the exercise of a group’s right to self-determination is a direct threat to it, let us focus upon that. Indeed, the most powerful pro-nationalist argument in favor of the right to self-determination and secession is the one from the right to self-defense, which has won the hearts of millions of people all around the world. Some prominent writers, from M. Weber to M. Walzer, have even tried to define a nation in terms of its willingness to struggle, of a commitment to independence (Walzer, 1985). In using it, the nationalist appeals to the plight of stateless and oppressed ethno-national groups, such as the Albanians of Kosovo. Here the survival of the group is literally the condition of survival of many of its members.

2 Let us therefore return to our Lavinian model. Remember that within the Empire (see chapter five) Lavinians had been relatively discriminated against. Imagine that they have resented what they saw as discrimination, and that their leading public figures have started to resist the exclusive use of Carpathian, and at the same time to demand more authority for the Lavinian political sub-unit. A few of them have been arrested, massive public demonstrations followed, the imperial police reacted with force, and very soon sparks of violence started spreading over Lavinian territory. At that point, Lavinian intellectuals started talking of the need for self-defense. We might as well let our fictional hero, John, take the floor:

Let me give you the general line on the issue. The world is a nasty place for a people to live in if it doesn’t have its own state: throughout history, ethno-cultural communities with no state to protect their members and foster their culture have been the victims of those who had one. Consider stateless nations in our contemporary world. Jews were victimized before creating their own national state. Kurds and most Armenians are still stateless, and look at the consequences! In situations of the kind facing the Kurds practically all members of the community would demand the right to create a nation-state; and most liberally minded people would agree to their demands.

We should therefore distinguish between the active, provoking nationalism of the
oppressors and the reactive, self-defensive nationalism of the oppressed. The latter have a right to self-defense; and the collective right to it is grounded in the immediate, clear danger to each individual just because he or she is a member of an oppressed group. Reactive nationalism offers the only solution, and not a bad one at that. Let me illustrate the point with one more example. One often defends the expression of particularistic attitudes—say, Black and Aboriginal pride in contrast to white supremacy, and feminist pride about being a woman in contrast with macho pride. Appeals to racial solidarity are not always condemned, and can sometimes be morally praiseworthy. If a black leader—call him Mohammed X—declares: “I am black and I am proud, and my wife is black and I am proud to have a black wife” most liberals would hardly find such a statement objectionable, and many will value it. Some defenders propose that this is grounded on a shared history of a kind that makes partiality morally appropriate—namely, a shared history of suffering evil because of one’s racial belonging (Hurka, 1997, 152). The same applies to membership of a persecuted ethno-national community. Let me also point out that the victims of discrimination on ethnic grounds often find it especially insulting and demeaning; a criticism on the grounds of one’s looks, or tastes, or various convictions is often less resented than a derogatory remark about one’s ethnic origin. The right to defend oneself should be proportionate to the strength of the offense or threat, including the degree of subjective hurtfulness of the offense. In short, nationalist attitudes are justified in such situations in the same way racial pride and a feminist stance are.

The same kind of reasoning is valid, with slightly changed parameters, in the case of more distant threats, like those involved in globalization. Given that the threat is not so dramatic as in the case of immediate persecution, our reaction should be proportionately calmer, but no less firm for all that. Globalization threatens the survival of national communities and therefore has to be fought by the arms forged in more traditional episodes of defense “against the envy of less happier lands” (as Shakespeare put it in John of Gaunt’s praise of England, Richard II 2.1.49). Isolationism above all is a good antidote to globalization, coupled with a reaffirmation of the sense of national identity. These general considerations are equally valid in particular areas. Take the most essential ingredient of a people’s culture, its language. It has to be defended against threats of all sorts and defended by administrative means. To summarize, a reactive nationalism is the only relevant answer to the real threats posed to a given community by inimical surroundings, threats with which the contemporary scene abounds.

Reactive nationalism is justified since it prevents impending injustices and secures the future of the oppressed group. Analogously, one could justify the nationalist reaction against past injustice. Consider the Baltic states, which were occupied and annexed by the Soviet Union, and subjected to forced Russification. The injustice that has been committed cannot be undone by any other means than their secession; indeed, this point was conceded by the international community when these countries did secede. In short, there are cases in which the establishment of a nation-state is the only way to redress a past injustice and ensure a viable future for an ethno-national community. Also, given the permanent threat from their neighbors, it might be the case that a measure of external isolationism and internal homogenizing is the only answer. In such cases nationalism offers the best, nay, the only solution.

THE LIMITATIONS OF SELF-DEFENSE

Let us grant the nationalist that his argument indeed sounds persuasive, at least in dramatic cases. Confronted with the suffering of persecuted communities many of us feel it imperative that people from such communities should be protected, that communities themselves should be preserved as well, and that the most expedient way to do it is to
grant them the right to secession and to full sovereignty. Similarly, confronted with the hidden threat of domination implicit in globalization, one feels the pull of isolationism, indeed a moral pull. The most severe critics of nationalism agree that self-defense justifies secession. In their view, the nationalist claims of the members of an ethnic group are prima facie justified on the non-nationalistic grounds of general equality and fairness, when the members are being systematically disadvantaged because they belong to the group. Here is a typical view listing the conditions on which the argument for secession from cultural preservation can be successful:

(1) The culture in question must in fact be imperiled. (2) Less disruptive ways of preserving the culture (e.g., special minority group rights within the existing state) must be unavailable or inadequate. (3) The culture in question must meet minimal standards of justice (unlike Nazi culture or the culture of the Red Khmers). (4) The seceding cultural group must not be seeking independence in order to establish an illiberal state, that is, one which fails to uphold basic individual civil and political rights, and from which free exit is denied. (5) Neither the state nor any third party can have a valid claim to the seceding territory. (Buchanan, 1995, 364)

I more or less agree with this diagnosis. Note, however, that the nationalist’s proposed recipe, no matter how noble its rhetoric sounds, is to cure nationalism with more nationalism. It is reminiscent of homeopathic medicine, so I shall call it the Homeopathic Strategy. Not all homeopathic cures are bad: Alexis de Tocqueville has famously shown that evils produced by granting certain freedoms to people can be cured by allowing more freedoms, that the egoism of one group is often successfully blocked by the egoism of another, and so on, with all kinds of checks and balances. We have therefore to assess the particular strategy on its own merits. It is indeed obviously valid in the most dramatic cases, in which no other cure is available, that is, when the members of the group are physically threatened. If the life or basic well-being of each particular Lavinian is at risk just because he or she is a Lavinian, and there is no way one can negotiate a solution with those who threaten them, one feels that secession is in order.

However, let us consider where the obviousness comes from. One source is certainly the fact that the basic and universal rights of, for example, each individual Kurd are at stake, merely because he or she belongs to a given community. For many people this is the strongest source of the feeling that any viable solution, including the secessionist one, is better than the status quo. A second source is the feeling that injustice has been perpetrated against individual Kurds and that redress is in order. This second source again has little to do with the value of a national community as such; it is rather rooted in universalistic considerations. If these two sources were to dry up, not much justification would be left. Indeed, if—as is rather improbable—the threatening larger state(s) were to credibly withdraw the threat, grant Kurds a degree of autonomy, make considerable amends (including solemn repentance by the head of state), would not the case for Kurdish secession be drastically diminished? Abbas Vali, of the University of Wales, a prominent commentator on the Kurdish problem, claims that the very roots of the problem lie with the nationalism of others: “Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish national identity are products of modernity, following the emergence of centralized territorial states in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The Kemalist state in Turkey and the Pahlavi state in Iran legitimized the violent processes of territorial centralization” [Vali, 1996, 26]. Indeed, what would remain from this case would certainly have more to do with a feeling that past injustices cannot be so easily forgotten than any other independent source.¹
This small imaginative experiment points to three principled weaknesses of the Homeopathic Strategy as a means of defending nationalist claims. The first weakness is that its main source of persuasiveness has nothing to do with an ethno-national community as such; its appeal rests to a large extent upon our solidarity with persecuted individuals, whose individual universal rights have been put in jeopardy. This strategy works only when the protection of such rights happens to coincide with the protection of an ethno-national community as a whole. In practice, one will have to distinguish at least between traditional nation-states which might either wish to continue as they are or to renounce a part of their sovereignty to transnational bodies (UK, France, and Germany in relation to the EU), relatively new nation-states (Slovenia, Croatia), aspiring groups (Kurds) which are in dire need, and less urgent potential candidates (Flamands, Quebecois, Basques). Given the urgency of the Kurdish-type situation, one would do well to heed the demands of the oppressed for security and survival by whatever means; there is no time to work out sophisticated alternatives. For every other type a search is in order, without guarantee that a single solution, including the nationalist one, would be best for all. Similarly with more particular dangers or alleged dangers, for example, the disappearance of a minority language provoked by spontaneous defection of the speakers, who opt for the majority language for reasons of convenience. Here the mere fact that the survival of a trait (a language) is in danger tells us nothing about the required course of action, unless supplemented by an argument showing that the trait is more valuable than respect for the will of the individual defectors (those who do not care about speaking the particular language any more). Such arguments have of course been offered by nationalists, and we shall discuss them in the second part of the book.

The second weakness is that the Homeopathic Strategy presupposes the availability of situations in which the nationalism of the threatened group is justified by the attitude of the threatening one. The usual source of threat is the active nationalism on the opposite side. Separatist reactive nationalisms of small nations are justified in the teeth of the unifying active nationalism of big ones. Even in cases in which active nationalism is not the only agent, it is nevertheless prominent: much of the fear of globalization derives from the suspicion that particular peoples and states—for instance, the United States—are the real winners in the game. This dependence on active nationalism is the sore point of the strategy: it implies that the main reason why we need (reactive) nationalism for the oppressed is that there is already some (active) nationalism there, namely that of the oppressors.

This brings us to the issue of justifying reactive attitudes in general. Compare our imagined statement by Mohammed X to the statement actually given to the press by the late Croatian president Tudjman a decade ago: “Thank God that my wife is not a Serbian or a Jew!” (with the implicit addendum: “but a Croat”). This statement seems unpardonable. Our moral intuitions speak in favor of Mohammed X and against Tudjman. Why? Some defenders propose that it is “a shared history of a kind that makes partiality morally appropriate—namely, a shared history of suffering evil because of one’s racial membership” (Hurka, 1997, 152). This is only partly correct. No amount of past Croat suffering justifies Tudjman’s gaffe. Not only that, but a similar statement by Mohammed X (say, “Thank God that both I and my wife are black and not goddam gooks!”) would be equally condemnable. No past of racial oppression can justify this statement.

We need a different tack. Here is a proposal: when hearing Mohammed X’s statement we spontaneously relativize its meaning to the context of oppression and inferiority. The
relevant contrast assumed is between oppressed and downgraded blacks and privileged whites. Moreover, the pride statement is acceptable only as long as there is either a situation of inequality present, or its traces—fresh memories, feelings of injustice, hurt dignity—are still quite painfully active. This suggests that racial or national pride is ‘remedial’, that is, it is not justified outside a particular context of iniquitous asymmetry: no context-free value should be attached to it. (To put the simple point in philosophical jargon, it seems that intuitive judgments concerning the moral justification of verbal and other actions are tied to an implicit context of an assumed [imagined] scenario which in turn determines the relevant contrast class.)

10 The opponent of nationalism is now free to point out two things: first, even in situations of acute suffering the ‘homeopathic cure’ may not work. Take Bosnia, where each separatism is justified with the nationalism of the other groups. The practical risk is obvious and well known: given the omnipresence of internal minorities (the ‘Russian doll’ phenomenon) the nationalism of the oppressed threatens to become as ugly as that of the oppressors: they in their turn thwart their internal minorities. Such therapy often resembles drastic chemotherapy that extirpates the cancer by destroying the organism itself.

11 Secondly, and more importantly, in view of the risks of the Homeopathic Strategy the opponent may now propose that prevention is better than cure: if ugly active nationalism demands more nationalism, potentially equally ugly, to effect a cure, would it not be better to prevent the outbursts of active, initiating nationalism in the first place? Take the recent dramatic ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. Serbs and Croats in that state were extremely close neighbors, sharing the state, internal minorities, a lot of mixed families and individuals of mixed origin, with strong interactional ties at all levels, from global transportation highways to close collaboration in the business sphere. For three hundred years the Serbs of Krajina defended Croatian territory from Ottoman conquerors (in the service of the Habsburg Monarchy or the Venetian Republic). Culturally, the two peoples were extremely close, sharing (what is linguistically one) language, customs (including folk songs, traditions, superstitions), moral values as documented in literature, art, cinema, folk traditions, and a lot of high culture. The main difference was denominational, and that in a predominantly atheist society. Any recognizable civic community in the territory claimed by one ethnic nation would include a considerable number of the members of the other.

12 Looking at the beginning of the recent conflict, once Milosevic opted for nationalist policies, the natural reaction was self-defense precisely along nationalist lines. But would it not have been better if the international community had checked the initial outbursts of Serbian nationalism? Remember the initial Serbian oppression of Kosovo Albanians in the 1980s. It gave force to both Serbian and Albanian nationalism, and a new plausibility to the initially dormant nationalistic separatism in the western part of Yugoslavia. Timely international pressure might have closed the nationalist option for Serbia, thereby also undercutting the reactive separatist claims of other Yugoslav ethno-nations. That would have been much better than waiting for a bloody, but ‘homeopathic’ nationalist solution of the equally bloody problem. Again, once the NATO bombing gave a chance to the Kosovar Albanians to establish the rudiments of the state, their first victims were members of the local Serbian minority, and the next were the local Roma. In short, the best route is not to acquiesce in the ongoing process of nationalist redress of nationalist wrongs, but to block the nationalist offensive before an equally nationalist defense
becomes the only viable way. (The international and domestic outcry against Heider in Austria seems to me a good example of preventive action with a chance of success. It would be interesting to investigate why the public has reacted in time on this occasion. A somewhat pessimistic guess is that what is needed is a real and detailed similarity to a clearly recognizable paradigm of evil, namely Hitler: the same country, with the participation of actual ex-Nazi sympathizers, plus Haider’s explicit pro-Nazi statements. It seems that almost nothing short of this will seriously alarm the general public in time, before actual conflicts and massacres take place. In the case of Milosevic, on the contrary, the clear stereo- or prototypical signs of dangers were absent, and the West took its time to make the right decision.)

To mention less extreme cases, outbursts of minority demands for separation are not spontaneous expressions of a permanent and natural yearning, but most often the result of the failure of the majority to provide genuinely equal conditions for the members of the minority. In short, the failure of the Homeopathic Strategy should make us wary: even if we accept the right to secession and the creation of nation-states as a remedy for the time being, we should not accept the nation-state and the centrality of ethno-national culture as lasting best solutions. They generate new diseases, which then have to be cured with even more nationalism. What is the positive, constructive moral to be drawn from this discussion? Here is a proposal: we have seen that the basic intuitions in favor of according a distinct national state to persecuted communities derive from the non-nationalist, universalistic feeling that acute injustice is being done to individuals because of their belonging to the community. This kind of justification is not only not specifically nationalist, but it rests upon a strong sense of universal rights which is rather foreign to the original nationalist motivation. A similar kind of universalistic feeling, together with plain common sense, suggest that preventing nationalist excesses is preferable to curing them with more nationalism. But the prevention of active, aggressive nationalist outbursts should itself take place along non-nationalist lines: the fostering of understanding between ethnically and culturally diverse groups. After all, in most contemporary states ordinary people of different ethnic backgrounds live together, interact rather closely and occasionally intensely without spontaneously and insistently demanding to be separated. As already mentioned, this is evidence against the nationalist claim that normal life is impossible unless one is a member of one’s own national state. We should assume that people are ‘voting with their feet’ by staying together, in contrast to the isolationism implicit in a lot of pro-nationalist literature. Such cohabitation diminishes the natural fear and suspicion of what is ‘foreign’ to one. Fear and suspicion are the prime movers of mutual distrust. Also, it teaches individuals to recognize their common humanity under the guise of variation and difference; recognition that is itself of intrinsic moral value. The very fact of cohabitation is a good to be upheld, so the state should secure a stable and enduring framework for it. We shall return to this constructive picture at the close of part one.
1. Consider a parallel case of immigrant minorities and estrangement due to their imposed, unwilled isolation. Take working-class Arabs or Pakistanis in France or Great Britain. A young Arab woman living in Paris or London has little to gain by identifying herself with Muslim fundamentalist and extremist movements: she would hardly live a decent life by her own standards if such movements were in power. Any sympathy for the movements she might have is more probably due to utter estrangement in France, the feeling of being rejected by the core French society, than to any deep religious or identity-oriented need. The same seems to hold for Turkish youths in Germany, who feel permanently denied the chance of becoming socially equal members of the dominant society and respond to rejection by rejecting its values in turn.

2. Note also that even when the conflict was well on its way, the nationalist leaders at all levels of the hierarchy had to make a lot of effort to prevent peaceful solutions being imposed on the ordinary people involved in the conflict. Many conscripted soldiers—on all sides—were not willing to go all the way, not to speak of volunteers who lost their enthusiasm once they were sent outside their immediate home area: they had to be forced to participate in massacres or in torture in order to make it impossible for them to pull out once their initial motivation was gone. The ‘manipulation of future preferences’ (as the strategy is known in the specialist literature) has been happening at the highest level of state decision making as well: the Croatian Parliament has passed an act forbidding future leaders to enter into any kind of cooperation agreements with Balkan states, no matter how useful they might be, that involve the creation of supra-national communities on the model of the European Union.
Chapter seven. How successful is the nation-state?

A HISTORICAL SUCCESS STORY

We now turn to the line of thought that stresses various social and moral successes of modern nation-states and attributes them to their ethno-national orientation. So let our nationalist first make his speech.

We have witnessed more than two hundred years of the successful formation and spread of the nation-state. As a historical reminder, let me quote a great French historian of the nineteenth century, Jules Michelet; in spite of its somewhat sentimental tone, his view on the unification of France is typical of what any nationalist would like to say about the successful creation of an ethno-national state:

This unification of France, this destruction of the parochial spirit is often considered as the simple result of the conquest of provinces. But a conquest can glue together, chain together the hostile parts, never unite them: conquest and war have only opened provinces to each other, and have given to isolated populations an opportunity to meet each other; the quick and lively sympathy of Gallic genius, its social instinct, has done the rest of the work. What a strange event! These provinces, of differing climate, customs, and language have understood each other, fallen in love with each other, felt solidarity towards each other. (Michelet, 1996, 115)

Contemporary sociologists and philosophers express similar thoughts in a different rhetorical garb. They stress the advantages of nation-forming along ethno-national lines. By offering people a culture in language(s) they actually speak, by encouragement of the formation of more local elites, directly in contact with their electorate, and by promoting the capitalist mode of production, they enable mass democratization. As many sociologists, prominently Anderson and Gellner, have pointed out, democracy and nationalism go together. Let me paint in more detail the advantages offered by ethnic ties, such as the ties of an actually spoken common language. Some of the ties can simply serve as convenient signs helping to find the right partner for interaction (for example, if you are an immigrant worker in a far-away country, the cheapest and best thing to do is to look for your compatriots. More importantly, there are substantial advantages offered by national ties, which are nowadays discussed in the literature on the rationality of
nationalism. The community of language offers obvious opportunities for communication, and the community of culture and tradition opens routes for exchange (see Coleman, 1995; Hardin, 1985). Even at this very general level one can see that such opportunities are not offered by, say, ties of age, gender, or profession. Most importantly, no matter how great a number of persons is linked to us with such ties, the community based upon them cannot become a political community since it is not capable of autonomy and of reproductive sufficiency (obviously, a community of teenagers founded upon the solidarity of age does not survive more than a few years, a community of philosophy teachers is not economically self-sufficient, and so on.) In contrast, the ethnic network is often endowed with a size and variety which allow the constitution of a durable political community, self-sufficient and capable of reproducing itself.

A unitary language offers opportunities for a unified market and economic development, which usually result in more democracy and more opportunities. The importance of such links has been noted by the likes of Gellner and Anderson. Not only has the nation-state been successful in the past, but also it promises to be essential for the moral life of communities in the future; it is the only political form capable of protecting communities from the threats of globalization, both from the cynical and unscrupulous exploitation orchestrated by transnational and multinational companies, and the elitist cultural cosmopolitanism that leaves to the masses only a bland, ‘McDonaldized’ pseudo-culture (see Rorty, 1998).

You might retort that nationalism has also produced a lot of evil. But nationalism should not be judged by the excesses of some nationalists. Here is a formulation from Schnapper: “Once a political order is organized by nations, wars become national. This does not mean that the national principle as such is responsible for outbursts of conflict. When political order is organized in nations, wars are national; while if grounded in dynastic religious or imperial principles, wars are dynastic, religious, or imperial” (Schnapper, 1994, 12-13 [my translation]). Of course, she does not mean ethno-nation, but we can extend her point to ethno-nations as well. Indeed, very often, nationalism is innocent and its excesses are a natural reaction to the utmost oppression. Also, as Gellner has pointed out, once a community achieves the status of a nation-state, the initial excesses tend to disappear; they are just ugly excrescences, not essential to nationalism. The overall track record of nationalism is very successful and promising.

**PROMISES, PROMISES**

2 Let me pass directly to criticism. The most general consideration against the nationalist in this context is Gellner’s reminder about overcrowding, which we discussed in chapter five on self-determination. Nationalist policies cannot be generalized and used in the long run because there is a natural limit to their viability. Remember, our even-handed nationalist is proposing his principles as generally valid and obligatory; if a proposal is impossible to actualize, it cannot be morally binding. If it is known to be impossible it should not be seriously proposed and advertised by political thinkers.

3 Consider now the particular points made by our nationalist. As regards the first—two hundred years of alleged success—it is not clear that the successful formation of national states has been achieved by means that are themselves morally in the clear. Some of the most politically successful nation-states have been formed by the use of military and police force—including massive massacres, ethnic cleansing, decades of severe oppression—that makes the result a moral failure. In spite of the known facts, nationalist historians have tried to invent explanations designed to preserve the appearance of spontaneous success, as the quotation from Michelet amply shows. Michelet probably knew that
provinces had been conquered by force, “opened” to each other not by friendship but by police oppression, that people in the greater part of France in his own time did not speak French, but various dialects or languages (‘patois’) that had little to do with the “general, universal spirit of the country”, and that the most brutal methods had to be applied to vanquish the “fatality of particular places” and replace it with the unitary, centralized will of the Paris government. It is obvious that such nationalist violence in the service of the creation and preservation of nation-states is not a thing of the past; witness the examples of the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. It is the burden of the nationalist to show that such massive violent episodes are not endemic to nationalism, given that nationalist outbursts take exactly this shape; no proof of innocence has been offered, and we have grave reasons to doubt that such can be offered. Let me quote, as a reminder, the beginning of the summary of the results of nationalist conflict in the former Yugoslavia by Timothy Garton Ash, an impartial and knowledgeable observer:

In the last decade of the twentieth century, this European country has been torn apart. At least 150,000, and perhaps as many as 250,000, men, women and children have died in the process. And how they have died: with their eyes gouged out or their throats cut with rusty knives, women after deliberate ethnic rape, men with their own severed genitalia stuffed into their mouths. More than two million former Yugoslavs have been driven from their homes by other former Yugoslavs, many deprived of everything but what they could carry in precipitous flight. (Garton Ash, 1999)

In short, the violence that often accompanies nationalist uprisings counts heavily against the very idea of nationalism being a moral and political success. To stay for a while with the threatening realities of actual nationalism-in-the-street (as opposed to the sensitive and civilized nationalism of academics), the dream of the homogeneous ethno-national state trumpeted by the usual secessionist propaganda is a tantalizing illusion. Very often, the goal appears very close at hand: one just needs a bit of political will and stamina, and the state will be created in all its sublime purity! Nationalists concentrate their propaganda upon the easy tasks and downplay the difficult ones (ethnically homogeneous Croatia is a much easier project—although still quite costly—than ethnically homogeneous Bosnia, or even ethnically homogeneous regions of Bosnia; however, those aspiring to an ethnic Croatian state knew they would have to come to grips with the difficult problem sooner or later). The tantalizing quality of the goal might be partly responsible for the passion, brutality, and readiness to sacrifice oneself and others required in order to achieve it. (Economists would speak of ‘sunk costs’ in this context: given that so much has already been invested in the task, it is hard to give up, even if the odds seem less and less favorable.)

Consider next the Schnapper argument concerning the permanence of conflicts. It is not valid: from the fact that violence and injustice took non-national forms in a more distant past—for instance, imperial or religious ones—it does not follow that a nation is innocent when they do take national form. The Catholic Church is not innocent in relation to crusades and religious wars, and to claim that ‘the Church as such’ is indeed innocent is to give up dealing with concrete realities in favor of whitewashed abstract ones. Similarly, to claim in relation to nationalistic wars that they have nothing to do with ‘the national as such’ is to postulate an unrealistically abstract item in order to exculpate the existing ones.

What about democracy? In chapter eight we shall raise the principled question about the relationship between democratic and nationalistic principles. Here we shall confine
ourselves to reviewing the historical facts. Do democracy and nationalism go together sufficiently often to warrant the nationalist’s moral optimism? Has nationalism consistently promoted democracy? The alternative reading of the same history would have it differently: in countries which had already sufficiently developed conditions for democracy, capitalist or proto-capitalist economies, educated local elites, and other preconditions for democratic public life, national liberation resulted in a democratic form of government. Countries not satisfying these conditions did not profit from nationalism —on the contrary. To take the best-known example: the history of the first half of the twentieth century in Central and Eastern Europe is the history of quasi-fascist or fascist governments arising from nationalistic outbursts partly causing and partly following the dissolution of multi-ethnic empires. The newly created states in the region are now doing their best to shrug off Western pressure to recognize minority rights, one of the cornerstones of contemporary democracy. (Take the example of Bulgaria: the ruling party, the UDF, and its allies believe that there are no minorities in Bulgaria, while foreign journalists claim that the signing of the Convention for Minorities’ Rights is simply a prerequisite for Bulgaria’s business hopes in Europe.) The activists of minority parties are being arrested, and the parties themselves are considered illegal. The pattern is of course general, and Bulgaria is just following suit. It seems that there is no intrinsic link between nationalism and democracy. The point is often made that the fever of nationalism disappears once a state is created. From Slovenia and Croatia to South Caucasus the same pattern of cooling off is being observed. But is the improvement a result of nationalism? Hardly. The appeal to Gellner’s authority in matters of the disappearance of initial nationalist excesses is not legitimate. Gellner’s overarching point is that the social function of nationalist ideology has little to do with nation, but a lot to do with capitalism, economics, and distribution of power and that therefore the excesses disappear once the nation-state is formed. It cannot therefore be legitimately used to promote nationalist principles as the cornerstone of durable politics.

There is a further problem for the nationalist appealing to the success of the contemporary nation-state. Is it really ethno-national in the sense that interests our nationalist? One could argue that many of the most successful states of the contemporary world are not typically ethno-national: Switzerland and the United States are certainly not a nationalist’s paradise (these are two countries in which it is not even clear what group counts as a nation). Moreover, other successful states that are traditionally bound to a particular culture, say Germany and France, have become culturally pluralistic to the extent that hardly justifies using their example as a paradigm for nationalist policies of any kind.

The further point concerns the worldwide spread of the nation-state as the dominant political form. It should offer the ethno-nationalist no ground for pride, since most states outside Europe and North America are not ethno-national states in his sense, and far less so than the Western countries mentioned in the previous paragraph. In Africa and Asia, the territories of most states typically cut across ethnic boundaries, so that local nationalist writers bitterly complain that the states are a-national or even anti-national (in the relevant sense of ethno-nationality). In Latin America, the nations emerged early and quickly out of artificial territorial divisions, quite in contrast to the usual assumptions of nationalist sociologists about the original and irreducible character of nation.
The thoughtful nationalist should be well aware of a further difficulty that awaits him if he appeals to socio-economic considerations. Average-size nation-states were perhaps ideal in the past, given the necessary resources and means of communication. Note that the model of the world as consisting of closed sovereign states was promoted as the dominant legal model as early as 1648, the year of the Peace of Westphalia. Since those times, both the world economy and the technology of war, industry, and communications have changed drastically. Why should we suppose that the old form is going to be successful in the coming millennium?

The nationalist appeals to the threats of globalization. Consider first the danger from transnational and multinational companies. I agree that the danger is real. But is isolationism the only or the only proper response? Many authors feel that it is not, that global dangers require global democratic control.

What about elitist and assimilationist cultural cosmopolitanism? We shall dedicate a whole chapter to the issue, but here is a quick reminder of a nice example of cosmopolitanism in the arts: the Italian conductor Claudio Abbado, when principal conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, made the orchestra play much more French music—not Italian—than before, especially Ravel, whose preponderant taste was famously for Spanish music. What is wrong with that? Is this really part of an assimilationist aggression? Should only Spanish musicians perform Spanish-sounding music? Should Ravel be censured for his love of a ‘foreign’ tradition? High culture belongs to the world, and it would be barbaric to criticize it for that. (I shall expand upon this and the following point in the final chapter of the book.) Consider now the bland, ‘McDonaldized’ pseudo-culture. Compare it with national mass ‘culture’: say a McDonald’s restaurant with a Bavarian Bierstube, and soap operas with the savage customs often accompanying important football matches in the UK, Italy, and Croatia. For my part, I prefer soap opera and Disney to the bloody fights of nationalistic football fans. All in all, alleged successes appear to be rather thin on the ground. The moral failures of nationalism in this century seem to have been much more serious than its successes, and its promise does not look much better.

This ends our all too brief discussion of the more narrowly political arguments in favor of the nationalist program. We started with the line that most often comes to mind when speaking of new nations, that is, the appeal to the right of self-determination. The right has been enshrined in important documents of the international community, but only under rather strict conditions. It turns out that it is not of much help to the nationalist in its general form. Next, we considered its most plausible sub-variant, that is, the right to collective self-defense in the context of ongoing injustice. There it did sound justified, but on non-nationalistic grounds, those of liberty and equality. On the factual side, again, it seems that the members of a given group are probably going to be ready to struggle for a separate nation-state mostly in situations of general discrimination and of serious threat, where exactly such non-nationalistic considerations justify their struggle. Finally, justification is made in terms of the lesser evil: secession is a remedy and nothing more. It cures the nationalist evil (on the aggressor’s side) with a nationalist response (on the side of the victim); a prevention of nationalist excesses would in general be a much better solution, if obtainable. Finally, we considered the claims of nationalists concerning the spectacular historical successes of their program, coupled with promises that success will stay with them. It turned out that these reasons might appear persuasive at first glance, but they do not really hold water.
NOTES

1. The point seems obvious. Still, one hears reactions to particular nationalisms—for instance, from feminist activists—which implicitly deny it. Here is a typical expression of wonder occasioned by the dissolution of Yugoslavia: “Why were Croatian mothers who lost their children in war still voting for the nationalist government? Why were they not showing more solidarity with Serbian mothers in the same kind of situations than with the nationalist army officers who were partially guilty of their loss?” The question has a certain psychological plausibility, but the political answer is clear: the solidarity of grief between mothers on the opposing sides of the divide in a nationalist war has no relevance in determining the shape of a political, state-like community to which they can possibly aspire to belong.

2. It is used by many anti-nationalists (most prominently by Buchanan [1991, 329]).
Chapter eight. Does nationalism support liberal-democratic values?

A SOURCE OF DEMOCRATIC ENERGY

Let us now pass to the morally most important claims, concerning the liberal-democratic credentials of nationalism. They center around the idea that nationalism is successful in helping to promote basic liberal-democratic values. Here is the nationalist’s line.

The critics of nationalist ties sometimes think that they are a lamentable phenomenon, to be checked and controlled by liberal-democratic institutions. An ad hoc liberal-nationalist compromise is therefore a possibility, maybe an expedient one, but it is certainly not the best option for the liberal democrat. In contrast to this picture of nationalism as a danger to be kept under control, I want to suggest a very different metaphor: nationalist sentiment as a source of energy that can be harnessed for liberal-democratic aims—a ‘battery’, to use M. Canovan’s metaphor. I want moreover to point out that it is perhaps the only such source available at the present time, and the liberal democrat would do well to use it. Let me start by assuming that the central liberal-democratic values are social justice, democracy, and freedom.

Let us take justice first. Liberal justice requires at a minimum some equality of opportunity, and is usually also taken to include a degree of protection for the welfare of the worst-off citizens. The implementation of these sub-goals requires several conditions. One of the most important is a degree of solidarity: the better-off members of society are required to accept principles and practices of redistribution that take away some of their wealth and channel it towards satisfying the needs of the poor. Human solidarity is a limited resource, especially durable solidarity with more distant human beings, not personally known nor in any simple way related to the person exercising such solidarity. “We are experiencing these days a weakening of civic ties”, writes Schnapper (1994, 11 [my translation]). There is an elegant way for the liberal democrat to solve this problem, one which has proved itself in the recent past: ethno-national solidarity is a powerful motive for more egalitarian distribution of wealth. The British philosopher D. Miller argues that the functioning of the welfare state presupposes that its “members recognize
such obligations of justice to one another”, and that “national communities are indeed of this kind” (Miller, 1995, 93). He is joined in these matters by his colleagues N. McCormick, K. Nielsen, and, to some extent, R. Rorty, who in his recent book Achieving Our Nation enjoins the Left to take the path of national(istic) solidarity. In short, nation-states centered around particular communities of language offer a promise of a more just society, and should appeal to leftist liberals, not just to more conservative and traditionalist liberals.

This liberal-democratic potential of nationalism seems to bear testimony to the existence of a close link between love of nation and love of justice. Montesquieu famously identified the love of one’s country with the love of its just laws; his insight was prophetic, and is of the utmost importance for contemporary politics.

Nationalism serves democracy as well. To start with, it is itself democratic. As J. Couture puts it, her liberal nationalism:

sees the nation as forming a society committed to the freedoms and rights characteristically granted in liberal constitutional democracies and affording all its members equal democratic rights and freedoms. What is nationalist in liberal nationalism is that it sees such a liberal society as a society whose members are sharing—or wanting to share—in a common culture, language, history, self-perception, institutions, and some collective projects for their society, including the project to secure (or to gain) political sovereignty. (Couture, 2000, 263)

Even the minimal effort needed for the functioning of democracy—the effort required in casting one’s vote—requires some motivation. The feeling of belonging to a community guarantees such a motivation. A minimally successful democracy also demands a measure of trust: when my party loses, I have to trust that the new winners will play by the rules; otherwise, it would be more rational to break the rules first and simply refuse to turn over power. Trust, however, is a relatively rare commodity (like solidarity).

Trust in co-nationals is a well-documented phenomenon. Trust is equally important for the functioning of a richer sort of democracy, one based upon the common deliberation of citizens. Again, you have to conduct the deliberation in a particular language: language barriers are barriers to democratic deliberation. They might not be insurmountable, but they exercise considerable pressure upon the extent and quality of deliberation.

Finally, national belonging is important for democratic freedom, and for two reasons: first, it provides the context of choice in the form of a repertory of meaningful options; secondly, it secures vital self-respect. As regards the first, a rich national culture should offer various traditions and patterns of life which its members know first-hand and understand from within. This palette of possibilities is an essential prerequisite for free choice, since in its absence there are no meaningful, fully understood options from which a citizen can choose. The second reason has to do with our need for recognition: being recognized as a member of a nation is essential for individual self-respect. Equally, if one is discriminated against because of one’s national belonging the result is especially dramatic, since national belonging has such a wide range of consequences and ramifications.

In conclusion, let me return to the metaphor of the energy source. We have seen that nationalism has served liberal-democratic purposes well. There might be other sources, but why not trust the one that has proved reliable in the past? It is not wise to throw the battery away before you are certain there are alternative energy sources. End of the nationalist’s case.
How should we assess the battery metaphor? There is an element of truth in it: nationalism does energize its followers. The issue is: in what direction? To start with, some of the most energetic nationalisms have been authoritarian, or straightforwardly fascist. Indeed, nationalism has sometimes been the only source of energy for otherwise completely intolerable regimes and arrangements: without nationalism, Milosevic would not have had a chance of taking power in Serbia. A more balanced conclusion would be that nationalism does provide a source of energy, but a very dangerous one. It is more like a nuclear reactor than a battery, and nationalist Chernobyls have been many and varied. Worse, by seriously deploying the metaphor the nationalist almost explicitly admits that there is nothing inherently liberal-democratic about nationalism: it supplies the force, whereas the direction of the movement is determined by other factors. To stay with the notion’s most prominent proponents, neither Miller nor Kymlicka are prepared to admit this; in their eyes, nationalism is intrinsically liberal-democratic. But they owe us a serious account of why it is so easy to harness nationalist energy for authoritarian purposes, something which in their view should be contrary to its natural course (not to say its very essence, since Kymlicka refuses to believe that there is an essence of nationalism). The issue can be made even more dramatic. Suppose one argued that harnessing nationalism for liberal purposes has often been at best a half success: liberal ideals have often got lost in the turmoil of nationalist conflicts. (And important victories of democratic liberal solidarity and justice have been won by somewhat leftist, non-nationalist movements, and in situations in which a nationalistic agenda did not occupy center stage.) One may continue by showing that harnessing them for authoritarian purposes has been historically much easier. Authoritarian political programs usually did not lose anything by being aligned with nationalism—on the contrary, they only gained in impetus. In short, nationalism mixes better with authoritarianism than with liberal democratic principles. I am not claiming that I can present such an argument in any detail, only that it seems plausible in its general outlines.

Let me illustrate. Does a love of one’s people and country lead to social solidarity and encourage a more egalitarian distribution, as Miller, McCormick, and Nielsen would have it? Here is a rough test: if nationalism leads to egalitarianism, then the more radically nationalist a political system is, the more egalitarian it should be, and the more solidarity it should produce. Take the extreme Right and radically nationalist fascist regimes: were they egalitarian and did they foster genuine social solidarity? Not at all; they offer the disgusting show of rich and all-powerful elites, wallowing in wealth, while millions of people suffer the utmost deprivation. Not only this: such regimes have sought to destroy the very tissue of social solidarity wherever they have come to power. To turn to the next test, in communist countries egalitarianism was preached, if not practiced, so people were well acquainted with its principles. The question is, are the newly formed post-socialist states in which nationalists have gained power conspicuous for their solidarity, equality, and social justice? On the contrary, in these countries nationalism provides merely a smoke screen for a very unjust redistribution of wealth. Take again the example of extreme nationalism in the former Yugoslav countries: this was accompanied by extreme social injustice. As T. Garton Ash puts it in the article quoted in chapter seven: “[a] few people have grown rich, mainly war profiteers, gangsters and politicians—the
three being sometimes hard to distinguish” (Garton Ash, 1999). Almost everybody else became dramatically worse off than before the nationalist outbreaks.

12 Why is this so? There is no direct link between nationalism and greed, so whence the correlation? My modest proposal is that the link is indirect: by overstressing just one narrow set of goals—those having to do with ethno-national independence—and by legitimizing rather extreme means, nationalism, once it has been enthusiastically accepted, makes the general public dramatically insensitive to most other social issues. In some post-socialist countries large minorities have been routinely deprived of their citizen’s rights in order to secure the space for nationalist policies accepted by the majority. I would expect that such massive injustice on nationalistic grounds numbs the sense of justice and of social solidarity: if you can expel all Serbs from a school, or deny all Russians in the town the right to vote, or deny Albanian women in Kosovo the right to health-care, why bother about seemingly minor infringements of civil rights within the ethnic community?

13 As far as the elites are concerned, in contrast to the general public, one might surmise that they are from the outset to a large extent motivated by the wish to attain scarce positional goods. Such a motivation does not prepare one well for the exercise of solidarity. The countries in question have ended up with a combination of a desensitized general public and cynical elites. Once social solidarity goes overboard, the space is clear for introducing dramatic inequalities and for plundering the country—as has apparently been happening in Albania, Serbia, and some former Soviet republics—under the aegis of national unity and pride.

14 A similar argument can be developed about trust. Basing trust on ethno-national belonging implies allowing for, and perhaps even enjoining, distrust for those who do not belong to the same ethno-nation.

15 The pro-nationalist thinker might retreat to a very thin conception of nationality, the way Kymlicka does in his ‘Western Political Theory and Ethnic Relations in Eastern Europe’ (to appear in a collection of papers published by Oxford University Press). Here is the picture he proposes. Western liberal democracies have gone for a ‘thin’ nation building. Typically, such democracies are multinational, with one majoritarian nation. The glue that holds the majoritarian nation together is the unity of language and institutions, not origin, customs, or religion. (This makes the relevant concept of nationality very thin.) The same should be valid, at least in the ideal case, for the minoritarian ‘nation’ within the state. Call a ‘nation’ in this sense a ‘thin-nation’. In this picture, solidarity and trust most strongly bind together members of each thin-nation, both minoritarian and majoritarian, and this is where the actual democratic process takes place. Central—for instance, federal—politics is conducted by elites and is less actively democratic. The origin of trust and solidarity is the feeling of belonging grounded mainly upon common language and thin national, not central—say, federal—institutions.

16 A minor and theoretical problem for such a view is social-psychological: why would solidarity and trust reside specifically in this one combination of traits, language, and local institutions, and not in others, apparently equally attractive? Here is an illustration which Kymlicka presented at a lecture in Budapest. He described the feelings of active solidarity of an English-speaking middle-class Canadian (himself, in fact) with poor fishermen on the other side of Canada, as contrasted with a lack of solidarity with poor and unemployed former steel workers in neighboring US industrial towns. A Canadian fisherman is ‘one of us’, he claimed, while a US worker is not. I assume such a person
might feel just as much solidarity with his compatriots who happen to be French-speaking, poor Quebecois fishermen. In that case, being ‘one of us’ is just being a Canadian citizen, not a member of the Quebecois ‘thin-nation’. Equally, since language is the only trait that remains from the ethno-national arsenal in the new picture, one should, on nationalistic grounds, expect the person to feel solidarity with the US workers, who speak the same language. If this does not happen, we must ask why. In short, it offers a telling example of a situation in which language and institutions point in opposite directions: language and linguistic belonging to the US, institutional belonging to Canada. Solidarity seems to go the institutional way—indeed, the way of belonging to federal, non-national institutions—against the prediction of the nationalist.

A major practical problem is the distribution and balance of trust versus mistrust (as well as of solidarity vs. non-solidarity) within the same multicultural state. Remember that in our liberal-democratic nationalist’s picture trust is reserved for in-group members (that is, those belonging to the same cultural group or ‘thin-nation’, say Quebecois) and mistrust for all other groups within the same state (say, English-speaking Canadians). The same goes for solidarity. How is a liberal-democratic state politics to be conducted? Why do people vote for the central government, and why do they trust it? Would anyone, in this view, ever accept the central redistribution needed for a balanced welfare state? In Kymlicka’s official picture the problem is hidden behind the use of the phrase ‘nation building’: since the phrase otherwise commonly refers to the building of nation-states (for example, the UK, Canada, the US, Spain), one is apt to forget that in his use what is here being built are sub-state institutions of sub-state nations, both majoritarian and minoritarian (for example, Scottish, British, and Quebecois institutions). To switch to the British example, why, for instance, would Scots ever participate in the central institutions of the United Kingdom or express solidarity with British workers belonging to a different system of sub-state institutions? This presents a dilemma for the aspiring liberal-democratic nationalist. On the one hand, he can reserve trust and solidarity for one group to the exclusion of others (or at least assume a very unequal distribution of the two across the groups, say a lot of trust for fellow Scots, and very little for the English). In this case, the common state threatens to become ungovernable, at least on liberal-democratic principles. Instead of having a liberal-democratic multicultural state, he will have a non-state fragmented into isolated cultural communities, each aspiring ultimately to secede.

This problem leads the aspiring liberal-democratic nationalist to the other horn of the dilemma. To illustrate this with a prominent example, it seems to be one motivating reason for D. Miller’s variant of the pro-nationalist argument: he proposes to take as the national unit just the nation-state, in his examples the ‘British nation’, as opposed to English and Scottish communities, which he refuses to dignify with the title of nation. This, however, makes his ‘nationalism’ a very cold and artificial one, at least in the usual nationalist view, since it seems to be based crucially upon common public institutions. Even worse, it risks becoming circular: common institutions are pictured as requiring antecedent trust and solidarity in order to function well; but where do these antecedent goods come from, if trust and solidarity are in their turn to be based upon institutions they are expected to establish and support? To reiterate, this is the advice characterizing the other horn of the dilemma: base trust and solidarity on the commonality of institutions. Then, any institutional arrangement based on general—that is, non-nationalistic principles of justice—will generate the required trust and solidarity, and the result has nothing nationalistic, not even nation-centered about it. Either one has distrust
and lack of solidarity within a state, or one has trust and solidarity that go way beyond the boundaries of a narrowly defined nation, and require a redefinition of ‘nation’ in purely institutional, non-nationalist terms.

Classical nationalism has famously avoided the dilemma by demanding that the boundaries of a state should coincide with the boundaries of a culture: all the Lavinians should live in one state. The soft, multicultural, liberal-democratic new nationalism has no such option. The dialectics of the debate seems to lead its advocates, if they want to remain serious liberal democrats, to embrace the second horn of the dilemma: tie trust and solidarity to institutions and common constitutional arrangements that have little or nothing to do with a nationalist agenda. But they should be more clear-sighted and view this as the first and most important step to a more flexible, perhaps ultimately cosmopolitan notion of citizenship.

The arguments for the importance of national belonging for democratic freedom are hard to judge before embarking upon an extended review of the concepts of culture involved in the debate. Still, it should be noted that all meaningful, well-understood ways of life do not depend on tradition in the way the nationalist would have them do. To give an example, for thirty years successive generations of young people in various Western and Central European countries have followed a way of life determined by participation in a pop culture totally unrelated to any national tradition of their own: do the Beatles or the Rolling Stones belong to the national cultures of Germany, Hungary, or Croatia? If the nationalist says no, I agree with him, but then he must accept that the choice of pop culture is meaningful for generations of young people, well understood by them, and a way of life from outside the national culture (as is the way of life of a computer geek or of a local Buddhist in Berlin or Ljubljana). Alternatively, the nationalist can accept the consequences and agree that, in his sense, both the music of the Beatles and Buddhism are part of, say, Croatian national culture. But if the Beatles and Buddhism qualify, everything does.

As far as self-respect goes, the argument is partly question-begging: people resent being despised for their national belonging because life is, in many states, organized around national belonging; their sensitivity might be a reason not to organize it that way. Given that many countries are organized around national belonging, one wise policy would be two-pronged: first, to protect each individual’s national belonging from immediate threats, and secondly, to lower the level of importance of national belonging. This is the policy that has been applied to races in the West: one makes certain that, say, Asians are not despised for their race, but at the same time one refuses to organize the life of the nation around racial belonging.

Here is a question that has been somewhat neglected by political scientists, and which is directly relevant to the issue of the link between nationalism and democracy. One of the distinctive features which separate nationalism from its universalistic competitors (say, liberalism or socialism) are two principles of priority. First, the issue of belonging—that is, who belongs to a given community—is politically more important than that of the manner in which the community is being governed (that is, the issue of its political constitution). Secondly, non-voluntary belonging is essential in contrast to the chosen, voluntary kind. In which situation is it rational to accept this order of business, rather than the reverse? Consider the first principle. Imagine a large, mixed community encompassing three ethnic groups A, B, and C. Concentrate upon so-called positional goods, for example, social and economic status. Positional goods are in principle scarce (if
James is first, Steve cannot be first as well). Therefore, members of each group may always be tempted to create a situation in which their own ethnic state would offer positional goods for them only, in quantities not available within the larger community (this kind of analysis was famously proposed by C. Hardin [1985]). The temptation for the members of group A will typically increase in the following situations: a general decline in standards of living encourages individuals to try to climb the social ladder in order to compensate their losses. (This condition was satisfied in the former Yugoslavia after the death of Tito when a general economic crisis brought economic growth to a halt.) Next, due to better initial endowments, the members of groups B and C have more chance of succeeding in the situation of unlimited competition. (It can be argued that this was the situation with Slovenia and Croatia in relation to Serbia in the 1980s: they were economically better positioned and poised for victory in economic competition.) Finally, the condition for winning at the expense of B and C is to deny them access to the political mechanisms of government. (Again, Serbia had better control of the army, the police, and the state administration.) In short, a decision in favor of nationalism and of two priorities (belonging over the constitution, and non-voluntary belonging over the voluntary kind) might become rational—at least in the short term—in situations in which the struggle for change in the internal constitution promises fewer benefits to the group in question than a restructuring (enlargement or narrowing down) of the limits of community. (In the case of Serbia, Milosevic played the card of demographic spread—all Serbs should live in one state—and of control of the army, and won the hearts of his electorate.) This kind of analysis, if correct, would show that nationalism has intrinsically little to do with democracy, which is more concerned with the (internal) constitution of a community than with the external limits of belonging (its relevance can be extended to these issues as well, but it is not the primary topic of democratic concern). I am not claiming that the analysis is correct (although it is my favorite option), but only that it is plausible. Unless the nationalist has a better one, he should not assume that his stance is particularly democratic: on the contrary.

NOTES

1. I rely on Kymlicka’s excellent presentation of this cluster of claims in his lectures at the Central European University, February 2000.
Chapter nine. Political alternatives to nationalism

1 We have reviewed the typical political arguments for nationalism. It is time for a provisional conclusion before we move on to the cultural arguments. The realities of nationalist conflicts usually take the following dialectical form (which we have already encountered and discussed in terms of the so-called homeopathic justification of nationalism). A large ethno-cultural group, call it A, starts building an ethno-culturally based political unit. In doing this it uses typical nationalist reasons, justifications, and methods. This annoys another group, B, situated at least partly on the same territory. The B group responds to A-centered nationalism with its own B-centered nationalism. The claims of B seem justified in terms of group and individual self-defense against the backdrop of A-centered nationalism. But there might also be a minority C within the B region, which will resent B-centered nationalism, the same way the B people resent that of the A group. A straightforwardly catastrophic result of this escalation would be a war between A and B. A more civilized solution is a compromise: both groups engage in some kind of political institutionalizing of their group identities. The A majority goes for a ‘soft’ nation building, granting to the B group substantial group rights: it lessens its pressure, accepts the speaking of B language on predominantly B territory, does not cut the territory so as to deprive B members of a majority in their own homeland, allows or even sponsors schools and public media in the B language, and grants a measure of home rule for the B group. A compromise solution has to be implemented.

2 As already mentioned, one has to distinguish at least between traditional nation-states which might wish to either retain or renounce a part of their sovereignty to transnational bodies (say, France and Germany in relation to the EU), relatively new nation-states (Slovenia, Croatia), aspiring groups (Kurds) which are in dire need, and finally, less urgent candidates (Flemish, Quebecois). Given the difficulty of situations like that of the Kurds, one would do well to heed their demands for security and survival by whatever means; there is no time to work out sophisticated alternatives. For every other type a search is in order, without guarantee that a single solution would be best for all. Still, we may identify some general constraints upon alternatives that result from our discussion of nationalism.
In discussing the argument from self-defense we implicitly relied upon a number of constraints that should govern any such solution. First, people normally prefer to identify themselves with what they see as positive traits (this is part of the understandable optimism of our inner make-up); it is a rather tragic fate to have to identify with a trait one finds worthless or despicable. Secondly, if a certain non-voluntary trait obviously and persistently plays a significant role in one’s life, it is impossible not to acknowledge it as one’s own, not to accept its consequences for oneself, and in this sense not to identify with it. Thirdly, actual belonging to a given category (prominently race, gender, ethnic origin) is often non-voluntary. If such belonging is at the same time socially devalued and treated as a significant negative trait of the person bearing it, the person will most often be forced to identify with it and bear the consequences; at worst, the person will internalize the social judgment and find the trait worthless or despicable themselves. This links the compromise project with issues of dignity and recognition, that is, with the demand that belonging to a given category should not clash with a person’s self-respect. Non-voluntary belonging should be socially recognized and not devalued. At the minimum, one should not unjustifiably be put in a position of having to be ashamed of one’s objective belonging to a given social category, that is, one should be enabled to carry the trait in question with dignity. At a more than minimal level, one should be able to cherish, care for, and develop the elements of one’s belonging if one chooses to, provided the identification does not clash with general moral requirements. Equally, one should be free not to identify with such a belonging, to take it as an accidental and limiting trait, without incurring any negative political consequences. The minimal requirement is non-discrimination, which basically has to do with the value of equality. The more than minimal desideratum concerns opportunities to develop one’s identifications in a free and spontaneous manner (both in the positive direction of acceptance of what is given or negative in the sense of the right to exit) and derives from the value of liberty. The compromise, if successful, will uphold these liberal values.

Any compromise solution respecting the principles listed is already an important alternative to classical nationalism, and a counterexample to the claim that the borders of a state should coincide with the borders of the ethno-nation or of a ‘culture’. Contemporary liberal-democratic states, however, go much further. Let me use the description of Will Kymlicka, who is sympathetic to nationalism, and certainly cannot be accused of a bias against it. In his analysis there are at least nine points that characterize liberal nation building (Kymlicka, 1999, 40-45) all resulting in a kind of multicultural compromise. Note, however, that the term ‘nation building’ in his parlance has a meaning slightly different from the usual: it does not refer so much to state building, but rather focuses on the building of sub-statist institutions within a multinational democracy, with one majoritarian nation. There is a majoritarian nation building (say, the British one in the UK), as well as the minoritarian one (say, Scottish in the same case) within the state. Since Kymlicka himself speaks of a ‘thin’ nation building, meaning the building of a nation in a ‘thin’ sense (see chapter eight), I will use his expression and speak of ‘thin nation building’, implying that it is a liberal way of building institutional arrangements and thereby a society. Here are the main differences between such a process and the illiberal building of a nation in a ‘thick’ sense.

First, the level of coercion used to promote a common national identity is low: “Liberal states impose fewer penalties or disadvantages on those who remain outside the dominant national group.” Secondly, liberal states have a more restricted conception of
the public space within which the majoritarian national identity can be expressed. Thirdly, they allow propaganda against nation building, and even tolerate propaganda for secession. Fourthly, they have a definition of membership of the nation that is not restricted to those of a particular race, ethnicity, or religion. Fifthly, national identity reduces to a very thin notion; in order to acquire one, the candidate just has to learn the language, participate in common public institutions, and perhaps express a commitment to the long-term survival of this thin-national community. It is not the community of custom or ethnicity, just of language and institutions. Sixthly, the value of nation is strictly instrumental, to be measured by the goods it provides for the individual. Nations are means for an individual’s flourishing. Seventhly, “national cultures become more ‘cosmopolitan’”. Eighthly, liberal nations are inclusive, all the way to admitting dual loyalties and dual citizenship. Ninthly, liberal states publicly recognize “those national minorities which consistently and democratically insist upon their national distinctiveness”. Taken together, these points delineate a kind of multicultural compromise which is nowadays a rather widespread solution to nationalist conflicts, perhaps the most viable one in situations of nationalist tension. The resulting state is, by supposition, a liberal-democratic state.

The model proposed certainly clashes with classical nationalist views. Consider the ‘thinning’ advocated in the nine points. Start from the ‘thin’ idea of national identity: it retains only the language from the classical nationalist arsenal. Note, however, that in virtue of the instrumentalist approach (from point six) even this feature is to be appreciated only for its practical value or for the sentimental value it has for some members of the culture. The rest of the ‘thick’ conception is gone: no purity of culture, no obligation to uphold common traditional customs, no specific set of national values to uphold. With the introduction of a ‘more cosmopolitan’ culture the last remnants of the traditional image are gone. Traditionally, one of the main functions of the nation-state is to promote the given ethno-national culture in its rich, thick, and allegedly pure form, far beyond the mere preservation of a language. Here, by contrast, we have a principled cosmopolitan opening towards other cultures, coupled with tolerance for diverse customs and religions, allowing one to become a member of a majoritarian ‘thin’ nation (say, English) in spite of retaining quite atypical traditional beliefs from a completely different culture (say, Shiite Muslim). The resulting project is merely a combination of linguistic belonging and institutional loyalty.

Let me explain. The citizen of a given state will typically belong either to the minority or to the majority group (sub-statal ‘nation’). His or her belonging will rest upon three tiers: first, the language he or she speaks, and only language will tend to put him or her into one of the groups. Once his or her linguistic belonging is determined (probably by early socialization, but in the case of an emigrant, simply by mastering a language), he or she is ready for the second tier, that is, participation in sub-statal institutions of his or her group. For instance, he or she can be a linguistic Catalan, loyal to the ‘Generalität’, the provincial government of Catalonia. Finally, he or she also accepts the institutions of the central state, in this case, Spain. The first tier accounts for a kind of linguistic patriotism, the next two for an institution-centered, constitutional one. The resulting attitude is a hybrid ‘linguistic-constitutional patriotism’.

Strangely enough, Kymlicka himself sometimes likes to describe the project as “liberal nationalist”. However, one wonders whether the label of ‘nationalism’ applied to such a linguistic-constitutional compromise is any more than empty rhetoric. Of course,
everyone has a right to call his or her view ‘nationalist’, but the continuity with what have been the paradigmatic nationalisms in the West seems to be lost in the new picture. (Kymlicka apparently accepts that one should grant thin national rights on non-nationalistic grounds, such as the democratic will of the people and the like. A detailed discussion of his interesting and original view would demand much more space than we can allow it here, however.)

9 Since our main interest is in viable alternatives to nationalism, we have to go further and explore the possibilities of making the project still less tied to ethno-national belonging. The project is multiculturalist, but of what sort? In order to gain a proper perspective, we need a finer distinction. A multi-ethnic state can be ‘multicultural’ in various ways, depending on its stance towards the diversity of cultures it encompasses. It can passively tolerate a plurality of mutually isolated cultures (like the ‘millet’ system in the Ottoman Empire), or even actively promote their isolation, by passing restrictive laws (children of A parents must go to A schools, the state-sponsored media should be monolingual in each particular region, and so on). Alternatively, it can passively tolerate intercultural penetrations, or even encourage them (A children should learn the rudiments of the B language in school, and vice versa, multilingual media should be encouraged and perhaps financed). Let me set aside the options in which the state is passive, since we are interested in what values should be actively promoted, not just tolerated. This leaves two options. Call the option in which various communities interact with the blessing and support of the state ‘open multiculturalism’, and the model in which they are isolated from each other, also with the blessing of the state, ‘closed multiculturalism’.

10 What direction should a viable alternative to nationalism take? Remember that one of its important functions is preventing aggressive nationalist outbursts. Such multiculturalist prevention must rely upon the existence of some sort of understanding between ethnically and culturally diverse groups. This is not unrealistic. After all, in most contemporary liberal democracies ordinary people of different ethnic backgrounds live together, interact closely, and occasionally intensely, without spontaneously and insistently demanding to be separated. Such cohabitation diminishes the natural fear and suspicion of what is ‘foreign’. Fear and suspicion are the prime movers of mutual distrust. Also, it teaches individuals to recognize the common humanity under the guise of variation and difference; recognition that is itself of intrinsic moral value. The very fact of cohabitation is a good to be upheld, contrary to what is often implied in the pro-nationalist apologies of secession which create the impression of a permanent state of alert: various national communities are depicted as constantly ‘celebrating their diversity’ and potentially or actually demanding a sovereign state; those which do not are implicitly depicted as being not sufficiently self-conscious. Outbursts of minority demands for separation are not spontaneous expressions of a permanent and natural
yearning, but most often the result of the failure of the majority to provide genuinely equal conditions for the members of the minority, and of estrangement due to this imposed, unwilled isolation of the minority.

Let me end this chapter with a further widening of our theme. Contemporary liberal-democratic states tend to enter wider alliances. If our compromise model-state is situated in Western Europe (imagine that it is, for instance, Spain) it will also be a member of the European Union. Its borders will be open to the citizens of other member states; its economic policies will partly depend on the economic situation of the larger whole; its linguistic policies will have to take into account the needs of communication within the same larger whole; and so on. Besides accepting international jurisdiction in respect of basic principles like human rights, it might also accept it in much more specific issues.

What about the threat of globalization, our nationalist might ask? Global threats demand a global response. Unless states are well coordinated, they will never be able to deal with emergencies affecting the global market, for instance. Coordination leads to extended cooperation and interdependence, and might finally point in a truly cosmopolitan direction (for more on this see Held, 1995).

If, on the other hand, our model-state is situated somewhere in the East, from Eastern Europe to Asia, it will have a different but analogous motivation for opening up. Here minorities typically have their kin-states, often bordering the majority state. In situations of tension the mechanisms of mistrust tend to shift into top gear: the minority is seen as disloyal to the majority state and as supporting its kin-state (for instance, Kosovar Albanians are seen by Serbs as supporting Albania against Serbia). The minority responds by distrusting its majoritarian compatriots and the state, and is consequently forced to rely on its kin-state: the self-fulfilling prophecy that members of the minority will become traitors is thus taken to justify the distrustful majority. Unless such a spiraling of distrust is prevented, our model-state is doomed to failure. The obvious path is inter-regional cooperation, with minorities acting as a bridge between their host-state and their kin-state, and being also perceived and recognized in such a mediating role. The final result would then hopefully be analogous to the development described in the preceding paragraph. The state building in the model depends for its success on softening the borders between states, on recognizing regional interdependencies and multiple loyalties—solidarities.

Viewed in the proper context of international interdependence, alliances, and limits on sovereignty, the policy proposed in the model looks more like nation deconstructing than nation building. Not only is the internal boundary between the institutional affirmation of a particular national culture and the setting of a neutral pluralist framework in practice being blurred, but the external frontier defining the nation as a unit is becoming more and more open.

Of course, this is just a very rough sketch. It is not meant as more than a reminder of various alternatives to nationalist proposals, which have been worked out and to some extent tested, as well as those that have yet to be worked out.

Let us briefly mention the matters of principle. What is the proper moral underpinning of such a compromise multicultural state and a prospective system of similar states? It cannot reside in exclusive affirmation of any particular ethno-national identity. Of course, a pragmatic nationalist might try to have it both ways: he might claim that the proper moral value resides in such an affirmation, whereas the moderate, compromise-
oriented framework is valuable only insofar as it permits such an affirmation. But this is compatible with neither the international framework nor the spirit of compromise: for a serious nationalist who believes that only the exclusive affirmation of national identity has a moral value in politics, the compromise is unacceptable anyway, except as a temporary modus vivendi. The serious justification of open multiculturalism must appeal to values of conviviality and mutual understanding, which go beyond ethnic ties, as far as the ultimate ground that makes the compromise morally worthy is concerned. The only viewpoint from which such an ultimate justification is to be undertaken is itself substantially universalist.

18 It seems that the dialectics of the debate has led us towards a more cosmopolitan solution, which is still respectful of group belonging. The nationalist will question the viability of any such model. Most pro-nationalist theoreticians are aware that the battle is not to be won on narrowly political ground. In recent times the tide has been turning towards cultural matters; the best authors build their case for nationalism upon culture-oriented arguments. In their view, the morality of self-determination, the right and duty to create one’s own state, depend upon the value of national culture. To this central group of arguments we now turn.
Part Two. Identity, Culture, And Tradition
In the nineteenth century, nationalist thinkers frequently used concepts such as ‘the spirit of a people’ and ‘collective mentality’, portraying nations as entities in their own right, independent of the individuals who happened to belong to them. Individuals were presented as dependent products of their respective national communities, where ‘national’ was often construed very broadly, so that all Germanic or all Slavic communities counted as Germanic or Slav nations respectively. Contemporary nationalists know better. They do not use the rhetoric of the ‘spirit of the people’ in serious discussion. They nevertheless wish to maintain that national communities are valuable as such, just because they are what they are and therefore should be preserved in a recognizable form. In this way, they tie the issues we discussed in chapters seven, eight, and nine to the notion of the value of community. The question is then how they can consistently do so without appealing to antiquated notions. The answer has been found in appeals to culture, and the moral value culture might have. The issue of ‘spirit’ is replaced by that of ‘culture’ and ‘value’. The best authors most often start from the value of a national culture, and then proceed to the duties that follow from it. They typically present the whole of cultural life in terms of its recognizable ethno-cultural traits, and later in this chapter we shall debate whether such a picture is correct. The appeal to national culture and its value forms the general framework for particular lines of thought that we shall try to disentangle and then critically discuss in this section of the book. Remember that our nationalist is quite demanding towards members of each national community, but at the same time non-invidious in the sense of making the same demands of every nation. I shall ultimately claim that the nationalist’s misplaced concern for culture can be and often is deleterious for the very culture it professes to protect.

Before passing to the argument proper let me point to the dialectics of the actual debate. If I may judge by the reaction of various academic audiences, many intellectuals of the leftist-liberal persuasion endorse a kind of tolerant anti-imperialist cultural relativism, especially in relation to more distant cultures: to each tribe its own culture and morals! Nationalist cultural arguments go along with this stance and seem to speak to it: what is more acceptable to such a leftist-liberal than to grant each ‘tribe’ its own rights! It is only when one reflects upon the nationalist conclusions that the more ugly and intolerant aspect of the story comes to the fore. I shall be recommending more caution at the
beginning, when the nationalist arguments are being constructed out of apparently acceptable components.

3 We now approach our main topic. First, what is meant by ‘culture’? We can distinguish at least two meanings. The narrow meaning is sometimes captured by the expression ‘high culture’: painting, music, architecture, mainly done by professionals and spread by the education system. Next, there is a wide or general meaning referring to a ‘way of life’, encompassing “customs, ways of doing things, traditions of a society” (De George, 1993, 116). Rorty defines it simply as “a set of shared habits of action, those which enable members of a single human community to get along with each other and with the surrounding environment as well as they do” (Rorty, 1993, 93). The definition leaves out both material items (from tools to clothing, arms, written texts, photos, religious paraphernalia, records, and so on), and mental and other abstract items (thoughts, ideologies, views) that are usually considered to be part of culture in the wide sense, so it should be supplemented, but the intended meaning is clear.

4 Let us recall the terms of the debate concerning, more specifically, national culture. Both parties—the tough but even-handed nationalist and his more liberal and cosmopolitan opponent—agree about the obvious fact that some people enjoy the particular ethno-national aspects of their culture, and concur that in principle everybody should be allowed to do so if they wish. The divergence, however, starts when further questions come to the fore.

5 First, do people have a duty to promote the ethno-national aspects of their culture (or, as the nationalist would put it, their ‘ethno-national culture’)? Preservation and transmission programs can be put to work in various ways. Assuming that there are a number of cultural producers and consumers interested in keeping alive an ethno-national item, an authority (state, university, local community) can decide to let them have a go, and a sponsor (a state, a rich businessman) can decide to actively further their interest. Alternatively, an authority can decide to make this keeping alive mandatory. Distinguish then between free preservation and transmission, and compulsory preservation and transmission. A mark of nationalism is a preference for the latter.

6 Secondly, is love for the ethno-national aspects of one’s culture morally superior to an interest in ‘foreign’ culture, or to cosmopolitan curiosity? Let me detail the issue of patriotic ‘love’. It sounds very fine in its more poetic moments. Shakespeare’s John of Gaunt describes his country as:

This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by Nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war...
(Richard II 2.1.43-45)

He sounds like someone in love, and a gentle one at that. He goes on in the same vein to talk about:

This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea...
(Richard II, 2.1.46-47)

But nationalism is much more than a kind sentimentality. In the same scene, just before Gaunt’s speech, the Duke of York warns against the “venom sound” of fashions in “proud Italy” corrupting English youth, and against habits of “our tardy-apish nation” imitating Italians, all this in the verse form of iambic pentameter borrowed from Italian poets (if Shakespeare was being ironic or naïve here, we shall probably never know). The contrast
between Gaunt’s kind sentiments and the duke’s xenophobia vividly illustrates the contrast between various aspects of nationalism. As mentioned, it is not just a matter of wishing particular national traits as such to continue—say that the Lavinian language be spoken one hundred years hence; the patriotic lover of his own culture usually wants the descendants of Lavinians to speak Lavinian. If other nations start speaking Lavinian, so much the better, but best of all for the glory of the Lavinian nation itself. Many conservative native English speakers even regret the fact that English has become an international language. A famous British philosopher has in conversation described this internationalization to me as a catastrophe. He probably feels deep in his heart that only the descendants of the British should be allowed to speak English. In brief, the nationalist wants the descendants of his or her people to have the traits he or she cherishes. It is an interesting wish. In contrast, most Beethoven fans would like everyone to listen to Beethoven, not particular descendants of particular people. This well-known but still curious feature of patriotic love finds little echo in the extant theoretical literature. Theoreticians, including pro-nationalist philosophers, usually oversimplify and present it as a neutral wish for preservation, which it is not; it is the wish that particular future people, related to particular present people in a particular way, should have the trait in question.

Thirdly, should each state ‘rightfully belong’—at least ideally—to a single ethno-cultural community, and serve the particular culture of this community? Is there anything wrong with culturally neutral states that serve as an umbrella for a pluralistic intermingling of different cultures? Should the ethno-national aspects of a culture (or, as the nationalist would put it, ‘ethno-national cultures’) be kept alive in a pure state by administrative means in order to prevent the ‘interbreeding’ of various cultures, that is, to counteract the pull of macro-regional or even cosmopolitan influences?

To illustrate this last question, take linguistic preservationism and purism. In the countries of the former Yugoslavia, rigid programs of linguistic purism have started on the wave of popular war-time disgust with ‘foreign admixtures’; in Croatia this basically involves words considered to be of Serbian or Turkish origin; the only problem for the nationalists now is to keep the enthusiasm going. This brings us to administrative measures. The philosopher G. Fletcher recently made a case in favor of the right to ‘linguistic self-defense’: languages threatened with extinction should be preserved. Fletcher (1997) points out that only one-tenth of the six thousand actual languages have a chance of surviving into the next century, and calls for measures of self-defense (Fletcher, 1997, 327). But whose fault is it that languages go extinct? Against whose attack should one defend more than five thousand languages, and what is the self in this ‘self-defense’? Most of the languages in question are not being systematically or politically oppressed; rather, older generations of speakers are dying out and the young do not care to keep them going, or languages become so mixed with others as to become unrecognizable (‘creolized’, as the linguists put it). But the nationalist’s defense of the language seems to be legitimizing its rigid preservation, even if its speakers themselves are for the most part unwilling to keep it alive, or—in the case of linguistic purism—if they do not themselves care to keep it ‘pure’. (Young French or Slovenians use American words and expressions taken from pop culture and commercials; the purists want to make them change their habits, although they do not harm anyone in particular.) Now, is the preservationist/purist right?
The nationalist answers all four questions with a resounding ‘yes’; his liberal cosmopolitan opponent with an equally resounding ‘no’. As we suggested at the beginning of this book, the claims of the former center upon the idea that the preservation of a given ethno-national culture—in a relatively pure state—is a good, independent of the will of the members of the culture, which ought to be assured by adequate means. Of course, the ethno-national community has the right in respect of any third party and its own members to have an ethno-national state. Once a national state has been formed, and the dominant ethnic community has established itself as its ‘rightful owner’, it has to guard its full sovereignty. It has a duty to promote the ethno-national culture of its owners, in a recognizable form, defending it from spontaneous mixing with foreign influence. The citizens of the state have the right and obligation to favor their own ethnic culture in relation to any other. (Keep in mind that our nationalist interlocutor is an ‘ideal type’, patched together from bits and pieces culled from the literature.)

Since the writers we shall discuss use the term ‘preservation of national culture’ to describe the activity they recommend, let me discuss it briefly. The term is ambiguous, potentially encompassing both historical preservation in museums of some kind or other, in which given items are indeed preserved and available but most commonly not presented as integrated in the ongoing concerns of a cultural life (the way dead languages, say Latin, are preserved by scholars), and preservation-as-keeping-alive combined with further transmission. The debate concerns mainly the latter, so I shall leave the first out of the discussion.

Let me then, within the preservation-as-keeping-alive option, distinguish between a rigid and a flexible preservation and transmission, together with programs associated with each. The model of rigid preservation and transmission is linguistic purism: the aim of such an endeavor is to transmit and keep alive given cultural items (language, rituals, ceremonies, practices) in original and pure, that is literally the same, form. Flexible preservation and transmission keeps alive and transmits some sufficiently large and recognizable subset of elements of ethno-national culture. It admits of degrees, and is open to pragmatic and principled compromises. The former are obvious (allowing names of foreign origin for imported goods), while the latter concern allowances for creative reshaping, including strong forms of irony, travesty, and the like. (For example, Joyce’s mockery of Irish traditions and of the Book of Kells in *Ulysses* is, seen from this perspective of a flexible preservation and transmission program, a legitimate ‘re-reading’ of the tradition, and a potential contribution to the program, whereas it is seen as an insult from the standpoint of the rigid preservation and transmission program.) Note that the rigid preservation and transmission programs will more often than not need a compulsory push from the state.

Let me illustrate the relevance of the debate, and the role of state control in the rigid preservation of a culture, with the help of another real-life example. My home town, Rijeka, is predominantly Croatian, with a small but influential Italian minority, enjoying some cultural autonomy. This includes, prominently, Italian-language primary and secondary schools, well subsidized by the Italian government, and ready to enroll, free of charge, children from ethnically Croatian families as well as ethnic Italians. Given that schooling in Italian offers significant advantages for some career paths, should an interested Croatian family—including the child who wants to study in Italian—be allowed to enroll or not? Similar issues arise in Quebec with children from French-speaking
families who want to study in English. The Croatian Tudjman government—like the Quebec authorities in their country—has discouraged decisions out of step with its general nationalist line. Who is right, the family or the government?

How can the nationalists defend their advice? Almost any culture—including many ethno-nationally specific aspects of a culture—is obviously valuable, and the nationalist can use this fact as his or her starting point. As already mentioned, culture is often seen as having both a value in itself (intrinsic value) and an instrumental value for securing some unproblematically valuable goals. The nationalist will most often mention the value of community culture for individual members, nay, its indispensability for their social identity. Since the main points are all linked to the primacy of community life in relation to the individual, they all belong in the communitarian tradition. Some defenders of the value of community present it in a rather benign way. Here is a statement by Avishai Margalit. He stresses the value of 'belonging' and goes on to make precise the sense of belonging in which he is interested:

To belong in this sense means to be accepted by others as you are, not as the result of some deed or misdeed of yours. The family is the paradigm example of a unit based on belonging in this sense, while a professional football team is an example of belonging based on achievement (as opposed to merely being a fan of the team, which is a matter of belonging in the family sense). National belonging, like family belonging, is not based on achievement. It seems to me that Berlin's concept of belonging is close to the sense in which it is opposed to achievement. Belonging to a nation, in Berlin's view, needs to be manifested in a feeling of being at home, where this means being able to act freely and naturally. Berlin assigns great importance to acting naturally and spontaneously rather than artificially... The third sense of national belonging bridges the gap between belonging and achievement. This sort of national belonging provides you with reflected glory based on the achievements of gifted members of your nation. (Margalit, 1997, 80)

Pleasant and desirable as it may be, the unconditional acceptance of an individual by his or her community, not on the grounds of merit but simply of membership, is not the main issue in the debate. The family in the example from Rijeka wants to be left alone by the local community and allowed to follow its own path, and the issue is whether it would be morally in the clear in doing so. The nationalist, of course, thinks that it is not: a community has a moral claim on its members that is not a matter of individual choice. Cultures come in different sizes; we talk freely of English-speaking culture, but also of Scots culture (much smaller), of Christian or Western culture (much bigger), of youth culture, and of many others. As already mentioned, a basic assumption that our nationalist suggests to his audience is that the natural size of a culture is a nation. In his eyes, a culture comes in a national format, neatly separated from others. For him it really is “this little world/This precious stone set in the silver sea/which serves it in the office of a wall” (Richard II 2.1.45-47). Take a nation-state like the UK: a nationalist has to claim that British culture is precisely the right unit (as opposed to English-speaking culture, which is too big for its purposes, and to Scottish or to youth culture, which are too narrow). Note that the nationalist has to make the assumption, if he wants to use the appeal to culture, to buttress the duties to the nation-state he wants to defend. Let me give a name to the assumption: the Nation-as-Basic-Unit Assumption. The right and natural unit of culture is the nation, that is, a culture is first of all (or essentially) a national culture.

The older versions of this assumption sound rather naïve today. Here is the French historian Jules Michelet:
One can classify nations the way one can classify animals. Social superiority resides in the common enjoyment of a large number of parts, in the mutual solidarity between them, in the reciprocity of functions they exercise for each other. It thus belongs to France, the country in which the national personality comes closer to the individual personality than in any other country in the world. (Michelet, 1996, 115 [my translation])

Most curiously, in spite of the enormous amount of work it does, the Nation-as-Basic-Unit Assumption is almost never explicitly discussed and defended in the nationalist literature; it is sometimes put forward without defense, perhaps illustrated by a handy example, sometimes present merely as a tacit assumption. Let me now illustrate the final step, from culture to state, with a quotation:

There are good reasons for cultural groups to have a political dimension... The fact that a nation has a political dimension seems to be connected to and to partially explain the fact that it is natural to think of nations as having a right to self-determination. (McKim, 1997, 259)

Note that the national character (or essence) of culture dictates the need for, and the character of, the nation-state: it is because cultures are national that states should also be so, not vice versa.

When presenting the even-handed nationalist, I briefly sketched the main culture-based lines of defense that appear in nationalist literature. In the chapters that follow I shall try to disentangle the various strands that are interwoven in the appeal to the 'value of culture': for instance, national culture is often regarded as something valuable in itself, in addition to being valuable as a means to other ends. This intrinsic value will have a short chapter for itself (chapter eleven), together with which we shall consider the related values of cultural proximity. Next, we consider the alleged value of national culture for the flourishing of its members, in particular its role in informing them about various sorts of values that find their respective niches within particular traditions. Now, is there any sense in which moral values are particularly national? Given the importance of morality in our context, chapter thirteen will be dedicated to this issue. The next nationalist argument to be discussed is the one from the value of diversity. Before concluding part two, we shall discuss the nationalist's case against cosmopolitanism. All these lines of thought insist on the value of culture, moral and general. The nationalist then focuses upon the ethno-national aspects of culture and derives the claim that ethnic aspects are central for culture as such; finally, he passes from the alleged centrality of ethno-national culture to the need for a statist institutional structure to protect it.

Before presenting the particular lines of thought, let me start with the criticism of the Nation-as-Basic-Unit Assumption common to all of them. As already mentioned it is never seriously defended in the nationalist literature, only assumed. Even very thoughtful pro-nationalist authors (who are themselves hardly to be classified as seriously nationalistic) accept it without defense. For example, Michael Walzer (in his ‘Nation and Universe’, Tanner Lectures, 1990, second lecture, section 2), assumes without further ado that the nation is the proper unit of culture, the most important collective within which moral views and ways of life develop; he stresses the contingent nature of this alleged fact and introduces all sorts of qualifications, but fails to address the main point: why would one take it to be a fact at all?

Curiously, the competition between units of various size and character becomes apparent already within the nationalist debate. Some pro-nationalist authors clearly prefer wider, and some narrower groupings (identities, or ‘social taxa’, to use a technical term). Most
authors—for instance Kymlicka, Tamir, MacCormick, and Lagerspetz—take as their preferred kind relatively narrow groups; to use British and Balkanic examples, their ‘nations’ would be English, Scottish, Welsh for Britain and Croats, and Serbs and Muslims for the former Yugoslavia. A prominent pro-nationalist, D. Miller (1993), however, opts for a wider unit: in his view the British would form one nation (I assume that such a unit would correspond to a Yugoslav nation in the Balkans and in the former Soviet Union a large Russian [‘Rossiiskaya’] nation encompassing other ethnic sub-units beyond the ‘Russians’ proper). Moreover, most of them are not explicit enough. The degree of cultural unity, common history, religious homogeneity, and even linguistic-dialectal homogeneity varies drastically as between British-type and English-type ‘nations’. Depending on which one a given author chooses, the reasonable grounds for his claims will vary in a principled and far-reaching fashion. For instance, whereas one can (with, say, MacCormick) probably speak of a deep and spontaneous attachment of ordinary Scottish people to their native Scotland, it is not clear that there is such an attachment to Britain or to the United Kingdom, to which a wide-notion theoretician like Miller could appeal. In the case of many Scots loyal to the UK, the attitude might be closer to a loyalty to institutions (a ‘constitutional patriotism’ if the UK had a written constitution), than to a deep passion for one’s ‘roots’. (In my own case this would have been a fair description of my loyalty to Titoist Yugoslavia twenty-five years ago: an attachment to institutional arrangements that seemed to me fair, at least on paper, and as the best option available at the time.) An immigrant can easily acquire such a loyalty to a hospitable state, retaining a deep love for his original fatherland. It is not clear that the UK or the former Yugoslavia count as ‘communities’ in the thick communitarian sense at all. To summarize, the competition between groups/communities of radically different types is not external to nationalistic issues, but taints the very attempt to define a nation. This internal competition has not been sufficiently noted and analyzed in the literature, nor are pro-nationalist authors always aware of the problems it creates for their views.

A severe critic of the nationalist would simply conclude that his case for nationalism has not been properly stated at the outset, so that he loses even before the debate has started. Moreover, when speaking about ‘the’ culture of a given ethno-natiorial group, nationally minded theoreticians usually mean the recognizably ethno-national aspects of the culture. They most emphatically do not mean the actual diversity of non-ethnic elements within the wider culture. The examples of what is to be excluded range from the rock-loving adolescent sub-culture to the sub-culture of philosophy teachers who pursue, say, the German idealist tradition within French or Anglo-American universities. Not accidentally, such non-ethno-national elements also fall prey to nationalist enthusiasms. In Serbia, a cleansing of ‘Oriental’ elements from culture—that is, everything that is reminiscent of Muslim influence—has been strongly promoted in the last ten years: the damage will probably be great, since most of these influences form an integral part of everyday cultural life in the country. For example, some of the best contemporary music has exploited them to very good effect. In contemporary Croatia, well-known writers have suggested particular things to be avoided by a good Croatian. (A prominent Croatian essayist, the late D. Cvitan, included in his list items such as Syrian bread [lepinja in Croatian], very popular in some parts of the country, shish-kebab [ćevap], which is a standard meal in many restaurants both in Zagreb and along the coast, as well as the music written for the zurla, a descendant of the Greek aulos, an instrument also detested by Plato, by the way, but for different reasons.) Given such treatment of the non-ethnic
components of a given culture, one would be almost justified in denying the nationalist a hearing on the topic at all.

Nevertheless, I want to extensively discuss his assumption that culture is essentially national, that is, that the natural unit of culture is the nation. (I shall not pursue one possible and fashionable line, namely, that the very idea of a unit of culture or of the right size of a culture is completely ungrounded since there is no natural classification in these matters.) Let me start with a brief remark on Walzer’s formulation quoted above, according to which the nation is the most important collective within the framework of which moral views and ways of life develop. Taken strictly and literally it does not imply that morality and ways of life are themselves national, since the framework can in principle remain neutral, failing to reflect upon the contents. (Take a classroom, the most important framework within which pupils learn about science; this does not imply that particular sciences, say biology, are classroom-bound.) One needs a more committed reading, according to which the collective in question molds the culture and moral view. It takes an anthropological naïveté to accept this claim for most ethno-nations, apart from the culturally most prominent ones.

First, given the subjectivist definition of (ethno-)nation, shared by thoughtful nationalist theoreticians and many sociologists of various persuasions, it is extremely unclear how such a ‘nation’ can guarantee a deep unity of culture. Remember Miller’s warnings, quoted at the beginning of the book:

What needs underlining is how little this definition includes. It contains no assumption that nations are, as it were, natural kinds marked off from one another by physical characteristics. It can easily accommodate the historical fluidity of national identities, and recognize the extent to which nations are brought into being by extraneous circumstances such as conflicts between states. Nor is there any assumption that people who share a nationality will share objective characteristics such as race or language. (Miller, 1992, 87)

Miller himself keeps pointing to the importance of ‘national culture’. But why would culture be particularly national, “given the historical fluidity of national identities” and “the extent to which nations are brought into being by extraneous circumstances such as conflicts between states”? Suppose a nation sprouts at the beginning of the twentieth century as a result of a conflict between two states. Why assume that it will have a distinct, recognizable culture?

Let us not insist upon this disproportion between the pale, emaciated concept of the nation and the tough, demanding work it is supposed to do in characterizing cultures. Grant our nationalist that nations actually do have some elements in common, and assume that language will sometimes be peculiar to a nation (unlike English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese, each spoken by at least three different nations, and unlike German, spoken by exactly three). In such cases the literature in the given strictly national language will have a distinct character in virtue of its linguistic substrate. However, culture does not encompass only language and literature, but much more: music, painting, sculpture, philosophy. (To stick with ‘high’ culture. Folk culture encompasses much more, and is often quite varied within one nation.) Consider one competitor to the classification by nationality, namely, classification by style, which is standard in art and literary history. Styles are, in the vast majority of cases, supranational. Czech Baroque is closer to Austrian, Slovenian, and even to Spanish Baroque than to Czech Gothic. If there are natural units of culture, style may be a much more serious candidate than nation. But what about expressions like ‘Czech Gothic’, or
'Lavinian Classicism', that seem to suggest a national variant of a style? Note that 'Lavinian Classicism' can mean very different things: either a full-blown style originated and developed in Lavinia, or—and more often—a specifically Lavinian sub-style of Classicism in general, or simply Classicism on Lavinian soil, realized by artists of Lavinian origin, or anything in between the last two (for example, a slightly eccentric, or slightly folkloristic, trivial variant of Classicism realized by some Lavinians). The nationalist has to prove that the variant is genuinely 'national' in his sense, that is, having peculiar national traits, and is not just called 'national' because of the ethnic belonging of its creator.

Some cultural phenomena are admittedly 'national', for example, the Italian Renaissance, German and British traditions in philosophy, Italian and German traditions in music, or Jewish cultural achievements in various domains. (Even these are national only in the wide sense: 'British' philosophy encompasses achievements by English, Scots, and Irish thinkers; 'Jewish' cultural achievements are deeply indebted to local cultures, from Spanish/Arabic in the West, to Slavic and Germanic in the East.) But these achievements of rich, and in various ways powerful, nations are exceptions rather than the rule: the vast majority of (ethno-) nations participate in wider circles of high culture, macro-regional, continent-wide, or global. The very spread of these achievements to dozens of other areas creates a problem for the ethno-national-unit view: if the Italian Renaissance style is a natural unit and is deeply ethnic, then none of the recipient groups (British, French, South German) can count its Renaissance past as ethnically its own. Forgetting this difficulty creates the ethno-nationalistic misinterpretation according to which cultures can be considered to be essentially ethno-national without further ado.

If one happens to be interested in philosophy rather than in the arts, one can simply replace the names of styles in the preceding paragraph with the names of philosophical schools: if French existentialism (or British empiricism, forgetting for a moment that 'British' is not an ethno-national term) is to be taxonomized primarily as 'French philosophy' (or 'British philosophy'), then all the members of the school in the wide sense outside the relevant country simply become imitators of the French (or of the British). Then our nationalist ends up with at best four to six 'national philosophies' of great nations (in the West). This meager result is, however, deeply offensive to the cultural nationalists of most other ethno-nations and cannot be recommended as a general nationalist stance. To develop the example, M. Heidegger has claimed that philosophy “always belongs to a people [Volk]”, but not many contemporary historians of philosophy would go for specifically Finnish, Estonian, Slovenian, Modern Greek, or Flemish philosophy. He himself seems to have set very demanding standards for the national character of a philosophy: it should be historically embedded in a particular language, have a continuous tradition, and be centered around a specific, recognizable set of topics. By his standards the nations just listed have no philosophy that belongs to them, most of the candidate national authors having written in some foreign language or other, there being no tradition concentrated around a small set of topics, and no significant continuity. The same holds for ‘national music’ (apart from folk music), even in the case of ‘big’ nations like the British and the French: to stay with the great composers of our century, they have simply been too much influenced by traditions outside their own national group to produce any recognizably ‘national’ corpus. (Benjamin Britten sought inspiration in Russian and even Javanese music; Ravel and Ohana in Spanish music; while many living composers, from Steve Reich to György Ligeti and Hans Zender have learned...
from North African and Oriental traditions: what is the cultural nationalist going to do about their work?)

In short, the illusion that the nation is anything like a natural or mandatory unit of either high or popular culture comes from the salience and excellence of the few Western European and some traditional Asian examples, plus a vague sense that something similar must also go on elsewhere. It is fostered by a concentration upon language, and by misinterpretation of the availability of a few very conspicuous instances in which the origin and the flourishing of a famous tradition have both clearly been linked to a recognizable ethnic-like unit. Let me treat you to a longer quote that captures, in my opinion, the gist of the issue.

Not only do cultures overlap geographically and come in a variety of types. Cultures are also densely interdependent in their formation and identity. They exist in complex historical processes of interaction with other cultures. The modern age is intercultural rather than multicultural. The interaction and entanglement of cultures has been further heightened by the massive migrations of this century. Cultural diversity is not a phenomenon of exotic and incommensurable others in distant lands and at different stages of historical development, as the old concept of culture made it appear. No. It is here and now in every society. Citizens are members of more than one dynamic culture and the experience of crossing cultures is normal activity. In Europe and the People without History (1982), Eric Wolf showed that the interaction and interdependency of cultures is not a recent phenomenon; the cultures of the world have been shaped and formed by interaction for a millennium. (Tully, 1995, 119)

I believe that the reasons put forward cast doubt on the general idea that cultures are primarily national. Note also that, very often, the ethno-national classification becomes relevant and even important in retrospect, once the ethno-national state imposes a national taxonomy as the official one and molds cultural life according to it. This can take the unpleasant form of cultural cleansing in an attempt to remove elements that are seen as foreign; we shall return to this when discussing particular functions of culture. In spite of the weaknesses of the Nation-as-Basic-Unit Assumption, I propose that we be charitable to our nationalist interlocutor; after all, he needs the assumption to argue for specific functions of nation, for example, that a nation is essential for one’s identity. Perhaps the national elements of a culture are particularly good for that job, and less so for others. We should therefore consider particular uses of the assumption within each line of thought presented by our nationalist; if it turns out to be plausible for one particular use (in spite of its falsity for most other lines), we should admit this without grudge.

I shall be criticizing various aspects of the nationalist line(s) of thought, from purely theoretical to more practical ones. On the theoretical side I shall try to show that it does not keep its promise; the issues left dangling at the end of the ‘political’ chapters of this book are not to be resolved in favor of the nationalist through considerations of culture. On the practical side, I believe that the direct practical consequences of the claims the nationalist makes (has to make, and is, for the most part, happy to make) are quite unpleasant, incompatible with what one normally expects from a culture, and I will try to show this. Also, the relatively general formulations that appear in the literature can be given, and often invite, an extremist interpretation; their indirect consequences can then be dire indeed, and lead to the corruption and slow death of the cultural life of the community the nationalist originally wanted to protect. The nationalist theoretician is not equally responsible for the direct and for the indirect consequences, but then, the
indirect ones are so dire that a lot of caution should be exercised. I shall suggest that the
danger is so great that we should perhaps jettison the whole nationalist line, the way the
racist line has been jettisoned.

NOTES

1. Still, one encounters the picture of the nation as a big Individual in the writings of most
refined pro-nationalist writers, even leftists like M. Walzer. In chapter four of his Thick and Thin.
Moral Argument at Home and Abroad, he claims that nationalism is “collective individualism” (as
opposed to collective egoism), and then develops the analogy nation/individual at considerable
length. Rorty opens his book Achieving Our Nation by claiming that national pride is to the nation
what individual pride is to the individual, without ever stopping to ask whether and in what
sense a nation can have character traits or emotions. I shall not enlarge upon the misleading
character of such a view of collectives.

2. The problem of the right format of a community is a general headache for the communitarian.
Here is a good statement of it. Jeremy Waldron (1995, 95) asks what such philosophers have in
mind when they talk about community.

Many of us have been puzzled and frustrated by the absence of a clear understanding of this
concept in some of the assertions made by communitarians like Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael
Sandel, Charles Taylor, and Michael Walzer. I do not mean the absence of a precise definition. I
mean the absence of any settled sense of the scope and scale of the social entity that they have in
mind. When they say that the modern individual is a creation of community, or that each of us
owes his or her identity to the community in which he or she is brought up, or that our choices
necessarily are framed in the context of a community, or that we must not think of ourselves as
holding rights against the community, or that communities must have boundaries, or that justice
is fidelity to shared understandings within a community, what scale of entity are we talking
about? Is ‘community’ supposed to denote things as small as villages and neighborhoods, social
relations that can sustain gemeinschaft-type solidarity and face-to-face friendships? (Waldron,
1995, 95)
Chapter eleven. The general value of culture

THE IDEA OF CULTURAL TRADITIONS

1. Culture is often regarded as something valuable in itself, in addition to being valuable as a means for other ends. The nationalist exploits this fact by ascribing a high value to, above all national, culture. He or she puts forward an argument that centers around the value of the national community, especially its culture and traditions. Let us call thinkers who believe that traditions should be piously preserved ‘traditionalists’. There are several lines of thought in the traditionalist defense of nationalism, and they are rarely presented one by one, in isolation. I think it is worthwhile setting them apart and considering each in itself. In this chapter, we shall discuss the most general line centered upon the value of national traditions as such, not as means for some ulterior end. We shall also consider the related point, namely, that belonging to a national culture creates ties of proximity which are morally, and therefore also politically, relevant. (Other uses of the appeal to culture will be discussed in succeeding chapters. This disentangling will also give us the opportunity to introduce the fundamental notions one by one, and so avoid overcrowding.) Culture is often plausibly seen as the totality of traditions or practices sustained by a larger group.

2. We need some terminological explication. A practice is any kind of organized and sustained activity having internal rules and standards. The examples of a practice given in the literature are football and chess playing, scientific inquiry in various domains, painting and music, religious ceremonies; all these practices can become traditional and most often are. What does it mean that an action of a given type (say, eating with a knife and fork) is done traditionally in a given group (a very large group in our example) under given circumstances (say, at set meals)? At the minimum, that the members of the group have been doing this kind of thing for some time in the given circumstances; they do it now partly for the reason that they, or other individuals, have been doing the same thing (our parents ate with a knife and fork) in similar circumstances before; some members at least (in the example, our children) are enjoined to do the same for that reason (see Armstrong [1981] for an extended analysis). Tradition is thus a practice in which the
authority of the past and common knowledge that the action was performed earlier under similar circumstances plays at least some role; minimally in the practitioner’s beliefs about his own reasons for performance. Most authors writing about the topic, from Armstrong through MacIntyre to Ruth Millikan, stress imitation and copying of patterns. The traditionalists often add that practices and traditions essentially involve “standards of excellence and obedience to rules” (MacIntyre, 1981, 177), so that to enter a practice involves accepting these standards and rules.

Similarly, a tradition of belief involves a succession of people each of whom believes something on the authority of his or her predecessor. The traditionalist, in respect of beliefs, claims that such traditions cannot, need not, and should not be put to an independent test. Michael Walzer offers an apt and dramatic example of such a traditionalist stance, from a Talmudic story. A group of sages is disputing a question: Rabbi Eliezer alone appeals for divine help, and indeed, the miracles he asks for do happen, and even a voice from heaven confirms his view. Rabbi Joshua, the speaker for the majority, rejects the appeal to miracles: the common tradition of the sages counts for more than even the immediate evidence. Walzer agrees: “There is a tradition, a body of moral knowledge; and there is this group of sages, arguing. There isn’t anything else” (Walzer, 1985, 29). In general, the traditionalist starts from the obvious point that many traditions transmit valuable contents: linguistic traditions transmit meanings, moral traditions transmit moral rules and values, artistic traditions transmit aesthetically valuable qualities. Finally, the more global traditions concerning ways of life preserve various paradigms of the ‘good life’. The traditionalist goes on to claim that all such contents are due to particular traditions that create and preserve it, and cannot survive outside its original niche.

Traditions of action are important in one particular respect. In a cooperative activity one often encounters a division of labor that assigns a role to a participant. Roles are primarily tied to what one is capable of doing: for example, only a priest can perform a church wedding. Furthermore, they carry with themselves a package of expectations, norms, and values: a priest is expected to perform weddings should the occasion arise. Roles habitually assigned to participants in a tradition are traditional roles. MacIntyre stresses the importance of such roles:

> We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters—roles into which we have been drafted—and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. (MacIntyre, 1981, 177)

Note that all sorts of activities can become traditional. Some traditions are morally neutral, as for instance artistic ones; some are morally recommendable, like raising children to obey the rule of truthfulness. The contemporary traditionalist avoids mentioning traditions that are obviously morally despicable, such as witch-, Jew-, and ‘nigger’-hunting, violence at football matches, or ritual cannibalism.

Traditionalists in general insist upon initial, non-voluntary belonging to given traditions. They are more impressed by the fact that people are usually ‘born into’ certain traditions—the way, say, a child is ‘born into’ a religion without choosing it—than by free choice of a tradition to pledge allegiance to. We may now proceed to the nationalist use of the idea of tradition. The nationalist simply adds to the general traditionalist view the Nation-as-Basic-Unit Assumption. Older nationalist appeals to tradition sound poetic and quite strange nowadays, for example:
The thought of our distant ancestors always exercises a strange and strong pull on our lives. The people of fairies and genies that lived in waters and forests has disappeared, but in dying it has bequeathed to the places it once animated the right to be venerated and has conserved the links of friendship or fear with our race. (Barres, 1996, 122)

Contemporary nationalists are more rational. Let me then give the floor to our nationalist. His speech summarizes the general line of argument common to many sources. (My principal source has been MacIntyre [1981; 1994], but I am here disentangling the line of traditionalism in general from the more particular line on moral tradition, to be discussed in chapter thirteen.)

Think of all the treasures a national culture offers its members! Start with language, the most precious of all. One’s mother tongue is the most important depository of concepts, knowledge, social and cultural significance. All these are embedded in the language, and do not exist without it. Such an indispensable thing certainly demands an active and vigilant effort at preservation in as pure a state as possible. Languages are essentially national, and so is the literature written in the given language, from lullabies to the most sophisticated avant-garde novels.

This brings us to culture in general. Think of the enormous achievements in each of the great traditions of our culture. Notice that all these achievements are possible only thanks to the willingness of thousands of people to subordinate themselves to the norms and standards of excellence inherent in each of the traditions mentioned. A mere ‘touristy’ interest in a tradition is not sufficient for excellence. One might be tempted by cosmopolitan proposals to take one component or aspect of a tradition and add it to a patchwork of elements from other traditions. Here is why one cannot do this, on pain of producing an absurd mixture. Actions and roles typical of a practice or tradition—say, scoring a goal in a football match—only make sense within the practice or tradition. Let me quote a succinct statement:

The difference, however, between, say, an event that is part of a practice (for example, striking out in the practice of baseball) and an event that is not part of a practice (for example, a tree falling on an uninhabited island) is that the former event gains its identity, not as an event, but as the event it is (gains, that is, its meaning, significance, and characterization) in virtue of its being part of and informed by its practice. All the constituents of a practice—its events, objects, actions, and so on—are what I call ‘practice informed’. That is, their identity—their meaning, significance, and characterization—is a function of their practice. (Vadas [reinterpreting MacIntyre], 1987, 493-494)

The holistic nature of tradition requires that traditions have been handed down in an unadulterated form. The guarantee that traditions will be upheld is that people accept them without, so to speak, neurotically questioning them on every occasion. The deepest acceptance is usually due to those traditions one grows into naturally, preferably by being born into them. Voluntary belonging to a tradition is secondary in comparison to non-voluntary belonging; the latter grows spontaneously into a more reflective acceptance, without ever snapping the link to the roots that give reflection its vigor and penetration.

Let me now pass to the issue of the proper format of the tradition. Note that the ethnic or national framework is the best and most natural one which cultural traditions can take, since it is tied to language, most conspicuously in the case of literature. Other fine arts are also best developed within an ethnic-national framework. Let me remind you of conspicuous and famous instances in which the origin and flourishing of a style have both clearly been linked to a recognizable ethnic-like unit, including the Italian and Flemish Renaissance (assuming that Renaissance Italy and Holland are ethno-nations), and German Romanticism. Even in philosophy one encounters clearly national traditions, each marked by strong ties to a language, by the continuity of a tradition and deep originality. Take the birth of philosophy in ancient Greece, or its modern peaks, such as British
empiricism, German idealism, French existentialism and post-modernism, as well as contemporary analytic philosophy, which is basically Anglo-American (although keen to deny this belonging). Let me finally mention the remarkable unity and depth of the Jewish cultural traditions that have enabled the survival of this remarkable people across several millennia, in spite of the greatest hardships, a clearly ethno-national tradition which has found expression in religion, literature, music, and philosophy, as well as in folklore and popular arts.¹

The goal I am proposing therefore is the preservation of this central, national cultural framework. Of course, I don’t mean just historical preservation in a museum, in which given items are indeed available but most commonly not presented as integrated into the ongoing concerns of a cultural life (the way dead languages—say Latin—are preserved as part of specialized knowledge). I mean preservation-in-life combined with further transmission. Such preservation demands that the culture be transmitted in a recognizable form; very often this requires a certain degree of purity that might be unacceptable to some members of the culture (the young will wish to use expressions from their favorite foreign pop songs, scholars will thoughtlessly borrow foreign expressions, and so on). Still, the recognizable shape of a national culture is so important that it justifies and even demands certain sacrifices.

The importance of culture also has a moral side to it, captured by the old saying: Out of sight, out of mind. Members of a culture are culturally closer to each other than to outsiders. This cultural proximity is morally relevant, and consequently one has stronger and richer obligations to those close at hand than to strangers (MacIntyre, 1994; Oldenquist, 1982). Let me quote Tamir: “Living in a community where members share an ‘imagined’ sense of togetherness engenders mutual responsibilities” (Tamir, 1993, 85). In short, distance—and in particular, cultural distance—has a moral significance.²

The moral consideration one owes to other people decreases in proportion to their distance from one. Call this rule the Distance Principle. People especially close to each other have special mutual responsibilities. People belonging to the same ethnic community are closer to one another than to any other people. The closeness of the ties makes the mere aggregate of persons into a specific ethnic group. Ethnic closeness justifies strong ethno-national partiality towards the group. Therefore, ethno-culturally close people may (or even should) form a political community in which partiality will be exercised by all its members. The link between proximity in space and in time with the continuity of tradition is nicely captured in M. Walzer’s metaphor: “Community rests most deeply on a contract, Burkean in character, among the ‘living, the dead, and those who are yet to be born’” (Walzer, 1985, 219).

8 Before moving on to our criticism of the views presented, a word of apology. It goes to those very moderate pro-nationalist authors, above all to Yael Tamir and David Miller, whose ideas I have used in the reconstruction: Tamir is so moderate that I can hardly agree with her overall self-description as a nationalist, while Miller’s nationalism is clearly not of an ethnic variety. Still, I hope that I have not misrepresented the thrust of their thought, that there is a recognizable core of a sympathetic attitude to nationalism that they all share, and this attitude becomes clearer and easier to discuss as soon as one uncovers the abstract structure of the argumentation most often left implicit and in many respects indeterminate in their work.³
REPLYING TO THE NATIONALIST

WHAT IS SO SPECIAL ABOUT ETHNO-NATIONAL TRAITS?

It is not difficult to agree with the nationalist-minded philosopher that culture and the traditions it encompasses are often valuable. The moot point is the Nation-as-Basic-Unit Assumption: is there really something so special about the national culture and the national framework for traditions that it has to be given special protection, rather than, say, micro-regional or macro-regional traditions, or traditions that cut across national boundaries, such as the transnational tradition of solidarity between workers or women? We have already argued that this is not supported by the facts. Here I want to discuss two points: one concerns the unity of traditions, the second appeals to proximity. The two reinforce each other, since participation in a unitary and close tradition makes participants particularly close to each other. I shall address each point separately.

Let me start the debate with the crucially important domain of language. The nationally minded philosopher stresses the importance of language for all cultures, and some languages are tied exclusively to one ethnic community. Given that one’s mother tongue is one’s first and perhaps most important window on the realm of concepts, knowledge, social and cultural significance, and so on, the nationally minded philosopher argues that culture exists only in and through language. Therefore, language should be preserved in a pure state, and the culture as well. But what he has forgotten to add is that the same individual might have acquired almost exactly the same, and certainly no less useful, concepts, knowledge, signification, and identifications in other linguistic media. First, in almost any other dialect or language spoken around the place; secondly, in an ‘impure’, suitably mixed dialect of the same language; and thirdly, counterfactually, in any of the less pure successors of the ‘pure’ language, which will be spoken in the same place if no one interferes, in, say, fifty years. In short, one has to acquire a culture in some language, but not necessarily in this particular language. Once we realize this situation of indifference between options, we shall be less ready to draw preservationist political consequences from the facts of language acquisition. If we generalize from language to culture in general we shall be more ready to agree with the following view of A. Buchanan:

[The right to cultural preservation] cannot be a right to cultural stasis—a right to preserve a culture just as it is at present. The basis of the alleged right is the good that cultural membership achieves for individuals, and this good does not require an unchanging culture. For the same reason, an appreciation of the value of cultural membership cannot by itself even support a right to the continued existence of any particular culture. What is important is that an individual be able to belong to a culture, some culture or other, not that he be able to belong, definitely, to any particular culture. (Buchanan, 1995, 357)

What about the purity of traditions? We shall address this issue briefly in chapter fifteen on ethno-diversity. For a quick reminder, take language again: bilingualism is not a defect, but a very useful and enriching achievement. Again, biculturalism is a revealing phenomenon, not a mere curiosity. Also, we should not underestimate the flexibility of traditions and practices, and their capacity to beget new and different practices.

Let me pass to a more abstract, theoretical issue. Our nationalist defends the integrity of traditions by entering the holistic claim, according to which the very identity of
particular actions and roles within a tradition and practice depend upon the whole: that is, they are constituted by the practice or tradition.

13 Is this holistic assumption tenable? I don’t think so. For a simple example, consider simple practices/traditions, such as eating with a knife and fork. The particular kind of action (cutting the food with a knife, impaling a piece of it on a fork and bringing it to the mouth) is available antecedently to the tradition. Conversely, our Western traditions of eating with a knife and fork depend upon there being such independent kinds of action. Indeed, as Armstrong has pointed out, complex activities seem to derive from simpler ones (Armstrong, 1981, 103n). But what about such examples as the following? The action of scoring a goal 'makes sense', that is, has an identity, only within a game of football; outside the game just kicking the ball between the two posts simply does not count as scoring a goal. In order to answer this point we should distinguish between an ongoing practice (together with the tradition of doing something), and mere activity. Imagine a mythical first game of football: suppose people sat together to modify some existing game and introduced the idea of scoring a goal, and then agreed to play by the rules established. They play, and someone kicks the ball between the two posts. Now this is a bona fide goal. It has received its identity from the rules just established, not from any repetition of some pre-existing football playing. In short, putting the letter A for a kind of action involved, an A-game precedes, temporally and conceptually, the practice of playing the A-game, the A-practice.

14 Put more generally, the identity of an action is independent of its history, or of some assumed repetition within a practice or tradition. An action indeed receives its identity from its role in a wider pattern of activity, but it might happen independently of whether the pattern has been already instantiated. There is always a first time, as the saying goes. The importance of the point is that it suggests the following view. We can picture the scoring of the goal as an 'atom' within a wider 'molecule' that is the football game, which then enters a larger whole of football practice or tradition. Call this view of tradition 'molecularism'. The holist would claim that only the larger whole is real, endowed with an independent identity, while the atomist would claim about moves in a game that scoring itself has an independent identity, outside the game. The 'molecularist' occupies the middle ground: he admits that scoring counts as such only within a game, but declines to accept that the game requires tradition for its identity. He claims that the holist has confused the atemporal dependence of the action on its larger activity framework with the alleged but non-existent dependence of the action on a temporally extended series of repetitions. The vagueness of the term 'practice' may have contributed to the confusion: it is sometimes taken to mean mere activity, sometimes the habitual repetition of an activity pattern over time.

15 The nationalist-traditionalist might object that such independent identification of actions is possible only if the actions are of a simple and banal kind. Let me therefore illustrate my anti-holistic claim using an example from high culture which will recur throughout this part of the book. Painting a Crucifixion is a tradition that stems from the late Middle Ages. Romanic art is inimical to Crucifixions, deemed to be too demeaning to the divine Christ. At a given point in history the authorities of the Catholic Church started to search for topics for sacral art that would speak more directly to the hearts of the common churchgoers, that is to say, to a wide, non-aristocratic public. I assume that painting Christ on the cross was a well-defined action type before the tradition started. One can imagine church officials debating whether to condone it; a debate hardly understandable
if the action had no identity, as it would not have on the holist assumption. This brings us to analogous events today. The molecularist view explains an important phenomenon: the relatively easy birth of new traditions. Many small local traditions have been started by our parents' generation or even by our contemporaries. Sports, music, cuisine, all abound in examples. On the holist view it is hard to see where the components of the tradition come from: if a component has identity only within a tradition how did the tradition ever start? How did its various aspects come together, devoid of significant identity as they were, on the holistic picture? The traditionalist holist is wrong.

16 This is not to say that preservation of a tradition, including the ethno-national aspects of it, is not valuable. Of course, the freely chosen and flexible preservation and transmission of ethno-national cultural elements is prima facie justified and good. (The prima facie proviso is meant to exclude, for example, the keeping alive and transmission of extremely intolerant or offensive elements of the culture, the interference of some of the elements with otherwise legitimate pursuits.) The members of each ethno-national group should be permitted to indulge in preservation, if they wish. The sponsoring of efforts towards flexible preservation is a good thing, if it is not discriminatory: a state should sponsor them either for all or for none of the ethnic groups it contains, but not necessarily in equal measure; some provision should be made for considerations of cost, and the extent and quality of the benefits.

17 Where the nationalist errs is in reducing a culture to the recognizably ethno-national elements of it, and in making the preservation alive of such a reduced skeleton the foremost duty of all concerned. The falsity of the Nation-as-Basic-Unit Assumption, especially in combination with this duty-oriented approach, has considerable practical importance. Following the assumption, the nationalist often recommends policies that are inadequate and can be harmful in various ways. Let me start with the least spectacular inadequacy, concerning education.

18 Cultural history is often taught in schools in ways that distort the student’s view of it: the work of artists and thinkers belonging—sometimes by birth only—to a given ethno-national group is presented as isolated and encapsulated from the larger currents, outside which they cannot be understood. This kind of ‘patriotic’ cultural history educates for parochialism, and very often for narrow-mindedness. The ‘patriotic’ cultural project induces a strong temptation to falsify history in various ways.

19 Education finds its natural continuation in general cultural policies. Nationalist parochialism prompts closed cultural production, centered upon rather conservative values. Very often projects are financed simply because a certain line of research or creation is presented as having to do with ‘national traditions’ (say, a project on pragmatism presented as ‘the American national philosophy’); much worse, others are rejected simply because they are more broadly based. Such policies sap experimentation and innovation. These options are endemic to nationalism. They follow directly from the assumption that culture is primarily ethno-national.

20 An even worse situation arises when nationalists go overboard, as is actually happening in southeast Europe. In many countries national(istic) myths are taught as history, with all the nasty bits untrimmed. It is the extreme consequence of the view that the more ‘national’ a content is, the more central a place it must occupy in education and culture. Equally, such historical/national contents are being forced upon painters, musicians, and writers, resulting in ‘kitsch’; valuable contemporary art is being rejected as worthless since it does not speak to particularly ‘national’ interests.
Finally, attempts are sometimes made to ‘cleanse’ culture of foreign elements: either cosmopolitan or, more often, those belonging to the closest neighbors. Here is an example from Croatia: a Croatian member of the government recently promised subsidies to schools to ‘cleanse’ school libraries of books in ‘Serbian’ and to replace them with books in ‘Croatian’ (these are linguistically two dialects of the same language, as close as British English and American English; the equivalent would be to ‘cleanse’ British libraries of American books).

It is good to keep in mind both the first, moderately bad group of consequences that proceed directly from the nationalist assumption as such, and the second, completely catastrophic one that proceeds from a particularly nasty interpretation of it. Let me now try to show that the nasty interpretation is actually the one to be expected given the political realities. I also want to add a new twist to the criticism of the Nation-as-Basic-Unit Assumption and the related assumptions about proximity.

**WHY THE NATIONALIST SHOULD NOT APPEAL TO CULTURAL PROXIMITY**

We shall start with the issue of proximity. In order to introduce more realism into the debate, I wish to deploy a truism about ethno-nationalist tensions which seems to have been forgotten in contemporary debate. Its validity is particularly obvious in the Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe, Northern Ireland, and the Basque country, as has been pointed out by historians and sociologists. I suspect that it is universally valid, but I shall illustrate it briefly with local examples. The truism is that ethno-nationalist conflicts usually involve very close neighbors. Consequently, ethno-nationalists—politicians, writers, ideologists—do not react primarily against distant foreign cultures, but against their close neighbors. Ethno-nationalist animosity follows the rule of hate-thy-neighbor. Let me give a name to it and call it the Hated Neighbor Truism. I shall present and defend it briefly in the section that follows. The truism has, in spite of its simplicity and obviousness, some far-reaching consequences. It presents a serious threat to the relevance of the nationalist argument in most cases. It also points out some promising avenues open to the anti-nationalist politician and intellectual that usually remain hidden from view. One can immediately guess that the abstract appeal to closeness as against distance will not help the nationalist, if in practice nationalism turns against close neighbors. This is precisely what I want to argue. But let me sound a note of caution. The claims I shall put forward are limited in several ways. Here is an obvious limitation: they are valid only insofar as the Hated Neighbor Truism is so, and its validity is contingent. There might be ethno-national conflicts which involve no mutually similar, close, or related peoples, no ‘neighbors’ in our half-literal, half-metaphorical sense. Such conflicts would then remind one of the history of colonization in which two disparate worlds seem to interact dramatically. There might also exist isolated ethno-cultural islands not
interacting with their geographic neighbors to which the truism does not apply. Let me now first state and defend the truism.

In order to specify who counts as a neighbor, let me propose a list of traits that are usually taken to be relevant to how close communities are to each other. Two ethnic groups A and B may be close:

- geographically, living in immediate vicinity to one another or sharing the same territory, or being distributed in the mixed, ‘Russian doll’ style (an A majority encompassing a B minority encompassing another A minority, itself having some B individuals on its territory);
- demographically, having a lot of mixed families and members of mixed descent;
- politically, belonging to the same state;
- by cooperative interaction, having a lot of global or local projects and dealings in common, economic, technical or otherwise;
- historically, by sharing large segments of common history (alliances in wars and in peace, having belonged to the same state, having shared or sharing the same ruling family);
- culturally, having large segments of culture in common (either on an equal footing or through the dependence of A on B), for instance:
  - shared or similar language(s),
  - shared or similar customs,
  - shared or very similar forms of ‘high’ culture (literature, arts, scholarship), created through common or interrelated efforts,
  - shared religious denomination,
  - shared history of influences (from some third source),
  - shared basic values (or shared hierarchy of values).

Here, then, is a truism about actual ethno-nationalist conflicts:

Hated Neighbor Truism: Ethno-nationalist claims are usually directed to neighboring peoples with which the claimant people has close ties and interacts quite intensely.

Let me explain. The nationalist claims are meant to affirm the claimant’s rights against neighboring peoples. At the least, they are geared to making those people respect the rights claimed; at worst, they are openly aggressive.

The nationalist usually worries about external neighbors and internal minorities. His or her world is what geo-politicians call a ‘macro-region’: the Balkans, or the Middle East, or the Iberian Peninsula, not the world at large. The term ‘neighbor’ will be used for both external neighbors and the compact internal minorities of a given people. It is fair to say that neighbors (internal or external) sharing most of the traits listed above are very close neighbors, and that neighbors sharing roughly about half of the traits listed are moderately close neighbors. (One could develop a detailed taxonomy of traits, such as those used by archeologists in the study of commonalities in artifacts.) Let me put forward a non-controversial thesis: Many peoples in the world (and most peoples that one hears about in the newspapers) live surrounded—from without and often from within—by at least moderately close neighbors.

In order to get a rough picture of the validity of the Hated Neighbor Truism for the recent most dramatic ethnic conflicts, consider the former Yugoslavia. We have already mentioned Serbs and Croats, and the very close cultural similarities and ties between them. A similar degree of closeness existed between Bosnian Croats and Muslims: many Muslims thought of themselves as being of Croat descent and Muslim faith only (again, in a strongly atheistic society). They shared a language, many customs, a large part of
common—pre- and post-Ottoman—history, common high and pop cultures, not to speak of closely interwoven demographic and interaction-derived ties. Again, any relevant civic community would include members of both ethnic groups. The same holds for many contrasted groups: Czechs and Slovaks, Poles and Ukrainians, Ukrainians and Russians, Macedonians and Bulgarians, Ulster Catholics and Protestants. Some of them share a religious denomination but differ in language (where they are still mutually understandable), others the other way around. Another historically prominent example until the Holocaust was the Jews, everybody’s internal minority, intensely interacting with the majority, speaking its language, contributing to its culture, business, and politics.

There are many (difficult) pairs of moderately close neighbors. Turks and Bulgarians, as well as Turks and Greeks differ in language and confession, but have a history of intense interaction, with a lot of citizens of mixed descent in certain regions. A particularly worrisome example of almost everybody’s close internal minority are the Roma, or Gypsies, again at least moderately close to the corresponding social strata of their host society, again the long-standing target of ethno-nationalist animosity.

The main point to be retained is that typically nationalist claims are at least implicitly (and often explicitly) oriented towards very often close, sometimes very close, neighbors. Further, the internal ‘neighbors’ addressed by such claims are normally those who belong to the same civic community as the claimant. This distinguishes classical nationalism from anti-colonialism, whose target is often a distant people or culture with links of violent interaction marked by massive inequality and unfairness. To illustrate the main point, Croatian nationalists have nothing against Placido Domingo singing Spanish music in Zagreb: what they do not want is Serbian singers from Serbia, and above all Serbian singers from Croatia itself. As already mentioned, the Croatian Parliament voted a constitutional amendment prohibiting any future alliances with any Balkan country. Finally, remember a related truism: The enemies of my enemies are my friends. For a nationalist tactician this suggests cooperating with moderately distant entities (groups, states) against immediate neighbors often perceived as being at best ‘close strangers’, at worst as posing a direct threat.

This goes some way towards explaining why abstract nationalist principles so often receive a particularly nasty interpretation in politics. If national culture were to be defended against a genuinely foreign one (as it was in colonial conflicts, pitting, for instance, Arab Islamic culture against French lay or Catholic culture) the good to be defended would be easily recognizable, relatively isolated, and could be affirmed without much ado. But when it comes to a close neighbor, the conflict must be heartbreaking: too many crucial ties have to be severed, too many close alliances have to be broken, too many promises made void, and all at the same time. An enormous amount of aggressivity is necessary to start and sustain such conflicts. It is to be expected that under such circumstances—that are rather frequent in typical national conflicts—only the most radical interpretation and application of nationalistic abstract principles has any bite.

Let us now link the Hated Neighbor Truism to the issue of the moral status of proximity and distance and to the Distance Principle. It states that nationalist claims are directed towards neighbors, often close ones. But then, the Distance Principle simply does not apply to most cases for which the nationalist argument from distance is assumed to hold. Indeed, even when it does hold, it is valid only to a certain extent, not absolutely. To revert to our examples, the nationalist argument from distance starts from the appealing
idea that, say, a Serbian has fewer and weaker obligations towards Eskimos than towards fellow Serbs, and proceeds by a series of steps to justify demands for secession and for favoritism in respect of Serbian culture. But the argument relies on the moral power of distance: whereas very distant peoples are (permissibly) morally indifferent to one, very close ones should not be. On the contrary, the closer they are the more concern they should command. Now, the demands of Serbian nationalists obviously do not concern Eskimos; they emphatically concern the closest neighbors, Croats, Albanians, and Muslims, and to a lesser extent the Slovenes, who were part of the same federal state. The demands of the Ulster Protestants concern their closest neighbors only. So, even if the Distance Principle holds in the strongest, literal and absolute sense, it dictates a conclusion contrary to the nationalistic one.

The argument from distance proposed towards the end of the nationalist’s speech in the first section of this chapter thus certainly fails in many important, dramatic cases. It seems to me that it even fails typically and for most situations, but this stronger point should be argued on a case-by-case basis, which I cannot possibly do. So I rest my rejection upon the former claim: the actual, interesting cases of nationalism cannot be covered by the argument from distance, since they all concern the closest neighbors who should, by any version of the Distance Principle, be the object of very high concern and solicitude.

We can, however, go even farther than the mere non-support of the argument from distance for ethno-nationalism when we consider its positive morality. If the principle holds, the unit of one’s moral concern in politics is, first, the community of individuals close to one, according to criteria listed at the outset: territory, demography, history, language, culture, cooperative interaction. Most often, the first relevant unit will be the territorial civic community, regardless of its ethnic composition. It will include the majority ethnic group, together with internal minorities. The second winner is the macro-region comprising neighboring and similar peoples. Some of them are almost as close to one as one’s own people, others are friends’ friends. To clinch the issue, consider the duties one owes to visitors from more distant countries: consider what you owe to a visiting Indian or Japanese (assuming you are yourself a European). Whatever they are, the Distance Principle admonishes you that you do not owe less to your closest neighbors of different ethnic origin. The Distance Principle dictates first of all that one make peace with those closest at hand.

Let me reiterate at the end that I am myself agnostic about the Distance Principle, more skeptical about it than not. My point is a more modest one: even if the principle holds, it suggests the exact opposite of what it is taken to suggest by pro-nationalist writers. It enjoins us to reserve our special care and attention precisely for those from whom the nationalist wants us to distance ourselves the most.

It is useful to keep in mind the simple realities of actual nationalist conflicts in their actual political context. The real targets of nationalist distrust are not distant foreign cultures, but close neighbors. Conversely, the critique of nationalism should focus upon the relationship of the given ethnic group with groups and peoples in its immediate vicinity. To use the geo-politician’s parlance, it is the macro-region that counts morally, not only the world at large. With this contrast-class in mind one can arrive at a more realistic judgment about the (limited) value of nationalistic claims.
NOTES

1. I am putting together claims culled from various sources. For instance, the line on the national character of philosophy is a commonplace with intellectuals in small nations, such as Croatia, Slovenia, Finland, or Slovakia.

2. The origins of the idea can be traced back to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII, 1, (see Baertchi [forthcoming]).

3. Some authors appeal to some variant of the Distance Principle to justify partiality in general (Hurka, 1997; Baertchi, forthcoming), without committing themselves to concrete political claims (the best in my opinion is Miller [1995, chapter 3]).

4. Most concepts philosophers tend to care about have been transmitted to us—in the English-speaking tradition—in an impure, Latinate linguistic garb, through the meanderings of various Romance and later English transformations of Scholastic Latin, for which any Roman communitarian would have had nothing but disgust. The lingo we, philosophers, identify with is the highly abstract idiom of a highly cosmopolitan quasi-community, and it serves us much better than any historically pure, community-bound—in the communitarian sense of a community—idiom could do.

5. For an even more radical line against holism see Millikan (1998a).
Chapter twelve. Human flourishing and understanding of values

WHAT THE NATION HAS TO OFFER

1. We shall now develop the congeries of themes centering on culture and tradition and pass to one of the threads we isolated from it, the argument from flourishing (as J. Lichtenberg has called it [1997, 160]). Its underpinning is the nationalist-traditionalist picture we began to discuss in chapter eleven, that is, the view of a particular culture, prominently its language, as creating a natural framework—that is, a 'second nature'—for members of the culture, the only road to the world of meanings, values, and of human and cultural significance in general. Only within a given comprehensive linguistic-cultural tradition (or practice) is a flourishing life to be lived, and the nation offers a congenial, comprehensive framework for such a life. Of course, the preservation of traditions—in their pure form—is then the paramount task of cultural politics and of politics tout court. What I have to say will overlap with chapter eleven, since I want to use the considerations of flourishing to develop in more detail the approach to tradition sketched there.

2. The central part of the flourishing afforded by tradition has to do with our ability to recognize and understand meaning and value, both in general and on a specifically moral level. Recognition of value is, one hopes, compounded by endorsement. Here we concentrate upon meaning and value in general. Since moral values form a politically crucial group of values, we will dedicate to them the whole of chapter thirteen (of course, this does not commit me to any sharp contrast between moral values and the rest). The traditionalist believes that values are available only to insiders sharing a tradition and accepting its norms wholeheartedly. Of course, we should think about the culture in its pervasive unity and totality: its merely cognitive achievements are inseparable from the rest. As MacIntyre puts it: "Beliefs are expressed in and through rituals and ritual dramas, masks and modes of dress, the ways in which houses are structured and villages and towns laid out, and of course by actions in general" (MacIntyre, 1988, 255). Let me call the traditionalist view that claims that values are recognizable and available only within a large context of a tradition the Availability View. After stating the Availability View the
nationalist typically proceeds to demand loyalty to such a tradition—implying its preservation and continuation—as a condition sine qua non of the very ‘presence’ of values, both moral in the narrow sense, and cultural in the wide sense. In reconstructing the argument I have relied upon the current of literature stressing the immediate presence and availability of meanings and concepts in a language (a theme developed within the Wittgensteinian tradition in Anglo-American philosophy, and used with communitarian political overtones by authors such as MacIntyre, Taylor, and Margalit). If the reader thinks that I am attributing to my nationally minded thinker an argument that is too involved and too indirect, and that actual nationalists go for much less subtle grounds, he is perfectly at liberty to skip this chapter. In most actual pro-nationalistic literature the uniqueness of tradition is simply assumed, and I shall go a little out of my way to make philosophical sense of various brief statements to this effect. (The critics of nationalistic communitarianism are, as a rule, less charitable than I am: see, for example, Hardin [1985], and Kautz [1995], for a rather harsh judgment on it.) Here is my reconstruction of the argument from flourishing, put in the mouth of a moderate, even-handed nationalist:

Let me continue to draw upon language as my central example. Meanings exist only within a given language, so that only through it can one apprehend them. They are learned together with words and sentences, and become fused in conscious understanding and speech. But for the native speaker of a language the contents apprehended are not just abstract meanings. The words carry with them also their emotional significance: the word mort sounds frightening to many native speakers of French, and poets are particularly adept at exploiting such significances. Thanks to this blend of form and meaning the native speaker of a language is capable of apprehending the meanings directly: we read the meanings from the words, the way we read anger from a familiar face. In short, it is a fact that one’s mother tongue is one’s first and perhaps most important window on the realm of concepts, knowledge, social and cultural significance, and so on. We, the speakers of the language, owe our humanity, indeed our very identity, to it. The same point generalizes to culture in its totality. Let me first mention a more pragmatic reason for endorsing tradition-created patterns of value (which was in political theory famously formulated by Edmund Burke at the close of the eighteenth century in his criticism of the French Revolution). Here is a good contemporary formulation: “Good lives do not just spring from rational insight... Like forms of painting or music or literature, ways of life require centuries of experimentation and innovation to develop” (Putnam, 1996, 94). I hasten to add that Putnam himself is far from agreeing with further traditionalist claims.

Let me now pass to principled considerations. Take religious and aesthetic values (this can be generalized to any values that matter to the reader). For a religious Christian, in particular a Catholic, a good painting of the Crucifixion immediately manifests its emotional, religious, and aesthetic content. The suffering of the god crucified is made immediately manifest in the painting, in the appearance of Christ; we do not ‘infer’ or ‘reconstruct’ it, but recognize it, as immediate participants in the tradition which invented it. From the iconoclastic point of view of the Jewish and Islamic tradition this is sheer abomination. What an iconoclast sees is just a man hanging from some boards; the whole point—religious, and thereby also aesthetic—is lost upon him. This nicely illustrates the traditionalist’s point that—as MacIntyre puts it—a practice essentially involves “standards of excellence and obedience to rules” (1981, 177), so that to enter a practice involves accepting these standards and rules. Only within the tradition of painting the Crucifixion with its implicit rules, and beliefs that give the rules their point, can one properly appreciate a great Crucifixion, like those of Duccio, Dürer, or El Greco. The value in question is a complex one, welding a purely religious aspect with an aesthetic...
quality. Such goods and values are, as MacIntyre would put it, “internal to the practice” of religious painting. [Here is his explanation of what it is to be internal to a practice: A good is internal to a practice only if it can be described exclusively in terms of it, and can only be “identified and recognized by the experience of participating in the practice in question” (1981, 176)].

Let us take one more tradition as our last example: the ritual of All Souls’ Day in Mediterranean cultures (French, Italian, Croatian, Hispanic, including Latin American). It involves the ritual of burning special candles in the evening at the cemetery, at the tombs of deceased relatives, often accompanied by ritualized crying, pious remembrance of the dead, a memento of the brevity of life and the vanity of things. The practice features a mixture of specific beliefs—that the dead relatives are living ‘souls’ who might perhaps already be blessed (which is rather improbable, but polite to believe), but who might also be suffering terrible torments; that one is oneself facing such a prospect; that the dead relatives care about the ritual—specific feelings of piety and awe, and a unique ritual aesthetic. One can convincingly argue that the custom features a special, unique feeling that can be felt only by the believing participants. It seems to make available to them a distinctive felt trait or quality of the situation at the cemetery, close to the quality of the sacred, but tempered with sadness and compassion. Call it the ‘All Souls’ Quality’. Individuals acquire sensitivity to standards and norms within a determinate given tradition. Therefore, they can only apprehend the tradition-contents—meanings, significance, and values—in the version in which they are incarnated in some specific community. In a nutshell, only tradition makes available some important values and meanings, and so on. To put it in philosophical parlance, the contents—meanings, significance, and values—are made epistemically accessible (made manifest) only within a tradition. They become welded to the tradition that makes them accessible, and cannot be separated from it and grasped in isolation. Notice that traditions are quite different between them: just cross the street from a Catholic church to a Protestant one, and there will be no painting of the Crucifixion nor statues of the Virgin Mary. Now, the preservation of a given tradition is essential for preservation of the value it makes manifest. In particular, given the importance of the specific traditions, it is essential that each such tradition be preserved in a relatively pure form. They should be somewhat encapsulated in order to prevent indiscriminate, eclectic mixing.

Finally, what about the need for criticism? After all, we nationalists need not be dogmatic about our traditions. We should (following the advice offered by the American theorist Michael Walzer in his Thick and Thin. Moral Argument at Home and Abroad [1994]) distinguish between a critic who tries to disconnect him- or herself from the tradition, place him- or herself outside it, and the critic ‘connected’ to the tradition. The first kind is bound to be empty and ineffective, lacking roots in common values, and addressing no audience in particular; the second is welcome and might also turn out to be effective since it speaks to a particular and known audience. The same applies to the birth of new practices: any change must start from some given practice. Every new practice is dependent on some existing practice or other. Let me now remind you of how all this connects with the topic of nation. We just apply the Nation-as-Basic-Unit Assumption: the proper format of a tradition is ethno-national. The consequences have already been drawn in chapter eleven, so I will not repeat them.

A PLURALIST VIEW OF TRADITIONS

TRADITION AND CONVENTION

Just to warm up, let me briefly point out that the Nation-as-Basic-Unit Assumption is here just as invalid as in the matters discussed in chapter eleven. It is partially valid for
linguistic meanings and the signification attached, insofar as language is welded to a particular ethnic group. For the vast majority of other significances and values it is clearly invalid. Consider pragmatic, aesthetic, and religious values, starting from the latter (and leaving aside moral values, to be discussed in chapter thirteen). Christian religious values are clearly anational; even the narrower ones, Catholic or Protestant, go far beyond anything like a single ethnic group, or even a congeries of such. Major religious denominations notoriously cut across ethnological-linguistic categories: some Slavs are traditionally Catholic, others Orthodox; some Germanic peoples are Catholic, others Protestant; some ethnic groups in India are Hindu, others Buddhist or Muslim, still others are Christians of various denominations. (I am listing notorious examples to point out the utter and obvious implausibility of the nationalist’s strategy.) Are there any clearly important pragmatic values that characterize one national tradition in contrast to others? If there are, they remain to be discovered. (The same holds for aesthetic values. Is there a special Albanian artistic beauty, recognizable only if you pledge your allegiance to the Albanian nation? Hardly: the only contexts in which beauty is national is the banally commercial one of beauty contests, and even there it is the mixture of types and even races that nowadays often wins.)

Given these problems, some implication of the assumption taken literally can easily be seen to be quite eccentric. On the literal reading of it only a Frenchman would be able to understand French literature, only a German would enjoy Mozart’s and Schubert’s music, or understand Kant’s and Reichenbach’s philosophy, and Thomas Mann’s novels. A practical consequence is that foreign culture should not be taught at all, since there is no way it can be transmitted to the student of another nationality.

Although the glaring implausibility of the Basic-Unit Assumption tells forcefully against the nationalist appeal to the tradition, we are still far from finished with it. Our opponent could just replace the nation with some wider circle, and then reiterate the same line, claiming that the wider circle should be given a kind of absolute status (take, for instance, Huntington’s widely publicized view of civilization as the basic unit of politics and history). Equally, some nationalists are primarily interested in the atypical nations for which the ethno-national format coincides to a large extent with cultural belonging, such as Israel. (Their philosophical spokesman facing the task of universalizing his claims might propose that for other ethno-national communities some ad hoc accommodation can be found.) Therefore, we have to dig deeper, and discuss the motivation for traditionalism in general. I shall argue that traditionalism misconstrues traditions. However, there is something to the feeling—shared by many people—that to understand certain kinds of values (for example, the religious and aesthetic value of a Crucifixion scene) it helps to belong to certain traditions (for example, the Catholic one). I shall try to do justice to this feeling, explain it, and dissociate it from more far-reaching traditionalist claims.

Here are the questions I want briefly to address: first, why and how do traditions open an avenue to specific values; secondly, is tradition the only avenue to them? Since I shall answer the second question in the negative, I have at least to sketch the alternative ways of accessing value and meaning. Let me first point out an element which seems completely absent from the traditionalist account, namely the importance of conventions for the birth and maintenance of tradition. Since authority is essential for tradition, tradition-bound actions are not forced by situation and human nature alone; a certain elbow room is available. It is normally shot through with convention.
The simple practice ('tradition') of driving on the right seems to be purely conventional. Language, especially the sound/meaning pairing, also leans to the side of convention. But are all conventional solutions to a given problem (from the banal one of driving on the same side of the road to the deeper one of representing an invisible deity pictorially) equally good? Consider driving and the choice between driving always on the right, always on the left, and on alternate sides on alternate days. All three options are solutions to the problem of how to coordinate the actions of individuals so as to minimize damage, and the choice between them is in this sense conventional. However, the last option is less simple and puts more demands on drivers, so the first two are better and in this sense more 'natural'.

So, the beginning of wisdom is to recognize that some choices are better than others, although all of them are conventional in the sense of being up for grabs. Let me give a few more examples. A slightly more complicated matter concerns the fact that only some meanings are assigned particular words: English has a single word for female fox 'vixen', but not for female whale. The linguists express this by saying that a meaning is 'lexicalized'. Lexicalization often implies the frequent occurrence, importance, and naturalness of the property referred to. (There is in English no male equivalent for 'midwife'; the fact that the combination 'woman + assists at childbirth' is lexicalized, whereas 'male + assists at childbirth' is not, indicates that the job has traditionally been done almost exclusively by women.) Different languages lexicalize different concepts. There is no single word equivalent in ancient Greek, Chinese, Slovenian, or Croatian for the English 'mind'. So the practice of speaking English makes one familiar with the concept 'mind' immediately, so to speak, whereas a Slovene speaker has to learn the concept through descriptive explanation. Various contemporary schools of philosophy have attached various degrees of importance to the difference. Good advice for a language-creator (society, evolution, God) is to first lexicalize the concepts that stand for the most conspicuous properties: create the word for 'dog' before creating one for mammal or for basset hound ('dog' belongs among the 'basic-level categories', as they are officially called in the psychology of concepts). So some conventions (lexicalizing the concept 'dog' and waiting with 'basset hound') are better than others (lexicalize 'basset hound') in a given practical context. One can tell a similar story about artistic traditions of style: a given tradition might offer optimal solutions for satisfying diverse demands, urgent at the time of its birth, but also relevant at later epochs. Let us then generalize this point.

Traditions involve conventions, but some conventions solve the problems at hand better than others. The traditionalist denies any role to conventions, while the radical conventionalist inflates it. The truth lies in the middle. This partly vindicates the pragmatic consideration about the good life proposed by Burke and his followers: tradition-transmitted paradigms of the good life may incorporate the results of accumulated experience. They are like actual living species that have survived through evolution by being successful. But the vindication is only partial. First, our thoughtful and pragmatic traditionalist faces a paradox. Notice that he justifies traditions by their excellence in solving problems: if tradition demands that you do such-and-such an action—say eat with a knife and fork—you should perform the action since it is an efficient way of getting things done, it saves time and deliberation (are my hands clean enough so that I can safely eat with my fingers, and so on). But performing an action, A, as part of a tradition implies doing it primarily because it is being done, and has been done, by
others. Our traditionalist enjoins us to do A on grounds that are independent of tradition: considerations of efficiency and economy are precisely non-traditional grounds for doing A. So, a kind of mild paradox threatens our traditionalist. One may almost cynically add that tradition starts when the original pragmatic reasons for doing things are forgotten (as B. Bercic once put it). Moreover, the proposed account of how traditions begin implies that some experimentation is essential for finding good solutions; perhaps one should then go on experimenting, and not follow tradition blindly.

Now, merely pointing out that conventions are valuable because they solve problems does not explain the more difficult cases: why does one have to know so much about the history of religious painting properly to appreciate a Baroque Crucifixion, or so much about history of science properly to appreciate the achievement of Linnaeus or Darwin? In order to answer this question, let me propose an idealized sketch of the development of tradition. To vary the example, take table manners: how should one eat? At the beginning we face simple choices: eat from one’s hand, eat with sticks, or devise knives and forks. Some solutions (say sticks and knife-and-fork) offer themselves as better than others given the general conditions of hygiene, the nature of the food, and so on. So each tradition adopts one solution (the West adopts the knife and fork, and China adopts chopsticks). The appropriateness of the solution is determinable independently of the adoption and tradition and this makes the adoption rational. Similarly with the more sublime issues, like religious painting.

Returning to Crucifixion scenes, here is a drastically simplified sketch. A culture can be atheistic, denying that there is a God, or it can be a religious culture. Focus upon monotheistic religion and take the problem encountered by Moses and Aaron (according to some version of the biblical story). Moses has understood that God is infinite and has no visible shape. On the other hand, Aaron reminds him that the faithful want to adore a concrete item, to visibly represent God in order to be able to think of him. What should one do? The Jewish and Islamic founding fathers chose to forbid portraying God, the Christian ones to allow it. Each tradition has found its own answer to the Moses and Aaron problem.

At a second stage some further choice is encountered. For table manners, once you choose sticks, you have the option of cutting food in small pieces before cooking, or afterwards. The Chinese chose the first option. Similarly with the Moses and Aaron problem. Several options offer themselves for the first tradition: don’t decorate churches at all, decorate them with symbols, or with calligraphically written names of God. Several options are also available to the second tradition. Once God is to be portrayed, and Christ is God, you can portray him as a ruling judge or as a suffering victim on the cross. People are already used to God being represented. Suppose that the sympathies of the public lean towards those who are suffering, and that judges and kings are not very popular. In such an atmosphere, a crucified God is an appropriate object of painting. A tradition of painting Crucifixions, even rather naturalistic ones, can get started. From the (iconoclastic) point of view of the Jewish and Islamic tradition this is sheer abomination; it makes sense only within a tradition which already routinely represents God, and only chooses among various ways of doing so.

If we simplify matters, and also represent the alternative between religion and atheism, we obtain the following tree that leads to the tradition of painting Crucifixions.
This explains the epistemic bonus that membership of the tradition gives: if you are a devout Catholic, pictures of the Crucifixion have a content for you that you can grasp without hesitation; first, you understand the literal meaning of the picture without any conscious effort; secondly, you see it as deeply intertwined with other religious/cultural contents (such as the sorrow expressed in various Stabat Mater compositions), and finally its emotional and moral significance is not only manifest to you, but it is manifest immediately. The tradition has done the job for you, taking you along the complicated decision tree sketched above: of course it is all right to represent God pictorially; of course you should represent him in one of his moments of deep, not apparent glory, the glory of total sacrifice for humankind. And of course this glory is only accentuated by a naturalistic, dramatic display of the otherwise gory details of martyrdom. In contrast, a member of an iconoclastic culture is stuck at a distant branch of the decision tree: for him or her, the first decision, to paint a likeness of God, already amounts to blasphemy, so that the issue of the naturalistic representation of the Passion is completely out of the question.

A large part of the justification and value of membership of the tradition lies in the fact that it is appropriate given that one has adopted previous solutions and responded to problems they have created: the rationality lies in the path taken, not in the outcome considered in isolation. This initial success can then lead to later stages (consider expressionist Crucifixions, or the more recent ones painted by Francis Bacon). Very often the choices become completely unintelligible outside the long and tortuous path. Consider an analogy with evolution: why did nature not invent wheels as means of locomotion? Well, once proto-legs emerged out of various excrescences, evolution was stuck with this solution; it could only make legs more perfect, not start anew with a fresh design for wheels. To summarize, the impression that values exist only within given traditions is in large part due to the way human activity is structured within traditions. The value of particular solutions is relative to the problems, and the problems are posed within given frameworks. These frameworks are themselves products of previous attempts at problem solving.

This insight into the path-dependence of value is a double-edged sword for the traditionalist. On the one hand, it gives him some consolation; after all, some values really do not exist outside their tradition. On the other hand, he has to admit that some of the tradition-sanctified values are such only insofar as one complies with the tradition, and evaporate once the tradition is jettisoned. Of course, such values cannot by themselves justify the continuance of the tradition, on pain of circularity.

Now, how about the directness of access to meanings and values that the language-tradition offers its members? Here is a way to account for it, starting with language meanings. Meanings are learned together with words and sentences, and become fused in
conscious understanding and speech. This engenders the feeling of naturalness: of course, the word-shape 'cat' means [CAT] and refers to cat(s). We don't need psycholinguists to tell us this: the experience of learning a foreign language is enough. You first put together the word *chat* and the meaning [CAT] which may be, for you, incarnated in the English word and for the time being inseparable from it. After having spoken French for a longer time, you come to recognize the meaning ‘immediately’; the word *chat* begins for you to refer to cats without any need to invoke the English intermediary.

18 With the acquisition of a first language, the issues are more controversial. It is not clear what kind of concepts the prelinguistic ones are (if such exist, as the cognitive scientists are more and more inclined to believe). Certainly, a lot of concepts are acquired through the acquisition of language, and inseparably from it. Now, a monolingual child normally assumes that the naming relation is in a sense ‘natural’: of course, the word for cat is ‘cat’—what else? The conventional character of the word-form-meaning connection is hidden from view, unavailable for the learner. I propose that we take this simple fact as our paradigm for explaining the felt naturalness of the semantics of our mother tongue.

19 Psychologists will one day come up with a detailed explanation of why the conventionality of certain relations keeps such a low profile and stays in the background, if nothing intervenes. The lack of conspicuousness certainly makes learning simpler by reducing the number of alternatives the learner would be tempted to think of; but the phenomenon might also be a byproduct of our neural design. For instance, the learning of skills is generally less flexible than propositional learning, and a lot of semantic knowledge may be just a question of skilled use. Alternatively, one could argue that neural networks are extremely good at simple and univocal associations, and rather bad on subtleties. Whatever the actual bio-psychological cause, the effects are tremendous. The low visibility of the mechanisms that fix meaning is responsible for the dramatic difference between the view from within and the view from without.

20 The feeling that a word has a semantic ‘profile’, a ‘physiognomy’ is tied to this fusion of meaning and form. But there is more to it, namely affective significance. The acquisition of language does not stop at the recognition of mere semantic profiles. It involves a ‘thick’ understanding, rich with emotional and evaluative overtones. If the word *mort* does not sound ominous to you, you have not even begun to master French. How is this to be explained? Consider language learning. The graphic shape ‘mort’ in my own colloquial dialect of Croatian, means [PLASTER], and is for me devoid of any emotional significance. The sound pattern ‘mo:r’ in English (meaning, of course [MORE]) is often emotionally equally bland. Now, in learning French, I have to ‘see’ the graphic shape as embodying the meaning [DEATH], and my anglophone counterpart has to ‘hear’ the sound pattern ‘mo:r’ as doing the same. In doing so, we presumably transfer the emotional overtones associated with the meaning and referent to the newly learned word. The assumption is a piece of commonsense. It is not because of the sound of the word that we fear death, but the other way around. The form of the word ‘death’ carries an emotional overtone since its meaning does; the meaning does since the (type-)event does. Equally, the form of the word ‘mort’ begins to acquire the overtone, once the learner associates the French meaning with it. Of course, in learning his mother tongue, the child does not start from the correct view that it is a matter of convention what the sound ‘mo:r’ stands for. For little Jacqueline it is a scary word, whereas for Johnny the same sound pattern is a useful device for asking for a second helping. Again, the conventional character of the link between word and significance remains in the background, or even completely hidden.
from the speaker. Worse still, the inability to think of alternatives and the feeling of complete fusion is a sign of deep, spontaneous mastery of language. It is then used by poets and musicians and becomes part of high culture. The fusion can be accompanied by the following phenomenon: the emotional overtones of mort and ‘death’ are almost the same, but perhaps not exactly the same. It is not that death itself is scary to the French in a different way. More probably, our access to emotion is holistic and blurred, so that a difference in the vehicle—the word shape—is felt as a difference in content.

One can use the analogy with language in order to understand in detail how other kinds of tradition manage to make manifest significance and value. Unfortunately, we can here only signal the possibility and leave the hard work for another occasion.

**CAN A TRADITION BE UNDERSTOOD FROM THE OUTSIDE?**

We can now tackle the main issue: is the only way to understand tradition-bound values to become a card-carrying member of the tradition, or can an outsider achieve an understanding as well? For some traditions the answer is clearly negative: it is enough for the outsider to learn the facts about problems and choices. For instance, once you know the basic facts about eating with chopsticks, you can come to appreciate a virtuoso technique displayed by an authentic member of the tradition. Even a person who only knows the rules of chess and has very little experience of playing can understand some spectacular quick victories won by great chess-masters.

But can an outsider equal an average member of a religious tradition in his or her understanding of religious painting and music? One way is to try to reconstruct the path, and thus achieve insight into the point of the final result. One can do this without oneself endorsing the choices. A thoughtful atheist can understand why other thoughtful people believe in an infinite, personal god, in the sense of being able to reconstruct their motivation, their reasoning, and the sources of their emotion. One can well understand the need for pictorial representation of a beloved being, and the difficulty which arises if the being is supposed to be infinite and literally unrepresentable. (I first understood this many years ago, following the plot of Schoenberg’s opera *Moses and Aaron.*) One can then reason from the general facts of human sympathy. We can read books on church councils in the fourteenth century, when iconography became more humanized, and books about the Counter-Reformation and the artistic views of the Council of Trent. Moreover, it might happen that an outsider can understand some of the values in certain ways better than an insider. A traditional Christian normally sees only one possibility for a religious person, that is, to believe in a god. No god, no religion. A researcher doing comparative work might point out that Buddhism is, strictly speaking, a religion without god; he understands that religious feelings are not necessarily tied to (an idea of) a god at all. In his view, then, Christianity actualizes one distinctive possibility of religious life. It might seem to other readers, as it seems to me, that this insight from an outsider offers an authentic understanding of an aspect of Christianity that is simply not available to the traditional Christian unacquainted with other possibilities.

But is the reconstruction sufficient? Is it enough coldly to understand the point of certain beliefs and practices, the traditionalist might ask? Is not the value of a painting disclosed primarily to someone who is capable of emotionally reacting to it, not to someone whose means are limited to cold, rational reconstruction?
Indeed, the traditionalist might have a point. But is emotion reserved to serious, literal love or hate? Do we not sympathize with the plight of Anna Karenina, or with Kurosawa’s (culturally rather distant) heroes? The examples of emotion evoked by fictional characters point to the general capacity for empathy, which goes a long way in helping people to understand distant strangers emotionally. To return to our example, the outsider need not limit him- or herself to cold reconstruction. Once he or she has realized that some people really do feel intense love for God, he or she might understand their wish by putting him- or herself into their shoes. Of course, the outsider knows what it is to want a picture of a beloved person (he or she might carry a photo of one in his or her bag), so it is enough for him or her simply to imagine that a beloved person is a somewhat unusual one, an almighty and perfect being. He or she then imagines how it would be to believe that such a being has let himself be tortured and killed for the well-being of humanity (or how he or she would feel if he or she knew this was actually the case). Of course, he or she is then deeply touched by a picture of this ordeal, in the same imaginative way in which he or she would be moved by a good dramatic representation.

Cognitive psychologists have elaborated a theory of empathy under the title of ‘mental simulation’. They would represent our outsider-character as using his or her own mind to simulate the reasoning and feelings of a devout Christian. He or she uses his or her own mental ‘equipment’ for an imaginative task. He or she starts by giving it the appropriate input: there is a perfect, infinite being that I love. Then he or she lets it run—so to speak—’offline’, not with a view to reaching an actual decision, but rather to see how it feels to be a devout person. The result of this simulation is an affect, a wish to have a picture to adore, which is not seriously acted upon, but used in order to understand people with different beliefs. (Alternatively, if our hero is well read in history, he or she can try to empathize with a priest living centuries ago when Christ was not routinely depicted on the cross, and having to make a decision whether to commission a crucifix for his church; he or she might relive his struggles and come to understand the deep point of this genre of religious painting.) Of course, coming to understand the religious and artistic values of a foreign tradition might be an arduous task, but the anti-traditionalist does not claim it is easy, only that it is humanly possible without endorsing the tradition oneself.

Consider again the example of All Souls’ Day. The alleged quality of the situation at the ritual is seen by us as depending upon a web of belief we find hard to sustain. We can account in a rough and ready way for the specific All Souls’ Quality: it is projected from the web of beliefs, ritual, and the filial sorrow and sense of loss. In philosophical parlance it is a response-dependent quality. Perhaps no other combination can create the same response, and project exactly the same quality. (The Chinese cult of ancestors is probably accompanied by different emotions and qualities.) In this case the alleged quality is indeed essentially tied to the practice, but this is simply in virtue of being projected from it; it is a pleasant phantom born from the practice, rather than a solid item revealed in it. Similarly with All Souls’ Day in a community which does not believe seriously in the afterlife. We manage with a simulation: taken in by the beauty of the ceremony, we simulate the belief that our deceased ancestors are perhaps tormented (I myself cannot imagine them exactly in purgatory, which seems to me ludicrous, but I manage to imagine them tormented somewhere, somehow, in a rather Romantic fashion). Recently the Kronos Quartet, together with a composer who had studied the ritual in Mexico, decided to recreate it at one of their concerts, to my mind quite successfully. In an interview they expressed a feeling featuring a deep interest in the aesthetic component,
plus the simulation of sorrow, piety, and awe; the music, which was extremely beautiful,
was in the same vein.

28 This bring us to the last possibility, namely a theoretical, scientific understanding of
traditions and their contents. I shall mention it for the sake of completeness, since it
would take us too far afield to consider it in detail. A theoretical understanding is not to
be excluded in advance, and, if and where possible, should certainly be sought.

29 To summarize, it is not true that one can understand the meanings and values embedded
in a tradition only by becoming a devout member of the tradition. The main line of
defense of traditionalism is invalid. The outsider has several options: first, learning the
facts about problems and choices; secondly, rationally (commonsensically) reconstructing
the path and recognizing the reasons for choices; thirdly, using empathy to 'simulate'
original feelings and thoughts; and, possibly, fourthly, attempting a theoretical
reconstruction of original choices.

30 Using these options one can even hope to understand the tradition better from the
outside. We begin to understand the flexibility of traditions and practices, and their
capacity to beget new, rather different practices. Again, language should be our
paradigm; like bilingualism, biculturalism is a revealing phenomenon, not a mere
curiosity. In the West it has been almost a conceptual truth about being religious that one
has to believe in (at least) a god. Now, some Buddhists are clearly religious and profess
belief in no god, Buddha being just a perfect saint. The moral of the story: the practice of
worshipping a god is not the only practice which fosters religious feelings and activities.
The form of god-centered religion is only one way among many to be religious. Learning
this fact makes one view one's own practice from a (sometimes salutary) distance; one
learns that certain emotions survive drastic transplantation, and thrive in unexpected
climates. If you believe that emotions reveal values then the values revealed in this case
seem to transcend even very broadly conceived practices (the broad practice of theism,
encompassing Greek polytheism, Islam, Christianity, and a lot of others).

31 The discussion, however, need not remain purely theoretical. The possibility of
empathizing with different traditions points to the importance of the plurality of cultural
forms, most of which are not specifically ethno-national. They might all become available
if one's education is cosmopolitan enough. It also reminds us that the antiquarian interest
of preservation has to be counterbalanced by the striving for originality and innovation
and the moral effort for the correction of the morally repulsive traits of any given
culture. Indeed, among the good solutions that various traditions propose, some are
solutions to antiquated problems that need to be reviewed, and all of them have been
arrived at by experiment in innovation: so why not go on in the same direction?

32 We should also take into account the fact that the creative development of art and culture
might require a pluralistic context which can go in our time all the way towards a
cosmopolitan setting. In the next chapter we shall try to extend this result to the special
and specially important case of moral traditions.

33 Let me conclude the chapter by pointing to another, more general weakness of the
argument from flourishing. The un-chosen national framework is essential for human
flourishing, it claims. But such a high valuation of non-chosen, non-autonomous
belonging neglects the value of autonomy. We do not want to be made happy
independently of our choice. We do not want to live in a brave new world in which others
decide on our destinies; therefore, the appeal to non-chosen belonging to tradition seems
to run counter to the fundamental value of autonomy. One reason communitarian nationalists do not mind sacrificing some of our autonomy lies in their view that individuals are products of socialization, therefore not independent units (‘atoms’, as they put it), as the quotation from N. MacCormick in chapter two made clear. Children do not autonomously choose the kind of community they want to live in, and once constituted by the community they had better abide by its traditions. In my view, the communitarian’s mistake lies in jumping to the further conclusion, that is, that socializing does not result in autonomy. As we have already mentioned: individuals in our civilization are normally often socialized precisely for independence. One can caricature this goal using the notion of the ‘atom’, but the goal is more noble than the caricature allows one to suppose. We cherish an education that makes one capable of choice, not blind identification with a given framework.

34 According to a comment by M. Haller, then of Geneva University, M. Haller, MacCormick and other communitarians might simply mean by ‘independent’ individuals, ‘individuals anterior to any form of organized society’, whereas I mean ‘competent to make autonomous decisions’. But the issue is precisely whether the right model for a state is the model of the contract entered into by autonomous individuals. If communitarians take the view that it is absurd to suppose that human beings are autonomous anterior to any form of organized society, and accept that, once socialized, individuals are capable of autonomous decisions, then they cannot derive a criticism of the contract view from this origin-oriented dependence: although socialized, an individual might view staying within it as a matter of autonomous decision, and if all individuals do the same, their community will rest on a broadly contractual basis, without any absurdity being implied.

35 At this juncture our even-handed nationalist can enter a complaint that we have identified culture with ‘high’ culture and that we have talked mostly about paintings and sophisticated music. When he talks about culture he means all of it, customs, ways of solving practical issues, that is, traditions of action of a much more solid kind than those characterizing high art. To these issues we now turn.

NOTES

1. The extant literature in favor of national traditions is unfortunately rather stingy with examples, so I am reusing my own Crucifixion example, hoping that it captures the kind of considerations our nationally minded philosophers have in mind.

2. There is a stronger version of these claims, namely that traditions are incommensurable: there is no way to appreciate the values of one tradition from within some other tradition. Since Taylor and MacIntyre do not go so far, I will follow their lead and not saddle my nationally minded philosopher with claims of incommensurability which I find wildly implausible.
Chapter thirteen. National tradition as a school of morals

‘THICK’ AND ‘THIN’ MORALITY

We now pass to the line of defense of nationalism which claims that the nation is the best and perhaps the only school of morality and virtue. Individuals acquire sensitivity to moral standards, and the capacity to live up to them, only within a determinate tradition, most often a national one. It is therefore essential that each national tradition be preserved in a relatively pure state, and this demand can trump other demands of morality. Therefore, the love of one’s nation is an important virtue, perhaps even a supreme one, the condition of all others. I will follow MacIntyre’s reasoning very closely, combining his examples from *After Virtue* (1981) and the defense of the nationally minded attitude in his *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?* (1994). Here is what our even-handed (but rather tough) nationalist has to say:

All of us learn the fundamentals of morality on our parents’ knees, within the community to which we originally belong. The British learn their values from the British tradition, the Bantu from the Bantu tradition, and so on. But this is just a beginning. Like other values, moral ones become visible and available, and remain so only within a communal tradition and practice. As the philosopher MacIntyre puts it: “I can only apprehend the rules of morality in the version in which they are incarnated in some specific community” (MacIntyre, 1981, 10). Let me detail the example given by him. Consider the value of truthfulness. Now, the Pietist child learns about the value by submitting to the Pietist code and practice in matters of truthfulness, the Bantu child makes exceptions when there is a danger of witchcraft as a consequence of following the Bantu code, and little Alasdair tells a white lie to his aunt in accordance with the Anglo-American code. Following MacIntyre I propose to treat these as different traditions of truthfulness.

Here is a related example, offered by M. Walzer in chapter one of his *Thick and Thin. Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (1994). He recounts his enthusiasm for the Czech ‘Velvet Revolution’ that brought down the communist regime. He watched the Czech protesters carrying transparents with the words ‘truth’ and ‘justice’ on them. Of course he understood what the words meant: a demand for an immediate end to official lies, and an immediate end to the glaring inequalities between the nomenklatura and the people. His main point, however, is that he would not be able
to say what detailed view of justice these Czechs held: their culture and experience has been different from his. When it comes to the nitty-gritty of particular applications of justice—say in health care or the insurance system—it is their tradition that counts for them, not his. He offers a useful terminological distinction, and calls the rich, detailed concept of justice or truthfulness the ‘thick’ concept, whereas the general, more abstract one is a ‘thin’ concept. So, in his view, he and the Czechs share the ‘thin’ concepts of justice and truthfulness, but not the rich, ‘thick’ one. We can apply the distinction to the previous example: the Pietist, the Bantu, and Anglo-Americans share the thin concept of truthfulness, but each has a different thick one, embedded in his own tradition. In short, the real, concrete value is available only to the insider, and there is no moral life apart from concrete, historical communities. We learn the rules of morality from within particular societies, and our community is needed to sustain us as moral agents, and the justification of morality must be in terms of particular goods enjoyed within particular communities. As MacIntyre puts it, “A central contention of the morality of patriotism is that I will obliterate and lose a central dimension of the moral life if I do not understand the enacted narrative of my own individual life as embedded in the history of my country” (1994, 16).

Moreover, as MacIntyre has been stressing for a long time, one’s life makes sense only if integrated into a (narrative) unity, and such a unity is achievable only within a tradition. He makes a dramatic, but appropriate statement of the practical consequences of such a view: given the paramount importance of community in fostering one’s moral life, one’s allegiance to the community and what it requires of one—even to the point of requiring one to die to sustain its life—largely surpasses what mere abstract morality would require of one. Only a concrete, historical community, such as a nation, can legitimately demand such a degree of solidarity, can demand that its members unconditionally love it. As the saying goes: Lavinia, love it or leave it!

ARE THERE NATIONAL MORALITIES?

We have discussed traditions in general at length. Now, can the general traditionalist line about morals be plausibly and usefully narrowed down to the specific domain of ethno-national concerns? All depends on the claim that the ethno-nation is the basic moral unit, that is, on the moral version of the Nation-as-Basic-Unit Assumption. Let me try to show that it is false and that the contemporary ethno-nation is not a very good candidate for being the school in which we learn rules of morality, nor is it the right framework for substantial moral traditions. Unfortunately, the communitarian writers we are discussing offer no guidelines about what counts as the same (type of) moral code, nor what differences are sufficient for classifying two particular codes as belonging to different types. Therefore, we have to work from examples.

To start from moral development, the crucial phase is early socialization. A child’s first notions of fairness and duty seem to be acquired rather early, in the context of family and peer group, long before any significant contact with the (ethno-)nation at large. (Some authors even think it is innate.) Neither is adolescent socialization particularly nation-bound in contemporary societies either. Often, moral character is essentially formed before any significant appeal to specifically national values finds its way into the heart of the acolyte. Now, the pro-nationalist could reply that small groups are just pipelines transmitting ‘(ethno-) national morality’. But in that case we must point to a banal fact: for most small and middle-sized ethno-nations there is no specific moral tradition which would distinguish them from their neighbors. The Catalonians cannot base their claim to
independence upon any specifically 'Catalonian' morality, distinct from the 'Castilian' one. To use MacIntyre's example of truthfulness, there is no specifically Serbian code of truthfulness distinct from a Bulgarian or a Romanian one. (Remember, ethno-nations want to distinguish themselves from their immediate neighbors; moral contrasts between Serbs and Eskimos, if such exist, are simply not relevant in this context.) This means that a given Serb could have acquired strictly identical standards of truthfulness, say, anywhere in the Orthodox Balkans and probably even further afield. As a school of morals, a town, a nation-state, and a micro-region are often on an equal footing; if anything, smaller neighborhoods play a more prominent role in early socialization than such relatively large areas as nation-states.

4 More importantly, moral traditions unite people of very different origins: the Catholic tradition unites Italian and Irish, Croats and Argentines; the Confucian tradition encompasses all of East Asia; the Orthodox Church unites Macedonians, Bulgarians, and Greeks, groups which would hardly agree to become one nation; and so on. Now, what about the borders of great cultural circles? Do not Poles legitimately see themselves as defenders of a valuable Catholic moral tradition in the face of (or in the teeth of, as some would put it) Russian and Ukrainian Orthodoxy? And is not macro-regional cultural belonging in this context an important pillar of national belonging? Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that it is often invoked when needed (in our Polish example, against Russians); no, in the sense that appeal to it is neither very principled nor consistent. To keep with the same example, when describing the historical conflict with Catholic German crusaders, Polish romantic nationalist writers tend to forget the very same trait that seems so essential when the Russians play the role of enemies. The choice is obviously tactical and pragmatic, not principled and moral.

5 Let me add that I find Walzer's example of the Czechs puzzling. They are not an exotic tribe, with a morality profoundly different from the Anglo-American one. His giving up of 'thick' understanding because of his inability to recommend the detailed organization of particular institutions for the Czechs seems too hasty: of course, no one can form an idea of how to organize the health-care system for a people justly and in detail simply by watching a short TV-movie about them, but this does not show that the people in question have fundamentally different moral values from those of the TV watcher. (I could not give competent advice on the same topic, even to my best friends with whom I share a lot of moral views; am I therefore a moral stranger to them?)

6 Furthermore, most contemporary nations exhibit not only internal diversity but a transnational closeness of particular sub-populations, as illustrated by the following simple example: given two Western nations, which are overall rather conservative, there will certainly be some feminist (or environmentalist, or whatever) groups in each, such that they are by any reasonable standard of closeness of moral codes, morally closer to each other than to other groups in their own nation. Professional morality is one example; to take an illustration that should be close to MacIntyre's heart, even in the good old times the morals of a Scottish priest were closer to those of his French colleague (celibacy, complicated property laws, obligations and liabilities related to sacraments) than to the moral code of his own Highland peasants. This is relevant to MacIntyre's other claims on behalf of the ethno-national community, not just the learning claim. Consider his idea that our community is needed to sustain us as moral agents, and consider the feminists and the priests in our example. For both groups, 'our community' is the community of commitment—fellow feminists, or fellow priests—it primarily
sustains them as moral agents. In short, many groups compete for the loyalties of individuals, not just ethno-national communities.

7 In light of these two points consider the view that the justification of morality must be in terms of particular goods enjoyed within particular communities. Bear in mind that the word ‘particular’ is ambiguous between an indexical, person-relative and a general meaning. A Croatian victory over Serbs is a particular good, mainly, if not exclusively, for Croats; in this sense such goods are tied to given communities but have little to do with the justification of morality. On the other hand, ‘particular’ can mean ‘of a particular kind’, for instance a particularly Croatian truthfulness, as opposed to a Slovenian one. In this sense, it would be morally relevant if it were available; but a particular Croatian truthfulness is nonsense, unworthy of a serious philosopher. (Here is a problem for more philosophically oriented readers: suppose you want to understand Spinoza’s, or Schiller’s, or the pope’s ethical teaching. How do you proceed, given that they are not your co-nationals, at least not all of them? How is ethics to be taught? Divided into sections by the national origin of important philosophers? There is more: the pope is a Pole and, naturally enough, a Catholic; how should he preach morals to non-Polish Catholics if Polish morals are essentially national?)

8 Next, the appeal to the narrative unity of life does little to relate it to the ethno-nation more closely than to any other group that happens to play a role in the narrative. For some persons, the fact that they are women is vastly more important than their ethnic belonging; for some it is their status as workers that counts, in terms of socialization, standards of valuing and acting, and the unity and meaning of life. Some pro-nationalists might be tempted to use as an additional argument the following considerations, offered by Charles Taylor, which relate to the value-providing role of language: “The language we have come to accept articulates the issues of the good for us. But we cannot have fully articulated what we are taking as given, what we are simply counting with, in using this language” (Taylor, 1989, 36). If we take ‘language’ here in the sense of a particular language—Dutch, Swahili—a case can be made for linking the issue of good with the ethno-national tradition. (It is not clear whether Taylor meant it the way the ethno-nationalist line would develop it.) Remember that we are dealing with specific distinctions between ethno-nations. How plausible is it to claim that ‘language’ which articulates the issues of the good for us in specific terms is ethnic language, not just the ‘language of morals’ or of praise and blame? I submit, not very much. Take the Romance family of languages: is the ‘issue of the good’ differently articulated in Italian, Castilian, Catalan, and French? How differently? Is blame in Italian ‘incommensurable’ with blame in French? How about ‘truthfulness in German’ as opposed to ‘truthfulness in French’? Remember, the task at hand is not to distinguish the Asian Taoist tradition from the European Christian one, or to discuss the fine details of Japanese in contrast with English, but to find justification in terms of a specific ‘language of the good’ between geographically close (ethno-) nations: their members are supposed to preserve their specific ethno-nationally bound and transmitted values. How about mixed marriages, say, between an Irish person and a German? Do they normally suffer from moral incommensurability? Or what about translating works on moral issues? Is the practice of using translations in court, when discussing matters of moral importance, a madly irrational practice, giving the lie to our deepest moral commitment? Is it irrational to translate Spinoza’s Ethics into Polish, a language distinct from Latin? How about translating Taylor and MacIntyre into French? Is this necessarily a falsification? The
obvious answer is 'no'. The whole line is sheer nonsense (and I hope Taylor did not have this extreme in mind).

Finally, it is not clear that moral traditions should be as determinate, closed, and fixed as MacIntyre is claiming, in order to provide individuals with values and standards of life. But this is a point that reaches further than the narrowly ethno-national issue, so before discussing it let me recapitulate: patriotism would be able to trump other moral considerations only if the ethno-nation were the central and perhaps only provider of moral value. This is, however, far from the truth.

**IS PURITY OF TRADITION A VIRTUE?**

We have not finished yet. Even if the ethno-nation is not the right carrier of moral tradition, or at least not in most cases, some other community might turn out to be. In that case such a community would inherit the sanctity of tradition or practice, if the practice is actually sacrosanct, that is, such that it should not be replaced by another one on pain of moral anarchy. As already noted, I take the traditionalist to be making a claim about the need to preserve given practices and traditions. Again, one general problem is that there is no agreed standard of sameness of tradition, so that the defender can always downplay the changes, claiming that the tradition is still the same, and the critic can always point to innovations and claim that the tradition has been subverted.

Let us therefore return to the truthfulness examples, in which case MacIntyre has already done the job of identifying particular traditions for us. Remember that the Pietists, the Bantu, and contemporary Anglo-Americans (the culture MacIntyre perhaps means by 'ours') all value truthfulness. Now, as already mentioned, the Pietist child learns about the value by submitting to the Pietist code and practice in matters of truthfulness, the Bantu child makes exceptions when there is a danger of witchcraft as a consequence of following the Bantu code, and little Alasdair tells a white lie to his aunt in accordance with the Anglo-American code. MacIntyre treats these as different, which is a rather strict criterion of sameness. (He has to, of course; otherwise he would prematurely arrive at a position of universal morality.) However, he himself draws the reasonable conclusion that each of the codes embodies the value—presumably the same one—of truthfulness. What is it about the three codes that makes each of them a candidate for preservation (immunity, in short)? Suppose that Bantus soon come to realize both that there is no danger of witchcraft, and that aunts are excessively vulnerable to criticisms from their nephews, and thus “the reformulation of their beliefs or the remaking of their practices” come close to the Anglo-American code on details of truthfulness. Would there be anything wrong with this? Or, to take a more serious and more realistic example: in many Mediterranean cultures young gentlemen are taught that truthfulness is not mandatory in matters of love, that is, that successfully hidden male infidelity is a good thing; that is the Mediterranean code and practice through which the young males acquire their imputed characters/roles. Well, a young Don Giovanni grows up, does some thinking about how he would feel if his beloved did the same, and decides that cheating is cheating. What is wrong with this rejection of imputed roles? Given that the final value is universal, and that differences come from largely minor matters, morally speaking, there must be something about the path to the value that makes it immune to criticism. What is it? MacIntyre, and most other communitarians, are curiously silent on this issue. They stress that the apprentice has to submit to authority in order to learn, and has initially to
accept the rules as given; but what about mature moral reflection? It is incredible that they think that one should not change one's behavior upon learning that there is no witchcraft, or coming to realize that lying to a woman who loves you is just lying to a loving human being; they are too humane and sophisticated for this sort of moral blindness. Let us survey the possibilities.

12 The least persuasive answer is merely to reiterate that there is no grasping the value of truthfulness outside a particular practice. Our Don Giovanni has transcended his native practice in the direction simply of a more general rule. The native practice has helped him, and enabled him to grasp the value of truthfulness at least in a masculine context; but once his moral eyes are opened he is obviously pursuing the value outside his native context. The availability of this option shows how difficult it is for the theoretician of narrowly bound practice to uphold his view in the pure form. If he wants to avoid relativism, he has to admit that native practices open individuals’ eyes to values that are universally binding, at least to some extent (that is, perhaps, subject to a lot of qualifications). But then, the practices have only an instrumental importance, that of a good transmitter. If, on the other hand, he takes values to be particularized to narrow practices (which MacIntyre himself avoids at all costs), he will end in relativism, in courage-for-Bantus being incommensurable with courage-for-Europeans. Thus he will lose any right to claim an intrinsic moral value for particular practices binding for those who are not already participants in them.

13 A better, but rather simple-minded answer is that since there must always be some particular path to truthfulness, we should retain the given particularized codes as the most viable paths. (I mention in passing the desperate answer that the very fact that you must take some path makes the path you actually take immune; if that were true of physical paths, no road building would ever have been started.) This is economical, but will not do if the enlightened Bantus protest strongly enough; their judgment of moral irrelevance has more weight than the mere practicality of the Bantu code. An even better answer along the same lines is that the final state is essentially path-dependent: if you have started from the Mediterranean code, your allegiance to truthfulness will carry the marks of its origin, whatever finished form it may eventually take. It is the whole narrative of your coming to realize the wrongness of lying ‘in love’ that characterizes your final, enlightened state. (It is the whole narrative of the abolition of slavery that characterizes the present state of the American nation.) This may well be the case, but what does it establish? Should we preserve the male-chauvinist traits of the Mediterranean code just in order to rejoice in the wisdom and moral strength of those who have overcome them? (How about retaining just a bit of slavery, for the greater glory of those who reject it?) Of course not. The extra triumph of overcoming the barriers is sweet, but this does not make perpetuating blindness or suffering justified or even mandatory. One could object to my style of criticism that I have over-dramatized the differences between codes-cum-practices, replacing the innocent examples featuring aunts and witchcraft with the morally laden example of male chauvinism. My answer is that only serious differences count: if the divergences between codes are morally frivolous, they offer no serious ground for the right to preservation. On the other hand, if you want to have such a right for practices, the divergences must be morally serious, like those which I have just presented. (A different line available to the nationally minded moralist would be an open, pluralist line, claiming that the diversity of values is a good in
itself. This is not part of the argument from intrinsic value, and is rather foreign to authors like MacIntyre and Taylor. We shall dedicate chapter fifteen to this line.)

All in all, the preservationist conservative approach to morality is difficult to uphold since it is at the same time based on particularized practices, but aims at avoiding relativistic particularism (at least judging by the best attempt[s] in the field). The main tension within it is the one between the particularity of narrowly defined practices and the non-relativity of the thick values they (are supposed to) reveal. The preservationist ways out are not very appealing. One is to give up non-relativity, and to acquiesce in a relativist morality. But relativism offers no general ground in favor of preservation rather than of overthrowing any given moral code. The other is to define practices in a broad fashion, say, taking the whole complex of social interaction as a single practice. This would save our theoretician from relativism but make the preservation of the practice utterly banal: of course, people will go on interacting socially, so this practice is in no need of special care.

Here is a final illustration of the tension between the traditionalist view and the actual plurality of traditions/practices. The philosopher Hilary Putnam, a leftist liberal sympathetic to very moderate nationalism (“patriotism”, in his wording) tries to defend the school-of-morality argument by appeal to the plurality of styles of the ‘good life’ (Putnam, 1996, 94, 95). “Ways of life require centuries of experimentation and innovation to develop”, he rightly notes, and proposes a nice compromise: “Tradition without reason is blind; reason without tradition is empty.” Now, what is the final proposal to be derived from this appealing slogan? Putnam suggests “critical intelligence and loyalty to what is best in our traditions, including our national and ethnic traditions” (97). First, notice the plural; Putnam introduces himself as an American, a practicing Jew, and a philosopher. This is precisely what our nationalist does not accept: he is a community monist, and for him it is one identity, in this case the American one, that counts. Secondly, notice the appeal to ‘critical intelligence’ that has to find out what is ‘best in our traditions’. The nationalist can only shudder: it is not the philosopher who has to discern what is best in ‘our traditions’, for him it is Our Tradition—in the singular—which decides what is best for us and teaches us virtue. (As Rorty puts it, the Left should abandon theorizing if it wants to become truly patriotic [Rorty, 1998].) I take it that the contrast epitomizes the predicament of liberally minded intellectuals who flirt with ‘patriotism’; the better part of themselves wins over traditionalist rhetoric.

Let me briefly return to practical matters. Suppose a government takes seriously the view that morals—in their serious, ‘thick’ dimension—are essentially national, as our nationalist would enjoin them to do. For instance, it starts seriously to believe that there is a British morality, essentially different from the Dutch or Danish varieties. What would the consequences be? A mild negative consequence is that one should have serious worries when traveling even to a neighboring country, or when encountering a Dutch or a Danish colleague: God knows what set of values they find compelling! A more serious but still rather direct one is a generalized and justified moral suspicion of all people who are not one’s co-nationals. (Never trust a foreigner!) Worse, if ‘thick’ moral codes are so divergent, one can only devise a very modest, ‘thin’ code for dealing with any kind of foreigners. What about marrying a Dutch woman and having to deal with the thick moral abyss this may open? (Walzer believes Czechs have a substantially different ‘thick’ morality from his: imagine you are in love with a Czech person and ask Walzer for advice about a relationship, or, God forbid, marriage!) Now, the indirect consequences could be...
much worse: some of the ugliest items in nationalist propaganda all over the world consist in claiming that the other nation or group is 'morally different' (which in the context means 'defective'). Talk of the ethno-nation as a unit of moral code encourages such claims, and can therefore be simply irresponsible, besides being inaccurate and false. Of course, a civilized nationalist most often stresses that the other's moral code is 'moral' in some sense; he is not literally agreeing with the propaganda, only providing suitable ammunition that can be misused. Moreover, in situations of conflict it is salutary to point out the plain fact that two enemy nations share a common moral code, contrary to what the propaganda claims.

Agreeing that cultures and traditions are valuable, we arrive at conclusions opposite to the nationalist ones. Each individual belongs to at least several cultural spheres, which need not be concentric: a Protestant English person belongs to one circle (language, common history) that groups him with a Catholic Scot, and to another (denomination) that groups him with other Protestants, for example, with the Dutch. His language takes him close to Americans, his geographical and historical ties to continental Europe. Each of these belongings is potentially valuable, and our individual should be free to choose which one(s) to consider more dear to his heart. Moreover, the human being is an animal endowed with curiosity. Many individuals have at least the possibility and opportunity to expand their native circle of cultural belonging, by falling in love with yet another culture, by conversion to another, possibly exotic denomination, or by entering or exiting the church altogether, by mixing one’s own private cocktail of religious convictions the way many people do nowadays. Now, if cultural belonging is valuable, so is the acquisition of new belongings.

The plurality of belongings is indeed a school of morality, not of the parochial morality of local or 'Bantu’ truthfulness, but of concern for all fellow human beings. Furthermore, mere passive belonging is, for some individuals at least, just a prelude to a more active kind of engagement. Culture is a framework for moral creativity, which starts from given tradition(s) but moves beyond.

NOTES

Chapter fourteen. Is national identity essential for the identity of persons?

‘A STABLE NATION PRODUCES STABLE INDIVIDUALS’

1 Whereas the appeal to culture and tradition is an old weapon of the nationalist, the notion of identity is a relatively new invention. It originated in social psychology (with Erik Erikson as the contemporary classic) but has managed to become the magic word in political and social debate at the start of the new millennium. All sorts of movements appeal to identity, and the issues of ethno-national identity in particular keep attracting the hearts and minds of millions, setting the framework of the debate, even for the most ordinary matters. An Indian writer, an immigrant to the US, has written a (fine) newspaper article on his doubts and concerns about his child’s names: for instance, what will the life of a boy named Narayana Nambudiri be like in an average American neighborhood? The article is anthologized in a book of readings dealing with ‘names and identity’ (Crasta, 1993, 35). No wonder the debate about national identity includes political and philosophical celebrities. Given the popularity of the topic, I shall introduce it with a choice of quotations and short paraphrases, and then give the floor to our nationalist persona. This time, he will have a hard time reconstructing the essentials of a complicated, labyrinthine debate. (Remember that the lines of thought we shall systematize here are often presented by actual writers in an entangled form.) All the authors concerned discuss the national identity of persons, not the identity of groups. The issue is, what does one’s national belonging contribute to one’s identity as an individual? Suppose you are in need of an identity. Should you turn to the national leader to provide you with one? The nationalist denies that this is the right question: your identity is already determined by your national belonging. You do not choose it, you endorse the one you have, and it shall determine who you are.

2 Let me start with the American politologist Gertrude Himelfarb. She formulates her defense of patriotism and denunciation of cosmopolitanism in dramatically broad terms: “Above all, what cosmopolitanism obscures, even denies, are the givens of life: parents,
ancestors, family, race, religion, heritage, history, culture, tradition, community—and nationality." None of these are, in her opinion, accidental; all are essential to a given individual. And all of them enter the identity of individuals, which is "neither an accident nor a matter of choice. It is given, not willed." Trying to reject any of these traits brings 'costs to the self'. Moreover, "the 'protean self', which aspires to create an identity de novo, is an individual without identity" (Himmel-farb, 1996, 77).

According to the Israeli philosopher Avishai Margalit, "Belonging to a national form of life means being within a frame that offers meaning to people’s choice between alternatives, thus enabling them to acquire an identity" (Margalit, 1997, 83). The American philosopher Oldenquist puts it thus: "The social identity they [that is, ‘people’] feel with their group often is a strong and defining element of their personalities." (Oldenquist and Koller 1997) And here is the Quebecois philosopher K. Nielsen, who starts from a person’s need for selfidentity or self-definition and ends by urging the need for a nation-state for each ethno-national group:

Self-realization and a sense of self cannot be sustained simply by creative activity or an identification with humanity. Development of human powers, Feuerbachian species-being, indifferent to particular culturally specific self-definitions, is probably impossible, but, even if possible, it is not sufficient to provide anything like an adequate self-definition... We are, to put it crudely, lost if we cannot identify ourselves with some part of an objective social reality: a nation, though not necessarily a state, with its distinctive traditions. What we find in people—and as deeply embedded as the need to develop their talents—is the need not only to be able to say what they can do but to say who they are. This is found, not created, and is found in the identification with others in a shared culture based on nationality or race or religion or some slice or amalgam thereof. Given this nature of our human nature, national consciousness and the forging and sustaining of a nation are extremely important to us whoever we are. Under modern conditions, this securing and nourishing of a national consciousness can only be achieved with a nation-state that corresponds to that national consciousness. (Nielsen, 1993, 32)

Another Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, has proposed, with some reservations, a linguistic argument in favor of national identity (Taylor, 1993, 33-34). He describes it as deriving from Romanticism and shows a lot of sympathy for it, but in the end he wisely declines to endorse it himself. According to Taylor’s reconstruction it has five steps. The conditions of our identity are indispensable to “our being full human subjects”. Now, the crucial pole of identification is “language/culture and hence the linguistic community”. The availability of linguistic community is indispensable to being a full human subject. Of course, one has a right to demand respect for one’s condition to being a human subject. By implication, one has a right to demand respect for “the conditions of our linguistic community being a viable pole of identification”. Let me finally make explicit the last step, implicit in Taylor’s chapter title, ‘Why Do Nations Have to Become States?’ (Taylor, 1993): the condition for community being a viable pole of identification is that it should become a state.

I shall assume that the notion of identity used by our theoreticians involves at least the following aspects: identity is an all-or-nothing matter. It encompasses essential, vitally important traits and is partly a matter of what you are, independently of your choice, partly a matter of your identifications. One is born a female, but can identify oneself with one’s womanhood to a larger or smaller extent. Call a trait or a belonging one identifies with the ‘pole’ of identification: being a woman, being of Indian origin is such a pole. Some philosophers, notably Charles Taylor, limit identification to ‘moral’ items (but it is
unclear how far the ‘moral’ is supposed to reach). It is useful to distinguish two aspects of identification, one more affective, related to the 'heart’, and the other to the ‘head’. The affective identification with a trait (say, being a Lavinian) involves endorsing it and starting to care about its furtherance (for example, becoming a ‘good Lavinian’), and about the commitments one associates with the trait (a good Lavinian never swears!). Notice that such care can involve deep emotional ties, a cathexis, as psychoanalysts would put it. The ties make the trait salient, and guide the desires of the identifier. Of course, coming to care about the trait and the associated commitments may involve some nonvoluntary steps (being born a Lavinian, falling in love with a very patriotic Lavinian person), and some chosen, voluntary decisions (avoid non-Lavinians!).

Now, an achieved identification with a trait (quality, membership, role) should encompass at least the following attitudes:

- Acceptance of the (alleged) fact that for a long time it has influenced one’s powers and liabilities, and in this sense it has ‘created’ one as one now is (firmly believing things such as ‘The reason I am so decent and civil is that I am an Englishman’, ‘The reason I do not harass women in the workplace is that we, the British, care about decency’).
- Deep care for the trait and, when the trait is positive, about its preservation. It also involves a picture of what kind of commitments the trait carries with it, and the willingness wholeheartedly to assume such commitments.
- Readiness to enhance the effectiveness of the trait (if such a deed is in one’s power) in the future (for example, a readiness to dress even more in accordance with one’s belonging, to monitor one’s speech and bring it in line with ‘what one is’, and the like).

Here is a schematic drawing:

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SELF  --> ROLE, TRAITS, BELONGINGS
        ↓
        NORMS AND COMMITMENTS
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Call the attitudes towards the trait just depicted ‘identificatory’. Of course, the trait (one’s belonging) and the attitudes towards it (one’s being proud and happy that one belongs to this particular community) enhance each other, forming a self-perpetuating loop. The more you are proud to belong, the more you belong, and vice versa. In the case of a durable identification there is a loop of mutual reinforcement between the trait and the attitude. A mature identity is thus a stable one: one’s loyalties are fixed, they form part of one’s self-image, which is itself a stable, durable one, not exposed to the whims of fortune. After thus having sketched at least some features of identity (in the sense used in the debate) let me give the floor once more to our nationalist:

Most people agree that a lasting and stable identity is a necessary condition of the flourishing of each human being, and of the very possibility of particular political choices for individuals. Now, John’s identity is largely independent of his will; on the contrary, it is a condition enabling him to have a determinate will at all. Now, what kind of identity is central to human beings? Well, they need to belong to a unified and given (that is, non-chosen and nonvoluntary) comprehensive community, and to participate in its life in order to acquire and maintain a lasting and stable identity. In order to have a stable and mature identity, a person must belong to a solid community, not of his own choosing. Tradition-based communities are ideal identity providers. This dovetails nicely with my previous statement about
Remember that tradition encompasses actions and roles (performer of such-and-such acts, participant in such-and-such a practice with such-and-such a status). It constitutively determines the roles available within them, that is, a role has its identity only within a tradition. The roles empower their holders (an umpire has the power to decide about excluding a player from a game) and they carry with them a set of values and duties, also determined by the encompassing tradition. Traditions typically constitutively belong to a larger social framework, most prominently an ethno-national one. Among all the traditional, historically developed candidates, it is the best and most reliable framework for cultural traditions. By being born into a national framework, an individual acquires his or her first and most important belonging. As the Israeli philosopher Yael Tamir says, "national identity is best cultivated in a small, relatively closed and homogeneous framework, which neither wishes nor needs to reach beyond the members of the nation" (Tamir, 1993, 131); it should be noted that Tamir is aware of the importance of macro-regions, but does not focus upon them. Being a member of such a framework makes the insertion into most typical traditions within it morally obligatory, and at the same time it facilitates the insertion and makes it natural. Now, stable identity traits have to do with such a belonging and with the roles determined by the traditions flourishing within the national framework. Roles and associated properties are among the most important potential identity traits for each person. Therefore the almost natural, initially non-chosen kind of belonging is the central provider of identity traits. Also, full participation in the tradition makes possible the understanding of traits and roles with attendant significance and values/norms. Participation, by disclosing values and norms, underpins the affective attachment necessary for identification. Typically, general loyalty to a tradition underlies the acceptance of the particular norms that figure within it.

Let me illustrate this with a diagram:

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SELF                     ROLE, BELONGING         TRADITION
                           ↓                      ↓
                           NORMS                
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This, then, is the connection between the psychological and cultural identity of a person and the traits of the ethno-national culture it belongs to. The best candidate for an identity-forming and identity-protecting community is the (ethno-)nation, a traditional, historically formed community, with a non-voluntary criterion of membership. National belonging is independent of the will of the person in question, since having a particular will depends upon having such an identity. The value has to be protected. But identity is an important value in anybody's view. By providing one and protecting it, the ethno-nation itself inherits some of the value in question, together with the right to be protected.

This concludes my general defense of the nation on the basis of the identity of its members. Let me add a slight complication. There are two ways to account for the importance of the (ethno-)nation in relation to identity consideration. The simplest account ascribes identity-forming power to ethno-nationhood itself, to the 'national form of life', regardless of the particular traits that constitute it. In the case of the Bosnian Croatian 'national form of life' (grounded on religious difference with the Muslims) and that of the Quebeccois (grounded linguistically) the implication is that both can equally well provide their members with the required identity. If pressed, the defender of this second way might reverse the order of explanation: some traits (for example, language) are valuable because they belong to the ethno-nation, rather than vice versa (the ethno-nation is valuable because it
protects language, which has an independent value).
An alternative account proposes that certain traits—language, moral code, customs—can play the important role of providing identity for individual human beings. Their role is independent of their use in nationalistic or similar contexts, and derives from their general anthropological relevance. (For instance, language is valuable as such, since it is an important ‘pole of identification’. The other is a community of values.) Now, since the ethno-nation incorporates and protects the trait, it is assumed to inherit its identity-related value. Finally, the nation-state inherits the value from its role in fostering and protecting the ethno-nation. If successful, such a proposal then offers a genuine explanation of why the ethno-nation and its state are valuable to individuals, starting from the independent value of the traits they both enhance and protect.

Whatever detailed account you choose, the overall story remains the same. The preservation of a given ethno-national culture—in a relatively pure state—is a good independent of the will of the members of the culture, which ought to be assured by adequate means. But, in order that such a community should preserve its own identity and support the identity of its members, it has to assume (always or at least in most cases) the political form of a state. Therefore, once the state is in place, its citizens have the right and obligation to favor it and their own ethnic culture in relation to any other. They can and should indulge in loving it and in hating its enemies.

TOWARDS A PLURALISM OF IDENTITIES

A MISPLACED ANALOGY

9 The line of thought just presented is very appropriate for the contemporary framework of political thought, since it grounds the value of the ethno-nation upon individual needs, the need for identity, in this case; on the other hand it is favorable to the nationalist since the value in question is community-dependent, and not at the mercy of individuals’ whims. Nevertheless, I do not think that it fulfills its promises.

10 Before proceeding to a detailed discussion, let me note that I find it difficult to believe that serious and civilized pro-nationalist authors literally mean what they say, or seem to say, about national identity. Take the two key claims, that non-chosen identities are much more important—in point of fact as well as morally—than chosen ones, and that among the former national identity is paramount. On a literal reading that would entail that loyalty to non-chosen identities (race, gender, nation) should for the most part prevail over loyalty to chosen ones. Now, how about crucial decisions in one’s life, say marriage, choice of friends, choice of career and place(s) to live: is it possible that the loyalty to race and nation should here play a role, indeed a paramount role? Is it possible that a civilized person should think that it is morally bad to marry a person of different race or ethno-national belonging? Should Jews have only, or for the most part, Jewish friends and avoid the ‘Gentiles’ if possible, even if these are their colleagues with whom they share professional interests, artistic tastes, and so on? No decent intellectual would claim this nowadays; so what does our nationalist really mean by his view that loyalty to the non-chosen identity should prevail? Under what circumstances? What should it be allowed to dictate? Let me then charitably assume that our nationalist does not literally mean to advise you to avoid friends of other race or ethnic belonging; he restricts this to special circumstances, which he does not care to specify.
I now pass to the general issue of the importance of national and cultural identity. Let me first try to fend off a possible misunderstanding. It should be stressed that one's national-cultural 'identity' is not the (numerical) sameness of a person. Little Kai, a Scandinavian, can move to Canada and become, culturally and politically, a Quebeacois; thereby he has not ceased to be the person he is. One should distinguish between cultural (psychosocial) identity, which is 'identity' in a wide, metaphorical sense, from the literal sameness of a living person. Recognizing that the former can be flexible and changing without jeopardizing the latter, as the experiences of conversion and sincere changing of sides show, even deeply held cultural identifications can be meaningfully given up without loss, even with profit. Saul, the Jew and Roman citizen, becomes Paul, a Christian and future martyr; but the whole point of the conversion is that it is the same person who undergoes the change, and that Saul is not being literally replaced by another. Traditionalists, like MacIntyre, sometimes confuse cultural identity and sameness of person, deriving from this confusion the idea that cultural identity is sacred and untouchable. So, we should keep in mind the difference between the literal sameness of the person or the self (which is, in this banal sense, numerically one), and the pluralism of cultural identifications, resulting in a plural and changing cultural identity (in a non-literal, metaphorical sense). The seriousness of cultural identity does not consist in the fact that it is not literal sameness. It is the psychological importance of identification that makes cultural identity crucial. Let me explain. If one identifies with a trait one is prone to ascribe to it factual importance in one's past biography and actual decisions. Equally, one tries to act in accordance with the trait and its normative commitments, and to develop these commitments. All this gives enough seriousness to identification, without any need to develop the trait into something that is literally necessary for sameness of person.

Let us turn to the more practical weaknesses of the nationalist line. First, a quick reminder about the race/nation analogy with which this book began. One kind of belonging that is certainly dramatically non-voluntary and normally quite manifest is racial identity; still, no one in his right mind would today claim that states should be run on racial principles (see Gutmann and Appiah [1996] for an excellent discussion). Why is this so often forgotten in the case of the nation?

Furthermore, our nationalist claims that solid communities and institutions form stable persons. But military barracks are not known for building stable and strong persons, although these can be said to be solid and stable institutions. In short, there is probably no positive correlation between the rigidity of the trait and the stability of identification. A solid and stable institution can produce feeble and neurotic persons, while flexible traits can support stable identification. The whole idea is just a misplaced analogy that feeds further misunderstanding. The same holds for the stability of traditions. The misplaced analogy between the stability of the 'whole' (nation) and the stability of the 'part' (individual) should not mislead us. Stable identity traits are not necessarily connected with the roles determined by a national tradition. More generally, the whole idea that tradition, national or other, constitutes the roles is wrong. Traditions are most often constituted by actions and roles, and not vice versa. Equally, not all causal, teleological, value-related, and normative properties carried by roles are either constitutively determined by tradition or essential to the roles themselves. (Remember that being a full member of a practice is not the only way of properly understanding the roles and properties in question. One can arrive at understanding by empathy/
Another of the misunderstandings fostered by this ill-conceived analogy is the implied view that ‘identity’ in the requisite, non-literal sense is an all-or-nothing matter. Personal identity is: I either am or am not Nenad Miščević. But national, cultural, or professional identity is not: I can be a philosopher more than I am a sociologist; and at the time Yugoslavia was still one country, I could have been more of a Croat than a Yugoslav. It is not clear why such partial identifications are worse than total ones; they certainly produce less fanaticism and intolerance than the latter.

For many people, voluntary belonging is the central provider of identity traits: membership of a union, a party, or a club can fill one’s life with as much meaning as one’s membership of a race. Non-chosen roles and associated properties are not the most important potential identity traits. Everyday experience shows that people both change their identifications during their lifetime, and that mutually incompatible identifications take turns in dominating one’s life at various times: a football fan will have no problems identifying with his home team when it plays against others in the national league, with the national team when playing against foreigners, and with chosen, close foreigners when they play against distant or particularly disliked ones. These remarks take care of the accusation that multiple identifications make for a ‘weak self’. On the contrary, they make part of the ordinary richness of life and opportunities. The ‘mixed self is a rich self’.

HOW GOOD IS THE NATION AT PROVIDING IDENTITIES?

Let me now discuss the crucial nationalist thesis which states that the best candidate for an identity-providing community is the (ethno-)nation. A person typically belongs to several, often concentric cultural/geographic domains: for instance, micro-regional (say, Yorkshire), macro-regional (northern Europe), and global (Europe or the Western world). One is typically a member (full or potential) of various comprehensive communities (statist, such as Great Britain or the Commonwealth, religious, such as the Protestant Church, and more), which at least to some extent compete with the (ethno-)nation for a person’s allegiance. It is prima facie unclear why the nation should have such a special role in building an individual’s identity, in comparison with all kinds of more localistic or universal, or simply incommensurable competitors. Mere assertion certainly cannot replace argument, and mere assertion is what one gets from quite a few pro-nationalist authors. I would like to develop and vindicate this initial suspicion.

First, we have already stressed many times that as far as culture goes it is typically not constitutive for a tradition to belong to some determined social/ethnic framework. Frameworks are blurred, often taxonomized pragmatically, and it is very questionable that there is a unique natural taxonomy.

Secondly, being a member of a framework (say, Indian or French) by birth does not make insertion into the typical traditions of the framework obligatory: autonomy takes precedence over mere factual belonging. It often facilitates and makes natural the insertion into such practices, but people often enter practices that are not part of their native tradition.
Thirdly, the very idea of non-chosen, non-voluntary belonging as the crucial identity-conferring and -supporting trait does not go well with the definition of nation proposed by the authors that defend the idea. The motivation behind the primacy of non-chosen traits is presumably their firmness and objectivity: chosen traits are volatile, subject to one’s whims; the non-chosen ones are more solid and ‘real’. Remember then D. Miller’s statement which we endorsed in chapter one, that nationality is “essentially not a matter of the objective characteristics that [people] possess, but of their shared beliefs”. This view is typical of contemporary defenders of nationality (A. Smith, K. Nielsen, Y. Tamir).

Now, if national belonging is not objective, if it is grounded in subjective belief, what about the primacy of the non-chosen? The only non-chosen item left is belief: it is presumably formed in a non-voluntary manner. But this is quite disappointing: most beliefs, above all the most banal ones, are non-voluntary. It is not up to me whether to believe that it is raining if I clearly see the rain pouring and feel it on my face and hands, to believe that two plus three equals five, and so on. If this is the only way non-voluntariness enters the matter, it is utterly banal; it is definitely unclear whether non-voluntary association of this variety is more important or more basic than the voluntary kind.

The suspicion increases when we look at the contents of beliefs that enter into the constitution/construction of nationality. Take the first few in Miller’s list:

a belief that each belongs together with the rest; that this association is neither transitory nor merely instrumental, but stems from a long history of living together which it is hoped and expected will continue into the future; that the community is marked off from other communities by its members’ distinctive characteristics. (Miller, 1992, 87)

Note that what grounds the nation is not its members actually belonging to each other, or having distinctive characteristics, but their merely believing that this is so. Can mere belief ground one’s identity, and, more importantly, ground serious moral obligations, and defeat the usual moral demands of impartiality? Hardly. Something is wrong either with the idea that national belonging is special because un-chosen, or with the definition.

Let us, however, be charitable, and forget for the moment the unsuitability of the nationalist’s definition for his own purposes. Suppose that the traits in question are more real than he himself claims, and consider more closely the further options offered by the nationalist: either the national form of life as such is the identity provider, or it is some underlying trait, such as language, common history, customs, values, or a common religious denomination. Bear in mind that various ethno-nations distinguish themselves by various combinations of various underlying traits, as we mentioned and illustrated with examples in chapter one. Start then with the view that particular traits provide an individual’s identity and consider, for vividness, one candidate trait of nationhood, say the common language. It is a very sensible proposal, supported by authorities such as B. Anderson and C. Taylor: linguistic identity is indeed important for many people, although to a large extent on an unreflective level. (Even this might be exaggerated upon a closer look. Consider how many people in each country speak a dialect rather distant from the standard idiom. Some of these dialects—for example, the Croatian dialect spoken in the northwest of Croatia—are at least as close to the neighboring dialect of the officially foreign language [in this example Slovenian] as to the standard idiom. The identification of dialect speakers with the standard idiom is markedly non-spontaneous.) However, it has one major defect: it is not general enough. In all the cases in which language is not
the central distinctive trait, it fails to justify the ethno-nationalist program. Worse, it suggests that in all these cases ethnic identification itself is defective, lacking the central feature. This concerns Austrians/Germans/Swiss Germans, most Arab nations considered in relation to each other (modulo the difference between Suni and Shiite denomination), Serbs/Muslims/Croats, to list only the examples that happen to be most familiar. Benedict Anderson, who takes linguistic belonging as basic, dedicates almost half a chapter (chapter three) of his classic *Imagined Communities* to Latin American nations; these nations were among the first non-European ones to adopt the nation-state model, but they are indeed a glaring and massive counterexample to the linguistic thesis. Their main initial enemy was Spain or Portugal, with which the respective colonies shared a language; the main later enmities were of course those between new nations which spoke the same language. (Anderson never notices that his own writing offers a counterexample to his main thesis.) Similar considerations apply to the would-be attempt to choose denominational identity as central; an obvious non-starter, incapable of differentiating between a vast number of, say, Catholic ethno-nations in Europe. (Let me briefly mention the community of moral values, since we have already noticed that nations are just too small to be carriers of a particular morality.)

23 There is worse. Suppose one takes a low-level trait (language or system of common values) as the identification-providing trait meant to justify ethno-nationalist preferences. Then each of many exceptions (linguistically or valuationally indistinguishable national communities) constitutes a counterexample to the nationalist thesis. If language is indeed so deeply important for identity, but Muslims and Croats share a language without sharing a national identity, then national identity is shallow. If a system of values is deeply important for identity, but Quebecois and Anglophones share values without sharing an ethno-national identity, then the latter is indeed shallow. The situation is desperate for our nationalist: the more he insists upon the centrality of a trait, the more he becomes vulnerable to all the instances in which national identity does not encompass the trait; they all become glaring counterexamples to his claim.

24 The point is universally valid: given the multiplicity of belongings, the choice of one or two traits as carrying the burden of identity provision discriminates against all cases in which they do not play the central role, thus exposing the theoretician to an avalanche of counterexamples. (Add the wealth of potential, hitherto unrecruited traits; if a Black American community managed to secede and form a nation, it would presumably initially share language, religion, basic values, and centuries of history with the rest of the US, plus race with Black Americans who did not join the secession. Assuming it is an ethno-nation, it would be a counterexample to taking language, religion, basic values, and common history separately or jointly as necessary conditions for a stable identity.) Any such choice certainly fails and this clinches the issue. Still, let me mention a desperate attempt at escape. Why not just take all traits and ascribe to them the identity-providing power? The whole point of the nationalist’s choice of low-level properties as identity providers is that there is a hope that they provide identity independently of their role in building the nation, so that the nation then inherits from their legitimating power. (For example, language is independently essential for people; therefore, by protecting a given language, the actual or would-be ethno-national state legitimizes itself.) Also, the traits are supposed to have a special identity-providing power, stronger than the power of, say, gender or professional belonging. But then the burden is to explain why just the traits—
and all of them—that contingently happen to be useful for rallying individuals and for
nation building should independently have this exceptional identity-providing force.

25 The foregoing consideration leads us to the second possibility. Our nationalist can ascribe
identity-providing power to the ethno-national ‘form of life’ as such, regardless of
particular features that underlie it in particular situations. In this version it is the higher-
level property of nationhood that carries the burden. Note that the burden is heavy: the
nationalist line of thought demands that the relevant trait—that is, nationhood and its
form of life—should be a decisively more successful identity provider than any of its
competitors to which state-political status is being denied. The proposal has several weak
points.

26 First, it is unclear that mere nationhood, independently of its constituting traits, can have
much explanatory power. People do identify themselves as French or Slovenians in virtue
of living in France or in Slovenia, having grown up with French or Slovenian as their
mother tongue, and so on. It is these underlying traits that form one’s habits, provide foci
for cognitive and affective interest, hope and care, and explain people’s behavior.
Secondly, even if we grant mere nationhood some clout, it faces many competitors. Take
micro- and macro-regional belonging and loyalties. Considered in isolation from their
underlying traits they are just as relevant and attractive as candidates for identification
as the national ones. To illustrate, being a German (nation), being a Bavarian (micro-
region), or being Germanic (macro-region), taken in isolation from the particular traits
that constitute each of them, seems to offer equally attractive foci for identification.
There is nothing special about being a German-as-such, in contrast to being Bavarian-as-
such, that would a priori make the German—that is, the national—option preferable for
young Hans in his search for a stable identity in comparison with the Bavarian—regional
—one. Hans can equally well choose the cultural, all-Germanic option, identifying himself
indiscriminately with a macro-culture which has produced Goethe, Beethoven, Berg,
Schoenberg, Brentano, and Hegel, without weeding out the specifically Austrian, non-
German part. Moreover, on the subject of forms of life, regional particularities have more
title to be thus described than relatively bland national ones: there is a typical Bavarian
form of life, hardly a typical German one, that would have to unify the lifestyles practiced
in Munich, Hanover, Berlin, and Paderborn. Being German corresponds to no particularly
salient unit, apart from the contingent fact that there is the German state.

27 To summarize, the nationalist initially has two ways in which to formulate his crucial
premise, as a claim concerning either the higher-level property of nationhood (the
national form of life as such) or some chosen lower-level property (language, values). The
first option runs counter to the Competition Truism, in that there is no reason to give
primacy to contingent nationhood in contrast to equally contingent micro- or macro-
regional belonging and loyalty. Each is a priori equally entitled to a role in providing a
solid, stable identity, if there is a need for such. The second option runs into trouble as
well: any choice of a few (allegedly) independently identification-forcing low-level
properties will exclude others, expose itself to an avalanche of counter-instances, and
thus fail by lack of generality.

28 The line of thought proposed by the nationalist does not succeed in establishing the
primacy of national identity. Up to now I have charitably assumed that our nationalist
does not take the primacy of national identity to be absolute. Still, one should point out
that the general rhetoric of the primacy of the unchosen, and, above all, of national
identity, can do a lot of political damage. There is no reason why nationalist politicians
should follow the custom of us theoreticians and read the claim in a much more restricted meaning. On the contrary, they jump at the welcome opportunity and draw exactly the nasty conclusions we would like to avoid. If one’s national belonging—and unchosen belonging in general—is literally one’s fundamental moral fate, then people should in all seriousness give their allegiance to it in matters of family, friendship, career choice, choice of place to live, and the like. Indeed, in many countries of southeast Europe mixed marriages (Albanian-Serbian, Greek-Turkish, Croatian-Serbian) are viewed with the utmost suspicion: marrying outside of one’s ethnic ‘kin’ is considered morally wrong. Children from such marriages are often routinely suspected of divided loyalties if not of an outright propensity to treason. Civilized nationalist theoreticians should think twice before proposing formulations that seem, if taken literally, to condone, if not to recommend such practices.

Let me end on a more constructive note. Is there a positive moral that can be learned from the nationalist in matters of identity? I believe there is. Many people do care about their national belonging, and this should be respected (the nationalist just exaggerates the issue, and makes national belonging the main pillar of an individual’s identity). Indeed, at the minimum, one should not unjustifiably be put in the position of having to be ashamed of one’s objective belonging to a given social category, that is, one should be enabled to carry the trait in question with dignity. This does not concern ethnic belonging only, but most non-chosen belongings about which an individual cannot do much. This gives us the link with dignity and recognition (categories put forward by Taylor and his followers), that is, with the demand that belonging to a given category should not clash with a person’s self-respect. Non-voluntary belonging should be socially recognized, and not devalued.

The nationalist is also right in pointing out that the possibility of identifying oneself with a group or a tradition (that is, the possibility of acquiring a subjective identity), and of being able to vary, modify, and correct such an identification, is an important good for human beings. Where he goes astray is in not recognizing the fact that the plasticity (flexibility) of identification is essential for flourishing, moral maturation, and development. People are fallible and have to be given a second chance: our Don Giovanni from chapter thirteen deserves an opportunity to correct his unconditional identification with an antiquated macho moral framework. The nationalist equally fails to recognize the richness of human nature and possibilities which seeks expression in the variety of ties considered relevant or important. Now, the actual conditions of developed societies are such as to guarantee these things to a considerable degree due to political, cultural, and technological possibilities. There are unfortunate and sometimes unjustified limits, but on the whole, this pluralism is an acquisition to be defended and expanded.

What is then the political framework for such a pluralist cultural self? The political community should offer opportunities to develop one’s identifications in a free and spontaneous manner (both in the positive direction of acceptance of what is given or negative in the sense of the right to exit); this demand derives from the value of liberty. National identity is one among many, and has a right to be protected only to the extent to which its individual bearers actually care about it. Thus the proper framework is the liberal one. (It is compatible with the ultra-moderate pro-national view, which demands a prima facie right—not a duty, at least not a strong one—to the preservation of national traits, and does so on the liberal basis of the choice of interested individuals.) The opposite, traditionalist-communitarian, and, more narrowly, nationalist view of identity...
—centered around uniqueness and the claim of ‘no identity without a political entity’—is an important theoretical obstacle to the fulfillment of the task. The view is theoretically wrong, and suggestive of morally dubious practices, so it should be rejected.
Chapter fifteen. The value of diversity

Nationalism is usually associated with appeals to the unity and homogeneity of the nation. Let me now present an atypical argument which centers upon the value of diversity. (Lichtenberg presents it as the Pluralism Argument [Lichtenberg, 1997, 161].) The argument was famously proposed by G. Herder in the nineteenth century. It has been expanded upon by M. Buber, I. Berlin, M. Walzer, and the Israeli philosopher A. Margalit in more recent times. They cheerfully admit that variety is desirable, whereas uniformity is monotonous, dreary, dull, a fetter on the free-ranging human spirit. But they go on to claim that different national cultural styles actualize different possibilities from the total potential of mankind. Buber claims that each nation has a historical mission. The guiding picture is that of a mosaic: like stones in a mosaic, various cultures contribute to a diversified picture of human capacities. This line of thought appeals to ethno-diversity as a good in itself.

Berlin’s basic intuition is that even God cannot choose the best form of life because there are no supervalues, such as variety and order, that can be used to measure the totality of values that a society actualizes. The values embodied in each society exhaust all of the justifications we have for a form of life. (Margalit, 1997, 80)

One can liken the value of ethno-diversity as it is seen and presented by our nationalists to the value of biodiversity: if the diversity of existing species is a good, as many ecologists claim, then the diversity of cultures and lifestyles should be at least equally valued. It is atypical of political nationalists and is rarely encountered in the political press; on the contrary, it figures very prominently in abstract discussions of nationalism in political philosophy. We shall therefore let our even-handed nationalist abundantly quote or paraphrase contemporary philosophers in presenting it. Here is his statement.

Let me first present the outline of my reasoning in a succinct form. Given that various cultures embody various cultural and moral values, the diversity of cultures (preserved in a relatively pure state) is an important good. Each culture plays its unique part in the harmonious symphony of mankind, as Walzer puts it in his 1990 Tanner lectures, reiterating a picture proposed by Mazzini. But the natural unit of culture is the (ethno-)nation. Therefore, the preservation of a given ethno-national culture—in a relatively pure state—is a good independent of the will of the members of the culture, which ought to be assured by adequate means. To quote A.
Oldenquist: “[One] reason there is sympathy for ethnic separatism and self-determination is that we think of a culture or ethnic group analogously to how we think of a plant or animal species—unique, complex, irreplaceable, the result of past conditions that will never be repeated” (Oldenquist, 1997, 325). If biodiversity is valuable, so is ethno-diversity (if I may propose a newly coined word). Now, in order that such a community should support the culture in question, it has to assume the form of a state, and indeed a state focused upon tradition and national values. So, the ethno-national community has the right in respect of any third party and its own members to have an ethno-national state. Equally, the citizens of the state have the right and obligation to favor their own ethnic culture over any other. Let me now expand upon this line of reasoning, helping myself to the extant literature. Remember A. Margalit’s (1997, 80) idea “that people make use of different styles to express their humanity”, and that there “are people who express themselves ‘Frenchly’, while others have forms of life that are expressed ‘Koreanly’ or ‘Syrianly’ or ‘Icelandically’”. The Slovenian archbishop F. Rode has similarly claimed that a Slovenian has no other way to feel than ‘as a Slovenian’, in all circumstances. An analogy may make this clearer. Painters generally express themselves in a variety of painting styles, and many even belong to various schools. There are schools of figurative painting and abstract painting, realistic and surrealist painting, impressionistic and expressionistic painting, yet the members of all these schools share the effort to express themselves in painting despite their differences. There are also eclectic painters who do not belong to any school. They simply paint. Analogous to eclectic painters are cosmopolitans who do not belong to any group. But most people express themselves by belonging to a trend that determines the contours of their expression. The need for belonging in the first sense is the need for means of expression. This need is therefore parasitic upon human beings’ basic need to express themselves. A nation is a sort of school of human expression. There are also other sorts of schools—tribal, class, religious, and the like. Cultures should therefore be preserved, even at the cost of the rights of the individual in question: for example, the traditional norms constitutive of a tribal culture should be respected at all costs. To quote Oldenquist again:

Preservationists would protect the tribal culture and not give full weight to the negative effects this has on income, health, and longevity. There is, I think, more widespread sympathy for the preservationist position. Latvians and Chechens are not different from forest-dwelling tribes in uniqueness, irreplaceability, and in their desire to rule themselves in their own territory. If we value Daflas or Navajo as peoples and cultures and not merely as aggregates of individuals, must we not similarly value Latvians and Chechens and, for that matter, Russians too? Are not nationalities in any case tribes? (Oldenquist, 1997, 325)

One may distinguish the diversity of narrowly moral values (“It is both conceptually and psychologically difficult to reconcile a monastic life with a family life”, writes Margalit [1997, 80]) from the diversity of general cultural values (art, language, customs). Both have a moral value: although a single language is itself not a moral value, the preservation of languages in their diversity does have some moral worth. (Take as an example the right to self-defense in the matter of languages.) As already mentioned, the danger of extinction threatens some existing languages: only one-tenth of the 6,000 languages now in existence will probably survive into the next century (Fletcher, 1997, 327). Individuals have a right to preserve their language in the teeth of extinction in the same way in which they have a right to self-defense. To come to narrowly moral values, my claim is not that values are relative; that different people value different things. My line is not relativistic. It does not assume that something is valuable and worthy of political protection just because it is taken to be so by a group. (This would collapse the Herderian argument into a different argument, based on the decisions of individuals, and give it a more individualistic, liberal stamp. Also, the relativity of values is at best a justification for tolerance, not pluralism.) The idea is rather that different sets of objective values are actualizable
by different forms of life. The values, so to speak, find their own worshippers. Take the values of loyalty and fidelity and of independence and experimentation with ways of life. One might argue that typical Mediterranean cultures, such as traditional Sicily and Spain, embody the first set of values, whereas contemporary Scandinavian society prefers independence and the spirit of experiment. To quote Margalit once more:

There are no supervalues of a higher order that provide us with a way of comparing the collections of values that are embodied in each society. We cannot choose between different ways of life that we consider valuable on the basis of rational considerations or justifications—we can only perform an existential act of choice that expresses our freedom to live this way rather than some other way, where both this way and the other way are valuable to us. But more often than we choose a way of life, we are born into one. National belonging is the outstanding example of this truth. The idea that there are no dimensions for comparing national forms of life that embody desirable values is also a reason to avoid seeking national supremacy. There is no point in such an effort, just as there would be no point in the winner of a dog beauty contest entering a beauty contest for cats. The criteria are noncomparable. (Margalit, 1997, 80)

This closes my defense of the value of diversity. I have already sketched how one passes from it to the defense of the ethno-nation as the best framework in which this value is to be actualized.

How good is this argument? I shall try to show not only that it is deeply flawed, but also that it is doubly self-defeating: on the one hand, it lands the moderate nationalist in a kind of paradox; on the other, it offers the anti-nationalist useful raw material from which to construct an argument in favor of a pluralistic, graded cosmopolitanism.

First, let me argue that the argument as a whole verges on a paradox. Its avowed aim is to establish the high value of diversity. Now, who is to enjoy that value? Certainly not the intended producer/consumer of the narrow ethnic culture! He or she is supposed to concentrate upon his or her own ethnic values: like a good village cook he or she can only prepare the local specialty and does not care for the diversity of various kinds of cuisine. The value of diversity is a typical cosmopolitan value. Enjoying it presupposes sensitivity to differences, acquaintance with a wide range of local and national cultures, virtues that are anathema to our nationalist. He then faces the following options: everybody should be concerned with their own ethno-national culture, disregarding the panorama of the whole. Thus, in the perfect world diversity will blossom, but there will be nobody to enjoy it. Now, why would anyone want to deprive people of enjoying a value one takes to be fundamental? This certainly has not been the intention of actual cultural Herderians, from Herder, through Berlin, to Raz and others. The alternative, however, is even worse. Alternatively, most people—the worker bees of the cultural world—should be concerned with their own ethno-national culture, but the chosen few may enjoy the panorama of the whole. Besides being morally intolerable, this proposal reverses the intention of the Herderian: he wants to praise ethno-national culture, not degrade it.

Thus the (Herderian) argument from cultural diversity fails to establish ethno-nationalist conclusions. It also lays bare the tensions inherent in non-invidious, even-handed nationalism: such a nationalist is supposed to value his own culture, and at the same time also to value others because they are different from his own culture. Moreover, he is assumed by the argument to cherish his own culture for the sake of its contribution to the mosaic of other cultures he cherishes less!

This does not deprive the ideas present in it of any value they might have. On the contrary, one can preserve their sound kernel, that is, the view that each culture has a
positive value, rejecting at the same time the nationalist overvaluation which places it above the interest and the will of members of the culture. To see this, we first have to get rid of the idea of purity. We have been postponing the discussion of this nationalist ideal in order to assess its strength in the context in which it plays a crucial role. The demand for purity has three drawbacks, two of which are moral. First, it encourages xenophobia and cultural cleansing; secondly, it condones and even encourages the perseverance of the serious defects which characterize many ethnic traditions (the male chauvinism of several Mediterranean cultures; the racism inherent in many other traditions; irrational and morally problematic religious beliefs: they all are seen as authentic and untouchable parts of pure ethnic cultures). These two drawbacks can be partially eliminated by imposing ad hoc restrictions, but it is far from clear that our ethno-nationalist can impose them in a coherent spirit. The third drawback resides in the fact that such pure cultures, preserved by a continuous tradition, simply do not exist in most of Western and Central Europe and in North America; the purity of a continuing tradition is simply illusory.

To see the force of the anti-purist claim, consider another analogy, this time with the preservation of artifacts, such as tools, furniture, and works of art. Although the diversity of styles in arts and crafts is a value, nobody in his right mind would consider forcing or even morally obliging producers, including artists, to persist in or return to old-fashioned modes of production. The competing values of freedom and creative (re-)search, of originality and usefulness, join forces and achieve an easy and legitimate victory. The cherished styles are preserved in the museum, instead of being artificially kept alive with the help of the legal enforcement of ideals. The same should hold for the diversity of lifestyles, not quasi-biological ‘forms of life’. There is nothing morally problematic about mixed lifestyles—a mongrel culture is not necessarily inferior to a pure one. Let me be explicit: my criticisms are directed only to the imposition of traditions on individuals despite their better judgment and contrary to their wishes. Voluntary and deliberate attempts at continuation are of course protected from this criticism by the liberal values of freedom and autonomy.

The cultural Herderian pro-nationalist can reply that every attempt at mixing already presupposes the availability of pure elements to be mixed with each other: the cosmopolitan ‘potpourri’ depends upon the presence of non-cosmopolitan traditions. In reply, one should point out that there is no need for such a presupposition; the mixtures can go back as far as prehistoric times. The proposed analogy is between nature and culture: the long-term stability and the reproductive isolation of biological species does not find an equivalent in the world of culture(s), and particularly not in recent centuries. Cultures are open to novelty and intrinsically non-stable: trying to preserve them in their present state, whatever that may be, is doomed to failure and sterility. The absence of social isolation is fertile from the viewpoint of cultural and social creativity.

Moreover, isolation is today not an option. Here is a well-informed source, the anthropologist C. Geertz, quoting and enlarging upon the classic work of C. Lévi-Strauss:

In the past, when so-called primitive cultures were only very marginally involved with one another—referring to themselves as ‘The True Ones,’ ‘The Good Ones,’ or just ‘The Human Beings,’ and dismissing those across the river or over the ridge as ‘earth monkeys’ or ‘louse eggs,’ that is, not, or not fully, human—cultural integrity was readily maintained. (Geertz, 1985, 236)
He stresses that “such a situation clearly no longer obtains” and that “everyone, increasingly crowded on a small planet, is deeply interested in everyone else”. Finally, in contrast to the animal world, in the world of culture individual originality is of the highest value, not to be sacrificed lightly to the ideal of rigid preservation of a collective culture. Of course, this says nothing against trying to preserve some cultural traits, particularly those which are compatible with basic universal values.

We can now see how the value of diversity might be employed against the nationalist: communication and interpenetration can produce more diversity—and diversity of a more interesting kind—than purist preservation in some presumably ‘original’ state.

So much for purity. The next crucial weakness lies in the nationalist’s exclusivity, that is, his special pleading for national culture. We have already argued in chapter ten that the ethno-national size classification of culture(s) and cultural phenomena has many competitors. On the level of any given cultural time-slice, there is the competition of micro-regional and macro-regional cultures, plus non-regional differences having to do with various sub-groups within the dominant culture. But even Herder preferred to talk about the ‘Slavic’ national character, and not to go into subtle distinctions between groups which we now see as nations belonging to the Slavic cultural circle. Here is a quotation from J. Tully (see chapter ten) which directly addresses the issue of diversity:

...cultures are not internally homogeneous. They are continuously contested, imagined and reimagined, transformed and negotiated, both by their members and through their interaction with others. The identity of any culture is thus aspectival rather than essential: like many complex human phenomena, such as language and games, its identity and meaning changes as different aspects of it come into view as it is approached from different paths. Cultural diversity is a tangled labyrinth of intertwining cultural differences and similarities, not a panopticon of fixed, independent and incommensurable world views in which we are either prisoners or cosmopolitan spectators in the central tower. (Tully, 1995, 119)

Indeed, in our world ethno-national communities are never completely isolated; they always enter larger, culturally mixed and ‘impure’ civic communities. The value of diversity should then be judged in light of the fact that diverse cultural formations are to be found at diverse and multiple levels, both smaller and bigger than particular nations, some more ancient and durable, some more ephemeral and transitory. If diversity should be fostered it should be fostered at all these levels, not only at the national one.

Let us now put the two points together—the importance of communication for diversity and the multiplicity of levels at which diversity becomes actualized—and propose an anti-nationalist argument based upon the value of diversity. First, cultural creation (especially original creation) depends upon the communication and interpenetration of different styles of life and work: such communication and interpenetration of cultures is therefore a moral value. On the other hand, the diversity of cultures (preserved in a state which allows them to be recognized) is an important good. We should then leave a wide margin of choice to interested individuals: in fact, they should do the balancing. If the preservation of a culture does not collide with the preferences and long-term interests of its members (including the need for creative innovation), nor with the interest of the other members of their civic (territorial) community, it is better—ceteris paribus—to preserve it than not. Therefore, in the circumstances specified here, and only under such circumstances, the individual pursuit of the preservation of culture is a morally valuable task (on an equal footing with the pursuit of originality and innovation). The interest of the preservation of a culture for which many individuals are interested by their free
choice is a good reason to support it by administrative measures (but only to the extent allowed by the specification outlined above. There is no a priori suggestion that the culture in question is a national one; the support is equally due to micro- and macro-regional traditions and particularities.

15 This, then, amounts to the proposal of a pluralist, non-nationalist variant of the defense of cultural diversity. It replaces the quasi-mythical idea of a purity of culture with a more generous condition, namely the preservation of a culture in a recognizable form. It stresses the plurality of cultural forms, many of which are not specifically ethno-national, and it places on an equal footing the antiquarian interest of preservation and the striving for originality and innovation. Further, the importance given to individual interests should include the interest of ordinary curiosity (cultural, creative, or just touristy) which very often works in a pluralistic and cosmopolitan direction, counterbalancing the preservationist interest. This attitude also allows for correction of the morally repulsive traits of any given culture. The proposal takes into account the fact that the creative development of art and culture might require a pluralist context which can in our time develop all the way into a cosmopolitan setting.
Chapter sixteen. The anti-cosmopolitan argument

1 Ethno-cultural claims on behalf of one's own culture are often put in terms of people trying to preserve the “uniqueness of their communal life” (Tamir, 1993, 127). It is assumed that every ethnic group—but only that one—is thus unique. The claim is then favorably contrasted with cosmopolitan claims: when a cultural ethno-nationalist claims the centrality of his or her culture he or she is often taken (by philosophers) to be opposing some imaginary counter-claim to the effect that all other cultures, or some world culture of a cosmopolitan stamp, should be favored. This assumption is then developed into arguments we already discussed: the pro-nationalist theoretician claims that cultural identity is paramount to personal identity and to the flourishing of individuals. (This line of thought is often traced back to Herder, and in the English-speaking literature to Isaiah Berlin.) Cultural identity, however, means ethno-cultural identity: “National identity is best cultivated in a small, relatively closed and homogeneous framework, which neither wishes nor needs to reach beyond the members of the nation” (Tamir, 1993, 131; it should be noted that Tamir is aware of the importance of macro-regions, but does not focus upon them). Next the defender of ethno-nationalism presents the reader with a forced choice: in deciding for a form of culture (for yourself and your descendants) to live with, you have just two options: either abide by your own traditional culture, as it has been defined by your national-ethnic framework, or choose an indiscriminate cosmopolitan culture.

2 The analogous choice is offered for a would-be lawgiver (for an excellent formulation see Miller [1995, conclusion of chapter seven]): favor the national cultural tradition or leave the doors wide open to cosmopolitan world culture. (The usual invidious metaphor for characterizing the ‘cosmopolitan self’ is that of rootlessness [see, for example, Margalit, 1997, 85].) To over-dramatize a little, let me call the choice the Tribe-or-World Dilemma. The argument then proceeds by eliminating the cosmopolitan option: it is presented as being bland, commercialized (‘McDonaldized’) and incapable of supporting a strong and flourishing identity. The best authors are more cautious, but still quip about McDonalds: “The benefits of the high culture will be confined mostly to an elite... The non-elite will have to put up with the lowest-common-denominator mass culture exemplified by Disney, McDonalds, and Australian soap opera” (Miller, 1995, 187).1 The nationalist is
hereby depicted as defending his traditional culture primarily, even exclusively, against the cosmopolitan one. His main enemies are ‘McDonalds’: they will be replaced with traditional restaurants serving good local food. (Well, who would not vote for the nationalist if this were his chief concern?)

3 We should then distinguish two issues: first, is the cosmopolitan option really so bland and impotent; and secondly, is it really the only alternative to ethno-national, ‘tribal’ traditionalism? The first question may be difficult, and I am not going to sound its depths here. But even if the answer to it is ‘no’ (as I think it is, following Waldron [1995]), many people might still go along with the thought expressed in the above quotation from Miller and feel that the genuinely cosmopolitan option is in most countries of the world open only to a small elite (capable of extensive travel, speaking foreign languages, capable of understanding a wide variety of forms of expression, and empathizing with unfamiliar emotional complexes). It demands an involved process of training that might be too costly for most individuals and communities. The ‘tribal’ alternative is therefore still the winning one, many readers might think.

4 Things look different when we turn to the second question, that is, whether the dilemma is really exhaustive. I suggest that we ask actual cultural nationalists, not their philosopher advocates: Is world culture really your main target? Are you centrally concerned with the blandness of McDonalds restaurants and the attendant mass culture, or do you have other worries? It is here that the Hated Neighbor Truism comes in handy. Remember that it claims that ethno-nationalist claims are usually directed to neighboring peoples with which the claimant people has close ties and interacts quite intensely. Now, this fact answers whether the dilemma between tribe and world is exhaustive. The answer is a resounding ‘no’. The claim to the centrality of one’s own culture is in practice most often made in response to specific neighboring culture(s). The Croatian nationalists primarily want to get rid of any influence from Serbian culture, not from French or German culture. Even the very moderate kinds of nationalism which simply aim to secure traditional culture from the influence of others without inciting hatred (and may even enjoin a limited tolerance), will tend to secure it from mixing with close ones, not the distant cosmopolitan culture. (Note that even Tamir, the most moderate and insightful of recent self-declared pro-nationalists, still speaks about the preservation of ‘homogeneous’ ethno-national culture. Of course, ‘homogeneous’ is a philosopher’s euphemism for what used to be called ‘pure’.) It would be tedious to enumerate the examples of ‘cultural cleansing’ aimed at excluding the closest neighbor. My favorite one is from the life of Bartok in the early years of the fascistoid Horthy dictatorship in Hungary: he was attacked in the press by his own boss at the Budapest Academy of Music for having published Romanian folk songs from the then Hungarian Transylvania: of course ‘there is no Romanian minority in Hungary’. A signal domain is linguistic purism: the thrust of institutionalized linguistic purism is often directed against admixtures of neighboring languages or parlances (although the purists tend also to throw out international loan words). In the Balkans it is present everywhere, each community—from Slovenia to Turkey—purifying its language or dialect of admixtures deriving from its close eastern neighbor (Slovenians from Croatian-Serbian, Croats from Serbian, both together with Bulgarians from Turkish, Turks from Arabic, just to follow one path from northwest to southeast). Philosophers who write about ‘linguistic self-defense’ (Fletcher, 1997) should keep this fact in mind.²
In short, ‘indiscriminate’ cosmopolitanism is in practice a red herring. It is sometimes criticized in nationalist-ruled countries out of fear that it will bring the neighbors in or stimulate the internal minorities to claim their rights. Genuine anti-cosmopolitan feelings are therefore relatively unimportant: antipathy towards global culture comes only after the distaste for the neighbors (and after the mock anti-cosmopolitanism which only masks the hate-thy-neighbor ideology).

The truism then suggests the following reply to the initial Tribe-or-World Dilemma: indiscriminate cosmopolitanism (good or bad) is not the only rival to nationalism. Actual nationalists know better than their philosopher advocates: there is a third option, the co-evolution of close cultures of different ethnic groups, and they would like to prevent precisely that. Also, we all know deep in our hearts that the constructive cultural future for each Middle East or Balkan nation lies not in some distant Cosmopolis, but in the very concrete cooperation of local neighboring communities. We tend to forget this when in the philosopher’s study, and the pro-nationalist philosopher then plays upon our forgetfulness to confront us with his or her unpleasant dilemma: either a too wide-ranging cosmopolitanism, or cherished nationalism. But the dilemma is a false one: the politically and historically real third option is usually the actual encompassing region (Middle East, Central Europe, Balkans), much narrower—and in that sense more 'concrete' and less confusing—than the world as a whole (as a homeless cosmopolitanism would suggest), and wider than a particular ‘tribe’.

This suggests a kind of graded and pluralist cosmopolitanism, that is, geared to the reality of varied neighborhoods. An individual typically belongs to several overlapping, but not necessarily concentric, circles of cultural proximity. The widest can span continents (for instance, the circle of Catholic traditions), while the narrowest might be confined to one’s rather isolated village with a specific micro-culture. A pluralist culturalist cosmopolitan alternative should attend to this wide repertory of possibilities. We shall return to the topic in the final chapter of the book.

NOTES

1. I find the comment methodologically weak: Miller cannot, without begging the question, criticize cosmopolitan mass ‘culture’ just for being cosmopolitan (and this is probably not his intention); on the other hand, since he is implicitly criticizing it for its low quality he should, for the purpose at hand, compare it with national mass ‘culture’.

2. Top intellectuals of international renown seem to be no exception when linguistic purism is at stake. An example from an unexpected quarter (one that made me particularly sad): the prominent British philosopher Michael Dummett—whom I admire in many respects—criticized his Italian (!) colleague for writing in ‘bland’ Americanized English, without ever noticing that it is not the colleague’s mother tongue and that he is thereby at a serious disadvantage. Note that Dummett had no intention of criticizing texts in Italian; what worried him was the dialect of his own language.

3. Kymlicka offers a different solution to the dilemma: he suggests that “defenders of minority rights are rarely seeking to preserve their ‘authentic’ culture, if that means living the same way
as their ancestors did centuries ago” (1995, 8). The proposal is risky: first, it is not clear that his factual claim is correct; secondly, even if it is, it is still an open question which aspects of the way of life the defenders want to preserve, and there is no telling that the aspects to be preserved will not be the most retrograde, xenophobic, or whatever; thirdly, the issue is the principled one, and concerns not only what individuals want to preserve, but what they have the right to preserve.
Chapter seventeen. Recapitulation: nationalism against culture

1 Let us take stock. We started with the following questions: Do people have a duty to promote their ‘ethno-national culture’? Is love for one’s ethno-national culture morally superior to an interest in foreign cultures? Should each state ‘rightfully belong’—at least ideally—to a single ethno-cultural community, and serve the particular culture of that community? Should ‘ethno-national cultures’ be kept alive in a pure form by administrative means, in order to prevent the ‘interbreeding’ of various cultures? The tough but even-handed nationalist, ‘John the Lavinian’, answers all four questions in the affirmative. Note that his willingness to universalize his advice—that is, to extend it to all ‘peoples’—does not change the rather radical content of the advice itself.

2 Let us summarize the main criticisms of the value-based arguments. In order to defend nationalism based upon cultural considerations, the nationalist has to put forward views of culture that are extremely implausible and have unpleasant direct consequences. His proposals also suggest—in a more or less indirect, but completely foreseeable way—more extremist interpretations that might have catastrophic consequences if acted upon. I assume that one is responsible for such direct consequences, and that one should also be careful about foreseeable indirect consequences. I do not want to burden the theoretical nationalist, or the nationally minded philosopher, with ‘guilt by association’, but to point out our normal standards of responsibility when handling dangerous and explosive items, or risky energy sources, since nationalism is certainly one of them.

3 We have thoroughly criticized the fundamental nationalist assumption that culture is primarily national. As a brief recap of criticisms of this ‘monoculturalist’ view, neither high nor popular culture is spontaneously centered around the nation; cultural life is typically less than homogeneous, and there are many circles and traditions which are either smaller or larger than national ones. Rural popular culture is most often microregional; urban culture is nowadays rather transnational in average-size towns and clearly mixed in cities. High culture is also mixed: poetry and belles lettres in general follow the lead of language, whether it is linked to the nation or not. Given that it often is, literature is the prime carrier of national cultural identity, and nationalists forget that it is only one segment of high culture. Many other activities within high culture do not necessarily or most frequently carry clear national traits in the case of the vast majority
of nations. Often the national label (such as ‘Danish’ painting, ‘Albanian’ sculpture) is just a convenient umbrella term for an activity and its products in the given area of culture. Finally, there is a deep uncertainty about the naturalness and ‘authenticity’ of the ethno-national framework. It is not clear whether ethno-national traditions as we know them from old nation-states are constructions that post-date the creation of the nation-state, instead of being its condition and raison d’être.

4 We have also noted that the nationalist appeal to cultural proximity within the ethno-nation manifestly misconstrues actual cultural relations: the wish—even obsession—to distance oneself from the neighboring ‘culture’ essentially includes the suppression of many traits that are in normal cases common to the culture(s) of neighbors. We shall return to the consequences of this in a moment.

5 Remember that it is not that the nationalist simply wants a trait to go on: say, for the Lavinian language to be spoken for at least the next one hundred years. He wants the descendants of Lavinians to speak Lavinian. Now, this wish has no title to a universal rule: if John wants the descendants of his co-national Pauline (whom he only knows by name) to speak Lavinian, this in itself does not put any constraint upon Pauline, not to mention her descendants. Not even Pauline is in a position to exercise paternalistic care over the choices of the members of her ethno-nation, possibly including the choices of future generations.

6 The direct implications of the assumption involve teaching history of culture as a collection of insulated national packages, and organizing cultural life around narrowly national topics. Talk about the ‘centrality of national culture’ encourages the idea that in each big or small ethno-national country one should concentrate upon the local historical achievements in high culture. In Croatia there was a four-year course in Croatian philosophy, and we had exams in ‘Croatian psychological identity’; in France, as well as in some Central European countries, analytical philosophy is considered suspect partly on the grounds of its being ‘Anglo-American’. Examples of narrow-minded, downright disastrous attempts at inventing a specifically ethno-national high culture can be multiplied at will. The same over-general idea of the centrality of national culture often in practice encourages a disastrous linguistic purism.

7 The assumption naturally gives rise to even more problematic views. We have quoted Margalit’s metaphor to the effect that comparing cultures is out of the question: a dog, winner of a dog show, should not thereafter be entered in a cat show. If cultures are really incommensurable, their mixing is indeed contrary to nature. Now, an immediate consequence of such a view can be to restrict the transmission and creation of culture to the ethno-national tradition (more or less narrowly conceived), together with suspicion of everything ‘foreign’, and, in more competitive situations, an aggressive ‘cleansing’ of one’s cultural heritage of foreign admixtures. Given that most contemporary cultures are mixed, the cleansing would end up crippling the culture that has become its target: like a jealous lover, the serious nationalist sometimes ends up mutilating or killing the object of his love in order to keep it pure and unalloyed. In short, abstract talk about the ‘incommensurability’ of traditions encourages extremist readings, and these in turn give rise to extremist recommendations. The link is indirect, but clearly recognizable. In the case of racism it would be immediately acknowledged; just try the same dogs-and-cats line with race, and you will see the result! What sort of timidity and misplaced respect prevents us from recognizing it in the case of nationalism?
Let us now turn to an important issue that we have left dangling. Our nationalist assumes that the protection of culture in a relatively pure form justifies and even commands state intervention, and thereby strongly recommends that the state should be centered around a given cultural tradition. Is this ‘statist’ assumption warranted? Not really, at least not in liberal-democratic societies. It may be warranted in oppressive societies, such as the great multinational empires were for the most part; there, the complete political independence of smaller ethnic communities has been the only way to protect the basic rights of their members. But these cases are not central to the contemporary nationalist line on culture and tradition. For liberal-democratic societies—the prime target of the latter—this line has little chance of being accepted, since traditions there are freely formed, continued and discontinued, as circumstances arise. If there is a dominant majority language, it is perpetuated by the school system anyway, and special measures of ‘protection’ or ‘linguistic self-defense’ are hardly needed; it is much more important to give minorities their due. People normally, and without state encouragement, read literature in their mother tongue; normally show interest in novels that deal with their own town, region, or country; listen to pop music in their own language as well as in some foreign ones. Writers need not be encouraged to write about home topics by means of state support; one can rely upon the interest of home readers for that. Good thinkers tend to create their own ‘schools’ of thought, smaller or larger, to which interested people are spontaneously attracted. Of course, a sub-community might decide to perpetuate its ways of life, some of its members may decide to write in the dialect spoken around them, and many more may decide to read what has been written. It can negotiate some form of state support if the enterprise seems valuable to a larger public, or look for private support, or both. So, in most cases, there is no special need for a new state just for the protection of one culture, and different cultures can coexist under the umbrella of a single state. Moreover, when the purity of a culture can be maintained only by state intervention, it is unclear that the state has a right to intervene. In a democratic society, a culture becomes threatened when its members lose interest in it: a culture based on religion will be seriously threatened by the spread of atheism; a conservative culture is threatened when a new generation of intellectuals searches for new ways, or simply becomes enthusiastic for a different culture, and there is no interest among the public in maintaining the old forms. In such cases, the competing contrary rights of the creators and/or consumers of culture very often make state intervention deeply problematic.

There is a further difficulty for the nationalist. Vigilant state protection very often directly threatens the culture it is meant to protect. Good ‘national’ art and philosophy for the most part cannot be created by a conscious effort. The point is glaringly obvious: good love poetry in English is mostly written when an English-speaking poet falls in love, not when he or she sits down to ‘make a contribution to English culture’. Good philosophers are obsessed with philosophical problems, not with the goal of contributing to their ‘national philosophy’. In short, good ‘national’ culture is essentially a by-product. One cannot create it on demand, any more than one can fall in love on demand. Now, once state officials are taught the idea that they should ‘foster national culture’, what they typically do is, first, lavish money on national history (which might be a good or a bad thing, depending on the circumstances), and secondly, channel the money for contemporary production to works that are overtly and recognizable national. The latter move is almost always deleterious. Take art: good contemporary art is very often ironical to the point of sarcasm, iconoclastic, irreverent and rebellious on principle. Deciding to
foster works of art that are recognizably ‘national’ and consequently to diminish or withhold support to the rest is doomed to failure: such a move selects the worst art and eliminates the best. A nationalistic cultural policy in Britain would never have supported a Benjamin Britten or a Bertrand Russell. (Of course, some of the most irreverent and shocking art of the moment will be seen in a few decades by future nationalists as ‘great national art’, but this happens only after the event.)

The impossibility of creating ‘national culture’ on demand vitiates the efforts of even the most intelligent and benevolent state officials. When the officials are not benevolent, or not intelligent, or both—as sometimes happens in particularly unfortunate countries—the effects are much worse than just a lack of funding. Remember the example of Béla Bartók who collected folk songs all over Hungary, which at that time was large and ethnically mixed. In the 1920s he was severely criticized in the daily newspapers by his nationalistic colleague and boss for having published the songs of the Romanian minority: after all, Hungarians are the ‘rightful owners’ of the Hungarian state! He almost lost his job at the Budapest Academy of Music, and was forced, first into silence and a kind of ‘internal exile’, and later, when things got worse, into actual exile to the US. Hundreds of lesser-known artists and thinkers in other European countries have been forced to follow similar paths. This is what the nationalistic ‘state protection’ of national culture can come down to: the outright destruction of the culture that is supposed to be protected. The phenomenon is not limited to small nations: German nationalist politics was constantly destroying culture in Germany throughout the first half of the twentieth century.

Ill-founded statism, the misinterpretation of proximity, and misconceived ‘monoculturalism’ thus vitiate all of the arguments discussed. Notice that they are not the property of non-invidious nationalism; they are shared with the invidious variant, and are usually put forward as excuses for its excesses. We have charitably discussed them in the non-invidious context, since they have greater appeal there; still, their intrinsic invalidity remains, whatever the context.

Each of the arguments discussed also has its own weaknesses. They remain even if the statist thesis is weakened to some kind of cultural autonomy, and even if the nationalist tries to pay lip-service to cultural pluralism.

The arguments from the value of traditions as conditions of human flourishing, including the understanding of values—prominently of moral value—although it rightly stresses the importance of tradition, goes much too far in making tradition our unique window on value, and in making values dependent upon particular tradition(s) within which one might have come in touch with them. It underestimates the closeness of moral codes, representing relatively close peoples as having different, even incommensurable ‘thick’ moralities, and thereby encourages diffidence and moral isolationism.

The chief argument from identity misconstrues the notions of cultural and national identity by likening them to—to the point of confusing them with—personal identity, in order to suggest that such ‘identities’ (in a wide and somewhat metaphorical sense) should be as unique and fixed as personal identity. It unwarrantedly ties the strength and rigidity of one’s identity to the strength and rigidity of one’s ethno-national framework. Finally, it argues for the primacy of non-chosen belonging, which is morally unacceptable if taken literally, since it clashes with the value of autonomy.

The argument from proximity has two weaknesses: it rests on the problematic assumption that distance justifies neglect and even discrimination, and, more
importantly in the present context, it misrepresents the actual configuration of nationalist conflicts.

Now, the appeal to culture, tradition, and identity is the pivot around which the whole contemporary theoretical defense of nationalism turns; if it is too weak to support it, as I have tried to show, and if its weakness is due to its defects—which also have dangerous consequences—then one should seriously contemplate the possibility that things stand in exactly the opposite way: that the creation and preservation of a decent cultural life and of fruitful and interesting traditions, the richness of cultural identities, and the autonomous flourishing of people demand that nationalist advice be firmly rejected, and isolationist fantasies about encapsulated cultures of an essentially ethno-national character be relegated to the junkyard of cultural politics.
Chapter eighteen. Ultra-moderate nationalism

At this juncture we face the following risk. The authors we have been abundantly quoting as defenders of nationalism might collectively protest against such treatment. ‘Look’, they might say, ‘this is a misunderstanding or worse. When you talk about nationalism you mean a nasty, illiberal variety, and of course this variety is easy to refute. Our nationalism has nothing to do with such savage views: it is a liberal, even cosmopolitan nationalism, far from the savagery of Balkan nationalisms.’ Indeed, the nationalism we have discussed until now has been quite illiberal. These authors would, in a way, be right, and I have been apologizing all the way for lumping their arguments together with those of much tougher nationalists, who themselves offer no arguments whatsoever (although the philosophers in their more energetic moments come closer to the usual classical, but even-handed nationalism). They are also right about their views being more difficult to refute. They replace relatively radical nationalism with a very moderate variant, and, of course, moderate views are easier to defend, provided they are consistent. We now have to consider the nowadays popular attempt to mix elements of nationalism with elements of liberalism. This proposes a compromise between nationalism and liberalism which would preserve nationalist ideals within the liberal framework. Such a compromise might seem to combine the advantages of both—the more abstract moral appeal of liberalism and the emotional, identity-based appeal of nationalism—without bringing in the disadvantages of each. For less-developed countries suffering under the rule of illiberal nationalists, the compromise seems to promise a viable future: their citizens could retain the deep-rooted national values and struggle to establish a liberal political framework—acceptable to the developed countries—into which they could fit their nationalist ideals, purged of any ugly and invidious features. I shall take as my guide to such a compromise—and subsequently as the target of my (regrettably brief and sketchy) criticism—the excellent work of Yael Tamir (1993). Her attempt is marked by a rare mixture of intelligence, sincerity, and seriousness of purpose, and a better guide is difficult to imagine. I shall argue that, in the end, it probably fails, but I am convinced that her effort is the best that one can make in this direction. I shall also take into account other compatibilists, above all MacCormick (1992) and Miller (1995). Despite the initial appeal of
the compatibilist proposal, I wish to suggest that liberalism and nationalism are not
compatible.

2 Remember that the distinguishing feature of liberalism is its emphasis on the moral
autonomy of the individual. This goes hand in hand with the principled demand for the
neutrality of institutional structures with regard to particular conceptions of the good,
or, as some put it, the ‘exclusion of ideals’ concerning ways of life worth living. Its
anthropological underpinning is the individualistic image of the self as the ultimate
moral agent, and an equally individualistic image of social groups: group membership
should ideally be self-chosen. Involuntary groups can derive legitimacy from the fiction
of an idealized contract or consent. Now, the issues about conceptual compatibilities are
notoriously difficult, especially in political philosophy, where concepts are rather flexible
and open. A determined compatibilist can always try stretching and watering-down his or
her two apparently incompatible concepts, with a fair chance of making the result look
coherent.

3 Consider briefly where the clash between liberalism and typical nationalism comes from.
The typical, classical nationalist claims at least the following. There are ethnic-national
values which are independent of the choice of individual members of the ethnic-national
group, and nevertheless binding. The values generate obligations (duties) for members in
respect of the values. In the narrowly political sphere the foremost value is the political
autonomy of the community, normally described in terms of statehood. In the wider
cultural sphere, it is the (alleged) intrinsic value of the national tradition. Ethno-national
obligations trump most other obligations (the word ‘most’ is vague, but so is the concept
of nationalism). Among the narrowly political obligations the paramount one is to create
an autonomous political structure, most standardly an ethnic-national state. (In federal,
multinational states the aspiration to a separate state is the stereotypical mark of
nationalist parties in contrast to anti-nationalist, federalist parties.)

4 Here is an example in which the priorities dictated by nationalism—the high standing of
national value in culture—clearly clash with liberal values. In chapter three—on
invidious nationalism—we mentioned that most ethnic traditions contain crucially
important elements—legends, stories, proverbs—characterized by at least one of two
kinds of features: first, they are factually false, wide of the mark, or, to put it nicely,
‘mythological’; secondly, they are invidious to actual neighbors, implying their baseness,
cowardice, or lack of culture, and insist on the contrasting virtues of their own people;
they also typically mention glorious victories over the neighbors and the past glories of
the Great Fatherland (for example, the Greater Lavinia extending over territories now
’unjustly’ held and inhabited by Carpathians), presenting them as paradigms to be
followed and acquisitions to be restored. Classical nationalism takes such elements to be
constitutive of the identity of the people in question. Since cultural identity in its eyes
trumps all other considerations, classical nationalism recommends sacrificing the
recalcitrant values of truth and benevolence. Regarding factual falsity, it recommends
accepting mythology as it stands and discourages further inquiry. Regarding the negative
attitude towards neighbors (including mythology-based territorial claims), it tolerates, if
it does not straightforwardly recommend, sacrificing a cooperative attitude to the
construction and affirmation of identity.

5 Another illustration concerns the relation between the values of civic and of ethnic
patriotism. Very schematically, for the classical nationalist the basic kind is ethnic
patriotism: Lavinians should love their country because it is the Lavinian country. For the
classical liberal, civic patriotism comes first. Now we should dig deeper, looking for the ground of moral and political justification. Here, the most salient contrast concerns the grounds of (alleged) rights and obligations. According to the nationalist, the obligation to promote national values derives from the (alleged normative) facts about collective tradition and collective identity, and consequently does not derive from, and is in principle not dependent upon, the actual judgments and preferences of individuals.

The issue to be addressed now is: which of these features must be weakened, and to what extent, to fit nationalism into a liberal framework? Some features can be modified, some perhaps given up, but I assume that giving up all or most of the features would deprive the compromise of any legitimate aspiration to the title of ‘nationalism’. This point is important for daily politics. Just calling the compromise ‘nationalist’ will not fool sincere nationalists, nor win them over to the liberal side. A sincere and intelligent illiberal nationalist politician can easily point out the weak and—from his standpoint—almost treacherous aspects of the resulting compromise. It is at most a comfort to the as yet undecided, clothing their indecision in acceptable rhetoric.

THE SHAPE OF THE COMPROMISE

I shall describe the weakenings that have been proposed in the literature, and briefly suggest why each of them is essential from a liberal standpoint. Let me call the sought-after accommodation simply ‘the Compromise’.

Let me first set aside two obvious dead-ends, proposals that sometimes surface in discussions and are based on the views of nationalism I rejected at the outset. The first proposal builds upon the view that nationalism reduces to a pattern of behavior: if a liberal can recommend some behaviors usually recommended by the nationalist—for example, struggle for national independence—that already counts as a compromise. This is a non-starter: the coincidence of some aspects of behavior is not a valid indicator of the identity of reasons and motivations, and it is the latter that count. The second proposal is symmetrical with the first: it assumes that the inner, sentimental attitude is sufficient for nationalism, and paints a picture of a hybrid: a person who is nationalist by sentiment only and liberal by beliefs and practice. It founders on its inadequacy: if the sentiment is politically inert it falls out of the political debate; if it is not, the person depicted is either a dramatically divided soul or a hypocrite. I turn now to more promising proposals.

The first weakening of classical nationalism on the road towards the compromise with liberalism concerns the force of the national claims. The liberal framework takes some values or obligations to be absolute: human rights are a case in point. Confronted with them, national claims lose their status as trumps. Moreover, the framework accords a high value to the contingent needs and interests of individuals, regardless of their membership of a particular (say,ethnic) group, which therefore may rightfully block nationalist aspirations. Tamir quotes with approval the advice given by Mazzini: if your deed favors your country but injures humanity, desist (Tamir, 1993, 115). In short, national claims are, within the Compromise, only compelling prima facie.

A dramatic weakening awaits the paradigm nationalist claim to statehood. Tamir and other proponents express their satisfaction with much less than a state, say, with some political autonomy for a given cultural/national group. Contrast this with authors, from Weber to Gellner, who define nationalism as a statist ideology. It is hard to see what
justifies the readiness to go on calling the weakened claim ‘nationalistic’. I will return to this point in the next section.

11 Let me briefly mention ethno-national mythologies. How should our benevolent compatibilist—who sincerely wants to accommodate his or her nationalism within a liberal framework—go about accommodating their central role in the creation and sustaining of national identity? Many would-be liberal nationalist authors—such as Tamir, MacCormick, and, with reservations, Miller—tend to assume both that such mythologies are benign and that their falsehood is morally irrelevant. Miller draws a comparison between the mythological belief in a common origin and the false belief an adoptive child might have about being the biological child of his or her parents. The latter is morally at least neutral, although false, so why not the former? This is the best kind of compromise available: the nationalist soul of the Compromise cannot give up the very substance of the cultural tradition. Notice that this line says nothing about the less benign beliefs that may form part of national mythologies; we shall return to this in our criticism of the Compromise.

12 Consider now the status of ethno-national versus civic patriotism. The liberal framework dictates that we view the state instrumentally, as a means to a ‘comfortable life’, as one prominent liberal nationalist puts it (Nielsen, 1992, 171). But now the would-be liberal nationalist has a hard choice: what is he or she to recommend to his or her fellow patriots? Should they be loyal primarily to the liberal constitution, or to its contingent ethnic underpinning? Tamir’s case is dramatic and illustrative: what should a Jewish (would-be) liberal nationalist recommend to the citizens of her deeply divided country? Now, given the primacy of liberal values, it seems that the right choice is to subordinate ethnic patriotism to civic loyalty to the common constitution, the civic patriotism of the republican variety. This is precisely Tamir’s choice, which I applaud very much. Let me then summarize the political recommendation of the Compromise.

13 (1C) Ethno-national claims have only prima facie strength, and cannot trump other valves.
14 (2C) Legitimate ethno-national claims do not in themselves amount to the right to have a state. (In Tamir’s version they mostly reach the level of cultural autonomy.)
15 (3C) Ethno-national patriotism is subordinate to civic patriotism, which has little or nothing to do with ethnic criteria.
16 (4C) Ethno-national mythologies are to be tolerated only if benign and inoffensive, being thereby morally permissible in spite of their falsity.
17 (5C) Any legitimacy ethno-national claims have derives from the choice of the individuals concerned. (In Tamir’s version, the only relevant right that is explicitly guaranteed is the individual’s right to take some permissible ethno-nationalist obligation upon himself, and any obligation thus generated will be a freely assumed one.)
18 This ends the brief presentation of the Compromise.

DOES THE COMPROMISE WORK?

19 We have now reached the most difficult question: To what extent is the Compromise still nationalist? If it is not, is the very idea of ‘liberal nationalism’ coherent at all? Given the vagueness of political concepts, the dispute might appear merely verbal. After all, why
not grant to the Compromise the epithets ‘liberal’ and ‘nationalistic’? Well, there are limits: one cannot steer completely away from classical nationalism, the paradigm instance of the concept, and still be nationalist, otherwise the concept becomes emptied altogether. Given the difficulty of adjudicating in such delicate conceptual—and political—matters, I propose only to take some initial steps: I shall try to show that the negative answer is at least prima facie the most plausible one, but I have to leave the detailed defense for another occasion.

Let us start with a relatively easy matter. Our would-be liberal nationalists assume—by (3C)—that national mythologies are benign falsehoods, to be easily integrated into a liberal ideology. But we have shown in chapter three on invidious nationalism that they are wrong: mythologies come down from a savage and cruel past and bear its imprint; normally, they are far from benign in what they suggest or command. Our authors are also imprudent: false mythologies show their bite in many actual situations, for example, when historians begin to discover their falsehood. The problem for the would-be liberal nationalist is then to formulate principles that would condemn such practices, while at the same time allowing the moral centrality of community values (which include an appeal to the constitutive myths). I do not see how this could be done.

Let me now remind the reader that the five theses comprising the Compromise are a far cry from any of the central cases of nationalism. To start with more practical considerations, (1C) deprives the Compromise of clear-cut answers to burning political questions. Whereas classical nationalism told one where one should put one’s heart, the Compromise claims only that ethno-nationalist interest is one legitimate interest among many. No clear guide to action is thereby given. Furthermore, the Compromiser who (by 2C) gives up the right to a sovereign ethnic state certainly falls out of the prototype of a nationalist.

Notice that the problem arises from the principled source: as mentioned, the contrast between the prima facie and the ultimate, trump-like status of national claims is politically the most salient divide between classical and would-be liberal nationalism. If the nationalist also proposes to purge national mythologies of elements offensive to liberal tastes—to minorities, members of neighboring ethnic groups, possibly to women, to mention the most salient recipients—he or she will be left with little to substantiate his or her allegiance to specific ethno-national traditions. (Not to mention the fact that the whole idea of condoning false beliefs for their identity-building function is logically and pragmatically fishy. One wonders whether the Compromiser believes in the mythology. If yes, he or she cannot admit that it is false. If not, and he or she nevertheless manages to preserve his or her ethno-national identity, then mythology is not necessary for identity; why then insist that others should be left with their illusions for the sake of preserving their identity?)

Furthermore (concerning thesis [5C]), the permission the Compromiser grants one to take on some ethnically oriented obligation is not in itself nationalist. It is like the permission a tolerant lawgiver gives to members of some religious group; if they want to take special burdens upon themselves they are free to do so. The Compromiser is thereby as little committed to nationalism as the tolerant lawgiver is committed to endorsing the religion he tolerates.
Now, add together all these features—deriving from (1C) to (5C)—and consult your intuition: is there anything left worthy of being considered nationalist? I am inclined to answer in the negative.

The following objection is sometimes raised: if the Compromise is geared primarily to ‘cultural’ nationalism, could it not preserve both its aspects by judiciously assigning them to separate domains: liberalism in the political domain, nationalism in the cultural one? It is here that the strictures against the indiscriminate use of the term ‘cultural nationalism’ apply. A classical nationalist in culture is as much committed to the primacy of the national as the classical nationalist in politics is: like Flavia from our fictional example (see chapter two), he or she recommends Lavinian works primarily because they are Lavinian, not for their aesthetic merit. (The phrase ‘the value of a particular culture’ is ambiguous between a universalist and an indexical reading and our objector ultimately trades on this ambiguity.) The Compromiser should decide whether to go along with Flavia or not. If he or she does, that will clash with a liberal attitude about artistic tastes. If he or she does not, he or she can recommend the native tradition either for its intrinsic merit—in which case purely national considerations are out—or can merely condone the preferences for the native, in which case he or she is merely tolerant and his or her moral and aesthetic attitude is no different from that of some benevolent stranger.

Let me now pass to the fundamental philosophical issue. What is the ultimate ground of these (weakly) pro-national permissions and rights granted by the Compromise? Is it their intrinsic nation-related quality; the fact that they are related to alleged ethno-national values? That would be the ground endorsed and applauded by the nationalist. Or is it rather the fact that granting the rights satisfies the legitimate preferences of the individuals in question? It is this latter suggestion that the Compromiser puts forward. Moreover, he or she assumes that the preferences are legitimate mainly because they are, first, held by individuals and, secondly, centrally and deeply important for those individuals. The obligations people assume on the basis of these rights are binding because they are assumed by individuals, not vice versa. Their ultimate ground is the value of “the activist and participative character of full autonomy” (MacCormick, 1991, 15), where ‘autonomy’ refers ultimately to the autonomous liberty of the individual. In this way liberals and nationalists can locally come close in practice; in an ethnically homogeneous, highly civilized community (like French-speaking Canada), along lines that are by now familiar, the democratically formed constitution forcefully promotes national values with the consensus of the vast majority, whereby the rights and interests of the minority are protected. The liberal would accept such a constitution on liberal grounds since it enshrines the values that most of the individuals concerned would subscribe to, and protects the values of the dissenting minority. The nationalist would endorse it on his or her own distinctive grounds, that is, since it gives voice to precisely those values he or she finds binding (and he or she would excuse the concessions to non-nationals on pragmatic—their not being threatening to national interests—or other non-principled grounds). The two kinds of grounds, however, remain distinct and, in my view at least, clearly contrasted.

I conclude provisionally that liberalism and ethno-nationalism—as global political frameworks and global programs—seem to be fundamentally opposed and irreconcilable. It is not the accidental ‘excesses’ of nationalism that appear to be responsible for the clash, but the very scaffolding of its fundamental ideas. This was the traditional view of the liberal critics of ethno-nationalism, and I can find no convincing arguments to the
contrary. I am aware that my sample of liberal nationalist proposals has been rather narrow—although composed of items of very high quality—and my discussion of it all too sketchy. But I hope I have not been unjust or invidious towards the nationalist (even a most benevolent one), and that I have only reconstructed and explicated the assumptions he or she is conceptually committed to. To reiterate, I explicitly endorse and defend the weaker thesis that the reasons proposed in favor of compatibilism are not clinching enough to overthrow the traditional incompatibilist views, and I am tempted to recommend also the stronger thesis—which would need a lot more arguing for—that liberalism and nationalism are in fact incompatible.

NOTES

1. I shall have to be brief. I hope to enlarge upon each point on a later occasion. In particular, I regret that I cannot do full justice here to Tamir’s rich and sophisticated argumentation.
2. To see how it works with a concrete example, compare Leydet (1992) on the Canadian situation.
Part Three. Conclusion
Chapter nineteen. Why nationalism might be immoral

Our discussion of the morality of nationalism has had two prongs. First, on the negative side, I have criticized and tried to rebut the reasons the nationalist might put forward in defense of his view that nationalism is moral, even highly moral. The main reasons are centered around the value of national cultural belonging and identity, and the importance of defending this value; the value was presented as being in principle independent of the will of actual individuals. In the debate, the nationalist mainly puts himself forward as the unique defender of this important value. I have pointed out a contradiction that often arises at this point: sophisticated pro-nationalist writers most often accept that the ethno-nation is a 'construction' and an 'imagined community', but how can such constructed items compel an unconditioned loyalty and give rise to objective, non-chosen duties? Leaving this issue aside, I have further argued against the nationalist that (ethno-)national identity is one identity among many, that its value does not derive from its being unchosen; on the contrary, it becomes morally and politically relevant only when it is autonomously chosen as a focus of identification, or, alternatively, in situations in which the national belonging of an individual gives rise to discrimination (similar to the case of racial discrimination). In both cases (ethno-)national identity deserves protection on general, non-nationalistic grounds. In the first case it is the autonomous will of an individual that grounds the respectability of his or her national identity, not any kind of ‘group will’ or irreducible ‘collective autonomy’. In the second case it is a violation of the basic moral right of individuals to equal treatment that motivates moral considerations. However, the right to protection is limited: it does not in most cases guarantee a right to a state, only a conditional right to some kind of autonomy. It is a right and not a duty for the members of the protection-seeking group; they are free to exit, if they wish, or to remodel their life in non-traditional, non-purist terms. This may change the life of the group as a whole, may even make it unrecognizable as the group it once was; however, if the innovators form a majority, and use morally and legally permissible means, they are morally in the clear.

The real work that has to be done at this juncture is to come to the nitty-gritty of the issues of group rights and to spell out in detail a view about what kind of protection various characteristics of a group should be granted, and on what detailed grounds. This,
however, goes far beyond the scope of this book. I want instead to recapitulate the criticisms of the nationalist stance, and consider the proposition that nationalism may be immoral. I apologize for repeating some of the points from chapter seventeen, where I undertook to show not only that nationalism is not (highly) moral, but that in its most typical and central forms may well be positively immoral.

3 Here then is the gist of the case against nationalism. Remember that we have distinguished two basic kinds: the invidious and the even-handed. In chapter eighteen we discussed a third competitor, liberal nationalism, which in our view cannot be properly called ‘nationalism’ or (col)apses into a milder variant of the ordinary non-invidious variant. Let me start with the obvious. The invidious variant is typically rather nasty and morally repugnant. The main reason for this is the competition for scarce resources, united with an ideology that justifies extreme solutions. Remember the bottleneck we talked about at the beginning of the book: there is too little territory for all candidate ethnic groups to have a state. The sociologists should tell us more about cultural competition as well, but it is clear that it exists and might be fierce. Take language: the ‘big’ languages compete between themselves for worldwide domination; the ‘small’ ones compete with the big ones within particular communities, and with each other. Various dialects compete for official recognition and for the status of an autonomous language, possibly the official language of a given state. The competition is bound to be ferocious, and invidious nationalism precisely fits such situations and thrives in them. (This distinguishes national partiality from, say, familial partiality and faithfulness. Once you are married, if faithful, you are out of competition; Mother Nature has wisely administered the relevant resources here.)

4 Now, invidious nationalism compounds the difficulty by propounding a moral-sounding justification for tough attitudes. No wonder that a loop is often formed: the initial competition gives rise to, or selects, invidious ideologies, which make the competition even tougher, and in need of even more invidious ideologies. The excuse of nationalism on the grounds of self-defense is valid, but extremely limited. The cultural excuses for the invidious variant are invalid. They appeal to (i) excessive statism, (ii) monoculturalism, (iii) a wrong picture of cultural proximity, and (iv) an overly pessimistic view of human nature.

5 Most thoughtful pro-nationalist authors insist upon the self-defense of a group as the valid ground of excuse for invidious attitudes. For example, M. Walzer (1997, chapter four), stresses the role of fear and insecurity in producing extremist attitudes, apparently taking them to make the attitudes understandable, if not excusable. On the contrary, when people feel safe, he goes on to claim, they develop more complex identities in which the exclusive identification with one social framework (or ‘tribe’, as he puts it) is replaced by a plurality of identifications. This captures precisely the validity and limits of the excuse: it is valid only in situations of direct serious threat, and it stops being valid the moment the threat is removed. What Walzer forgets to add is that the threat itself is most often again a nationalist one: at the beginning of each justified nationalistic move, there is an unjustified one (from the opposite side, most often). He directly muddies the waters by proposing the picture in which particularist nationalist movements, say the anti-colonial movement in India, arise out of a legitimate response to imperialist ‘universalism’ (1990, second lecture). Only in retrospect do we learn that the ‘universalism’ in question is a false one; but if it is false, what is the truth behind it? Well, the truth is that the empire is again governed by one nation (in Walzer’s examples, the
English): the initial impetus was again nationalistic, and this is why the universalism has been false. But then, the advocate of nationalism has no right to use this kind of example to condemn universalism, and to extol the virtues of the nation: it was nationalism against nationalism from the very beginning.

6 As far as culturalist excuses are concerned, we have criticized at length the main assumptions of nationalism's culturalist line of defense, which could be harnessed to justify its various types, so we shall not repeat the criticism here. Now, the most typical kind of nationalism is the invidious variant, for reasons that are far from accidental. Perhaps the most logical is the following: if one values one's own ethnic group highly the simplest approach is to value it *tout court*. Partiality and universalization make for strange bedfellows, as has often been noted in the literature. Furthermore, the invidious variant is vastly more practical: if one definitely prefers one's own culture in all respects to any foreign one, it is a waste of time to bother about others. The non-invidious variant introduces an enormous complication: if you believe in it you have to believe, on the one hand, that your nation is somehow better, morally preferable, endowed with a more attractive culture *for you*, but that others, who are not your co-nationals, should justifiably believe exactly the same thing about cultures that you find less attractive, and so on. This tension between spontaneous attachment and reflective readiness to see all communities with an equal eye makes the non-invidious position psychologically unstable, and hard to uphold in situations of conflict. This psychological weakness is likely to make it politically less effective. This brings us directly to the next point.

7 The non-invidious but tough variant of nationalism is unstable for deep reasons that cannot easily be overcome. I have just mentioned the internal tension between the universality of the non-invidious variant (all should struggle for their own nation!) and the advice it gives to the individual (struggle for your people, against others, if necessary!). The sad reality of competition makes the non-invidious variant difficult to uphold in practice. Most nationalisms, perhaps all, sin against internal minorities, and the thoughtful defenders of pro-national attitudes tend to acknowledge the fact (see, for example, Walzer's insistence that the moment of truth for each nationalism comes when it has to face the next smaller community that wants to secede from 'its' territory). No wonder: suppose I am persuaded by the non-invidious but tough ideologist that I have to fight for my people, persuade my wife to have five kids for the benefit of our fatherland, and dedicate myself to my ethnic roots (not to mention such subtle things as listening for the most part to the music of composers of my ethno-nation), and that each member of any nation should do the same things for his or her people. Suddenly, I discover that in the very midst of my country there is a community that simply does not fit into the picture: they speak a different dialect, have a different religion, and show no enthusiasm for my project, for which I am ready to die. Perhaps I can summon some abstract understanding of their situation, but in the actual struggle they will appear as just another bunch of foreigners, inimical to our noble purpose. As Rorty puts it, apparently with a lot of sympathy, a group constructs its narrative identity by "apotheosizing its heroes, diabolizing its enemies" (Rorty, 1993, 587). With the enemy seen as the devil himself, it is difficult to preserve a universalizing attitude.

8 Even if it were not unstable, the variant under discussion is internally too radical to be morally acceptable. It relies upon the same false assumptions—(i), (ii), and (iii)—as the invidious kind. By giving primacy to unchosen belonging it sins against autonomy. By preaching the duty of partiality it adds an additional difficulty. Justice as impartiality is
meant to solve conflicts and make possible cohabitation. Once group partiality reigns, every group will reasonably want its own set of political institutions, and we will end up with the nasty variant. So the non-invidious variant, as presented in theory and in a relatively cautious form, is still not morally in the clear. The usual applications of the variant are obviously and dramatically immoral. The nastiness of non-invidious, universalizing nationalism is easy to overlook, if one falls into the trap of viewing the ‘national collective’ as one big individual. When the advocate of nationalism talks about ‘the will of the collective’ or ‘the autonomy of the group’, one tends to forget that it is the collective against its own members, if necessary. (Take the rights of individual women, if you need a reminder. ‘One should not abort the future defenders of our nation’, was the slogan of even the very moderate Slovenian nationalist coalition [DEMOS] in the early 1990s. For them, an individual Slovenian woman is just one more ‘mother of the nation’, whose will has to coincide with the will of the Slovenian collective.)

What about the ultra-moderate nationalism? The ultra-moderate variant does not present a clearly nationalist political or cultural program at all. To the extent that it is morally in the clear it is not nationalist, and to the extent it is nationalist it is not morally in the clear. We have already documented the problems for the ultra-moderate, liberal nationalist line. Let me briefly recall that ultra-moderate defenders of pro-nationalist attitudes do not offer clear long-term political guidelines. We have discussed authors that explicitly call themselves (liberal) nationalists. Let me in addition mention M. Walzer, who does not do so, but who nevertheless defends a particularism of nations. He sometimes bravely states that self-determination (involving secession) is the paradigmatic form of his moral program of a particularistic universalism (Walzer, 1990), and his general political advice is to let each nation that wants to go its own way do so. Then, facing the problem of minorities, he comes to the view that the best guarantee of civilized treatment are “federal and confederal controls”. But federation is not what secession preserves, but what it normally destroys. I am pointing to these internal tensions not in order to criticize Walzer, but to document once more the internal weaknesses of the ultra-moderate variant. It nicely illustrates the first part of my basic claim about it: to the extent that it is morally in the clear it is not nationalist. If you think that in order to control the enthusiasm of a given ‘tribe’ you have to harness it in a multi-ethnic federation, you are definitely against nationalism, not for it.

To continue on the cultural side, the ultra-moderate theoretician stresses that national identity is only one among many important identities (M. Walzer, D. Miller). The merely national identity is an impoverished one, grounded in fear and insecurity (Walzer, 1997, chapter four). How is this attitude supposed to be nationalistic?

In general, liberal nationalist authors mostly insist upon the right of individuals to give expression to their love of their ethno-national community and culture. It seems to be morally in the clear, but even here a modicum of caution is recommended: in a typical multinational state partiality to one’s own ethnic community does not always lead to the best solutions. In today’s world, rich with international interactions, such ethnically centered love can lead to isolationism and to the extent that it is nationalist it is not morally in the clear.

Let me briefly mention what I think might be the only serious sin of the ultra-moderate variant, namely that it gives nationalism an acceptable name, a front that actual, nasty nationalisms could make use of. To get the required distance, imagine that a bunch of intelligent, sensitive, and thoughtful intellectuals decide to promote ‘liberal and
cosmopolitan racism’, cooking up a bland, somewhat inconsistent mixture of claims, each of them morally acceptable, or almost. The mixture is not racist by any ordinary standards, featuring almost trivial claims about race, say, that ‘whites should not be ashamed of being white, since this is a part of their identity, although normally not the central one’. Still, they insist on calling themselves ‘racists’, and on publishing articles and books in defense of (what they call) racism. What would you think of their enterprise? I myself would beg them, as my respected colleagues and good human beings, to desist from lending their good name(s) to a highly problematic ideology.

13 Self-styled liberal nationalists sometimes claim that, given the importance of national sentiment, there is no viable alternative to liberal nationalism. We have already mentioned that more cosmopolitan alternatives should not be rejected out of hand. To this last issue we turn in the next and final chapter.
In discussing political alternatives to nationalism in chapter nine we have sketched a model which rests upon both the practical necessities of the cohabitation of various ethno-national groups within a single state and across state boundaries, and the moral value of understanding and toleration. It is a moderately cosmopolitan model which welcomes macro-regional integrations that weaken the role of the state, as well as micro-regional diversity that often cuts across state borders. Its kernel is a kind of interactive multiculturalism, enriched with a cosmopolitan perspective. By interactive I mean a multiculturalism which insists on the open character of particular cultures and actively promulgates interaction between them, as opposed to a closed, nationalist multiculturalism. Let me sketch this briefly and roughly, without trying to defend it, since a proper elaboration and defense would require another book.\footnote{In the model, classical states are seen as only one kind of political organization among many, macro-regional, micro-regional, and global. These non-statist forms institutionalize forms of political solidarity that go beyond or rest beneath, or simply cross-cut the boundaries of existing states.}

Secondly, the ethno-national criterion of belonging is certainly not the central criterion of political organization. States are typically multi-ethnic, with ethnic belonging most often cutting across state boundaries. For many ethno-national groups this entails the following needs: first, their loyalties and some of their institutions have to be allowed to cut across state boundaries, so that, secondly, they have a durable interest in the availability of open borders and durable cooperation between two or more states to which they belong, and thirdly, such an interest can only be satisfied by macro-regional integration of these states, accompanied by micro-regional connections across state borders. Obviously, in such a perspective ethno-national groups should be accorded opportunities to develop their political identities, but only to the extent that this is compatible with demands of cooperation and stability. Also, in this perspective classical
states are seen as only one kind of political organization among many, macro-regional, micro-regional, and global.

I have just claimed that the ultimate character of this perspective is cosmopolitan. Let me introduce the concept with the help of definitions proposed in the recent literature. First, according to Martha Nussbaum, herself a prominent advocate of the view, a cosmopolitan is someone “whose primary allegiance is to the community of human beings in the entire world” (Nussbaum, 1996, 3). A Canadian political scientist, C. Lu, follows and explains her definition in both its critical and constructive aspects:

A cosmopolitan ethics is commonly understood to refer to a universalistic morality that eschews parochial, especially national, limitations or prejudices. More positively, a cosmopolitan ethical perspective entails the acknowledgment of some notion of common humanity that translates ethically into an ideal of shared or common moral duties toward others by virtue of this humanity. (Lu, 2000, 244)

Another prominent supporter of cosmopolitanism, German-American philosopher Thomas Pogge, stresses three components of the perspective: first, individualism; secondly, universality, implying that each individual should be an object of concern, and indeed to everybody; which yields the third feature, generality. He distinguishes moral cosmopolitanism (just described) from the legal variety, defined by its commitment to “a concrete political idea of a global order under which all persons have equivalent legal rights and duties, that is, are fellow citizens of a universal republic” (Pogge, 1992, 49). I would like to add cultural cosmopolitanism, which claims that ideal cultural belonging is the one which is open to a variety of cultures, potentially to each and every culture ever created. We have argued for such a model from the existence of strong pressures exercised by actual political forces in the direction of prevention of (nationalist and racial) conflicts, from the actual plurality and interaction of communities, as well as from the actual proximity, geographical, demographic, often cultural (linguistic, historical, and religious) of various groups that typically enter nationalist conflicts. Here is a brief reminder.

It is agreed on all sides that it is crucially important to prevent (nationalist and racial) conflicts. They are always ugly and often extremely inhuman. This is explained by mechanisms of increasing mutual distrust (the Prisoner’s Dilemma) and the spiral of threats and violence that it engenders; once a group has begun nation building, a reactive nationalism on the part of other groups threatened by it becomes unavoidable, and even conditionally justifiable. We have argued that only a pluralist cosmopolitan political framework can prevent such conflicts (and we shall argue that such a framework should also be culturally cosmopolitan).

The realistic basis for such a framework is provided by the actual plurality and interaction of communities. Actual communities are plural (partially overlapping, in general non-concentric) and in intense mutual interaction. Any kind of ethno-nationalist monism, on the other hand, enjoins isolationism. Isolationism is impracticable in given circumstances, and requires unnecessary pressures, use of force, and risks. The best way to secure a durable, stable interaction is by a pluralist cosmopolitan political framework. A close and very important line of thought appeals to the demands of justice governing interactions with strangers, including distant ones. It concentrates on the fate of the world’s poor and the issues of distributive justice. I will not pursue this line here, concentrating rather upon those lines that have already been anticipated.
Let me mention a further motivation, which to some tastes might sound Utopian. Many people nowadays see and appreciate democracy not only as a mechanism for the occasional exercise of power by the electorate, but as an ongoing process of public deliberation. The view has been enshrined in the political theory known, among other things, as ‘deliberative democracy’, with prominent authors defending different sub-varieties of the view (most notable are H. Arendt, A. Gutmann, J. Habermas, and C. Santiago Nino). Now, what about international decision making, at least among liberal democracies? If public deliberation is of such importance within democratic states, it should also be prominent between states. Of course, actual diplomacy is nowadays a matter for specialists, but within contemporary liberal democracies there has been an increase in public participation in debates on international issues. Now, both thoughtful nationalists and cosmopolitans agree with the commonplace that in order for there to be a useful debate the participants have to share a repertory of symbols, meanings, and general principles. Witness what happens in the absence of such commonality: the NATO bombing of Serbia, and the activities of the Hague war crimes tribunal has met with a lot of hostility and misunderstanding in the whole Danubian region, even among audiences that did not support the policies of Milosevic, nor the activities of the Serbian and Croatian regimes. The bombing, in which the attackers risked almost nothing, was very much contrary to the traditional image of how one fights a war which is very much alive in the region, and has been interpreted as one more sign of haughty arrogance on the part of the US. The attempts of the Hague tribunal to bring to justice highly placed generals was seen as insulting to war heroes, offensive to national pride, and meddling in internal affairs. The only stable alternative to permanent misunderstanding of this kind is the creation of a common political culture across state borders. At least where the liberal-democratic countries, and those who aspire to become such, are concerned, their mutual dealings should mimic the deliberative patterns within each of them. However, a common political culture both presupposes and, once established, further enhances, general cultural understanding and interaction.

Although we have described our proposal as multiculturalist, we did not in chapter nine say much about culture proper. Having critically reviewed the issues of identity, values, culture, and tradition, however, we can return to the business of construction, armed with conclusions reached in the debate with the cultural nationalist. We now need to address the following issue: what is the correct form and scope of cultural life and creative endeavor? In particular we want to know whether it is cosmopolitan or narrowly national. We have already shown in chapter sixteen, on nationalist criticism of cosmopolitanism, that the latter need not be indiscriminate and bland. The anti-cosmopolitan option is defended both by traditional cultural nationalists and by more up-to-date authors whom one may call divisionary multiculturalists, whose slogan is ‘multiculturalism, yes, but with a neat separation between co-existing cultures’.

We have stressed important features of culture that go beyond or stay beneath national limits. We have reminded ourselves that within each macro-region in the world there are sufficient cultural similarities to ground a macro-regional culture, intermediate between a purely cosmopolitan and a purely ethno-national one. For instance, there is such a thing as Central European culture, which contains important Germanic, Slavic, and Hungarian elements, plus, on the margin, Venetian or Turkish admixtures, all merged throughout a millennium of common history. No single ethno-national culture in the region could be historically understood apart from this macro-regional culture, and there is a good
chance that many will go on to develop within such a macro-context, but now exposed to globalizing influences from the Anglo-American part.

10 The ethno-national framework is certainly not the only one available. As already mentioned, ethno-national traditions as we know them from old nation-states might actually post-date the creation of the nation-state. The fact of cohabitation and the demands that the belonging and dignity of people of varied origins and cultures be recognized, wherever they happen to live, suggest a pluralist, inter-cultural framework that can inherit pluralism from the cosmopolitan Utopia, but make it more graded. Such a culturalist cosmopolitanism should respect the overlapping, but not necessarily concentric, circles of local, national, macro-regional, and possibly other identifications. It can thus reply to criticism typically leveled against cosmopolitanism. Let us recall Gertrude Himmelfarb (first quoted in chapter fourteen), who starts her accusation of cosmopolitanism in dramatically broad terms: “Above all, what cosmopolitanism obscures, even denies, are the givens of life: parents, ancestors, family, race, religion, heritage, history, culture, tradition, community—and nationality” (1996, 77). There is no need, however, for a cosmopolitan to deny that people have families and ancestors. It is rather rabid nationalists who push people into denying and rejecting their ancestors and family if they happen to be of the wrong ethnic origin. In Croatia (as well as in the greatest part of the former Yugoslavia) such a non-Croatian (or elsewhere non-Serbian, non-Muslim) belonging was energetically stigmatized. A more cosmopolitan approach would be either neutral to the belonging of one’s ancestors, or would see variation as an asset and a good to be upheld. It is nationalism, not cosmopolitanism, that permanently falsifies history in order to uphold mythology.

11 Let me now argue for the importance of such a moderate, graded, culturalist cosmopolitanism from several sets of considerations that have played a central role in this book. I shall leave to the end the more elitist concerns of creativity, since cosmopolitanism has been traditionally associated with an exclusive interest in such concerns, which has done it more harm than good. I shall argue from three sets of values: first, autonomy, including self-determination, flourishing, and the development of belonging-based identity (in the wide, metaphorical sense); secondly, benevolent impartiality; and thirdly, creativity. The arguments are thus partly cultural, partly moral, and, though to a smaller extent, partly political. In a more general debate one would supplement them with additional moral arguments from the demands of distributive justice (see note 2), and with practical political arguments having to do with conditions for conflict avoidance and durable peace. Here I shall limit myself to considerations discussed in previous chapters, and draw further conclusions from the claims developed there. The arguments proposed in a way mirror the strategy of the nationalist opponent who assumes that political/legal forms should adapt themselves to cultural contents and the values implicit therein. The proposal gladly accepts the assumption, and then introduces a view of culture and values contrary to the nationalist one, the view that has been argued for throughout the book. If both the assumption and the view are correct, then political/legal forms should adapt themselves to a graded pluralist cultural framework.
FROM CULTURAL TO POLITICAL PLURALISM

THE VALUE OF AUTONOMY: SELF-DETERMINATION, FLOURISHING, AND IDENTITY

12 Autonomy is a crucial value for citizens of contemporary states. It need not go as far as a search for ‘absolute authenticity’, relativizing all moral frameworks, but it certainly includes the right to decide about the kind of life one wants to lead. Autonomy requires choice about commitments and sets of commitments. It is true that national frameworks usually offer some patterns or ways of life, and thus a context of choice to many people. However, many ways of life offered within a contemporary state are not ‘national’ in any recognizable sense (most professions, such as being a professor of mathematics or a plumber, are quite neutral as far as nationality goes), while others are clearly imported from definite world centers generating the guiding images and the standards of practice (pop culture, Buddhism, an obsession with computers and virtual reality); others still are strictly local, sub-national. Ultimately, only cultural pluralism of belongings, many of them voluntary, secures such a choice.

13 A multiculturalist arguing for closed, ‘millet’-like communities might enquire whether members of minorities want to have a choice. Is assimilation a real option for them? It depends on particular circumstances. In contrast to the nationalist picture, we should remind ourselves that very often outbursts of minority demands for separation are not spontaneous expressions of a permanent and natural yearning, but the result of the failure of the majority to provide genuinely equal conditions for the members of the minority, and of estrangement due to this imposed, not-willed isolation of the minority. I have already mentioned that this is particularly true for immigrant minorities. However, a member of an autochthonous minority might also prefer not to be viewed always and primarily in his capacity as member of a minority. Anthony Appiah has developed such a line of argument in relation to race: no matter how much he solidarizes himself with his black companions, he wants his professional talents to be judged on their intrinsic merits, not on the fact that he is African American. He wants to develop his tastes and suchlike freely (Appiah, 1996). This topic dovetails with the issue of flourishing. The latter is impossible without the ability to choose and to re-choose.

14 Let me now briefly pass to the subject of identity. Cultural and other acquired ‘identities’ should be plastic enough not to collide with autonomy. We have proposed that one should take acquired identities seriously, but not accord them the dramatic importance that one accords to literal sameness. In contrast to the literal sameness of the person or the self which is, in this banal sense, numerically one, the acquired identities allow for the pluralism of cultural identifications, resulting in a plural and changing cultural identity (in a non-literal, metaphoric sense). The seriousness of cultural identity is not compromised by the fact that it is not literal sameness. It is the psychological importance of identification that makes cultural identity crucial. Let me explain. If one identifies with a trait one is prone to ascribe to it factual importance in one’s past and in one’s decisions. Equally, one tries to act in accordance with the trait and its normative commitments. Furthermore, in the case of a durable identification there is a loop of mutual reinforcement between the trait and the attitude. All this gives enough seriousness to the
identification, without any need to promulgate the trait into something that is ontologically necessary for sameness of person.

The standard nationalist reply is that conviviality is dangerous for identity and thereby for the stability of persons. It is alleged to beget weak, neurotic ‘persons without qualities’. Have a cup of coffee with a foreigner and you lose your soul, as the prophet Isaiah thought. We have seen that this is false and deserves debunking. Psychologically, there is probably no positive correlation between the rigidity of the trait and the stability of identification; flexible traits can support stable identification. Finally, everyday experience shows that people both change their identifications during their lifetime, and that mutually incompatible identifications take turns in taking the lead at various times: I gave some simple examples in chapter fourteen. I remarked there that multiple identifications, far from producing a ‘weak self’, make part of the ordinary richness of life and opportunities. These moral and political consequences of everyday truisms point in the direction of pluralism. In chapter nine I summarized the requirements of such pluralism, first, nondiscrimination and equal concern; secondly, opportunities to develop one’s identifications in a free and spontaneous manner. Equally, one should be free not to identify with such a belonging, to take it as an accidental and limiting trait, without incurring any negative political consequences.

THE VALUE OF BENEVOLENT IMPARTIALITY

Pluralism is a school of impartiality which prepares us for life in a world of increasing interaction across national, state, racial, and all other kinds of boundaries. Let me help myself to the arguments of Martha Nussbaum, who presents the cosmopolitan option with references to its Cynic and Stoic origins (1996; 2000). The option enjoins us to give our allegiance to what is good for all human beings; metaphorically, to the world community. (Some critics find an unjustified duality here: in their view our moral duty is to the good, not to people that just happen to exist at the present time.) The proper road to such allegiance is through cosmopolitan education. Nussbaum notes that infants respond indiscriminately to the human face as such; common humanity is the first basis of recognition. Equally, the love of the familiar is balanced with the curiosity for the distant and unfamiliar. A cosmopolitan education should give its due to the latter, expanding the circles of the familiar, and for several reasons. First, through contact with foreign traditions we learn about our own limitations, the contingencies of our tastes and preferences. Secondly, cosmopolitan education makes one better able to cope with the global problems of our age, those that go beyond narrowly national frontiers. Thirdly, we recognize our moral obligation to distant strangers, usually the people most in need of our help. Finally, we learn that the national format imposed by national boundaries is morally contingent.

The nationalist might try to argue for an irreducible plurality of values, each suitable for a different community, (as do moral Herderians (for example Berlin and Margalit). However, the very idea of systematically divergent sets of objective (non-relative and non-indexical) value(-kind)s is somewhat problematic. Values might clash in a single case—Mary might find herself torn between the value of fidelity and the value of independence—but it is not clear that they are in themselves systematically incompatible. Nor is it clear that the Designer of Humankind (say God or History or Evolution) can and should isolate coherent subsets of values, and then assign particular groups to particular
subsets. A society insisting on fidelity in total neglect of independence would not be a just one, and, in general, a narrow selection of values to be clustered together and put in effect by a given society would tend to produce drastic but unnecessary limitations. Indeed, unlimited value pluralism is a hotly contested assumption. Many philosophers, the universalists, deny that such fragmentation of value makes sense. Others claim more modestly that there are core values obligatory for any human group, whose availability makes the divergence less dramatic. The moral Herderian is not a relativist, so that he or she is almost bound to accept such a modest claim and agree that there is a core of unifying values common to all morally acceptable societies. The most he or she can offer are ‘cocktails’ containing similar or identical values but in different proportions. But why then should divisive value(-kind)s have priority over unifying ones and merit special political protection? The upshot of these considerations is that there is little chance of there being a lot of divergent but genuinely respectable value-clusters for History or God to work with. (It might even happen that there are none.)

If this holds, it becomes obvious why a deep divergence in respect of serious value-kinds is very often not at stake in national identifications. The closest one may come to Herderian irreducible plurality is in respect of global differences between great religious currents. However, they suffer from several drawbacks from the point of view of Herderian pro-nationalist deployment. First, an obvious practical drawback: they are simply too vast and encompassing to individuate most nations, but at the same time often mixed within a single nation. Secondly, it is far from certain that the genuine moral divergence between religions is as significant as it should be for the purpose of grounding political separation, and when it is, that both sides are morally in the clear. (Remember, the Herderian wants to foster genuine values, not merely alleged ones.) Religion is thus of very limited help to Herderians. When they turn to morals, however, the prospects become utterly bleak. The most publicized nationalist conflicts simply do not fit into the mold of value pluralism. Quebeccois and Anglophones do not subscribe to different codes of values, nor do Croats and Serbs (beyond actual denominational differences, which are hardly differences in systems of value and in themselves mean very little to people in the street). Since many people think about denominational differences as paradigmatic differences in values, a caveat is in order. One should distinguish between the emotional charge of belonging to a given denomination (say, Serbian Orthodox)—in contrast to some other (Macedonian Orthodox, or Catholic)—from the actual divergence in non-indexical values promoted by each. For a moral Herderian it is the latter that counts, but for most members of the concerned groups in the twentieth century such a divergence, if it exists, is way beyond their ken. Even a specialist in the history of religion in the Balkans—let alone an average nationalist-in-the-street—would be hard-pressed to identify the values that distinguish various Orthodox churches (beyond the indexical preference for this or ‘my’ church) which have been warring with each other for centuries. Even the great Catholic/Orthodox divide is seen by many enlightened believers as an historically contingent, value-neutral divide.

THE VALUE OF UNCONSTRAINED CREATIVITY

Cultural creation depends upon the communication and inter-penetration of different styles of life and work. Indeed, most intellectuals in Western countries today live in quite a cosmopolitan micro-world. As J. Waldron describes it,
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, follows Ukrainian politics, and practices Buddhist meditation techniques. He is a creature of modernity, conscious of living in a mixed-up world and having a mixed-up self. (Waldron, 1995)

Many intellectuals in Eastern Europe who cannot participate in such a life intensely regret the fact (as witnessed, for instance, by the number of demands upon miserable funds in Eastern Europe for travel money and grants that would enable one to make international contacts). Let us note that the humanities, and the arts in particular, are not the only domains of the international formation of culture. Science is nowadays a truly global and cosmopolitan enterprise of the highest quality. Moreover, an important part of its excellence arguably derives from its universal and universalist features. Finally, the universal character of science does not preclude variation in the contributions particular cultures can make; it is not inimical to local and specific features of culture which are of enduring worth.

The nationalist might partially agree, but then claim that the only diversity of cultures worth having is the diversity of ethno-national cultures preserved in a pure state or at least in a state which allows them to be recognized as national; that is, the nationalist would appeal to the argument from diversity. We have already argued that it fails: purity is not a good, cultural styles are for the most part transnational, and mixing of cultures produces new and interesting formations and cultural ‘units’. As pointed out in chapter fifteen, the moral of the discussion is that one should leave a wide margin of choice to interested individuals: in fact, they should do the balancing. If the preservation of a culture does not collide with the preferences and long-term interests of its members (including the need for creative innovation), nor with the interest of the other members of their civic (territorial) community, it is better—ceteris paribus—to preserve it than not. This minimal support is due to ethno-national as well as micro- and macro-regional traditions and particularities.

To summarize, here is one possible line which a moderate cosmopolitan argument might take. A cosmopolitan pluralist culture might be the best means of actualizing the fundamental values of autonomy, creativity, and free and meaningful communication. A graded cosmopolitan pluralist culture is only possible within a broadly transnational political framework. Therefore, a broadly transnational cosmopolitan political framework is valuable in relation to the fundamental values listed. Now, such a framework is not contraindicated on the basis of independent considerations, as the nationalists claim. Therefore, there is a prima facie duty to work on the establishment of such a framework. Of course, the argument just sketched is far from conclusive. Also, even if it is cogent in the abstract, it might counsel a wrong line of action given particular political realities. In a world dominated by imperialism, well-meaning cosmpolitanism might unwittingly serve imperialist purposes. And even if political realities are not so dire, there is a long road from abstract thought to concrete political advice. Still, let me end on a note of hope, namely that the cosmopolitan alternative is ultimately viable in our world of increasing cooperation and mutual dependence.
NOTES

1. My presentation owes a lot to Nussbaum (1996) and Held (1995). I also learned a lot from the criticism of pure cosmopolitanism proposed by K. Nielsen and J. Couture (Miščević, 2000) and their attempt to combine cosmopolitanism with nationalism, in spite of my ultimate disagreement with their line.

2. This has been developed by Onora O’Neill most recently (2000). See also Jones (1999) who credits Peter Singer with having inaugurated the line (Jones, 1999, 1).

3. See the literature in Gutmann and Thompson (1996).

4. See, for instance, Held (1995), and, for the debate, the criticism by Couture (2000).

5. Thanks go to my colleague and friend F. Klampfer for proposing this way out for the moral Herderian.

6. For further development of this line of thought see Waldron (2000).
The beginner’s guide to the literature

1 This is a short list of books on nationalism that I have found readable and useful as introductions to the literature.

2 Two contrasting contemporary views on the origin of nations and nationalism are summarized with consummate skill and readability by their proponents in:


5 The whole debate is finely presented and commented upon in:


7 The two best recent anthologies of high-quality philosophical papers on the morality of nationalism are:


10 The debate continues in:


12 An interesting anthology from a Central European perspective is:


14 and from the perspective of southeastern Europe:


16 A good sociological introduction to gender-inspired criticism of nationalism is:


18 The best general introduction to the communitarian-individualist debate is still:
For a non-nationalist defense of cultural claims see:


The two most readable philosophical defenses of very moderate nationalism are:


An influential critical analysis of group solidarity in general, and nationalism in particular, written in the tradition of rational choice theory, is:


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Index

Aidara, Sandra xiii
Ambrus-Lakatos, Lorand xiii
Argument from Distance 173, 174
Austrians 52, 231
Availability View 178
Baccarini, Elvio xiii
Bacon, Francis 189
Balibar, E. 36
Basta, Lidija xiii
Beethoven, L.v. 51, 139, 234
Bengoetxea, Joxeramon 72
Bercic, B. 186
Berg, A. 234
Brentano, F. 234
Buber, M. 239
Buchanan, Allen 78, 79, 90, 108, 163
Buha, Aleksa 9
Communitarians 22, 38, 154, 198, 210
community
ethno-national 16, 25, 48, 65, 88, 89, 92, 140, 240, 284
imagined 13, 277
non-voluntary 21
de Coulanges, Fustel 39
country, love of 19, 39, 110
Croats 11, 16, 27, 34, 43, 52, 65, 95, 146, 171, 173, 204, 206, 231, 252, 297
culture, preservation and transmission of 19, 248
Deák, Ferenc 52
Deval, Ghislaine xiii
Dimitrijevic, Nenad xiii
Distance Principle 161, 173, 174, 175
Diversity 20, 26, 34, 58, 63, 67, 128, 130, 145, 147, 152, 163, 205, 212, 239, 240-248, 285, 298
ethnic cleansing 40, 42, 44, 79, 102
Gadpaille, Michelle xiii
Glass, Philip 30
globalization 62, 89, 90, 93, 100, 106, 130
Goethe, J.W. 234
Gumilev, N. 45
Haider, Jörg 5, 96
Haller, Markus 198
Hated Neighbor Truism 168, 169, 170, 171, 173, 251
Hegel, G.W.F. 23, 234
Homeopathic Strategy 92, 93, 94, 96
Horton, J. 66
Hungarians 52, 261
Huoranszki, Ferenc xiii
human flourishing 197, 261
identity
cultural 16, 32, 44, 79, 225, 226, 249, 256, 266, 293
national 12, 13, 34, 44, 47, 64, 89, 91, 126, 127, 132, 219, 222, 225, 232, 235, 237, 262, 268, 277, 278, 283
of persons 64, 218, 223
injustices, redressing 87
Kis, János xiii
Klampfer, Friderik 300
Koller, Peter 218
Lavinians 16, 29, 30, 31, 35, 41, 61, 73, 74, 75, 87, 118, 138, 150, 220, 257, 266
Ligeti, György 30, 152
Losev, D. 45
Lotman, J. 20
Markovic, Mihailo 9
Matulovic, Miomir xiii
Mazzini, G. 240, 268
Mendus, S. 66
messianism 35
Michelet, Jules 99, 102, 144
Milosevic, S. 9, 19, 41, 44, 95, 96, 112, 121, 289
Montefiore, Alan xiii
moralties, national 203
morality
thick 201, 213
thin 201
Muligan, Kevin xiii
myth 7, 43-47, 167, 271
mythologies 9, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 266, 269, 270, 271, 291
Nation-as-Basic-Unit Assumption 144, 145, 153, 158, 162, 166, 168, 181, 182, 203
national character 16, 64, 144, 151, 175, 246, 262
nationalism
classical 15, 22, 44, 118, 125, 172, 266, 267, 271
liberal 22, 60, 110, 111, 270, 271, 278, 284
invidious 35, 36, 40, 41, 46, 48, 261, 265, 270, 279
ultra-moderate 283
nationalist
invidious 30, 31, 35, 36, 40, 42, 47, 48, 49, 55
even-handed 31, 50, 55, 56, 60, 74, 101, 137, 145, 179, 198, 201, 240, 255
neighbors 5, 11, 13, 24, 37, 40-45, 89, 95, 167-175, 204, 252, 257, 265, 266
Njegoš, P.P. 44
Ohana, M. 152
Oldenquist, Andrew xiii
origin, ethnic 34, 42, 59, 89, 124, 174, 291
Peace of Westphalia 106
Pettit, Philip xiii
populations, exchange of 79
power, demographic 19
the Prisoner’s Dilemma 42, 287
proximity, cultural 65, 145, 253, 256, 279
Quebecois 11, 92, 116, 117, 124, 218, 223, 225, 232, 296
race 3, 4, 12, 22, 44, 119, 124, 126, 149, 158, 182, 218, 219, 225, 226, 228, 232, 258, 284, 290
religious denomination 11, 170, 171, 182, 230
Rode, F. 241
‘Russian doll’ phenomenon 79, 94
Russian Idea 45
scarcity of resources 40
Schoenberg, A. 193, 234
secession 75-84, 87, 89, 90, 91, 96, 107, 126, 130, 173, 232, 283
self-defense 27, 61, 75, 78, 80, 83, 87, 88, 90, 95, 107, 123, 124, 139, 140, 242, 252, 259, 279
self-determination 10, 18, 27, 61, 72, 74-79, 83, 87, 101, 107, 132, 144, 240, 283, 291
Seselj, V. 42
Shakespeare, W. 6, 89, 137, 138
Simon, Thomas 48, 58
Singer, Peter 300
Smith, Barry xiii
Smokrovic, Nenad 7
Swiderski, Edward xiii
‘thin’ nation building 115, 126
Thomas, Huw 72
de Tocqueville, Alexis 91
traits, ethno-national 162
Trubetzkoy, N. 45, 53, 54
Tudjman, F. 33, 41, 93, 142
values, liberal-democratic 109
Wolf, Eric 152
Zender, Hans 152