

# The Limits of National Partiality

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One million Arabs are not worth a Jewish fingernail.

—Rabbi Yaacov Perin, quoted in the *New York Times*, February 28, 1994

## Partiality and Impartiality

### *Nations and Nationalism*

Nations are human groups distinguished by both objective and subjective criteria. The objective relations that may bind the members of a nation together include a history of mutual association and common occupancy of the same territory, common ethnic origins, use of the same language, shared religious beliefs, a common commitment to certain political institutions, a common culture involving shared values and customs, and so on. Although most nations are united in several of these ways, no single objective commonality or any particular combination of these commonalities is necessary for the existence of a nation.<sup>1</sup> At the subjective level, most adult members of a nation must share a sense that together they constitute a distinct group and that belonging to this group is a constitutive element of each member's individual identity. They must, in other words, recognize one another as sharing a collective identity.<sup>2</sup>

Because some of these criteria admit of degrees or invoke concepts that are vague (for example, culture) and because many of the criteria are also characteris-

tic of other collective entities (such as clans, tribes, ethnic groups, and certain political associations), it is not surprising that there are frequent disputes about whether certain groups are actually nations. Some observers, for example, hold that the population of the United States has all the hallmarks of nationality, including a distinctive historical culture; others accept that it is a nation but one that embraces many cultures; while still others hold that the United States is a multinational state.<sup>3</sup>

“Nationalism” refers to a cluster of beliefs about the normative significance of nations and nationality. Those who are called nationalists typically hold, *inter alia*, that the continued existence and flourishing of their own nation is a fundamental good, that the members of the nation ought to control their own collective affairs, and that membership in the nation makes it not only permissible but in many instances morally required to manifest loyalty and partiality to fellow members. Some nationalists are “radically particularist”; they restrict the scope of these beliefs to their own nation, which they may regard as uniquely worthy of partisan sentiment and devotion. Other nations, they may believe, suffer from a variety of defects, among which is a tendency to entertain delusions as to their own merits. But not all particularist nationalists disparage the nationalism of other nations. There are some whose particularism is theoretically motivated. A morality, according to their view, is a communal product whose range of application is properly restricted to the community in which it evolved. One’s own morality, therefore, should neither condemn nor endorse the nationalism of others. Whether others ought to be nationalists depends on the deliverances of their particular morality.<sup>4</sup>

Other nationalists hold that, with perhaps a few exceptions, all people are morally entitled to value their own nation, to seek to ensure its self-determining character, and to show partiality to its members. These “universalist nationalists” are typically, as individuals, highly partial to their own nation. They are, one might say, “partisan universalists.” There are, however, universalist nationalists who lack strong national attachments themselves yet endorse the nationalism of those they regard as fortunate enough to have them. My concern in this essay is primarily with universalist nationalism in general, whether partisan or detached.

Some theorists have claimed that nationalism insists that “the political and the national unit should be congruent.”<sup>5</sup> But there are two ways to make national and political units coincide. One is to redraw the boundaries of existing political units so that they conform as closely as possible to the geographical contours of nations. The other is to preserve existing political configurations while seeking to forge the populations of states into nations—what is sometimes referred to as “nation building.” Since the latter may require breaking down national identities whenever two or more nations are encompassed within a single state, it is anathema to nationalists. Thus insofar as nationalists believe that nations and states should coincide, their view must be that states should be molded to fit nations rather than na-

tions to fit states. Even this, however, is not a defining feature of nationalism. While it does seem that nationalists necessarily favor some form of political self-determination for their own nation (and, if they are universalists, for other nations as well), they do not have to believe that self-determination requires sovereign statehood. Thus many nationalists in Quebec, Scotland, and elsewhere repudiate secessionist aspirations; some, indeed, embrace the anarchist doctrine that no state can be legitimate and thus none should exist.

The defining characteristic of nationalism that will be the focus of this inquiry is its insistence that members of the same nation—*conationals*—are in many contexts permitted or even required to be partial to one another—that is, that they generally may and often must give some degree of priority to one another's interests over those of foreigners or nonmembers. This commitment to partiality within the nation appears to render nationalism incompatible with the guiding principle of liberalism that all persons are of equal worth and as such are entitled to equal concern and respect.<sup>6</sup> It is, indeed, an axiom of modern moral thought that "no one is more important than anyone else. . . . [E]veryone counts the same. For a given quantity of whatever it is that's good or bad—suffering or happiness or fulfillment or frustration—its intrinsic impersonal value doesn't depend on whose it is."<sup>7</sup> But to give priority to conationals is to show greater concern and respect for them than for others; it is to count one's conationals more than others.

The conflict here is not quite as stark as it may initially seem. The claim that partiality may be permitted or required among conationals does not necessarily deny that people have equal worth; it may instead deny that an individual's worth is the sole determinant of how he or she ought to be treated. It is possible to acknowledge that all persons have equal worth, and thus matter equally *sub specie aeternitatis*, while also holding that a person's moral status *vis-à-vis* a particular moral agent may depend not just on the intrinsic properties that determine this person's objective moral worth but also on the ways in which he or she is related to the agent. What the nationalist claims is that we are not all morally equidistant from one another—that a special relation between two people may give each a special moral reason to favor the other that neither has with respect to others outside the relation. These reasons are "agent-relative," specific to those who share a certain relation rather than universal. They do not imply that anyone is owed partiality by virtue of an objectively superior moral worth.

Still, nationalism does insist that conationals should have greater concern for one another than for others and should, other things being equal, give priority to one another's interests over the interests of others. And this is at least *prima facie* incompatible with the idea that all persons are entitled to equal concern and respect or that no one's interests count more than the equivalent interests of another.

Various responses to this conflict compete for our allegiance. Two are radically particularist. One holds that national partiality is justified, though only in *our* case. Although we may give priority—perhaps even absolute priority—to our

own conationals, others lack a similar justification. Their duty is to submit to us. This view is not worth discussing. Nor will I discuss the somewhat more tenable view that there is no general answer to the question whether (or how much) national partiality is justified since different answers are given by different and equally valid local moralities. According to this view, whatever the local morality determines to be the appropriate degree of partiality within the community is authoritative for the members of the community. There is no neutral, external standpoint from which the local morality's determinations can be challenged or overruled.

I am interested in what can be said about the legitimacy of partiality at the universal level. I will simply assume that if any form of nationalism is defensible, it will be of the universalist variety. There are, of course, universalist responses to the conflict between equality and partiality that are also implausibly extreme. It might be held, for example, that all people should give absolute priority to their own conationals, that there are no constraints on what may be done to others in advancing the interests of one's own nation. Or, at the other extreme, it might be held that no degree of partiality can ever be directly justified, that no departure from equal concern and respect can be justified by appeal to the intrinsic significance of special relations. This latter view is, indeed, fairly widely held among philosophers, if not among people generally; I will return to it presently.

Here, as elsewhere, however, I believe that common sense should not be lightly dismissed. What most of us in fact believe is that there are at least two distinct sources of moral reasons, neither reducible to the other. First, an impartial core to morality imposes duties on all of us to respect the worth of others irrespective of whether or how we are related to them. But, second, the basic duties that we owe to one another may be supplemented by special moral reasons that arise from our relations with one another. The reasons deriving from these different sources compete for our attention, time, and resources.<sup>8</sup> It is therefore one of the central tasks of moral and political philosophy to seek a coherent, determinate, and stable reconciliation of the competing demands that issue from these divergent sources.<sup>9</sup> It is important to determine, in particular, what sorts of relation are capable of legitimizing partiality as well as how extensive the justified departures from strict impartiality are.

### *The Spectrum of Special Relations*

The sentiment of partiality toward particular individuals is elicited by a variety of relations that one may bear to those individuals. One may be partial to members of one's family, friends, acquaintances, coworkers, coreligionists, members of one's local community, citizens of one's state, members of one's race, or even the members of one's species. In some instances—for example, friendship—the sentiment of partiality is partly constitutive of the nature of the relation. But

manifestations of these various forms of partiality are not all equally defensible. Partiality within the family is almost universally recognized as paradigmatically legitimate. Parents are not only permitted to give a certain priority to the interests of their own children but also morally required to do so in a wide variety of circumstances. At the other end of the spectrum, partiality toward members of one's own race is widely condemned as a paradigmatically arbitrary, illegitimate, and pernicious form of discrimination. (Solidarity among the members of races that are the victims of discrimination or oppression is an exception. I will later suggest that there is a special reason why partiality seems legitimate in these cases.)

Where does partiality within the nation lie along the spectrum from familial to racial partiality? Is conationality a legitimate or illegitimate basis for partiality? Intuitively, nationalism is an intermediate case. It is a phenomenon about which many are profoundly ambivalent. We tend to judge it by its effects, which are mixed. On the positive side, nationalism summons forth many virtues: loyalty, commitment, and self-sacrifice. Those who share the bonds of nationality enjoy the security of belonging as well as the self-esteem that is the paradoxical concomitant of self-transcendence; and when the nationalist ideal of self-determination is achieved, members of the nation typically find a measure of dignity and autonomy that they are denied by even the most benign paternalism that fails fully to share and therefore to understand or respect their culture. But to understand the moral ambiguity of nationalism one must also note its darker side, and each positive feature casts a deep shadow. The nationalist virtues are inherently truncated: it is betrayal to exercise them equally on behalf of outsiders. The comfortable sense of identity and belonging is obtained at the expense of those who are necessarily excluded. And even national pride and self-esteem may depend on a judgment, implicit or explicit, of the lesser worth of outsiders. Viewed thus, the pursuit of national self-determination may seem less an assertion of human dignity than a meretricious expression of atavistic tribal impulses that threaten endless political fragmentation and conflict. We therefore find it heartening when barriers between nations give way to recognition, cooperation, and integration—as seemed, until recently, to be happening in much of Europe. For, in general, it is better that people concentrate their attention on what they have in common than on what divides them. (The exception is when another group is united around an identity or project that is evil; then a public assertion of difference may be necessary.) While it is true, of course, that nationalism, also, encourages the members of a nation to focus on their commonalities rather than their differences, nationalism seeks a heightened unity within the nation by stressing the otherness of those without. It unites some by dividing them from others.

A common defense of nationalism consists in comparing nations to families, thereby assimilating national partiality to the paradigm of partiality within the family. Opponents of nationalism have followed a parallel strategy by highlighting the similarity between nationalism and racism. But nationalism is not closely anal-

ogous to either. Indeed, all the various special relations that have been thought to justify departures from impartiality—love, friendship, parenthood, conationality, citizenship, and so on—seem *sui generis*; none is relevantly quite like any other. Each has to be understood on its own terms, though our understanding of one may be enhanced by comparing or contrasting it with another whose moral nature is intuitively clearer.

### The Justification of Partiality

Before we can assess any relation as a foundation for partiality, we must understand the different forms that the justification for partiality may take. Different relations may justify partiality for different reasons. In some cases, several distinct justifications may coalesce around a single relation.

#### *The Personal Point of View*

One defense of partiality appeals to our nature as persons. We are not disinterested and impartial spectators; each of us has a distinct identity, is variously related to some individuals and not to others, and views the world from a unique perspective that naturally generates a pattern of concern and valuation that is inherently partial. Since morality must respect and reflect our nature as persons, it must acknowledge that each person has reasons for action that are generated by or within his or her own personal point of view. The personal point of view is thus an autonomous and authoritative source of moral reasons, though most theorists concede that it is not the only such source. According to one prominent theory, while our fundamental moral reasons are independent of the personal point of view, morality nevertheless accommodates the personal point of view by permitting each person to give somewhat greater weight to those things that specially matter from his or her own point of view than they would be assigned from the impartial point of view.<sup>10</sup>

This is an important view, about which it is impossible to say anything decisive in the short space of an essay. But there are reasons for skepticism about its ability to justify national partiality. It seems, for example, to make the permissibility of partiality toward a person depend upon subjective factors, such as whether one specially cares or is concerned about that person. But while this may be the principal basis for partiality in the case of certain comparatively rare personal relations, it is at most an ancillary factor in the case of most special relations. It is, for example, not because a mother specially cares about her son that she is justified in giving him priority over others; rather, it is the objective nature of the relation she bears to him that both warrants her special concern and grounds the special reasons she has to favor him. If merely caring more about some person were a suffi-

cient reason for giving that person priority, then racist and other pernicious forms of partiality could be readily defended.

It is possible, of course, that reasons deriving from the personal point of view do not always have their origin in purely subjective considerations. The personal point of view might, for example, encompass a person's objective interests, so that one would have reasons stemming from one's personal point of view to pursue these interests irrespective of whether one cares about them.<sup>11</sup> But even if this is right, it does not offer the right sort of defense for many forms of partiality. While it is true that being engaged in certain special relations may contribute to one's objective good, one's reasons for being partial to those to whom one is so related are not typically reducible to reasons of self-interest. Parents, for example, normally benefit from the relation they bear to their children, but their interest in preserving the relation is at most a marginal element in the justification of parental partiality. A parent's reasons to devote special care to his or her child have a different source from that parent's reasons to protect or promote his or her own interests.

The idea that one's reasons for partiality toward those to whom one is specially related derive from the personal point of view is difficult to reconcile with the idea that there are special *duties* regarding those to whom one is specially related. That there are duties of this sort is an axiom of common sense as well as an integral component of nationalism, which insists that there are duties of loyalty and partiality to one's nation and conationals. But it is difficult to see how these duties could have their source in the personal point of view, irrespective of whether the latter is explicated in wholly subjective terms or whether it also incorporates objective interests. Duty is not contingent on inclination or subjective concern. The presence or absence of parental concern has no bearing on whether a parent has special duties to his or her child. Nor is self-interest commonly supposed to generate duties to oneself, though even if it did, those duties would be a poor counterfeit for genuine associative duties. The duties that arise from special relations are owed to those to whom one is specially related. These people are more than merely the incidental beneficiaries of duties owed to oneself.

The general problem with the appeal to the personal point of view is that one's moral reasons for showing partiality to those to whom one is specially related do not, in fact, emanate from oneself or one's own personal point of view. How things appear to one is largely irrelevant to whether one may or must show partiality to certain people. One's reasons derive instead from one's relations with these people—relations that are objective features of the world and in principle recognizable from any point of view. This does, of course, mean that the source of these special moral reasons is personal to the individual: the relation is something that ought to matter, and typically does matter, to that person but matters less, if at all, to others. But that is not to say that these reasons are the *products* of the individual's personal point of view. To say that is to confuse the fact that the *content* of the reasons is specific to the person with the idea that the person is the *fons et origo* of

these reasons or that the reasons derive their normative authority from the prominence they assume when viewed from that person's point of view. To assess whether it is legitimate for one person to show partiality to another, it is more important to understand the objective moral significance of the relations that obtain between them than to know what the one person's perceptions, sentiments, or interests are.

### *Instrumental Considerations*

Special relations may be morally significant in various ways. Many special relations are, for example, instrumental to or even partially constitutive of human well-being. This is most obvious in the case of relations involving love. A life devoid of either the bestowal or the receipt of love would be incalculably impoverished. But love is discriminating or selective and involves a powerful disposition to favor those who are its objects; it is therefore necessarily partial. This form of partiality must be permitted, since it is an ineliminable concomitant of a relation that is necessary for human flourishing.

Against this, some have claimed that one should love impartially by loving everyone equally. But this is a psychological and perhaps conceptual impossibility. The empathetic bond established by love imposes a limit to one's capacity to endure the emotional strains of loving. No one could bear for long the death of a loved one each day. More important, a set of dispositions that could be evoked by anyone, whatever his or her personal characteristics, would have to be wholly undiscriminating and largely uncharged by emotion. Perhaps *agape* could be like this, or *caritas*, compassion, or even respect. But nothing that anemic could be so critical to individual well-being. We need not only to love selectively but also to be loved with a degree of exclusivity, in a way that distinguishes us as special. We need more than to be faintly illuminated by the diffuse light of a universal affection or to be ministered to by the cold hand of impartial benevolence. Thus even those who now suffer most from lack of love would surely prefer a world in which each person is specially loved by a few to a world in which each is cared about equally and impartially by everyone else. George Orwell was right when he observed that "love means nothing if it does not mean loving some people more than others"—and, one might add, loving some not at all.<sup>12</sup>

This defense of the partiality attendant upon love assumes that the moral significance of love is instrumental. This is not to say that love is merely a *means*, since it is as much an ingredient as a causal condition of well-being. But the significance of love, according to this view, lies in the contribution that it makes to something else—namely, individual well-being.

Moral theories that insist on impartiality must take into account that many relations, like those based on love, have instrumental significance. Unless these theories treat impartiality as an end in itself, they must accept that it is often best,



from the impartial point of view, to encourage participation in special relations that require partiality. Rule Consequentialism, for example, may approve rules that enjoin the formation of friendships and require loyalty and fidelity to one's friends. Similarly, other theories require that we cultivate certain dispositions and traits of character that will cause us to favor some people over others if our having those characteristics will, over time, have consequences that are best from the impartial point of view.<sup>13</sup>

Dispositions that it is overall and impartially best for one to have will sometimes cause one to do what, in the circumstances, is worse from an impartial point of view—for example, succoring one's ailing spouse rather than working overtime in order to make a larger contribution to Oxfam. Some impartial theories imply that being guided by one's disposition in these circumstances is wrong, though this is an acceptable price to pay for having the disposition.<sup>14</sup> In this respect, these theories clearly diverge from commonsense morality. But this is also true, though to a lesser degree, of those impartial theories that accept that it cannot be wrong to be compelled to act by dispositions that it is overall and impartially best for one to have. For given the vast inequalities between rich and poor in the contemporary world, the dispositions that it would be best in impartial terms for those in affluent countries to have are not those that are presently approved by commonsense morality. It would clearly be better, from the impartial point of view, for those in affluent societies to be less strongly disposed to care for family and friends and correspondingly more strongly disposed to make sacrifices to benefit the poor in other countries. Doubtless this would significantly impoverish our lives, but our losses would be amply counterbalanced by the gains to the poor.

Even if the rules or dispositions enjoined by the variants of Indirect Consequentialism were to coincide with those approved by commonsense morality, the convergence would be contingent and the theories would require the right acts for the wrong reasons. The suggestion that parents ought to cultivate strong dispositions to favor their own children because this arrangement is more conducive to the general happiness than the alternatives is a grotesque caricature of the sources of parental obligation.

The same objections apply to another common argument for the view that it is best in impartial terms for people to form strong personal attachments and to devote special care and concern to those to whom they are closely related. According to this argument, the most efficient way to ensure that people receive the care they need is to assign each person special responsibility for those to whom he or she is specially related. Although it has been repeatedly echoed in the recent literature, the classic statement of this argument appears in William Paley's *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, which contends that "the good order and happiness of the world are better upholden whilst each man applies himself to his own concerns and the care of his own family . . . than if every man, from an excess of mistaken generosity, should leave his own business, to undertake his

neighbour's, which he must always manage with less knowledge, expediency, and success."<sup>15</sup>

It is of course true that, in general, one is better situated than most others to promote the well-being of those to whom one is specially related, for typically one has a superior understanding of the nature of their interests, one is naturally motivated by ties of affection to enhance their well-being, and one's physical proximity gives one the capacity to assist in ways that those who live elsewhere cannot. But the affluent in the contemporary world are again an exception. The affluent are in a better position to care for the needs of millions of impoverished people in other countries than are those people's families, friends, or conationals. They know that what the impoverished most need is food and medicine, and they have the ability to fulfill these needs via such organizations as Oxfam. At least in the case of the affluent, therefore, the impartial perspective requires a distribution of responsibility that is radically different from that demanded by commonsense morality; they must divide their care and concern, and more particularly their resources, more evenly between those to whom they are specially related and those who are utter strangers.

One could dispute the details. But again the more important point is that this account fails altogether to capture our understanding of the moral significance of special relations. Could any parents really suppose that it is simply a matter of administrative efficiency that they have special responsibilities to their own children and that they would be relieved of those responsibilities were there an alternative distribution of duties that would be better for children generally, even if it would be worse for their own?

To deny that instrumental considerations are the essence of the morality of special relations is not to say that they have no moral significance. In many instances it may be part of the moral case for permitting partiality within special relations that these relations are important in various ways to human flourishing. In some instances this may indeed be the sole reason. But in general instrumental considerations are only a small, though conspicuous, part of the story.

### *Formal and Substantive Impartiality*

Many writers have thought it possible to reconcile the demands of impartiality with the permissibility of partiality by distinguishing two levels at which partiality and impartiality may operate. Impartiality, they say, is required by respect for the moral equality of persons. But equality is sufficiently recognized if impartiality functions at the *formal* level by governing the evaluation, formulation, selection, or defense of moral principles. This means, as Thomas E. Hill, Jr., puts it, that moral principles must be assessed "from a point of view that requires temporary detachment from the particular desires and aversions, loves and hates,

that one happens to have; . . . principles must be defensible to anyone looking at the matter apart from his or her special attachments.”<sup>16</sup> But this formal impartiality, as Hill stresses, does not entail a requirement of impartiality at the *substantive* level—that is, the level at which principles are implemented in action.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the principles arrived at within the constraints of formal impartiality do not necessarily rule out substantive partiality—that is, giving priority to some people over others, for example, because of the relation they bear to oneself.

While this seems true, it is not helpful in assessing the challenge to nationalism, which comes not from the requirement of formal impartiality but from the demand for substantive impartiality. Universalist nationalism seems compatible with the requirement of formal impartiality. The principle that each person should be loyal and partial to his or her own nation does not appear to be biased in favor of any individual or group. But no form of nationalism seems compatible with substantive impartiality, which forbids giving preference or priority to one person over another for reasons that are private or peculiar to oneself or one’s group. And substantive impartiality, it may be argued, is required by the principle of equal concern and respect. For if all people have a right to equal respect, then even from the standpoint of the individual agent, no one must count more than another.

The important question, then, is whether strict impartiality is required at the substantive level. If so, can some attenuated form of nationalism be defended on purely instrumental grounds? If strict impartiality is not required, what forms and degrees of partiality are permitted or required? In particular, is conationality a legitimate basis for partiality, and if so, what degree of priority is it acceptable to give to conationals over others? It does not help, in answering these questions, to insist on formal impartiality. A great many methods of generating or defending moral principles, including numerous varieties of contractarianism, are compatible with formal impartiality. Some of these may yield principles requiring substantive impartiality, while others will surely grant that varying forms and degrees of partiality are defensible.

Yet none of these methods, I believe, can generate a detailed account of the conditions in which substantive impartiality is required, or of the forms and degrees of partiality that are either permitted or required, without considerable substantive moral argumentation. Thus, for example, Brian Barry’s favored form of contractarian methodology bids us ask: “What would rules and principles capable of attracting general agreement require in the way of impartial behaviour”—or permit or require in the way of partial behavior?<sup>18</sup> But the agreement sought is *reasonable* agreement—that is, agreement whose terms no one could reasonably reject. And I see no way of determining what people could reasonably agree to on these matters that would not require an independent and probing exploration of the morality of special relations. This essay is intended as a modest contribution to that necessary inquiry.

*The Intrinsic Significance of Special Relations*

I have acknowledged that many special relations have a profound instrumental significance. Nothing could be more obvious than that our relations with one another, and particularly our close personal relations, are vital and indispensable elements of our happiness and well-being. In many cases, however, the moral significance of special relations is not exhausted by the valuable contributions they make to our lives. It seems, rather, that the territory marked out by certain relations between people constitutes an autonomous area within the domain of morality, so that the existence of these relations and the forms of behavior that are appropriate within them do not require justification in terms of anything else. It is part of the meaning or significance of these relations that they legitimize certain forms of partiality. The relations themselves are fundamental or foundational sources of moral reasons, including permissions and requirements. These reasons coexist and in some instances compete with reasons that arise in response to people's intrinsic or nonrelational properties.

The radical particularist gives one account of the reasons stemming from special relations: a morality just *is* a set of norms that evolve within and govern the various fundamental human relations. But many relations, I believe, have a universal moral significance, though of course they may take somewhat different forms in different settings, with each variant absorbing some of its moral flavor from the surrounding culture. Mutual love, for example, demands partiality wherever it occurs—which is to say, virtually everywhere. A relation that did not, given opportunities, both call forth and require partial behavior on at least some occasions would not be love at all. And while loving relations are among the essential ingredients of a good human life, the primary justification for love and its associated partiality is not instrumental. Morality urges us to foster loving relations and to care specially for those we love not just because this is good for both us and them, making all our lives richer and deeper, but because this is the *right* way to live. Loving relations are not just essential to the good life but are also partly constitutive of the *moral* life. Within certain constraints that morality also imposes, expressions of love and special caring represent fundamental virtues whose justifiability does not depend on the contribution they make to any other good.

The relation that a parent bears to his or her child is similarly of intrinsic moral significance. This is not to say, however, that parental duties are morally primitive or unanalyzable. There seem, rather, to be multiple sources of parental duties: for example, the genetic or biological connection between parent and child, the voluntary assumption of responsibility (as in the case of adoption), responsibility for the child's need for aid arising from the act of having caused the child to exist, and so on. The list is undoubtedly incomplete (though what else it might contain is surprisingly obscure, for the foundations of parental obligation have not been carefully investigated and are not well understood). The important point for our

purposes is that none of these possible bases for parental duties is instrumental in character. Purely instrumental considerations—for example, that the natural affection of parents for their children tends to make parents more competent caregivers for their own children than others—cannot, as we have noted, provide an adequate account of the grounds of parental duties.

We should recall, however, the multiplicity of human relations, some of which appear to legitimize partiality while others do not. Can we identify the features that tend to give certain relations their intrinsic significance? Are there any features that the various significant relations have in common? I will begin to explore these questions below, focusing particularly on the question whether conationality is a relation that has intrinsic moral significance. Before that, however, I will consider some arguments for nationalism that appeal to the instrumental significance of conationality. Even if there is much more to certain relations than their positive instrumental significance, the contribution they may make to certain goods, such as individual well-being, may alone be sufficient to justify our engaging in them and practicing the forms of partiality they require. This might be true of nationalism, independently of whether conationality itself has intrinsic moral significance.

### The Instrumental Case for Nationalism

The literature is replete with claims about the importance that membership in a national community and participation in its culture have in the lives of individuals. It is argued, for example, that particular cultures provide “horizons of significance,” background standards of value by reference to which individuals are able to assess their options and choices.<sup>19</sup> National identification and solidarity are also held to be necessary in large and otherwise impersonal modern societies in order to motivate the forms of cooperation and self-sacrifice that are needed to ensure a decent material standard of living.<sup>20</sup> Finally, and most important, various claims have been made about the psychological significance of national affiliation.<sup>21</sup> We all seek some measure of self-transcendence, an enlargement of the self beyond its narrow boundaries, an escape from the isolation and insignificance of singularity. Group membership offers an accessible mode of self-transcendence, and the nation, for reasons that remain somewhat obscure, offers a particularly compelling focus for collective identification. In the modern world, the nation has superseded the family and the religious community as the primary locus of collective self-identification and has become a fecund source of self-esteem. By investing our egos in it, we ensure that its triumphs become our own; by making its goals our own, we partake in its greater permanence; it becomes a continuer of the self, bestowing vicarious survival. It provides a sense of belonging, security, strength, and stability. (In the case of many people, nationalist sentiments may indeed be

sublimated religious impulses. For these people, the nation—being transcendent, superpersonal, permanent, protective, authoritative, and so on—functions as an effective substitute for a deity.)

These and other claims about the value that national affiliation has within the lives of individuals form the basis of an argument that parallels that given above for the partiality that goes with love. The second step in this argument is to note that, like love, participation in national life necessarily involves partiality. Social psychologists have long known that people naturally tend to favor fellow members of any groups to which they belong, however arbitrarily those groups may be distinguished from others.<sup>22</sup> And the impulse to partiality is that much stronger in national communities, whose members tend to share certain values and to be engaged in the pursuit of common goals. Therefore, we may conclude that national partiality must be accepted as an unavoidable aspect of arrangements that are necessary for the good human life.

Matters are, however, more complicated than this. We may grant that national affiliation and partiality contribute much of value to the lives of individuals. But their darker side—the exclusivity, chauvinism, and hostility to outsiders—must also be taken into account. And even if the good features do outweigh the bad, that alone is insufficient to establish an instrumental justification for nationalism if there are alternative forms of collective identification that would fulfill the same needs that national membership does but without some of nationalism's more disturbing features. (If, moreover, it is assumed that conationality has no intrinsic moral significance, so that the instrumental argument must stand on its own, then the net benefit that people derive from national attachments must be sufficiently great to override the objection that it is unjust to discriminate among people on the basis of relations that lack intrinsic significance.)

Some, of course, have argued that the cosmopolitan ideal of identification with humanity as a whole—of being, as Diogenes put it, “a citizen of the world”—can offer much the same range of benefits that identification with one's nation provides. But this is improbable. Given that people have always tended to bond together in bounded communities, there are doubtless evolutionary mechanisms that make an eradication of particularist identities unfeasible. Moreover, the sense of identity and belonging that accompanies membership in a nation may crucially depend on the contrast between one's own nation and others. Without others to serve as foils, there would be nothing distinctive about one's own nation and thus no basis for identification. Similarly, the enhanced self-esteem that accompanies the enlargement of one's ego through identification with the nation may require an implied comparison with other nations, a sense that one's own nation is superior, at least in certain respects, to others.

But nationalism and cosmopolitanism are not exhaustive of the possibilities. There is no necessity to choose between, for example, being simply a Serb and being a citizen of the world. While it is impossible to avoid being to some extent a

child of one's culture, it is also the mark of a drone to accept with docility or without reflection a ready-made, mass-manufactured, one-dimensional conception of oneself as a Serb, Hutu, Chechen, or whatever. This is the stuff of which impoverished lives are made. Thus Schopenhauer noted that "the cheapest form of pride is national pride; for the man affected therewith betrays a want of *individual* qualities of which he might be proud, since he would not otherwise resort to that which he shares with so many millions."<sup>23</sup> To acquiesce in a vision of oneself in which nationality overshadows the other variegated dimensions of one's life, character, and relations with others is to suffer a miserable reduction of the richness of one's identity. Other elements of one's actual identity, as well as further possibilities for self-creation, get crowded out of one's self-conception and may, from inattention and neglect, eventually fade from one's identity altogether.

It is not only the distinctive individual qualities of which Schopenhauer wrote that may be displaced from one's conception of oneself by a hypertrophied, metastasizing national identity; other forms of group identification may be withered as well. In most cases, there are numerous social and political dimensions to a person's identity; we are all mongrel to a greater or lesser degree.<sup>24</sup> One may be, for example, a pacifist, a philosopher, a socialist, a southerner, a vegetarian, a ruralist, a belletrist, a squash player, or all of these at once. Membership in and identification with a range of groups may enrich one's life, extend one's sympathies and bonds with others, and thereby lessen the potential for incomprehension and conflict with others. Both prudence and an impartial concern with consequences therefore suggest that it is desirable for people to cultivate complex, multilayered individual identities, built around distinctive individual qualities *and* multifarious group identifications.

Let us call this model of self-identification "complex identification" and contrast it with "national identification," in which nationality has a commanding role in shaping a person's identity. Complex identification does not, of course, exclude nationality as an element of individual identity; it merely denies nationality the preeminent importance assigned to it by the nationalist. (As Walzer has observed, one may naturally shift back and forth between national identification and a more complex identification, depending upon, *inter alia*, whether one feels threatened or secure.)<sup>25</sup> The possibility of complex identification suggests that national identification is not necessary for the goods that it often provides: a cultural context, the security of belonging, self-esteem, social solidarity, and so on. These goods seem compatible with complex identification. Culture, for example, need not be monolithic. One may participate in and draw sustenance from a variety of overlapping cultures. And nations are only one source of culture. Many subnational cultures can exist within a single nation, whose unity may be more political or religious than cultural, and there can also be a union of nations whose historical cultures coexist within and contribute to a larger, encompassing culture based in part on respect for diversity. Who can say, in advance of experience, where the lim-

its to what is possible lie? Collectivities other than the nation can, moreover, provide a sense of belonging, security, self-esteem, and so on. A robust sense of connectedness with others can be achieved though identifying oneself with a variety of collectivities.

In addition to offering richer, more distinctive individual identities, complex identification has the advantage of recognizing and fostering diverse attachments that cross national boundaries, thereby broadening people's understanding of and sympathy with others and reducing the propensity for conflict characteristic of more exclusive national identities. While complex identification preserves the disposition to loyalty and partiality, it generates a more complex pattern of differentiation and commonality in one's relations with others and thus gives partiality a more diffuse focus than national identification allows.

Complex identification also calls for different political and institutional structures from those that are appropriate to national identification. Complex identification is naturally expressed not by molding political life to fit the national unit but by separating the two. Political units should be built around explicitly political rather than national or cultural identities. Thus solidarity in political life should to the maximum extent be based on shared political ideals and commitments, not on inherited national or ethnic ties. Correlatively, national life should be relegated, insofar as possible, to the private sphere, with national self-determination expressed more in cultural than in political terms.<sup>26</sup>

Because nations and states do roughly coincide in many areas of the world, it is necessary, if political life is to be wrested from the grip of nationality, to create political institutions both above and below the level of the state. This could involve both a devolution of political power within the state and the transfer of various forms of political authority (for example, over certain matters of economic, environmental, or military policy) to bodies representing states seeking greater integration (such as the European Union).<sup>27</sup> Each level of political organization could become a focus of collective identification, thereby enhancing the multidimensional nature of people's individual identities and further reducing the barriers between people of different nationalities.

We must acknowledge, however, that a shift from national identification to complex identification would not be without costs. As events in recent years amply attest, national identification can be quite intense, and this magnifies both its virtues and its vices. At its greatest intensity, it generates a solid and stable sense of self, an unshakable sense of belonging, and preternaturally strong bonds of solidarity. But the fierce loyalty and partiality that are corollaries of this solidarity involve an extreme sensitivity to threats to the nation, a tendency to dehumanize outsiders, and a willingness to commit atrocities in what one believes to be the defense of the nation. While a shift away from national identification toward complex identification would diminish both overt and latent hostility to members of other nations, it would also involve a corresponding diminution of the solidarity



within social groups. Still, although it is difficult to substantiate a generalization of this sort, it seems likely that the trade-offs would be on balance beneficial. With complex identification, people would be less willing to die for the groups to which they would belong, but they would also be less willing to kill, and there would be less reason for them to do either.

If it is true that the effects of complex identification would be better, impartially considered, than those of national identification, then the instrumental case for nationalism that appeals to the good effects of national identification fails. It remains to be determined, however, whether complex identification is psychologically possible for most people and also whether its associated political program is feasible. This requires further inquiry that is beyond the scope of this essay.

Another instrumental argument for nationalism deserves mention. This argument claims, roughly, that cultural pluralism is good, that respect for cultural pluralism requires the preservation of existing nations since each embodies a unique culture, and that each nation must therefore be politically self-determining in a way sufficient to enable it to survive and flourish. There are at least four distinct reasons for thinking that cultural pluralism is important. One appeals to the familiar liberal claim that there is no single best way of living. If that is right, then it is important that a variety of cultures exist so that people may have alternatives to the cultures in which they find themselves and dissidents may have sanctuaries or places of refuge. Second, the existence of diverse cultures facilitates imaginative reflection about different modes of life, thereby aiding individuals in the revision or expansion of their own conceptions of the good. This enables cultures to avoid stagnation and instead evolve and mature through creative assimilation from other cultures. Third, individual cultures may have impersonal value, value that is independent of the contributions that they make to the lives of individuals. Thus, as Charles Taylor has pointed out, people normally desire for their culture to continue to exist and flourish long after they themselves have ceased to exist, and this desire may be independent of their natural tendency to see in the continuation of the culture the survival of some element of their own identities. There is, moreover, no reason to suppose that only those within the culture are capable of appreciating its intrinsic value. Most of us are capable of perceiving in a particular alien culture a variety of merits that may not be replicated in any other culture. Fourth, and finally, cultural diversity is itself an impersonal value. Just as there are two distinct impersonal reasons for preserving a biological species, one deriving from the intrinsic value of the species itself and the other deriving from the contribution that the species makes to the value of biodiversity, so individual cultures are worth preserving both because of their own intrinsic value and because of the contribution they make to the independent value of cultural diversity.

The appeal to the value of cultural pluralism does support the preservation of existing nations but not in a way that would satisfy the nationalist. The protection of national cultures seems compatible with the rejection of the nationalist view

that political life must be organized around the national unit. It is possible for diverse cultures to thrive within liberal political structures that remain, so far as possible, neutral among them and committed to the protection and (in limited ways) promotion of each.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, in one respect liberal politics seems more hospitable to cultural pluralism than universalist nationalism is. The unity and solidarity that nationalists seek within the nation are threatened by the presence of non-national subcultures within the nation; hence nationalists typically seek the absorption of subcultures into the larger national culture. Liberal politics, by contrast, is tolerant of cultural diversity at the subnational level.

### The Intrinsic Significance of Conationality

In the preceding section we concluded that the instrumental moral significance of conationality may be less than the nationalist supposes since it seems that it would be better for people generally if they were to treat conationality as only one of many relations that may serve as sources of collective identification and focuses of loyalty and solidarity. But the idea that we should seek to diminish the role national identification plays in our lives loses force if conationality is a relation that has deep intrinsic moral significance. In this section, we will consider whether conationality is indeed a source of moral reasons that are underived from anything other than the nature of the relation itself.

#### *Commonalities*

Conationality is not a simple relation but is compounded out of the various relations mentioned earlier that unite people into nations—relations involving commonalities of language, ethnicity, religion, culture, custom, and so on. Conationality consists in these *relations of commonality* and typically does not involve *personal* relations at all, for most of a person's conationals are strangers to him or her. It is the various ways in which one's conationals are *like oneself* that primarily distinguish them from others. Are these various commonalities of intrinsic or foundational moral significance and thus capable of generating special moral reasons for those who share them to favor one another in certain contexts?

Clearly many forms of commonality are utterly without moral significance. Suppose, for example, that a person believes him- or herself to be one of a number of people who consistently overestimate the number of dots flashed on a screen. The relation that such people believe to obtain between themselves and these others is clearly of no moral significance. Yet, interestingly, it has been shown in controlled experiments that simply telling people that they belong to such a group (even if, in fact, they do not) is sufficient to elicit partiality from them toward other members of their group and make them less kindly disposed toward

those who they think underestimate the number of dots flashed on a screen.<sup>29</sup> So the fact that one feels warmly toward the members of some group to which one belongs need not even be evidence that comembership in the group is a morally significant relation.

Which commonalities, if any, do have intrinsic moral significance? *Commonalities of value*—that is, shared values, ideals, commitments, or even interests (in the sense of *being* interested in the same thing rather than *having* an interest in the same thing)—seem more likely to be morally significant than commonalities that do not involve any congruence of values. Of course, obvious restrictions apply. Shared values that are perverse or evil do not legitimize partiality.<sup>30</sup> Nor, it seems, do shared values that are utterly trivial. Assuming that commonalities of value can be intrinsically significant, the degree to which they are significant depends on the worthiness or importance of the relevant values. It also depends on how large a role the values have in people's lives. Consider two relatively insignificant commonalities of value: the bond shared by fans of *Star Trek* and that shared by fans of the Chicago Bulls. The relation that unites *Star Trek* fans seems the more significant of the two, since it involves deeper affinities of character, taste, and value than a shared enthusiasm for the Bulls. A taste for *Star Trek* is indicative of a range of interests and concerns that may be integral to a person's identity, whereas enthusiasm for the Bulls is often determined not by a sense that the team instantiates or embodies some ideal with which one identifies oneself but by the contingency of residence. A Bulls fan who moves to Houston may soon transfer his or her loyalties to the Rockets.

Another relation binding the members of a nation that may have moral significance is mutual esteem. Because conationals are typically molded by the same culture, they will tend both to share and to instantiate its values. They therefore tend to find more to admire in one another than they find in others. Of course, admiration is wholly subjective and I have suggested previously that subjective factors are in general a weak foundation for partiality. What matters primarily is the objective character of the relations that obtain between people. It is, however, characteristic of conationals that among their commonalities of value—that is, things they value in common—are traits that they themselves tend to instantiate. They tend, in other words, to share certain traits that they also tend to admire. These *valued commonalities* are objective commonalities that ground mutual esteem among conationals.<sup>31</sup>

Is it a reason for being partial to conationals that they share one's values or share with oneself certain features or characteristics that one values or admires? Certainly commonalities of value and valued commonalities constitute a basis for harmony, compatibility of character, and mutual understanding, sympathy, and esteem—things that draw people together and make them comfortable with one another. These commonalities are therefore elements in the psychological basis for partiality within nations. But as we have seen, the fact that a relation elicits partiality is no guarantee that it is a legitimate basis for partiality.

Racial partiality, or racism, often appeals for justification to the claim that members of the same race—*coracials*—are united by commonalities of value and in particular by valued commonalities. Racists value certain attributes they take to be characteristic or definitive of their race, certain valued commonalities. These are not the biological determinants of race, such as the color of the skin, texture of the hair, or gross morphology generally. The latter are, to borrow (and distort) the Lockean category, only the nominal essence of the race. The surface features are what guide us in practice in distinguishing between members of different races, but these features are not the object of racists' valuations. For racists, the nominal essence is only the visible marker of a deeper real essence that is primarily psychological. Other races are inferior not because their members are different morphologically but because they share various deficiencies of character or intellect. Racists are bound to the members of their race by commonalities that they believe set them above the members of other races.

The problem for racists, of course, is that there is an inevitable failure of correlation between the nominal essence and the supposed real essence, a misalignment between the criterion for discrimination and the object of evaluation. There is no race whose members all share the same psychological or moral profile. For any set of intellectual or moral virtues, there will be some members of a given race who fail to possess them and a vast number of members of other races who do possess them. Racists thus face a dilemma. Either they must treat the nominal essence (certain biological markers) as the ground for partiality, in which case their partiality will be grounded on a genuine objective commonality, but one that is obviously insignificant, or they must persist in the claim that the nominal essence, which provides the basis for discrimination, is an infallible indicator of the presence of the real essence, in which case the commonality to which racists appeal is illusory.

The error that racists make is moral, not intellectual. If they were simply mistaken about the facts, racism would not be as odious as it is. But the falsehood is too obviously false. Racism involves self-deception motivated by, among other things, a desire to see oneself as superior to others. Racists' contempt for those who are unlike themselves and admiration for the qualities supposedly characteristic of their race are transparent, though unmerited, compliments to themselves. Racists embrace and act upon what, at some level, they know to be fantasies—fantasies that degrade others as a spurious means of exalting themselves.

This objection to racial partiality does not discredit the idea that commonalities of value or valued commonalities are legitimate bases for partiality, but it does suggest that commonalities of these sorts cannot provide a foundation for national partiality. Typically, nationalists also believe in a real essence that underlies the superficial markers of nationality. This is the "national character," conceived as a superior set of moral, spiritual, and intellectual virtues. Nationalists often believe that the possession of this character by the members of their nation constitutes an

agent-neutral ground for partiality toward them. But this is supplemented, within the nation, by an agent-relative ground, which is that each member of the nation is related to his or her conationals by virtue of their common possession of the national character. The national character is, in short, a valued commonality, which consists in part of commonalities of value. But the national character, like the essence of a race, is at best a statistical generalization. The correlation between membership in the nation and possession of the national character is inevitably imperfect when membership is normally a matter of birth, with no screening or selection. There may, of course, be a rather higher correlation between the nominal and the putative real essence in the case of nationality than in the case of race since those who belong by birth to a particular nation will be socialized and acculturated within the national culture, which imprints its own features on its members. Certain similarities and affinities of character are thus statistically likely.

This fact, however, has its negative aspect as well, for if valued commonalities are to provide a foundation for partiality, the commonalities must, at a minimum, be genuinely worthy. But to the extent that there is a national character that is the result of cultural conditioning, it will also tend to be the case that the nationalist's admiration for that character is a product of the same process. The national character will *of course* be superior *relative to the values of the national culture*. But if the members of the nation value the national character because they have been indoctrinated by the culture to do so (and of course because it flatters them to believe in their own excellence), this casts doubt on the objective defensibility of their evaluation.

(It is worth noting that there are cases in which what appears to be racial or national partiality may be based only superficially or obliquely on commonalities that are constitutive of coraciality or conationality. If a racial or national group is subjected to discrimination or persecution, its members will often become more cohesive and mutually supportive as a result, and most of us believe that this is a morally acceptable response. But the defense of their mutual partiality need not appeal to the commonalities that make them members of the same race or nation. It may instead appeal to their common fate as victims of prejudice or injustice. Consider, for the sake of comparison, the fact that many members of the deaf community in the United States share a sense of identity and solidarity akin to and perhaps stronger than that typically found among conationals. Many do not regard their deafness as in any way a disability, have no desire to be able to hear, are pleased rather than distressed if their own children are born deaf, and are strongly disposed to favor other deaf people and to distrust those who hear.<sup>32</sup> It seems obvious, however, that deafness is a morally insignificant commonality, comparable to left-handedness. But what unites the deaf is not deafness per se but the fact that they share a common exclusion from full participation in American society as a result of their deafness. It is their common fate as victims of social neglect that justifies their banding together. And if this is true, it offers a way of reconciling our

condemnation of racial and other forms of discrimination with our sense that it is appropriate for certain minority groups to take pride in their distinctness and to maintain certain discriminatory practices that preserve their distinctness and benefit their members to the exclusion of others. For *their* discriminatory partiality need not be based on an insignificant commonality such as race but may instead appeal to their shared status as victims. Whether this commonality has intrinsic significance is uncertain and perhaps doubtful, but it has genuine instrumental significance.)

The general point is that even if we can detect certain broad and general commonalities of value or valued commonalities among the members of a nation, a significant number of members will not share the relevant values or manifest the national character and many nonmembers will. Suppose, however, that certain commonalities of value or valued commonalities are intrinsically significant, and suppose that some of these were to bind all and only the members of a particular nation together. How much would this pair of assumptions yield? It seems that commonalities of these sorts could at most make it *permissible* for those who share them to show a limited degree of partiality to one another. These commonalities could not support special *obligations*. Suppose that two philosophers both value rational argument and that both excel at it. Between them there is both a commonality of value and a valued commonality. While this might make it permissible for them to be partial to one another in certain contexts, it clearly does not *require* them to, even if the value they share is a worthy one. Special obligations cannot, it seems, be contingent on something as changeable as an individual's personal values. If there really were special obligations between the two philosophers, neither could be released simply by converting to mysticism.

In sum, what seem to be the most intrinsically significant commonalities within nations cannot provide the justification for the forms of partiality essential to nationalism. For the relevant commonalities are not universal within the nation and are, in fact, shared by many outside the nation. And even if they were possessed by all and only the members of the nation, they would be incapable of grounding special obligations rather than mere permissions. And nationalism certainly holds that loyalty to and partiality within the nation are duties rather than mere options.

Does the admiration that one typically has for the qualities characteristic of one's conationals add anything at all to the case for national partiality? There is rather a dilemma here. If the positive evaluation of one's conationals is based on values that are not recognized by others but are instead highly specific to the national culture, then this casts doubt on the validity of the evaluation, and so tenuously supported an evaluation seems a flimsy basis for partiality. If, however, one's admiration is for genuinely objective and worthy qualities that are widely shared by one's conationals and if possession of these qualities constitutes an intrinsic justification for partiality toward those who possess them, then it seems that one's reason for partiality must be agent-neutral in character. But then members of

other nations would have the same reason for partiality toward one's conationals that one's conationals have for partiality among themselves, and this takes us away from universalist nationalism, which asserts a universal justification for *agent-relative* partiality.

It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that any conspicuous virtues characteristic of the members of one's nation do not contribute to the case for partiality within the nation. (Thus a nation whose members were, in general, more admirable than those of some other nation would not have stronger reasons for mutual partiality, other things being equal, than the members of the other nation.) Yet it also seems that a group that is conspicuously unworthy of allegiance forfeits any claim to legitimize partiality among its members. Hence it may be that the general possession of some minimum set of admirable traits by the members of a nation, while not a positive reason for mutual partiality among them, is nevertheless a necessary condition of justified partiality within the nation.

### *Reciprocity, Gratitude, and Devotion*

The relations of commonality that obtain between conationals, as individuals, do not seem intrinsically sufficiently significant to ground duties of mutual partiality. However, other aspects of their relations do seem capable of generating special duties among them that are not merely instrumentally justified. I will suggest that there are two distinct sources of special duties among conationals, one found in their relations with one another, the other in each individual's relation to the nation as a whole.

One source of special duties among conationals is familiar from the theory of political obligation. One who engages in voluntary cooperative endeavors with others normally benefits from the contributions that others make to these endeavors and thereby acquires duties of fair play to reciprocate. Conationals are typically engaged with one another in multifarious, continuing cooperative activities. Salient among these are the normal political, economic, and social forms of cooperation necessary among citizens of the same state, for conationals are usually, though obviously not invariably, citizens of the same state. To this extent, the account of permitted and required partiality among conationals overlaps with the theory of political obligation. (I am assuming that the duty of fair play is one element, though not the only one, in a complete account of political obligation.) But conationals also engage in various common projects and activities that are nonpolitical or unconnected with citizenship. For insofar as they together constitute a nation, which is an active association spanning many generations, they are necessarily involved in sustaining and continuously re-creating their culture and way of life as well as transmitting the cultural heritage to their descendants. These various activities that make up the life of a nation are a further source of duties of reciprocity.

The second source of special duties among conationals is related to the first. As we just noted, a nation is, among other things, a grand collective project spanning many generations that furnishes countless profound and indispensable benefits to its members. However much one may repudiate certain elements of it, one is nevertheless deeply indebted to one's nation and its culture. They have provided the language in which one thinks and speaks, the intellectual and artistic heritage that informs one's sensibility and one's understanding of both oneself and the world, many of the values that give purpose to one's life and structure one's relations with others, numerous elements of the material and social infrastructures that make a decent life possible, and so on, almost indefinitely. In short, the nation itself, as a transhistorical entity, is one's benefactor, and there are duties that one owes to it in consequence. One has duties of gratitude to the nation—moral reasons, in acknowledgment of the benefits one has received through the nation, to cherish, sustain, and strengthen the nation and its culture; to preserve its physical treasures and its institutions as well as the heritage of its values, traditions, and customs; and to pass these on to subsequent generations that they may benefit in the same manner in which one has oneself benefited. This is true even if one's national culture is in no way superior to neighboring cultures. Just as one may have duties of gratitude to one's own parents even if they have been unremarkable in their role as parents, so one may have debts to one's nation even if one regards it as deficient in many respects or inferior to others. In that case, one's duty might be to seek its improvement through the creative assimilation from other cultures of the virtues that it lacks. (There may, of course, also be duties to support the national values, to the extent that they are objectively defensible, and this, too, may involve directly or indirectly benefiting one's conationals.)

Duties involving partiality among conationals that derive from this source are not ones that people owe directly to one another. The duties are, in the first instance, owed to the nation itself. It is only derivatively that duties owed to the nation as a whole take the form of duties to benefit individual members of the nation. There are some contexts, in other words, in which one has special reasons to benefit one's conationals not because of one's individual relations with them but because benefiting them contributes to the flourishing of the nation. One benefits them not qua individuals but in their capacities as members, creatures, co-creators, or fragmentary instantiations of the nation. These duties are therefore quite unlike duties of partiality within the family, which are owed to specific individuals by virtue of their individual relations with oneself.

This is a highly abbreviated sketch of what seems to me the most plausible account of the noninstrumental foundations of partiality within the nation. If I am right, duties of loyalty and partiality within the nation are not really *associative* obligations at all—that is, obligations that arise simply from “identity and relatedness.”<sup>33</sup> It is not a shared sense of collective identity or a set of commonalities from which the sense of identity flows that grounds these duties. The duties are in-



stead more closely analogous to political obligations as the latter are understood in traditional accounts that appeal to considerations of reciprocity and gratitude for benefits received. The moral significance of “identity and relatedness” is instrumental rather than intrinsic.

### Domesticating Nationalism

In the previous two sections, I have advanced two claims. First, I suggested that it would be better, where considerations of consequences are concerned, if we were to foster more complex individual identities, with the present intensive focus on national identification yielding to a richer, more varied pattern of collective identifications. This would result in people’s having more diversified group affinities and loyalties and thus a diminished inclination to national partiality. Second, I claimed that people are bound by duties of gratitude to endeavor to preserve and to promote the flourishing of their nations and that the fulfillment of these duties often requires people to favor their conationals over others. It may be doubted, however, whether these claims are compatible. For it may seem that to fulfill one’s duties of gratitude to one’s nation one must manifest a degree of loyalty and partiality to its members that would exceed what the proposal for complex identification regards as desirable.

These are not matters that can be readily quantified. But it is reasonable to suppose that the diminution of national identification and partiality required by complex identification is compatible with the fulfillment of one’s duties of gratitude to one’s nation. The central goals of complex identification are to diminish national chauvinism and exclusivity and to facilitate and encourage mutual understanding and recognition, cooperation, and mutual aid among nations. And what these goals require is mainly that people’s individual identities should accord appropriate recognition to the numerous profound commonalities that span divisions between nations and that national life and culture should be confined to a greater degree to the private rather than the political sphere. To see that this is compatible with extensive loyalty to the nation and partiality to its members, consider the case of the family.

There have been times when families were more like nations are now. Clans, family dynasties, and landed aristocratic families have at times had many of the characteristic features of modern nations: they have been important sources of individual identity, boasted of mythical bloodlines traceable back to ancient heroes, endowed their members with an invincible conviction their of superiority to others, and even been territorially based and often expansionist. But the family as a social unit and locus of partiality has now, with some exceptions in certain countries, been tamed. In contemporary Western societies, families are neither competitive nor antagonistic, are not a basis for political organization, do not compete

with one another for power, and are considerably less important as sources of individual identity than they once were (for example, it is now rare for one to identify oneself as “one of the Shropshire Smiths” or “the Virginia Joneses”). Yet the family retains a vital role in people’s lives, and family members remain intensely loyal and partial to one another. This shows, I think, that people may care intensely about one another, share a way of life together, and recognize an array of special duties to one another without regarding other groupings of the same sort as “out-groups” that are appropriately despised as alien and inferior.

What we should seek through complex identification is a transformation of the nation that parallels, in relevant respects, that which the family has gradually undergone. The nation must be tamed and domesticated. This requires action at the individual and institutional levels. Individuals must be encouraged to see themselves as more than drones in the national hive, and institutions must be arranged, both within and between states, to enable nations to coexist harmoniously while at the same time retaining their autonomy and cultural integrity. Provisions for self-determination, for example, would correspond to the assignment to families of a sphere of privacy that may be invaded only for the gravest reasons.

The proposal to reshape the nation so that it more closely resembles the family reminds us of one vitally important point: even paradigmatically justified partiality is not unlimited. For there are obviously limits to the degree of priority that one is permitted to give even to one’s closest family members. The degree of permissible partiality, even within the family, is determined in part by considerations of agency. The kind of case in which there is greatest scope for partiality is that involving the distribution of benefits. In many cases, the bestowal of benefits is supererogatory. In these cases, the scope for partiality is literally unlimited. It may be permissible, for example, to give one’s own child an expensive gift even if the money one spends could do more good if it were used to buy toys for children whose parents are less well off. (Even if one accepts a conception of morality as highly demanding, there may still be limited room for supererogation.) In some cases, of course, the distribution of benefits is not supererogatory. The proper distribution of a benefit may, for example, be determined by desert or need. Or it may be governed by norms designed to serve social purposes. Partiality in cases of the first sort is unjust, while in cases of the second sort it may defeat the governing purposes and therefore constitute pernicious favoritism or nepotism.

Special relations may also justify some degree of partiality in choices involving the prevention of harms. Most of us believe, for example, that a parent may save his or her own child rather than two children who are strangers if the parent cannot save them all. The moral significance of special relations begins to diminish, however, when we come to cases involving the causation of harm and, in particular, cases in which an act causes harm as a means of preventing a different harm or providing a benefit. A parent may not, for example, intentionally kill an innocent child, even if this is the only way the parent can save his or her own two children

(for example, because they both require organ transplants). Analogous restrictions apply in the case of partiality among conationals, except that in this case the restrictions are likely to be stronger since relations among conationals are a weaker basis for partiality than relations among family members.

Although in general it is desirable to seek to refashion relations within and among nations so that relations among nations come to resemble more closely those among families, there is one respect in which the nation ideally ought to be less like the family and more like an association of friends. While membership in the family is typically nonvoluntary, so that the boundaries between families may be crossed only through special events such as marriage and adoption, the aim of domesticating nationalism will be better achieved if the boundaries between nations become more permeable. At present, of course, membership in a nation is largely nonvoluntary and nationalists tend to regard the nonvoluntary relations that are constitutive of membership as having a deeper significance and authenticity than most voluntary relations. Those who belong to a nation by birth generally have a more secure status within the nation than those who have, for example, married into it or sought membership after renouncing or leaving the nation of their birth. Other members of the nation tend to feel a stronger affinity with the former than with the latter; they will feel the pull of loyalty and partiality more strongly toward those who belong by birth, even those who have publicly rejected the national values or the national culture, and less strongly toward those who, coming originally from another culture, have voluntarily, autonomously, and even passionately embraced the national values and culture.

Those who belong by birth are also regarded as being under a stronger obligation of loyalty to the nation. This may be so even when a person has emigrated and sought assimilation into another nation. In a piece of spy fiction by Agatha Christie, a naturalized German is caught spying in England for the Nazis. One of the protagonists observes that the captured spy is, "I'm sorry to say, English by birth," to which the heroine replies, "Then I've no pity or admiration for her—it wasn't her country she was working for."<sup>34</sup> According to this view, merely by being born a member of a country or nation one acquires obligations of loyalty and partiality from which one cannot be released even by emigration. This, admittedly, is a rather extreme conception of the nonvoluntary character of national membership and consequently of national duties. No one thinks that Einstein was a traitor for helping the United States defeat the Nazis. But the extreme view does help us to understand the more moderate and extremely common view that birth alone is a powerful source of duties and that a great deal is required in order for one to be freed from their demands.

This view draws support from the fact that there are other special relations, nonvoluntary in character, that are widely regarded as legitimate bases for partiality. The relation of a parent to a child, for example, is nonvoluntary. While two people may choose to have a child, they cannot, in most cases, choose a particular

person to be their child.<sup>35</sup> And the relation of the child to the parent is even more obviously nonvoluntary. Yet these relations are paradigmatically legitimate bases for partiality. There are, moreover, reasons why nationalists feel that the nonvoluntary character of full membership is important. Benedict Anderson suggests, for example, that “because [national] ties are not chosen, they have about them a halo of disinterestedness.”<sup>36</sup> Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz note that the sense of identity and belonging that one derives from national membership will be “more secure, less liable to be threatened” if membership is “determined by nonvoluntary criteria” than if it depends in some way on one’s accomplishments.<sup>37</sup> If membership is guaranteed by birth, then nationality offers a source of acceptance and approval that is automatic and unconditional. Finally, nonvoluntary relations may also have a greater claim to be constitutive of an individual’s identity. If one cannot help but be *x*, then *x* seems to be more securely a part of what one really is than *y*, where *y* is an attribute that one can choose either to have or not to have.

Yet, despite all this, one recoils from the view that, among our various nonpersonal relations, our deepest allegiances are determined by inescapable ties of blood and birth. The liberal impulse is to insist that, beyond the intimate sphere of the family, special relations provide a more legitimate foundation for partiality to the extent that they are chosen autonomously or entered into freely. The voluntariness of a special relation is no obstacle to its being integral to one’s individual identity, provided (as complex identification presupposes) that some degree of self-creation is both possible and desirable.

The argument for greater permeability of national boundaries, or greater interpenetration among nations, appeals to considerations of consequences. The aim is enhanced mutual understanding, appreciation, and respect, which will be facilitated by the recognition that some members of another nation were originally members of our own, while still other members of that nation have joined us and are not really such bad people after all. Against this, the nationalist might argue that communities bound together by nonvoluntary relations will be less inclined to believe themselves superior and more disposed to be tolerant of others. For when membership is a matter of birth, there can be no screening of members and therefore no guarantee that members generally will meet any criterion of excellence. And it might also seem that tolerance would be the appropriate stance toward outsiders who could not help being members of their group rather than one’s own. This *a priori* reasoning is, however, at variance with the facts, as the case of racial prejudice shows. Indeed, when membership is largely nonvoluntary, a group’s claim to superiority may become a dogma that it clings to all the more desperately for its evident indefensibility and that it can assert only through the exercise of power. What is necessary is a diminution of both people’s need to find self-esteem through identification with the nation and their sense of the utter alienness of nations other than their own. And the achievement of the latter aim may be fa-

cilitated by seeking to make national communities less exclusive, allowing other paths to membership than birth and blood.

### Summary

In this essay I have explored the question whether conationality is a legitimate basis for partiality. I argued that while relations among conationals certainly have instrumental significance, there are alternative patterns of individual identification and social organization in which nationality would have a less prominent role than nationalists would find acceptable but that would better serve people's needs overall. I argued further that while the various commonalities that are constitutive of conationality seem unable to provide an intrinsic justification for partiality within the nation, conationals do have special duties to one another that are based on considerations of fair play and gratitude to the nation. And I sought to reconcile these claims about the instrumental and intrinsic bases for partiality by appealing to the example of the family, a social unit within which there are strong special duties as well as intense mutual partiality but which is not a basis for political organization and no longer serves as an important source of collective identification and self-esteem. I am aware that my proposals are vulnerable to powerful objections. I have endorsed the view that we should seek, as far as possible, to confine national life to the private rather than the political sphere but am aware both that national unity is a potent source of political unity and that in many cases beliefs about political organization are integral to people's conception of the nature of their nation. And I have advocated increased permeability of national boundaries but am aware that wholly unregulated entry may be incompatible with the preservation of a nation's distinct identity and culture. I wish that I had compelling answers to these objections, but I do not. My one certainty is that the philosophical exploration of nationalism is still in its early phase, and others more competent than I will address the many issues and problems that I have ignored.

### NOTES

Versions of this essay were presented at the University of Colorado at Boulder, the United States Military Academy at West Point, and Tel Aviv University in Israel. I am grateful to the audiences on those occasions for suggestions and to Hugh LaFollette, Robert McKim, Arthur Ripstein, Samuel Scheffler, and Noam Zohar for comments on an earlier draft. I have also learned much from my commentator at the conference in Urbana, Thomas Hurka.

1. See Henry Sidgwick, *The Elements of Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1891), pp. 213–15.
2. Compare David Miller, "The Ethical Significance of Nationality," *Ethics* 98 (1988):

647–62, esp. p. 648; David Miller, “In Defence of Nationality,” *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 10 (1993): 3–16, esp. pp. 5–8; and Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, “National Self-Determination,” *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990): 439–61, esp. pp. 443–47. Miller’s illuminating study *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995) appeared too late to be taken into account here.

3. For the view that the United States constitutes a nation with a single culture, see Roger Scruton, “In Defence of the Nation,” in *The Philosopher on Dover Beach* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1990), p. 323. The view that the United States is a nation with a multiplicity of distinct cultures is defended in Kwame Anthony Appiah’s Tanner Lecture, “Race, Culture, and Identity: Misunderstood Connections,” a version of which appears in *Color Conscious*, ed. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

4. Walzer has advanced a qualified particularism according to which there is a minimal universal core to morality, which effectively takes the form of a requirement to respect the autonomous development of other cultures, with their own distinctive moralities. See Michael Walzer, “Nation and Universe,” in *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. 11, ed. G. B. Peterson (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1990), esp. pp. 533, 551–52; and Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), chaps. 1, 4.

5. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 1.

6. See, for example, Ronald Dworkin, *Taking Rights Seriously* (London: Duckworth, 1977), pp. 180–83.

7. Thomas Nagel, *Equality and Partiality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 14.

8. For a fuller discussion, see chapter 12.

9. Compare Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), chaps. 1, 8, 9, and *Equality and Partiality*, esp. chaps. 1, 2, 15.

10. See Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982).

11. This possibility was suggested to me by Samuel Scheffler.

12. George Orwell, “Reflections on Gandhi,” in *The Collected Essays, Journalism, and Letters of George Orwell*, vol. 4, 1945–1950, ed. Sonya Orwell and Ian Angus (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 527.

13. See Peter Railton, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13 (1984): 134–71.

14. *Ibid.*

15. William Paley, *The Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy*, vol. I (London: Longman, 1814), pp. 339–40. The more rigorously developed echoes are in Robert Goodin, *Protecting the Vulnerable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), chaps. 3–5, and “What Is So Special about Our Fellow Countrymen?,” *Ethics* 98 (1988): 678–86; Frank Jackson, “Decision-Theoretic Consequentialism and the Nearest and Dearest Objection,” *Ethics* 101 (1991): 472–75; and Martha Nussbaum, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” *Boston Review* 19 (1994): 6.

16. Thomas E. Hill, Jr., “The Importance of Autonomy,” in his *Autonomy and Self-Respect* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 45, 46.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 45. Also see Brian Barry, *Justice as Impartiality* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995),

pp. 7–12; and Alan Gewirth, “Ethical Universalism and Particularism,” *Journal of Philosophy* 85 (1988): 283–302.

18. Barry, *Justice as Impartiality*, p. 11. Similarly, Gewirth (“Ethical Universalism and Particularism”) claims that among the principles that are approved at the formal level there must be some that grant all people the right to form particular associations within which a certain degree of mutual partiality is essential. But he does not say how one discriminates, at the formal level, between acceptable and unacceptable associations or how one determines the limits to partiality within those associations that are acceptable.

19. See, for example, Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), chap. 4; Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community, and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), chap. 8; and Allen Buchanan, *Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumter to Lithuania and Quebec* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1991), pp. 53–54.

20. See, for example, Miller, “In Defence of Nationality,” p. 9; and, for a contrary view, see chapter 13 of this volume.

21. Some of these claims are developed in more detail in chapters 2, 10, and 13.

22. See, for example, Henri Tajfel, “Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination,” *Scientific American* 223 (1970): 96–102; and Jacob M. Rabbi and Murray Horwitz, “Arousal of In-group–Outgroup Bias by a Chance Win or Loss,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 13 (1969): 269–77.

23. Arthur Schopenhauer, “Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life,” in *Parerga and Paralipomena*, vol. I, trans. E. F. J. Payne (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 360.

24. For an independent articulation of this idea, see Appiah, “Race, Culture, and Identity.”

25. Walzer, *Thick and Thin*, p. 82.

26. The idea that political unity should be divorced from bonds of nationality is defended in Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), and in chapter 13 of this volume. It is subject to pungent criticism in Scruton, “In Defence of the Nation.”

27. Compare chapter 20.

28. This claim is defended by Walzer in chapter 15 and challenged by Kymlicka in chapter 8.

29. Tajfel, “Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination.”

30. A similar claim is defended in chapter 9.

31. There is a curious paradox in the efforts of the “nation builders” to forge a population into a national unit. They recognize that people will converge on a common identity only to the extent that the nation builders can get them to believe that they are bound by various commonalities and can rouse in them a robust mutual admiration. Hence the tendency of nationalist leaders to embellish freely what little there may be in the way of a national history or national character. While they recognize that people generally require commonalities, including valued commonalities, in order to be strongly cohesive, their own activities, such as fabricating mythical histories, presuppose the desirability of cohesion even in the absence of significant objective commonalities. The key to the paradox is probably quite simple—that their interest is in personal power rather than the reality of the nation.

32. See Edward Dolnick, “Deafness as Culture,” *Atlantic Monthly*, September 1993, pp. 37–53.

33. Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 99.

34. Agatha Christie, *N or M?* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1941), p. 217.

35. The limited exception is adoption, where there may be an element of choice. And, of course, there may be more scope for choice in biological reproduction as advances in genetic engineering progress. Even here, however, there is a deeper philosophical question: whether greater control over the genetic character of one's child will ever enable one to choose a particular child or just an increasingly specific *type* of child.

36. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), p. 143.

37. Margalit and Raz, "National Self-Determination," p. 447.