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ABSTRACT: *The idea of a purely civic nationalism has attracted Western scholars, most of whom rightly disdain the myths that sustain ethnonationalist theories of political community. Civic nationalism is particularly attractive to many Americans, whose peculiar national heritage encourages the delusion that their mutual association is based solely on consciously chosen principles. But this idea misrepresents political reality as surely as the ethnonationalist myths it is designed to combat. And propagating a new political myth is an especially inappropriate way of defending the legacy of Enlightenment liberalism from the dangers posed by the growth of nationalist political passions.*

What kind of community do members of modern nations make the focus of political legitimacy and loyalty? Answering that question has been difficult, especially since the idea of the nation is ordinarily called on to capture two distinct changes in the way modern individuals imagine political community. On the one hand, there is the development of a strong connection between cultural and political identities. On the other hand, there is the new way of imagining community that has developed to parallel the new orga-

nization of political power by the modern state. By breaking down and integrating local communities and overlapping jurisdictions, state sovereignty has in effect "nationalized" political community. It has taught us to think of those subjected to this new kind of power as members of distinct political communities.

Students of nationalism have generally focused on one or the other of these two momentous changes. The new connections between cultural and political community have received the most attention under the heading of ethnonationalism, the nationalization of political community under the heading of modernization or nation building. Those who look seriously at both changes usually urge us to distinguish them as separate phenomena inspired by two very different visions of the nation. The ethnic idea of the nation, we are told, celebrates inherited cultural identity and is exemplified by Germany, Japan, and most Eastern European countries. The civic idea of the nation, in contrast, is supposed to capture the freely chosen and purely political identity of participants in such modern states as France, Canada, and the United States.

This distinction between ethnic and civic understandings of national community reflects the two ways in which the term nation is used in everyday language: to point to cultural communities of origin and to characterize the political communities that correspond to modern states (as in expressions like the "United Nations"). The distinction also parallels and builds upon a long series of earlier conceptual dichotomies, such as Eastern vs. Western nationalism (Plamenatz 1973), *ethnos* vs. *demos* (Francis 1965), cultural vs. political states (Meinecke 1970), and German vs. French understandings of nationhood (Renan 1990; Dumont 1994). Like all of these earlier dichotomies, the contrast between ethnic and civic nationalism serves both descriptive and normative goals.[1] In other words, it serves both to classify the different forms of nationalism that exist in the modern world and to distinguish the more valuable or acceptable forms of nationalism from their more dangerous counterparts. Distinguishing civic from ethnic understandings of nationhood is part of a larger effort by contemporary liberals to channel national sentiments in a direction—civic nationalism—that seems consistent with the commitments to individual rights and diversity that they associate with a decent political order.

The Civic/Ethnic Dichotomy

Michael Ignatieff's recent book, *Blood and Belonging*, provides an excellent illustration of this dual use of the distinction between civic and ethnic nations. Ignatieff is a self-professed cosmopolitan—how else, he asks, to describe someone "whose father was born in Russia, whose mother was born in England, whose education was in America, and whose working life has been spent in Canada, Great Britain, and France" (Ignatieff 1993, 11)? But he recognizes that cosmopolitanism is only a viable option for a rather privileged subset of citizens of wealthy industrial societies. And even their security, he admits, rests upon their being able to take nationally defended citizenship rights for granted.

Accordingly, Ignatieff acknowledges that the Enlightenment vision of a cosmopolitan world society of rational individuals, a vision that he shares, cannot be realized, at least in the foreseeable future. Modern individuals seem to need a sense of belonging to a national community to support the very rights and freedom from fear that Enlightenment cosmopolitans strove to create (Ignatieff 1993, 11-13). But the Enlightenment's political legacy, he argues, can only be preserved in a *civic* nation, which Ignatieff conceives of as "a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values." The civic nation, Ignatieff argues, is a community created by the choice of individuals to honor a particular political creed. As such, it is relatively compatible with the Enlightenment legacy of rationalism and individualism, since it turns "national belonging [into] a form of rational attachment." Ethnic nationalism, in contrast, abandons that legacy because it insists "that an individual's deepest attachments are inherited, not chosen," that "it is the national community that defines the individual, not the individuals who define the national community" (ibid., 7-8).[2]

It is hard for anyone sympathetic to a relatively liberal, relatively cosmopolitan perspective on political life to reject such arguments. Nevertheless, I am skeptical about this familiar contrast between civic and ethnic nationalism. It all seems a little too good to be true, a little too close to what we would like to believe about the world. The civic/ethnic dichtomy parallels a series of other contrasts that should set off alarm bells: not only Western/Eastern, but

rational/emotive, voluntary/inherited, good/bad, *ours/theirs!* Designed to protect us from the dangers of ethnocentric politics, the civic/ethnic distinction itself reflects a considerable dose of ethnocentrism, as if the political identities *French* and *American* were not also culturally inherited artifacts, no matter how much they develop and change as they pass from generation to generation.[3] The characterization of political community in the so-called civic nations as a rational and freely chosen allegiance to a set of political principles seems untenable to me, a mixture of self-congratulation and wishful thinking.

I am a Canadian citizen who has been studying and teaching in the United States for close to 20 years. As such, I am in the relatively unusual position of being able to choose my citizenship, to become an American citizen or remain a Canadian. Yet even though I have been given the right to exchange one identity for another, it seems absurd to me to suggest that I simply chose my current political identity, as a Canadian expatriate, for myself. If my grandfather's flight from the Tsar's armies had ended in Toledo rather than Toronto, I might be an American expatriate in Canada, grappling with the anti-Americanism of many Canadians, rather than a Canadian expatriate in the United States, grappling with the ignorance and condescension of many Americans.

The "civic" identity *Canadian* is no less an inherited cultural artifact than the "ethnic" identity *Québecois* (Kymlicka 1995). Residents of Quebec who think of Canada rather than Quebec as their political community are choosing one culturally inherited location of identity over another. They may make that choice because they believe that the Canadian government will better defend certain political principles, but those political principles do not in themselves define Canada. Canada is a contingent location for these principles, a location that comes with all kinds of inherited cultural baggage: the connection to Great Britain and British political culture; the history of tension and cooperation between French speakers and English speakers; the ambivalent relationship to Canada's overwhelmingly powerful neighbor to the south; and so on.

The same is true for the United States and France as objects of identification and loyalty. However much they may have come to stand for certain political principles, each comes loaded with inherited cultural baggage that is contingent upon their peculiar histories. That does not mean that we must accept the image of a true France

or United States that some seek in the historical record. Collective identities are ever in the process of development and interpretation. Claims about our authentic or original identity most often represent ways of silencing debate about the interpretation of our complex and often contradictory cultural legacies (Lebovics 1992).[4] But even if collective identities such as *French* and *American* are little more than sites for controversy and construction, these sites themselves are cultural artifacts that we inherit from preceding generations.

The political identity of the French, the Canadian, or the American is not based on a set of rationally chosen political principles. No matter how much residents of the United States might sympathize with political principles favored by most French or Canadian citizens, it would not occur to them to think of themselves as French or Canadian. An attachment to certain political principles may be a necessary condition of loyalty to the national community for many citizens of contemporary liberal democracies; they are very far from a sufficient condition for that loyalty.

It may be reasonable to contrast nations whose distinctive cultural inheritance centers on political symbols and political stories with nations whose cultural inheritance centers on language and stories about ethnic origins. But it is unreasonable and unrealistic to interpret this contrast as a distinction between the rational attachment to principle and the emotional celebration of inherited culture. In order to characterize "national belonging [as] a form of rational attachment" (Ignatieff 1993, 7-8), one must ignore the contingent inheritance of distinctive experiences and cultural memories that is an inseparable part of every national political identity. And one must pretend that it makes sense to characterize nations such as France, Canada, and the United States as voluntary associations for the expression of shared political principles. Such is the myth that surrounds the idea of the civic nation.

The Myth of Consent

Defenders of this myth often cite Ernest Renan's famous description of the nation as "a daily plebiscite," a phrase that seems to point to individual consent as the source of national identity. But they rarely note that this phrase represents only half of Renan's definition of the nation. "*Two* things," Renan insists, constitute the nation:

> One lies in the past, the other in the present. One is the possession
> in common of a rich legacy of memories, the other is present-day
> consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value
> of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form. . . . The
> nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of en-
> deavors, sacrifice, and devotion. (Renan 1990, 19)

The nation may be a daily plebiscite for Renan, but the subject
of that plebiscite is what we will do with the mix of competing
symbols and stories that make up our cultural inheritance. Without
"a rich legacy of memories" there are no communal loyalties to be
tested by consent. The myth of the *ethnic* nation suggests that you
have no choice at all in the making of your national identity: you
are your cultural inheritance and nothing else.[5] The myth of the
civic nation, in contrast, suggests that your national identity is noth-
ing but your choice: you are the political principles you share with
other like-minded individuals.

This idea of a purely political and principled basis for mutual
concern and solidarity has been very attractive to Western scholars,
most of whom rightly disdain the myths that sustain ethnonational-
ist theories of political community. It is particularly attractive to
many Americans, whose peculiar national heritage—with succes-
sive waves of immigration and a constitutional founding—fosters
the illusion that their mutual association is based solely on con-
sciously chosen principles. But this idea misrepresents political real-
ity as surely as the ethnonationalist myths it is designed to combat.
And propagating a new political myth, it seems to me, is an espe-
cially inappropriate way of defending the legacy of Enlightenment
liberalism from the dangers posed by the growth of nationalist po-
litical passions.

The problems with the purely civic understanding of national
community emerge clearly in the most influential recent version of
civic nationalist thinking: Jürgen Habermas's defense of the idea of
"constitutional patriotism" (Habermas 1995; also Habermas 1989,
256–62). Habermas uses this idea to combat the resurgence of eth-
nic chauvinism in the wake of German reunification. He proposes
loyalty to the liberal democratic principles of the postwar constitu-
tion as an alternative focus for German identity. Accordingly, he
contrasts two ways of characterizing the incorporation of the East
German states into the Federal union: on the one hand, as the

restoration of "the prepolitical unity of a community with a shared historical destiny"; on the other hand, as the restoration of "democracy and a constitutional state in a territory where civil rights had been suspended . . . since 1933" (Habermas 1995, 256). Habermas's defense of constitutional patriotism is to a great extent a defense of the second, purely civic description of German reunification.

Given the terrible history of German nationalism, it is understandable that one would seek to downplay the existence of a prepolitical German identity. But Habermas's civic interpretation of German reunification merely justifies or legitimates the recent change of political regime, from communism to liberal democracy, in East Germany. It does nothing to explain or justify *reunification with the Federal Republic.* It may have been easier to establish a liberal democratic regime in East Germany by integrating it into an already functioning and wealthy liberal democracy such as the Federal Republic. But this option was not offered—or even contemplated—by the Federal Republic to the inhabitants of Czechoslovakia or Poland or any other former Communist state. How can one explain the peculiar form of East Germany's transition from Communism without invoking the prepolitical community of shared memory and history that tied West to East Germans, a sense of community that led the former to single out the latter for special support and attention? Habermas's civic interpretation of reunification begs this question.

Habermas tacitly admits as much when stating that constitutional patriotism represents a way of situating universalistic principles "in the horizon of the history of a nation" (Habermas 1995, 264). This statement clearly implies that the audience for arguments about the focus of political loyalty is not some random association of individuals united only by alliegiance to shared principles, but a prepolitical community with its own cultural "horizon" of shared memories and historical experiences. Only the existence of such cultural horizons turns a particular collection of individuals into an audience for Hamermas's arguments about the interpretation of German political history.

Habermas's plea for a constitutionally focused patriotism makes a great deal of sense *within* these cultural horizons. It is precisely because they share terrible memories of racist and militarist violence that it makes sense for Germans to cling to the Basic Law of the postwar constitution as their most valuable historical legacy. Haber-

mas's argument works best as part of a struggle to interpret the significance of a particular community's legacy of shared memories. But as such it assumes the existence of the very prepolitical cultural community that he, like most defenders of the civic idea of the nation, rejects in the name of a community based on rational consent and political principle.

The existence of such a community is a tacit but usually unexamined assumption in the contractarian and neo-Kantian forms of political theory that Habermas favors. Social contract arguments serve to legitimate, through actual or implied consent, different ways of ordering the social and political relationships within a predefined group of individuals. For these arguments assume that there is sufficient reason for individuals deliberating about justice and the social contract to pay attention to each other's proposals and decisions, rather than to those made by individuals outside of this group. Since the whole point of these theories is to determine the proper order *within* a given group of individuals, the assumption of a prepolitical community is safely tucked away in most of the debates about the meaning of liberal democratic principles. It is only in situations in which the boundaries of such groups are in question, as when considering the reasons for German reunification, that the assumption of prepolitical communal loyalties directly comes to light.

Popular Sovereignty and Nationalism

Liberal critics of nationalism like to characterize the invocation of prepolitical national identities as part of the Romantic and irrationalist rebellion against the Enlightenment and modern political culture. But these familiar criticisms ignore the extent to which liberal democratic culture *itself* inspires people to think of themselves as members of prepolitical communities. This is especially true of the rhetoric of popular sovereignty. Popular sovereignty arguments encourage modern citizens to think of themselves as organized into communities that are logically and historically prior to the communities created by their shared political institutions. To the extent that one condemns our tendency to look for prepolitical sources of political identity, modern democratic political culture is part of the problem, not the solution.

The doctrine of popular sovereignty insists that behind every state there stands a people, a community of individuals that makes use of the state as a means of self-government and thus has the right to establish the limits of its power. This doctrine was developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a way of countering fears that the dissolution of absolutist authority would necessarily lead to the anarchic war of all against all—claims supported by the belief that nothing but ascriptive social hierarchy binds individuals to each other. Locke and numerous other defenders of popular sovereignty responded to this fear by arguing that the dissolution of a particular form of government does not dissolve the group that institutes government, variously described as the community, the civil society, or the people (in contrast to the commonwealth or political society) (Morgan 1988).

Such notions directly influence liberal democratic culture (especially in the United States, where "We, the People" promulgated the Constitution). Modern citizens tend to imagine political community as something distinct from the state and the political processes it defines, a kind of cultural community that makes use of the state for purposes of self-government. When we are thinking about the relatively loose ties that allow us to associate with each other in public and private, we call this prepolitical community "civil society." When we emphasize government accountability to this community, we usually describe it as "the people." And when we are emphasizing the identity drawn from this community, we most often call it "the nation." All of these concepts—civil society, the people, the nation—rest on the notion of a community set apart from and using the state as a means of self-government.

Habermas deals with this difficulty by putting a Kantian gloss on popular sovereignty arguments. He portrays popular sovereignty as an "abstract model" of individual self-legislation in which "consensus is achieved in the course of argument . . . from an identically applied procedure recognized by all" (Habermas 1995, 259–60; idem 1992). Whatever its philosophical merits, this interpretation of popular sovereignty has little historical value. The contemporary political cultures that Habermas invokes as the basis for constitutional patriotism were at first established and defended in the name of the people and *la nation*, not in the name of the original position or the ideal speech situation. Moreover, the procedures for locating consensus that Habermas invokes as the basis for popular sovereignty

assume that individuals know beforehand *with whom* they are seek-
ing to achieve consensus. The abstractness of Habermas's under-
standing of communal consensus does nothing to eliminate this as-
sumption, even if it makes it harder to locate. As long as there is
little controversy about the historical referent for rhetorical invoca-
tions of the people, as in the English, American, and French Revo-
lutions, this assumption tends to remain in the background. But
disagreements about the historical identity of "the people" bring
the assumption into question, creating severe difficulties for popular
sovereignty arguments. We need to face up to the implications of
our reliance on such assumptions, even if doing so makes us uneasy
by showing how individual rights and political freedoms depend to
a certain extent on the contingencies and vagaries of shared mem-
ory and identity.

Ethnonationalists, however, are no more comfortable with the
real-world contingencies of communal identity than proponents of
the civic nation. Ethnonationalists rid themselves of their discom-
fort by picking out one source of identity in our ever-changing
communal heritage and turning it into a norm against which we
should measure our political communities. But in order to portray
ethnic community as the norm for political community, ethnona-
tionalists must make a number of implausible claims about our
communal identities. They must insist, for example, that we can
each trace our cultural identities back to some discrete ethnic com-
munity; that these communities maintain their original character
through time; and that even where there seems little evidence of
ethnic consciousness, these communities persist in their original
character, waiting like a sleeping beauty to be awakened by the kiss
of national self-assertion. In truth, ethnic identities are part of a
contingent and ever-changing legacy of shared memories and com-
munal identification. Portraying them as the norm against which to
measure the prepolitical sense of community associated with mod-
ern states requires a gross misrepresentation of the historical record.

The proponents of the purely civic idea of the nation rebel
against the search for norms within the contingencies of our histor-
ical experience. But, as I have tried to show, the norms that they
come up with tend to say much more about the way in which we
should order lives within *given* national communities than about
why the boundaries of these communities should take one shape
rather than another. As a result, they, too, tend to propagate myths

about national identity by redescribing contingent communities of memory and experience as if they were nothing more than voluntary associations of individuals, united by their shared attachment to a body of moral and political principles.

Why There Were No Greek Nation-States

One way of focusing attention upon the close connections that the citizens of so-called civic nations make between political and cultural community is to contrast them with their ancient Greek predecessors. This comparison is especially useful because, for the ancient Greeks, the distinction between *ethnos* and *demos* was an organizing principle rather than a moral aspiration. The inherited cultural identity that they shared as Greeks was clearly distinguished from their political identity as participants in one polis or another. As a result, the ancient Greeks actually separated cultural and political community in a way that it is difficult for modern citizens even to imagine, let alone emulate.

Students of Greek history have long been puzzled by this separation of cultural and political community. Why, they ask, did the Greeks, with their vibrant and wonderfully creative sense of cultural identity, not connect cultural community with a broader sense of political identity and loyalty? A great amount of ink has been spilled exploring the question why the Greeks did not, in effect, develop the idea of national community (Finley 1975). But if, as most students of nationalism agree, there is no necessary connection between *ethnos* and *demos* (Francis 1965, 77), then it is *our* idea of political community, rather than the Greeks', which is odd and in need of explanation. Looking at Greek political practice and imagination helps make clear just how thoroughly we have integrated political and cultural identity.

Consider how the Greeks founded colonies. Citizens of one polis would set off to build or take over a new one. They took with them their cultural and personal identities as Greeks, but not their political identity as members of the demos of the polis they left behind. As a result, they endured few of the painful loyalty struggles experienced by modern colonists both before and after the establishment of independence from the mother country. For the Greeks, to found a colony was to found a new political identity. A

new polis brought into being a new demos, since the demos was nothing but the community of individuals organized to govern themselves. Cultural identity as Greeks was something that colonists carried with them wherever they went. But political identity depended on continued participation in a particular polis.

Or consider the relative casualness of treason in ancient Greek politics. I have always found this a little jarring, given the conventional wisdom that Greek political life entailed submergence in a collective political identity. Can one imagine an American Alcibiades returning and being given command of an American army after defecting to the Soviet Union and helping to reorganize the Soviet military? Or imagine the fuss if the two greatest leaders of a successful Cold War America went over to the defeated enemy, as Themistocles and Pausanius went over to the Persians. Such an event would be a monumental personal and political betrayal to be memorialized far more intensely than Benedict Arnold's treason. Yet, at least in Thucydides's recounting, these betrayals recur regularly without the attention we would give to them. Indeed, in Thucydides's judgment Themistocles "has a claim on our admiration quite extraordinary and unparalleled," a judgment that one could never expect to hear from a contemporary historian dealing with someone whose life ended in the betrayal of his or her country (Thucydides 1982, 1.138). Putting ourselves and our politicians in the place of these Greek leaders, we expect some sign of inner turmoil and conflict of loyalty, but find none.

The reason for this difference, I believe, is that for us treason suggests a kind of self-betrayal, a betrayal of our own cultural and personal identity.[6] This is a telltale sign of the strong connection we make between political and cultural identity, even in liberal democracies. Lacking this connection, the ancient Greeks seem disinclined to treat treason as a form of self-betrayal. Alcibiades and Themistocles were still Greeks when they went to Sparta and to Persia. They took that element of identity with them wherever they went. But once they left Athens, or more to the point, once they thought Athens had rejected them, they were no longer Athenians. Like colonists embarking for a new community, they left their political identity behind them, something that modern politicians, no matter how venal and untrustworthy, find it very hard to do, and something modern citizens would find appalling.

Compare Themistocles's reaction to his ostracism and exile to

that of a modern counterpart, Alfred Dreyfus. Dreyfus, completely innocent and honorable, subjected to years of torture on Devil's Isle, remained loyal to the French nation throughout his ordeal and tried to prove his loyalty to an army that went to extraordinary lengths to destroy him even when fully aware of his innocence. Themistocles, in contrast, a man who was far from innocent of dishonesty and double-dealing, simply went off to join the Persians, the enemy he had done so much to defeat, after suffering the ingratitude of the Athenian people.

Judith Shklar constructed this comparison between Themistocles and Dreyfus in order to illustrate the difference between viewing political commitments as a matter of rational obligation and as a matter of emotional loyalty (Shklar 1993, 188–91). Themistocles's reaction to exile, she insists, is a reasonable response to an unjust world. His obligations to Athens were at an end after the citizenry voted to ostracize him. Dreyfus's reaction, in contrast, is for her a demonstration of the irrational lengths to which emotional ties of loyalty can drive us. The French army had cynically sacrificed Dreyfus to their vision of the nation, a vision that it was clear had no room for Jewish officers. How could Dreyfus still seek to prove his loyalty to an army that had betrayed him so callously and completely? Loyalty of this sort, Shklar declares, is nothing short of madness (Shklar 1993, 191).

I draw somewhat different conclusions from Shklar's comparison of ancient and modern exiles. The stark contrast between Themistocles's and Dreyfus's reactions to injustice strikingly illustrates a crucial difference between ancient Greek and modern attitudes toward political community. Dreyfus was so intent on demonstrating his loyalty to the French nation because that community was an important part of his personal identity. He took his French identity with him wherever he went, even to Devil's Isle; refusing to serve the nation and its army on his return would be like betraying himself. For Themistocles, in contrast, his abandonment of Athens raised few questions of self-betrayal. He, like other Greek exiles, could take his personal identity as a Greek with him wherever he went, but that identity did not require any demonstration of loyalty to the Athenian political community. Once he was no longer allowed to be an active part of that community, it no longer had any claims on his loyalty. Extreme though Dreyfus's expression of loyalty to an unworthy France may be, I believe that most modern cit-

izens would find his intense struggle with conflicting loyalties easier to identify with than Themistocles's cold calculation.[7] For most modern citizens, as for Dreyfus, betraying one's political community involves self-betrayal in a way it did not for Themistocles and the ancient Greeks.

My brief comparison between Greek and modern citizens thus drives me toward a somewhat surprising conclusion: thát (at least in one important sense) modern citizens are more loyal to, and more strongly identified with, their political communities than their ancient Greek counterparts. This conclusion is surprising because we have been taught by Rousseau and others to think of ancient citizenship as complete subordination to the collective identity of the polis (Yack 1993, 10-16, 30-33, 71-85). Moreover, it is hard to believe that the normally passive citizens of a modern nation could identify more with their political communities than ancient Greek citizens who spent so much more of their time fighting their country's battles and participating in its political life.

But participation is not the same thing as identification. For the ancient Greeks, political community referred to the sharing of self-government, not to the identity-shaping cultural community modern citizens experience. Indeed, I suspect that the relatively intense participation of Greek *citizens* in political life made it *harder* for them to identify with their political communities in the way that modern citizens do. It is far easier to declare "my country right or wrong" when I passively receive national policy from my representatives than when I am actively involved in making and executing it myself. When I am directly involved in the political process, then its ups and downs, victories and defeats are bound to affect me much more personally and encourage me to distinguish myself from my political community. The ancient Greeks appear to have had a passion for political activity, rather than an overwhelming identification with their polis. We are the ones, after all, who sanctify bipartisanship. Solon's laws, in contrast, punished those who did *not* choose sides in the city's political struggles (Aristotle 1950, 76).

Because it brings political and cultural community together in a way that was foreign to the ancient Greeks, modern nationalism, whether of the civic or the ethnic variety, combines political loyalty with loyalty to oneself. Political betrayal involves self-betrayal for modern citizens, regardless of whether the betrayed cultural inheritance is more closely associated with political or ethnic symbols and

stories. An American politician who calmly changed political identity simply because of a slight preference for French or Canadian political principles would probably seem just as peculiar and out of place in the world of the civic nations as the cold and calculating Athenian statesman Themistocles.

The Dependence of Liberalism on Nationalism

The late Ernest Gellner once quipped that Marxists have been forced to come up with a "wrong address" theory of history in order to explain the success of nationalism: history had a message for classes that somehow got delivered to nations by mistake (Gellner 1983, 129). Liberal theorists are only beginning to face up to their similar disappointment. History, they believed, had a message for individuals, but that message somehow got delivered by mistake to nations. The age of liberal individualism has also been the age of nationalism; liberal practices have been realized, for the most part, within the framework of national communities.

The myth of the civic nation reflects one strategy that liberals have pursued in order to salvage their hopes for modern politics: find and preserve a form of national community that is compatible with liberal political commitments. If only there were a viable form of national community that reflected shared political principles rather than some particular cultural inheritance, then the growth of national identity need not undermine social diversity and universal human rights. History's message could then still be delivered to individuals "care of" the civic nation.

But wishing won't make it so. The idea of the civic nation defends the Enlightenment's liberal legacy by employing the very concept—that of the political community as a voluntary association—whose plausibility has been undermined by the success of nationalism. The liberal legacy of individual rights and political rationality has developed within political communities that impart a kind of inherited cultural identity quite unforeseen by Enlightenment liberals. The battle to preserve that legacy is taking place *within* the framework provided by such communities. Within that framework we have every reason to construct and defend distinctions between more and less inclusive forms of national community. But in doing so we should not fool ourselves into thinking

that what we are constructing is a freely chosen and purely civic form of national identity.

Even if the myth of the civic nation were true, I doubt that voluntary associations for the expression of shared political principle would be as conducive to toleration and diversity as their supporters expect them to be. There would be plenty of room of exclusion and suspicion of difference in a political community based solely on a shared commitment to political principles. We should be willing to exclude anyone from such a community who disagrees with its basic principles. Moreover, we might be inclined to exclude anyone whom we *suspect* of rejecting these principles. For if it is commitment to certain principles that makes one a member of a community, then we will probably want to know whether this commitment·is genuine or a mask for subversion.

The possibility of intolerance and paranoia in a truly "civic" nation is far from academic or hypothetical. After all, American citizens have been denounced and persecuted for clinging to un-American political principles as well as for their foreign backgrounds. And as George Mosse reminds us, it was the decidedly civic nation of the French Jacobins that invented many of the techniques of persecution and mass paranoia exploited by twentieth-century fascists and xenophobic nationalists (Mosse *1993*, *65–72*).

It is only because so few of us really take the idea of a community of shared principle seriously that it appears to be an antidote to exclusion and intolerance. Were Americans, for example, to make citizenship contingent upon commitment to political principles instead of the mere accident of birth (to citizen parents or on American territory), they might become considerably more suspicious of their fellow citizens' declarations of political loyalty. Birthright citizenship can promote toleration precisely by removing the question of communal membership from the realm of choice and contention about political principles.[8]

In the end, I believe that Renan got it right. Two things make a nation: present-day consent and a rich cultural inheritance of shared memories and practices. Without consent our cultural legacy would be our destiny, rather than a set of background constraints on our activities. But without such a legacy there would be no consent at all, since there would be no reason for people to seek agreement with any one group of individuals rather than another. Focusing exclusively on one or the other component of national

identity inspires the contrasting myths of ethnonationalist and civic theories of political community, myths that exaggerate, on the one side, our inability to change, build on, and improve on the communal ties we have inherited and, on the other, our capacity to recreate ourselves in the image of our liberal theories.

NOTES

1. Moreover, the normative slant in these dichotomies is not always in the direction of the "Western," "political" variant of nationalism. Meinecke's (1970) distinction between political and cultural states, for example, is clearly designed to support the superiority of the cultural version of nationhood favored by Germans.

2. For similar arguments, see Bogdan Denitch's (1994) defense of civic nationalism; Liah Greenfeld's (1992) distinction between Anglo-American and continental European forms of nationalism; and Dominique Schnapper's defense of the idea of the civic nation, in which she attempts to prove that the "very notion of an ethnic nation is a contradiction in terms" (1994, 24–30, 95, 178).

3. Indeed, the idea of the civic nation, with its portrayal of community as a shared and rational choice of universally valid principles, is itself a cultural inheritance in nations like France and the United States. One aspect of distinctly French and American political ideologies is to portray their own cultural inheritance as a universally valid object of rational choice (Dumont 1994, 3–4, 199–201).

4. An appeal to original political principles, by the way, functions just as well as an appeal to cultural origins in shutting down debate about the meaning of one's political community. Opponents of multiculturalism, such as Arthur Schlesinger (1992), often use the appeal to original principles like "*e pluribus unum*" in this way.

5. Renan's complaint about the "German" understanding of nationhood, according to which Alsatians owed allegiance to Germany in spite of their explicit identification with France, is that it *eliminates* choice from nationhood, not that it refers to cultural inheritance as a source of nationhood (Renan 1990). This view of nationhood does not allow the Alsatians to focus on the legacy of French cultural symbols and associations (many of which are explicitly political in nature), which, like the German language, is part of their cultural inheritance. For Renan a nation grows out of the choices we make within our cultural inheritance. For a treatment of current American debates about cultural identity that stresses choice within a complex cultural inheritance, see Hollinger 1995.

6. Another factor in the casualness of treason among the ancient Greeks was the existence of networks of guest-friendships connecting aristocratic families in different cities (Herman 1987).

7. As an emigré from regimes, National Socialism and Stalinist Communism, with which she could not possibly have identified, it is not surprising that Shklar found it easier to identify with Themistocles than with Dreyfus.

8. Those, like Peter Schuck and Rogers Smith (1987) who complain about birthright citizenship as an anomaly in American political culture—a violation of its commitment to liberal principles of consent—fail to see this point. Birthright citizenship can have the effect of moderating our concern about our neighbors' commitments to shared principles, thereby promoting greater inclusion and toleration.

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