

CULTURAL NATIONALISM, NEITHER ETHNIC NOR CIVIC

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I

Québec, as I write this (1996), is a province of Canada. It is a liberal part of a liberal society and a liberal state. The provincial government, whatever political party is in power, remains a government of a liberal democratic society. It is not an *a priori* necessity that that is so, but there is no empirical reason at all to think that this situation will change in the foreseeable future. It is not unreasonable to expect that in a few years Québec will move from being a province to being a sovereign state. Will this very change, as many anglophones, allophones, and even some francophones fear, carry Québec from being a liberal society into being an illiberal society? I will argue that such fears are utterly groundless.

It is true that what fuels the drive for the sovereignty of Québec is Québec nationalism and that it is a nationalism voiced principally, but not exclusively, by francophone Québécois (80% of the population of Québec). This nationalism is committed to sustaining the existence of the national identity of the Québécois nation with its distinctive culture and institutions, including, very centrally, and as a necessary condition to preserve the rest, the French language surrounded in North America by a sea of English. The fear, on the part of some, is that this very nationalism, if it succeeds in its aim of establishing a sovereign Québec, will destroy Québec's liberal democracy. It cannot, those caught by this fear think, but undermine the liberal character of Québec society, for "liberal nationalism" is an oxymoron. We cannot, the claim goes, coherently cobble liberalism and nationalism together. (For an opposite view, powerfully argued, see Tamir 1993 and Levinson 1995).

The strongest theoretical statement of that belief about the necessary ill-liberalism of nationalism comes from such staunch and even left liberal theoreticians as Judith Shklar and Brian Barry. (Levinson 1995, 626-27, and Barry

1987). They despise nationalism, seeing it at best as a form of ethnocentrism, atavistic, backward-looking, exclusivist, and very often, even worse than that, a form of authoritarianism, even something that either is, or not infrequently tends toward, a fascist authoritarianism. In its very nature, the claim goes, nationalism cannot but be xenophobic, authoritarian, exclusivist and, where it has the opportunity, often expansionist as well.

Brian Barry, for example, who is both a tough-minded and close-reasoning left liberal, takes nationalism to be a doctrine which "claims that all people should give their highest loyalty to their nation" (Barry 1987, 353). Nationalists, he adds, take it that "in politics . . . the pursuit of national interest" should subordinate all other interests to its achievement. Where national interests dictate it, national interests should be pursued "at the expense of the interests of other countries and without regard to other values such as the avoidance of bloodshed, respect for international law, or the maintenance of international co-operation through bilateral or multilateral treaties" (Barry 1987, 353-54).

Surely some nationalisms have taken this fanatical, antidemocratic, and antiliberal form and surely *all* nationalisms, in seeking at least some measure of political autonomy (some form of self-governance), and not infrequently outright sovereignty, for their nations, have in all instances, and I believe rightly, sought to advance the "collective cultural and material interests of those united by common nationality" (Barry 1987, 353). But *pace* Barry nationalists need not *only* be concerned with those interests and they need not, and should not, be concerned to advance them at the expense of running roughshod over the interests or rights of others who are not a part of that common nationality (Barry 1987, 353). *Such* a nationalism is indeed incompatible with liberalism and a cosmopolitanism which affirms moral equality (i.e., that the life of everyone matters and matters equally) and the related belief that the interests of all human beings have in principle an equal claim on all of us. That is to say, *such* a nationalism is at odds with some beliefs and principles which are an essential part of any civilized moral outlook. Such an egalitarian person committed to a cosmopolitan outlook obviously cannot accept the belief that people should give their highest loyalty to their own nation or even that it will necessarily be the primary focus of their identity and loyalty. Commitment to a country or a nation cannot rightly override all other commitments. Such a nationalism is plainly regressive and retrograde.

Nonetheless, national identity is indeed a very important identity, an identity essential for very many people to give meaning to their lives, vital for their secure sense of self-respect, essential for their sense of belonging and security: all things of fundamental value to human beings. They are things that would be a central part of a good life for people in any society.¹ Still, however important, national identity does not exhaust their identity and it should not be their deepest

loyalty. Moreover, sometimes loyalty to one's country or state-aspiring nation is something which is very wrong indeed. It would have been a very good thing if far fewer Germans would have remained loyal to the Nazi regime. We should say this, and very firmly and unequivocally, while still admiring the very character trait of loyalty—but not loyalty above all—in Nazis or in anyone else. Loyalty itself is a good thing, but the forms it takes can have such evil consequences that it would be better, all things considered, that the person or persons in question not have it. The sources of formation and sustaining of identity are diverse and a human being's being loyal to her nation is one important loyalty among many loyalties. It is a loyalty that sometimes should be overridden without thereby disappearing, as promises sometimes should be broken even though a commitment remains to the practice of promise-keeping, thereby keeping the constitutive belief that to break a promise is always *prima facie* wrong. Moreover, that they are sometimes broken is no threat to the practice of promise-keeping. It might even strengthen it. Similar, though not identical, things should be said about loyalty.

Nationalisms are not always intolerant or even exclusionist. Will Kymlicka well remarks that "some nationalisms are peaceful, liberal, and democratic, while others are xenophobic, authoritarian, and expansionist" (Kymlicka 1995a, 132). Earlier in this century, nationalist movements in Norway and Iceland were peaceful and democratic and present-day nationalisms in Belgium, Scotland, Québec, and Wales are peaceful and democratic, fitting in well with a liberal conception of society. So it is (*pace* Shklar and Barry) not nationalism per se that is bad, but a certain illiberal type of nationalism and so, given the above examples, liberal nationalism is not an oxymoron (Tamir 1993).

II

This may be granted only to be followed by the characteristic response that good nationalisms are *civic* nationalisms while the bad nationalisms are *ethnic* nationalisms. Ethnic nationalisms, rooted in an ethnic conception of "the nation," define membership in the nation in terms of descent. In a country such as Germany, where the conception of the nation is ethnic, you are German and have German citizenship because of descent, because, that is, you can trace your descent to Germans. If you are a Turkish, Spanish, or Hungarian "guest worker" in Germany, you cannot acquire German citizenship no matter how well you know German, German history, or customs, no matter how attuned you are to German culture, how well you integrate yourself into German society, and no matter how long you have resided in Germany. A nationalism which emerged there without a change in the conception of the nation would be an ethnic nationalism. And it indeed is such an exclusionist nationalism which is bad.

Civic nationalism, by contrast, the story continues, rooted in a civic conception of nation, is a good or at least a benign or acceptable form of nationalism. Civic nations like the United States, Canada, Denmark, Australia, or Sweden are in principle open to anyone. They are not exclusionary. With a civic nationalism there is in principle at least an equal access for everyone to the cultural goods of and in the civic nation.

A small exercise in definition may help here. Ranging over nations that are civic, ethnic, or neither, I shall use "nation," as Kymlicka does, to mark "a historical community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory, or homeland, sharing a distinct language and culture" (Kymlicka 1995b, 11). "Nation," taken in such a sociological sense, is, as Kymlicka puts it, "closely related to the idea of a 'people' or a 'culture'—indeed these concepts are often defined in terms of each other" (Kymlicka 1995b, 11). This is not the only way that "nation" and the related terms can be and have been used. They plainly do not mark natural kinds. Some theoreticians, for example, and not without reason, speak of nonterritorial nations—nations in a diaspora; and there are still other uses. But Kymlicka's use is a familiar one which is reasonably determinate and useful and will catch, I believe, the phenomena relevant here. Moreover, even when in diaspora, as at one time Jews were, there was a conception of, and an aspiration for, a homeland. A nation, as I am using the term, must "be in aspiration (if not yet in fact) a political community" (David Miller 1995, 24). It must aspire to self-government, to *in someway* control "a chunk of the earth's surface" (Miller, 1995, 25). In that way a nation is very different from something which is merely an ethnic group.

In speaking of controlling a chunk of the earth's surface, I qualified it by saying "in someway." That qualification is essential, for a nation may not even in aspiration desire to be a state. The self-governance that some nations may have in mind is weaker than that. In any event statehood is impossible to achieve for all nations in our modern world, for there are more nations than there are, or even could be, states, where a state is taken in the familiar Weberian sense as an institution that successfully claims a monopoly of *de facto* legitimate force in a particular historical territory. But with the possible exceptions of Andorra, Liechtenstein, and Iceland, there are no longer, if there ever really were, any unination states (Levinson 1995, 630–32). All states of any size, and even most very small states, are multinational states. And *sometimes* these different nations in a single state share the same territory so that not all nations can reasonably aspire to be states. Think of conceptions of the Black nation within the United States or a Mohawk nation within Québec. But they can all aspire to be political communities where they have a sufficiently secure measure of self-governance to protect their public cultures. Sometimes—indeed I think typically—this requires a state, but sometimes it does not (Nielsen 1993, 29–43).

Finally, for a nation actually to exist that matches Kymlicka's characterization, there must be a mutual recognition of membership at least by its members (Miller 1995, 23). There must be a recognition that certain people are English, Irish, Finnish, and the like. In that important way nationality is not like a natural fact.

The above conceptualization of "nation" quite properly does not distinguish between an ethnic nation and a civic nation or derivatively between ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism, though it does distinguish an ethnic group from a nation, whether ethnic or civic. Immigrant groups are paradigmatically ethnic groups. They, unless they are for a considerable time repressed, do not aspire to a homeland or to a distinct political community. Members of what will become such groups immigrate to what is for them a new country where they realize that they will have to adapt to and in large measure adopt the public culture of that country. They are quite distinct from historical national minorities "whose historic homeland has been incorporated into a larger state, through colonisation, conquest or voluntary federation" (Kymlicka 1995a, 131).

Immigrant groups in societies into which they immigrate form ethnic groups as distinct from nations. By contrast to the people who form nations in a state, immigrants in some sense choose (though sometimes it is pretty close to a forced option) "to leave their original culture and homeland and move to a new country. They know that this uprooting will only be successful if they adapt to their new country, including its language and customs" (Kymlicka 1995a, 130). An ethnic group is distinguished from a nation, including an ethnic nation, by being a group with a common culture which does not seek to be a political community, does not seek self-governance, and certainly does not seek to constitute themselves into a state. There is no issue of secession with them. For them a crucial issue is how to integrate successfully into their adopted homeland while still preserving something of their ethnic identity.

However, an ethnic group may come to adopt a nationalist agenda, and typically an ethnic nationalist agenda, if it is prevented from integrating into the mainstream society either through mandatory segregation or severe and usually in part legal discrimination. It *may* even be the case that all nations were *originally* ethnic nations. But, however they were originally formed many of them are no longer ethnic nations and they do not now, whatever may have been true in the past, have an ethnic nationalist agenda. Their nationalism, if it exists, is not exclusionist. It is open to anyone, with a landed immigrant status within their territories, who wishes to come to have full citizenship and be part of that nation, to do so if they learn its language, history, and customs and are willing to abide by its laws.

As we have seen from our definition of "nation," it is given in *cultural* terms. A nation must have a pervasive public culture (a societal, encompassing, or

organizational culture, all qualifiers of “culture” adopted by various authors writing on nationalism). Without such a pervasive encompassing culture, something there in the public domain of a society, it would not be a nation.² Having such a culture is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for something being a nation.

Defenders of the claim that civic nationalism is the only acceptable nationalism try to deny that civic nationalism is also a cultural nationalism by claiming that a civic nationalism is a *purely political conception* reflecting not some distinct culture but only a common commitment, across cultures, to the political principles of democracy and freedom. But this is false. Indeed, worse than being merely false, it is a piece of deceptive ideology and may even be incoherent. To be a member of any nation at all, even in the most laissez faire liberal society, is to be accepted as being a part of a distinctive organizational culture in terms of which even this liberal individualistic nation is defined and which sets the parameters of national identity in the nation in question. It has, that is, a cultural component as much as the most traditional of ethnic nationalisms. To be an American, Australian, British, or a New Zealander, even though these societies are democratic and even if their economic policies and surrounding ideology are that of laissez faire individualism, it still is *not* necessary for a citizen of such countries to be committed to principles of freedom and democracy in order to retain their citizenship. Sometimes members of these nations—citizens of these states—become fascists or fundamentalists or in some other way reject democratic political principles. These might even just be things that they were socialized into as children. They do not, particularly if they are native-born citizens, thereby or even just in fact lose their citizenship and cease to be part of (for example) either the American or Australian nations. Particular political commitments, or even any political commitments at all, are neither necessary nor sufficient for citizenship. For the native-born, at least, their having citizenship has nothing to do with their political beliefs.³ Rather they automatically acquire citizenship by descent and at birth, and they cannot be stripped of it if they become committed to antidemocratic principles or practices. So nationality is not determined even in “civic nations” by a commitment to democracy and freedom. Even more broadly, it is not a matter of the political beliefs the citizens of these societies have. When Spain became fascist the Spaniards did not cease to be Spaniards. And their nationality did not change when Spain again became a liberal democracy. It remained constant through all the political turmoil and revolution.

Civic nationalism—the ideology surrounding it to the contrary notwithstanding—is not a “purely political nationalism” linked to a commitment to democracy and freedom. Who is a national and what is a nation even in societies taken to exemplify civic nationalism is not so determined. There is always a distinct

cultural component as well. Their nationality, as we have seen, is not determined by their commitment to democracy and freedom or by any other political belief or conception. A society could be both civic nationalist (*if* that is taken to be the opposite of ethnic nationalist) as well as a multiethnic society, while still being thoroughly antidemocratic. The people in Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, when under military dictatorships, had, as they have now, a strong sense of national identity that was then, and still is, nonethnic. Whites, Blacks, Asians, and Indians under the dictatorships, as before and after, all had at least formal equal citizenship. These societies were plainly not ethnic nationalisms, but there was very little that was democratic about them. In point of fact they were not liberal democracies or liberal societies, but oppressive dictatorships. Moreover, and distinctly, it is not (for example) sufficient for a Finn immigrating to Canada to gain citizenship to carry with her her democratic principles and practices. That will not make her a Canadian citizen. To become a Canadian citizen she must know or learn at least one of the two official languages, know something of the history of Canada, and something of its laws and customs. A purely civic nationalism is a myth. It exists nowhere and could exist nowhere, given the very definition of what a nation is. And even without that definition, the conception of a civic nation is too thin for a society to so determine nationality or to give its people a sense of national identity. There is always a richer cultural component.

It should be evident from what has been said above that it is also a mistake to equate cultural nationalism with ethnic nationalism. Ethnic nationalism, as all nationalisms, is cultural, but not all cultural nationalisms are ethnic. Cultural nationalism defines the nation in terms of a common encompassing culture. But that culture can be, and typically is in the West, a liberal democratic culture. The aim of a nationalist movement is to protect, and, beyond that, if it can, to insure the flourishing of the culture of the nation that that nationalist movement represents. Where the nation has a state, that state will in certain respects privilege that culture, though, if it is also a liberal democracy, it will only do so in ways that protect the rights of its minorities and indeed protect rights across the board. It will insist, at least in the general case, on educating children in the language of that culture and in its history and customs. And it will insist on the use of that language in the public domain. But it will not forbid in private domains the use of other languages or the adherence to other cultures. In the United States (Puerto Rico and Hawaii aside), English is the sole "official" language of the post office, the court house, and all other governmental institutions.⁴ But in the synagogue, Hebrew can be used, as Latin was used in the Catholic church until the church itself, without any governmental prodding, changed its own policy. In such places (and they are not all religious places) the members of such organizations can use the language of their choice. It is the mistake of equating "ethnic nationalism" with "cultural nationalism" that leads to the unfair and indeed

politically dangerous error of claiming, as Michael Ignatieff does in his *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*, that Québec and Flemish nationalisms are ethnic nationalisms. That is completely false. As Kymlicka accurately puts it, both “the Québécois and the Flemish accept immigrants as full members of the nation, so long as they learn the language and history of the society. They define membership in terms of participation in a common culture, open to all, rather than on ethnic grounds” (Kymlicka 1995a, 131).

III

What import, if any, does the above discussion of nationalism have for our thinking about what is to be done in Québec over issues concerning Québec sovereignty? It is easy, and I guess understandably so, for intellectuals to overestimate the import of more or less abstract arguments coming out in academic publications. Again and again intellectuals have been prone to such an overestimation. Still the considerations that have been advanced here might have a modest import. There is a widespread belief abroad both in and outside of Québec, mainly, but not exclusively, among anglophones and allophones, that Québec nationalism is an ethnic nationalism, and worse still, an ethnic nationalism of a backward and intolerant kind. The perception is that if such a nationalism prevails, it would destroy our liberal democratic society by stamping out the rights of anglophone and allophone Québécois. In some of the stronger reactions to the challenge of Québec sovereignty, Québec nationalism is seen as a backward-looking, Catholic-dominated, intolerant, almost fascist movement, isolationist and exclusivist, anti-Protestant and anti-Semitic, turning its back on the modern pluralist world and in the process thoroughly rejecting liberal values. Whatever may or may not have been true of the old Québec, nothing even remotely like this obtains today. Since the “Quiet Revolution,” Québec has been thoroughly transformed into a modern pluralist, largely secular liberal society.⁵ Indeed, it is arguably more secularized and more liberal in its outlook than the rest of North America, perhaps Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York City, Toronto, Boston, and some similar metropolises aside. But, be that as it may, surely modern Québec society is as liberal as any society in North America. Yet fuelled by some of the popular media—including Québec media, both anglophone and francophone (*The Gazette* and *La Presse*, for instance)—a not inconsiderable segment of the Canadian population both inside and outside of Québec have been bamboozled into almost a paranoid fear of ethnocentric, intolerant Québec “ethnic nationalism.” A reasonable knowledge of the facts about Québec francophones, the policies of the *Parti-Québécois*, and the attitudes of intellectuals and professionals in Québec would quickly and decisively dispel that. That there are a few loose cannons around who say extreme and

absurd things—things that get played up in the media—does not gainsay that. They have little support in the community and the problem of loose cannons is a problem for and in every society. There are even Swedish fascists. It does not at all show that Québécois are intolerant or that Québec nationalism is ethnocentric. Such a belief could not remain rational in the light of a reasonable knowledge of the facts.

If my arguments have been near to the mark, we can see that there is nothing inherently antidemocratic and fanatical about nationalism and indeed it can be quite compatible with liberalism (Tamir 1993). We have also seen that so-called civic nationalism is a nonstarter. In the first place there is not, and probably cannot be, such a thing as a pure civic nationalism. *All nationalisms are cultural nationalisms of one kind or another. There is no purely political conception of the nation, liberal or otherwise.* Furthermore, civic-cum-cultural nationalism, where civic nationalism is taken to be the opposite of ethnic nationalism, need not be democratic and liberal; it, as we have seen, can be, and has been, thoroughly antidemocratic while remaining multinational and nonethnic. Talk of civic nationalism had better be dropped from our political vocabulary (including the vocabulary of political theory), if we wish to be clear and coherent in our analyses in the real world. We should see that all nationalism is cultural nationalism. Sometimes it takes ethnic forms, sometimes it takes nonethnic but dictatorial forms (Brazilian, Chilean, and Argentinean nationalisms under their juntas) and sometimes it takes the form of liberal nationalisms, as was the case earlier in this century in Norway, Finland, and Iceland and as is the case now in Québec, Belgium, Wales, and Scotland. Not unsurprisingly, when a considerable segment of liberal democratic society goes nationalist, particularly if such a move is not then repressed, it usually goes and remains liberal nationalist. Germany during the Weimar Republic is the great exception. But there the circumstances were very unusual. There was the great depression, what was taken by Germans to be a humiliating and incomprehensible defeat in the First World War, and the bourgeoisie were terrified by what they took to be the Red Menace. The struggle, to return to normal cases in liberal democracies, may be, indeed typically will be, a hard one, but it will be fought out on a democratic terrain with civil liberties firmly adhered to. Québec nationalists are committed to the protection of civil liberties in their society and this, plainly, includes the language rights of the historic anglophone minority as well as, across the board, their rights and the rights of immigrants and of the peoples of the first nations. The policy of the *Parti-Québécois* is to protect the rights of anglophones to an English-language education, to service in English in hospitals and various governmental agencies and to the use of English, as well as French, in the National Assembly. This is more generous, more widespread, and more of a sociological reality in Québec than is the respect for parallel rights of francophones in the rest

CULTURAL NATIONALISM

of Canada. None of this well-entrenched structure of rights and customs is threatened by Québec nationalism, nor are any of the other elements of a liberal democratic society. Nationalism and liberalism can, and do, go comfortably hand in hand.

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NOTES

- 1 This view has been powerfully challenged by Jeremy Waldron and in a somewhat different way by C. Kakathar and in turn plausibly defended by Will Kymlicka and David Miller. Waldron argues that in the modern world we are getting more and more happy and successful cosmopolitan people who move back and forth between cultures, taking a little bit from here and a little bit from there, without any need for rootedness in a particular culture or for having a sense of national identity. Kymlicka and Miller argue that Waldron seriously overstates his case and that the empirical evidence for the need for roots is strong and, like Herder before them, they also argue that local identities and cosmopolitan ideals need not at all conflict. After all, Herder did not negate the Enlightenment, but provided it with a needed corrective. Still there is a lot more that needs to be said about this. I hope to turn to it on some other occasion (Waldron 1992), (Kakathar 1992), (Kymlicka 1995b, 85-89) and (Miller 1995, 146-147).
- 2 In defining or analyzing "nation" or indeed almost anything else we should not look for necessary and sufficient conditions because that is exactly what we are not going to get. Historically, within analytic philosophy the viability of what is called truth conditional analysis was, until quite recently, generally uncritically accepted. It was believed that a concept has not been properly analyzed until we have been provided with a statement of logically necessary and sufficient conditions for the exemplification of the concept in question. Even a superficial examination of the history of such attempts reveals the truth of John Pollock's claim that for any philosophically interesting concept "truth condition analyses are just not there to be found" (Pollock 1986, 508). The fact is that, in domain after domain, such attempts to analyze have failed. Think, for example, of the persistent, resolute, and often resourceful, but still failed, attempts to find suitable replacements for the intuitively plausible, but still demonstratively mistaken, analyses of knowledge as justified true belief. Repeatedly, truth conditional analyses in a whole range of very different domains have collapsed under pressure of counterexamples (what in other disciplines would be called disconfirming evidence). Persistent, and often acutely intelligent, efforts were made to provide such analyses, but slowly Wittgenstein's point sank in that the idea prevalent in philosophical logic that concepts are individuated by their truth conditions was just an unjustifiable dogma.
- 3 The need to qualify what I say to native-born citizens is *not* something to be welcomed. That in our liberal democracies naturalized citizens have had their citizenship revoked because their political views were not approved of by their government is not something of which a democracy can be proud. It, among other ills it creates, creates first-class citizenship and second-class citizenship.
- 4 This is so, even though the United States, unlike Canada, has no juridically official language.
- 5 The Quiet Revolution refers to the change in Québec society in the last thirty years from an almost feudal hierarchical society to a modern liberal society. Québec became a society where (though within a liberal framework) French culture is predominant and where modernization has

taken place, bringing with it a world where French Québeckers are no longer dominated by either the English minority or by the Catholic church.

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