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*Jeffrey Friedman**

NATIONALISM IN THEORY AND REALITY

Nationalism poses both political and theoretical problems of immense importance: not only the concrete and terrifying problems often facing those who live on the wrong side of a national border, but abstract and complex problems in our understanding of the modern world. Nationalism is the source not only of monstrous cruelties such as those recently experienced in the Balkans, but of two sets of theoretical difficulties: first, the challenge of explaining the sources of this ubiquitous modern phenomenon; second, that of knowing how to react to it.

In recent years, a small but growing literature of exemplary quality has addressed the first challenge. In such works as Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen* (1976), Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983), and Liah Greenfeld's *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (1992), scholars of nationalism as an historical phenomenon have emphasized its novelty and artificiality, but have at the same time disagreed with those, like Eric Hobsbawm (whose *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* is discussed below by Weber), who conclude that it is *merely* an artifact—let alone one that can be easily superseded. Rather, they have variously related nationalism to the deeply rooted imperatives of modern state-building (Weber, Anderson), modern economics (Gellner), and the modern devotion to equality (Greenfeld).

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Nationalism and Liberalism

Greenfeld's bold and initially counterintuitive linking of nationalism with egalitarianism is a promising point of departure for meeting the second theoretical challenge of nationalism, that which it poses for ethical theory. The basic normative difficulty of nationalism is its *in*egalitarianism: its apotheosis of a subset of human beings—one's fellow citizens—as worthy of special ethical obligation. This view of the moral universe differs sharply from the tendency of liberalism to base rights, entitlements, and obligations on some quality shared by all human beings—whether their cognitive capacities, their ability to choose and will freely, or their ability to experience pleasure and pain. Thus, as Amartya Sen (1992, ch. 1) has pointed out, the division between classical liberal or libertarian and redistributive liberals turns not on the issue of liberty versus equality, but on the question, "Equality of what?" The redistributive liberal wants equal resources for all; the libertarian liberal, equal freedom. By positing equal rights to noninterference, libertarians trump the liberty of the would-be murderer or thief, subordinating her freedom to the equal respect she owes her potential victims. Alternatively, liberal egalitarianism can take the form not of devotion to equal freedom, but to equal opportunity, equal welfare or well-being, or equal control over political authority.

Greenfeld's thesis suggests, however, that the liberalism we find implemented in the real world of nation-states does not live up to the egalitarian aspirations of liberal theory. Instead, really existing liberal egalitarianism is a matter of "the fundamental equality of those *defined as members of the nation*" (below, 177, emph. added). Only one's fellow nationals are thought to be entitled to the nation-state's protection of equal rights. Citizenship—the guarantor of equal entitlement to protection against rights violations; to the receipt of government health, educational, and welfare benefits; to the freedom to live and work within a nation-state's borders, and to a voice in its governance—turns out to be an entitlement not of all human beings, but only of those born within a nation-state's borders, and to the small numbers who manage to negotiate its naturalization procedures.

Although the partiality—the inegalitarianism—of really existing liberal states is obvious, its normative significance has not received

the attention it deserves. Indeed, the egalitarian policies pursued within the borders of the nation-state are often said to be justified on liberal grounds; but the egalitarianism of liberal theory has no room for invidious geographical distinctions.

John Rawls's difference principle, for example, stipulates that material inequalities should only be allowed insofar as they serve to raise the standard of living of "the least advantaged members of society" (Rawls 1985, 225). Using the difference principle to justify intra-national egalitarian policies requires equating the boundaries of "society" with those of an existing nation-state (and stipulating that redistribution would, in fact, improve the condition of the poorest inhabitants of the area circumscribed by that state's borders). The philosophical basis of the difference principle, however, is the arbitrariness of inherited wealth and talents. Rawls banishes this arbitrariness by depriving his hypothetical social contractors of any knowledge of their possessions or capacities. But why should they not also, and for like reasons, be deprived of knowledge of their birthplace? Does it make sense to equate fairness with ameliorating the condition of the least advantaged in a hyperaffluent society such as the United States, if this means turning one's back on the much worse off who happen to live outside the borders defining that "society"? (Cf. Beitz 1979.)

In attacking the privileges of birth, political or economic, liberals of both classical and contemporary vintage give voice to the conviction that one's humanity, rather than accidental circumstances, should determine one's rights. This egalitarianism is traduced by the inescapable particularism of the modern state. A truly liberal society would encompass all human beings. It would extend any welfare benefits to all humankind, not just to those born within arbitrary borders; and far from prohibiting the importing of "foreign" workers or goods they have produced, or the exporting of jobs to them across national boundaries, it would encourage the free flow of labor, the goods, and capital, helping to satisfy the difference principle in a much more meaningful way than is achieved by income redistribution within "societies" of relatively homogeneous wealth. If one is committed to easing the burden of the worst off, the fostering of free trade and free migration between the First, Second, and Third Worlds should be much more urgent tasks than the redistribution of wealth within the nation-states of the First.

First World liberals usually invert these priorities, not only by

opposing the unlimited influx of low-priced labor and goods and the outflow of jobs, but by defending income redistribution programs whose beneficiaries are restricted to the citizens of a particular First World nation. Such programs require as a political necessity the exclusion from their benefits, and thus from citizenship, of "foreigners," since otherwise the expense of the programs would vastly exceed the willingness of native taxpayers to fund them. Through both their immigration and trade and their *welfare policies, then,* First World nation-states place the (relatively high) income of their conationals in direct competition with the (disastrously low) income of "foreigners," and sacrifice the latter to the former. "Social justice" comes to require barring residents of other countries from improving their lot through migration, since unlimited immigration would be fatal to the high wages and the generous welfare benefits of the First World. Measured against liberal standards such as those adumbrated by Rawls, therefore, really existing liberal polities should be condemned for positively harming the interests of the "least advantaged": those, that is, who live outside their borders.

With the fall of communism and in reaction to the rise of conservative political movements, the previously tempered commitment of Western intellectuals to their welfare states has become much less self-critical. This has led to a number of attempts to close the gap between liberal theory and nationalist reality—not by reforming the reality, to be sure, but by reformulating the theory. One of these theoretical efforts appropriates the empirical distinction between "civic" and "ethnic" nationalism so as to legitimize the particularism of civic, or liberal, nations. This move is sharply criticized by Bernard Yack in these pages.

Empirical students of nationalism, such as Greenfeld, rely (in part) on the civic/ethnic dichotomy in order to distinguish individualist and democratic nationalism from more authoritarian variants. As such, the dichotomy is merely a taxonomic device whose value is a function of its usefulness in classifying regimes. It does no ethical work, at least in principle; and its employment certainly does not commit the scholar to endorsing the pretensions entailed by either civic or ethnic nationalism. The *normative* appropriation of civic nationalism, in contrast, tends to conflate ideology with reality so as to justify the inegalitarian practices of really existing liberal states.

The ideology of civic nationalism depicts nationhood as a matter

of individual choice. When this ideology is appropriated as a norm, there emerges an apparently egalitarian grounding for the division of humanity into separate "societies," each with its own government whose primary duty is to its own citizens. For if one of the equal human entitlements defended by liberalism is a right to freedom, and if freedom includes the ability to choose which society to belong to, then perhaps the exclusionary policies of nation-states can be justified as expressions of egalitarianism.

This possibility, however, requires the assumption that allegiance to nation-states is, in fact, the product of free choice. And as Yack's essay shows, that assumption is false. It is not the case that most, let alone all, of the residents of liberal nation-states choose their citizenship.

More to the present point, one's legal status as a citizen, as opposed to one's feeling of national identity, is almost never predicated on one's embrace of a liberal civic creed. Even though naturalization procedures sometimes include a dose of civic education, the rights and obligations of the citizens of liberal nation-states—like the psychological ties that bind them together—are derived overwhelmingly from the place where they were born, not from the ideas in their heads. When a natural disaster strikes southern California, the residents of New York do not base their approval of government relief efforts on the political beliefs of those affected by the calamity. Conversely, the question of whether Mexicans living just a few yards south of southern California are entitled to the same relief available to Mexican-American citizens—or to the same jobs—is rarely (if ever) conceived as a question of the Mexicans' political creed. It is solely a matter of their nationality: "we" feel obliged to take care of "our own" first, and the basis of this disposition in arbitrary national borders is rarely questioned. While the civic/ethnic dichotomy may capture the myths governing certain intellectuals' understanding of their own political allegiances, then, it does not do justice to the mass political basis of nationalism in either "civic" or "ethnic" polities. Supervening on both creed and ethnicity is geography, the usual criterion of nationality in the modern world—especially in "civic" nations. What happens in Mexico, or Bosnia, is not "our problem"; what happens "here" is.

Moreover, even if the common acceptance of a certain political creed is widespread in a given country, and even if this is vital to the maintenance of liberal institutions and to avoiding imperialism

and civil strife, it can have no more relevance to the proper obligations of a liberal state than it has to the actual conditions such states impose on citizenship. The liberal obligation to refrain from harming another person, or the obligation to extend positive assistance to her, are not contingent on her beliefs. Classical liberals do not sanction the murder of welfare statists or communists, nor do redistributive liberals restrict welfare rights to those who endorse the tenets of *A Theory of Justice* or *Taking Rights Seriously*. It is the equal humanity of human beings that, according to liberalism, generates their rights, and humanity has as little to do with the content of one's beliefs as with the location of one's birthplace. Egalitarian liberalism seems irrevocably hostile, then, to exclusivist nation-states.

The second main attempt to deal with the chasm between liberal theory and reality, accordingly, sanctions departures from egalitarianism by particularizing the applicability of equality and all other ethical norms. I refer to the recent wave of communitarian political theory, exemplified by David Miller's *On Nationality* and Yael Tamir's *Liberal Nationalism*; and to the earlier wave of communitarian philosophy, which provided communitarian political thought with its characteristic procedures.

Communitarian political theory attempts, *inter alia*, to provide reasons for believing that "the duties we owe to our fellow-nationals are different from, and more extensive than, the duties we owe to human beings as such," and thus that "there is no objection in principle to institutional schemes—such as welfare states—that are designed to deliver benefits exclusively to those who fall within the same boundaries as ourselves" (Miller 1995, 11). The reasons provided by the communitarian political philosophers, however, are both elusive and extraordinarily conventionalist. They emerge only indirectly, from critiques of the failure of traditional liberal theory to account for nationalist sentiments and for the role of these sentiments in sustaining really existing liberal states. Communitarian political theory thereby advances our grasp of political reality, but at the expense of taking its legitimacy for granted. Miller (1995, 70), for instance, discusses "the potency of nationality as a source of personal identity" as if its potency *ipso facto* established its normative validity; he seems to equate what is "strongly felt" with what is right. Similarly, Tamir (1993, 121) argues that "a feeling, or an illusion, of closeness and shared fate" is "a precondition of distributive justice," equating the political basis of redistribution with its moral legitimacy.

Tamir explains that "inward-oriented distributive policies" require "willingness to assume the burdens entailed by distributive justice" (Tamir 1993, 118); that is, really existing welfare states rely on the willingness of their taxpayer-citizens to vote to redistribute income to their fellow nationals. Conventional liberalism cannot encourage this willingness because it does not distinguish between fellow nationals and fellow human beings. It must be supplanted, then, by liberal nationalism. Since "communal solidarity" creates the requisite political willingness to redistribute, thus endowing "particularistic relations with moral power," the "community-like nature of the nation-state is particularly well suited, and perhaps even necessary, to the notion of the liberal welfare state" (ibid., 121). Since it is *assumed* that the liberal welfare state is "the setting in which ideas of social justice can be pursued" (Miller 1995, 185), the preconditions of that state are worth defending. And since "the welfare state—and indeed, programmes to protect minority rights—have always been *national* projects, justified on the basis that members of a community must protect one another and guarantee one another equal respect" (ibid., 187), nationalism is clearly one of those preconditions, and is, therefore, legitimate. "The fact that the liberal welfare state is necessarily predicated on certain 'national beliefs'" (Tamir 1993, 117) is thus taken to establish the entitlement of such beliefs to philosophical acceptance. What neither Tamir nor Miller reveals, however, is why we should accept the premise that the liberal welfare state is a good thing to begin with, if in fact, by egalitarian standards, it is a hindrance to justice.

The liberal-nationalist style of thought surely has its origins in communitarian philosophy. This movement of the 1980s, associated primarily with Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor, and Michael Walzer, has no necessary connection to nationalism. It is, however, conducive to all forms of group-based particularistic reasoning, including liberal nationalism. All four philosophical communitarians suggest that the problem with liberalism is, in a word, its universalism: not its egalitarian content (which all the communitarians try, in one way or another, to preserve),[1] but its attempt to derive this content in the traditional philosophic manner, through reasoning about what is true or right in all times and places.

The implication of the communitarian philosophers' various attacks on universalism (albeit an implication each of them takes pains to soften)[2] is to relativize morality, reducing it to the dicta of

one's timebound, placebound "identity." The equation of morality with identity has obvious general affinities with liberal-nationalist arguments that take for granted the moral obligations that "we," as liberals and nationalists, find attractive. Moreover, Walzer, Taylor, and Sandel each make the important and accurate observation that egalitarian redistribution takes place almost entirely within the borders of nation-states that find no theoretical justification in conventional liberalism, because such liberalism insists on extending its egalitarian precepts to all.[3] The communitarian philosophers thus establish not only the conventionalist procedures but the substantive starting point of communitarian political theory: the realization that far from depending on cosmopolitanism, as the left had tended to assume, real-world liberalism relies on particularist allegiances of the sort usually defended by the *right.*

Thus, the communitarian theorists attempt to legitimize the welfare state as the product of "our" particular community's values, rather than of universally valid principles, making political theory the servant of our preexisting institutional commitments, rather than being a reflection on whether these commitments are sound in the first place. Rather than asking what is right or good, the liberal nationalist asks what beliefs or "illusions" will "justify the principle of nationality" (Miller 1995, 64).[4] In concrete terms, this means providing "a convincing account" of the "social forces that keep society as a distinct, separate, and more significantly, a continuous framework" (Tamir 1993, 118). What Miller (1995, 79) calls our "commonly recognized obligations to fellow-nationals" appear to be so self-evident to him and Tamir, however, that neither author considers the threat such obligations pose to their own egalitarian convictions, both practically and theoretically. As a practical matter, such obligations may involve condemning residents of the Third World to lives of misery by barring them from employment and the other benefits that First World states restrict to their citizenry. At the theoretical level, the problem is that if one's moral obligations are coextensive with one's historically contingent sentiments, anything goes. If a community is *not* animated by egalitarian sentiments, it would seem wrong to try to induce such sentiments or otherwise to try to extract egalitarian commitments from it. Indeed, if morality is a matter of sentiment, it is difficult to see how one could say that one form of morality is better than another,

equally deeply felt form. But such objections will already be familiar to students of philosophical communitarianism.

The Psychology and History of Nationalism

It is possible, however, to put a universalistic gloss on political communitarianism by grounding the desirability of catering to people's feelings on a commitment to their well-being. This form of liberal nationalism is suggested by Miller's suggestion that nationalist sentiments are akin to familial and local relationships and friendships (Miller 1995, 50–51). In this view nationalist preferences play the role of individual "tastes" in modern utilitarian theory: one simply assumes that people will be made happy if their tastes are satisfied. Thus, if people are nationalistic, politics should have the goal of satisfying this preference, regardless of the inegalitarian consequences; just as, if people are consumerists, politics should have the goal of providing them with ever more disposable income. The obvious difficulty with this form of utilitarianism is that the satisfaction of people's preferences may in reality leave them *unhappy*. For liberal nationalists, there are at least two additional problems. First, satisfying the preferences of the members of a given nation-state may produce "externalities," such as the poverty and warfare visited on those outside a given nation-state in order to satisfy its members' preferences. Second, if preference satisfaction is the goal, it would seem to demand that we allow people who do *not* feel the tug of national identity to secede from the nation-state and stop paying taxes to it—just as liberal nationalism requires allowing "peoples" of noncosmopolitan bent to secede, as it were, from world society.

A truly eudaimonistic approach to nationalism would have to be prepared to evaluate people's affiliative preferences more critically, based on whether their satisfaction actually leads, on balance, to more happiness than would their frustration—or to more happiness than could be achieved through nonnationalist forms of affiliation. We would be miserable if we could not treat our friends, spouses, and siblings with special consideration; but is this necessarily true of our conationals? The answer must draw on human psychology. Martin Tyrrell's discussion below of the psychology of nationalism suggests there there is an innate human tendency to identify with those who have been designated as members of one's group, no matter

how arbitrary the group's definition. Because this tendency is so undiscriminating, it is understandable that the modern individual would find her primary group attachment in her nationality. For one thing, as Gellner in particular emphasized, nationalism homogenizes cultures, making conationals seem similar and congenial. For another, as Tyrrell suggests, the nation-state's growing entanglement with everyday life multiplies the occasions for our identification with it, and, thus with our conationals. The upshot of these considerations, however, is that instead of manifesting itself necessarily in nationalism, with all its attendant dangers, our tendency toward group identification might be satisfied through harmless and even beneficent means, such as cheering for hometown sports teams or participating in local community life, if the powers of the nation-state were reduced. Indeed, it is possible that one of the causes of the decline of community participation is the substitution of the nation-state for the locality as the primary locus of our feelings of group attachment—a topic touched on in these pages by Nicholas Xenos.

A critical eudaimonistic approach to nationalism, then, seems to lead to close scrutiny of the link between "the nation"—i.e., the primary locus of group identification—and the state. Such scrutiny also allows us to recognize, and perhaps explain, the importance of geography in national loyalties. A state is defined by its geographical boundaries, within which it is sovereign. Tilly underscores the military developments, and the consequent financial pressures, that transformed premodern states that were at best semi-sovereign into unmediated rulers of everyone within their borders. This created both the means and the motive for states to cultivate nationalism through campaigns of cultural homogenization, whereby the mutual identification of all of those living within the state's borders was encouraged. These campaigns might propagate the myth that the state's subjects were united either by ethnic ancestry or by free adherence to a civic creed, but the effect of either myth would be to implant in the individual an identification with conationals as the primary in-group.

What is missing from this account, however, is an explanation for people's identification of their primary in-group, the nation, with the state. This makes Greenfeld's story of the rise of nationalism on wings of egalitarianism and popular sovereignty indispensable. In trying to sustain the exactions of the newly sovereign state, the "armies of propagandists on the hoof" discussed by Weber and

Tilly—the teachers and state employees, not to mention journalists, politicians, and nationalist intellectuals—would have gained great assistance from the notion that the individual members of the nation were, in fact, sovereign, such that the state's exactions were self-imposed. At the same time, the egalitarianism inherent in conferring sovereignty on a "people" would buttress conationals' identification with each other.

The views of Greenfeld, Weber, and Tilly also seem compatible with the modified Gellnerian theory of nationalism suggested by Damian Tambini's article below. Like Tilly and Weber, Gellner emphasizes the culturally homogenizing effects of nationalism; but then, by stressing the advantages cultural homogeneity provides for industrial economies, he suggests that nationalism should be attributed to economic drives. As Tambini points out, this view faces both historical and theoretical problems. Both types of problem, though, might be remedied if we were to see early modern state-building, and the ideas of egalitarianism and popular sovereignty, as providing the sinews of nascent nationalism and of statism; if we were to recognize these political and cultural variables as mutually reinforcing; and if we were to view the resulting form of nationalism as only fortuitously a lubricant of industrial development, rather than industrialization being the driving force behind nationalism.

Such a synthesis has the advantage of allowing for a recognition of the vital role of nationalism in calling forth egalitarian politics within the borders of the nation-state, but without succumbing to the liberal nationalist temptation to view this role as morally self-validating. A page or two from public opinion scholarship might prove helpful here. Over the past three decades and more, it has been widely acknowledged and repeatedly demonstrated by public-opinion researchers that most members of mass electorates make momentous voting decisions on the basis of the flimsiest knowledge of the issues at stake.[5] Given the endless information that would be needed to master merely the most important involvements of the modern state, electors face the choice between confused guesswork and confident dogmatism (i.e., ideology) (cf. Converse 1964). All modern democracies subsist on the myth that the electorate "deliberates," such that its decisions are something more elevated than sheer acts of will or the random rotation of elites, but in truth electoral decisions are guided by crude substitutes for the detailed knowledge true deliberation would require. A shaky grasp

of economic trends, a vague impression of class interests, a television commercial, or a doctrinaire ideological affinity usually determines one's vote, but more basic than all of these shortcuts through the complexities of politics is nationalism. The one thing most citizens "know" is that the state should be measured by its ability to help "us," the nation. Identification with the nation-state is thus the surest guidepost available to most voters, and is indeed what makes them willing to redistribute income to "their own" poor.

This group identification, precisely by virtue of being the dominant form of modern self-understanding and the central organizing principle of modern politics, deserves critical scrutiny and philosophical skepticism, not complacent affirmation. For either its essential egalitarianism is sound, but the borders between nation-states violate the conclusions to which it should lead; or equality can be sacrificed to utility, in which case the constrained egalitarianism of the nation-state, too, might be dispensable. While the studies published in this issue suggest that the bounded egalitarianism of existing liberal states is the result of deep-rooted political processes, accepting this result as consistent with liberalism may mean falling victim to the power of nationalism to sanctify the morally arbitrary.

NOTES

1. See Friedman 1994 for substantiation.
2. See ibid.
3. See in particular Walzer 1983; Taylor 1985; Taylor 1995, ch. 10; and Sandel 1982, esp. 96 and 149.
4. Miller (1995, 36) goes so far as to defend the propagation of nationalist falsehoods, such as myths of glorious national origin, so long as they "contribute significantly to the support of valuable social relations" (cf. ibid., 184).
5. See Friedman 1996 for some of the evidence.

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