

**THE WORTH OF NATIONS:
NATIONALISM AS THE PURSUIT OF A SHARED FRAME OF REFERENCE**

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Department of Political Science

University of Toronto

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for

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Graduate Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto

ABSTRACT

This work argues that the moral value of nations arises in their role as a cognitive mechanism for bringing together relevant information about a population's circumstances. As something that represents a shared frame of reference, nations can provide personal benefits in esteem and efficacy and can help in the management of a group's collective life.

I begin by identifying and criticising six existing theory types that suggest a certain moral worth to nations and I claim that, while right in parts, they prove unworkable on some dimension. Turning to the experience with nationalism in Ireland and Quebec, I argue that in these cases there were two formulations of the nationalist claim. The first claimed that a difference in understanding between governed and governing harmed the population's interests. The second held that the loss of a unique idiom undermined the esteem and achievements of the population. Both, I argue, point to the significance of a shared frame of reference for political and personal well being.

I then normatively evaluate an account of nationalism as a shared frame of reference. The national frame of reference, I argue, bundles together information on time,

space, and relations with others, and given the territorialised nature of contemporary politics, this dimension sets nations apart. I also contend that nationalism is concerned with realising a good rather than establishing a condition for justice, and that is an instrumental good but one that derives from a capacity that is intrinsically good.

Nations can extend personal knowledge, support expression and esteem, identify relevant local issues, and help us adapt to our dynamic environment. However, they need to keep in tune with the actual circumstances of the population. If not, the information and options they offer will become increasingly ill-suited, and may become an obstacle to knowledge and efficacy. Fortunately nations also provide a way for populations to collectively revise the options and information with which they work.

Finally I ask how this account compares to the theories I outlined at the outset and I suggest that it addresses the weaknesses identified in these theories while it draws upon and complements their strengths.

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INTRODUCTION

This project is motivated by my own need to understand what to think about nationalism. I am Irish by descent and I spent my childhood in the Republic of Ireland. As a schoolchild in Ireland I learned about the struggle for Irish independence, I memorised the names of the heroes of the 1916 Rising and was taught the Irish language upon first entering school. There could be no doubt in the mind of an attentive schoolchild that the achievement of an Irish state was an achievement for which one was supposed to be grateful.

I immigrated to Canada with my family when I was fourteen. In this country the future of the state is cast in doubt by the nationalism of Quebec. Under the influence of a Trudeauesque vision of multicultural coexistence and liberal rationalism, the prevailing opinion I encountered among Canadians was that nationalism was an undesirable doctrine of dissent and strife. This left me in conflict over what to think about nationalism as a phenomenon. In one country there was widespread acceptance of its legitimacy, in another there was widespread acceptance (at least among Anglophones) that it was a harmful and dangerous doctrine.

If the question were put to me I would have to admit that I am grateful for the achievement of an independent Irish state. Yet what am I supposed to think about this response? Do I need to liberate myself from an attachment to the idea of an Irish nation, something that I know was an object of indoctrination in my Irish schooling? Am I a bad

Canadian if I think Quebec should have the option to go its own way, perhaps to develop itself as a separate nation? Indeed, what if I find that prospect exciting?

My object in writing this dissertation was to outline an understanding of the moral worth of nations that can account for my feeling that the Irish state was an achievement for which I could be grateful, but that did not sanction every extreme to which nationalism has been taken in the past. Having grown up in the most traditional part of Ireland I am well aware of the stifling environment that nationalism can foster, as well as of the violence and conflict that goes with it. But I am not convinced that this is a necessary part of nationalism, or that such conduct will serve the ends at which I believe nationalism aims.

I recognise that this is an ambitious goal, but I would like to think that this could be a strength as well as a vulnerability of the project. This work is an inevitably limited first attempt at grappling with a multiform and complex problem, yet it stakes out an important question – on what (if anything) do we base the moral worth of nations? If we can get clarity on this matter, then we will be better positioned to address the many other questions that immediately follow. Questions such as: Is nationalism worth the risks involved? How does this moral worth stack up against other principles we value? Under what conditions should we accommodate nationalist claims, and when should nations give way instead?

These are vitally important questions and without answers to them a theory of the moral worth of nations is hamstrung in its practical applicability. Yet important as they are I do not set out to address these questions here. In this regard, at least, my object is more modest. Though I will touch on these aspects indirectly, as the argument proceeds, my

interest is focused primarily on identifying what gives nations their moral standing. If we recognise a moral worth to nations, this may ultimately involve us in trade-offs with other things we value – like social diversity, individual autonomy, etc. – and I know that this may seem intolerable to some. But I am not convinced that an acceptable alternative is to deny nationalism any moral standing from the outset and thereby forestall the need to evaluate it against these other concerns.

In this introductory chapter I set out some preliminary information about the project. I begin with a brief preview of the argument I mean to make concerning an understanding of nationalism as the pursuit of a shared frame of reference. I then say a few words about the methodology I will employ, and indicate what I will *not* be doing in this project. I next provide an explanation of some of the key terms I use as well as an explanation of why I avoid certain other terms. I follow this with a more detailed outline of how the chapters of the dissertation are structured, and I close with a few comments on how I hope this project can contribute to the study of nationalism as a normative problem.

1. Preview of the Argument

The central claim of this work is that the moral value of nationalism arises in the benefits derived from a shared frame of reference in time, space, and in our relations with others. Based on a review of the arguments of Irish and Quebec nationalists, I argue that the national frame of reference serves as a cognitive mechanism for bringing together relevant information about the temporal, historical, and social dimensions of a population's collective life. Nationalism attempts to establish, or portray as already

established, a particular frame of reference among a population by changing either the political order or the population's traits so that they better reflect the national frame of reference. Since its moral worth is owed to the benefits that it can help realise for a population, nationalism is an instrumental good. However, the capacity to create and re-create shared frames of reference (national or otherwise) is an attribute which is intrinsically valuable, in that it makes collective life possible.

As a shared frame of reference, a nation can yield benefits at two levels. At the personal level it provides benefits via a secure sense of one's context and a feeling of belonging and esteem through association with group achievements. These benefits have been recognised in existing theories concerned with the morality of nationalism, such as those of Will Kymlicka, Charles Taylor, and Avishai Margalit. But often these accounts stop there, at the individual level, and this leaves out an important part of the picture. Because of this, these accounts run into problems when individuals are attached to different frames of reference, as in the case of immigrants. If nationalism is justified solely at a personal or individual level, then everyone has an equal claim to having their frame of reference politically or socially established. Kymlicka for instance tries to deal with this problem by accommodating some groups with historical rights or grievances and saying others (immigrants) have essentially contracted away their right to their original frame of reference.

At the collective level, nationalism also provides political benefits because a shared frame of reference assures a certain level of mutual understanding and makes it more likely that the governors will understand and share an interest in the affairs of the governed.

This kind of understanding helps to minimise inadvertent harm and facilitates the consideration of relevant interests in a representative system. Theorists of the morality of nationalism such as Miller and Tamir have already recognised that nationalism pays a dividend in terms of political efficacy. But they attribute this to the existence of affective ties between co-nationals. This account proves problematic, however, because it cannot explain the origin of these ties without becoming circular (I have ties to my co-nationals because they are my co-nationals). Instead, I believe a shared frame of reference is the origin of the special relationship between co-nationals, I believe that the co-national relationship rests on cognitive practices rather than affective ties, and I believe that this cognitive factor is reflected in the arguments nationalists use to justify their cause.

Following from the understanding of nationalism outlined above are several further claims. I also argue that the national frame of reference is evidence of an adaptive capacity that enables us to re-configure our ways of thinking, communicating, and acting together. Historic changes in what Benedict Anderson calls “forms of consciousness”¹ are, I believe, further evidence of this capacity at work. But these shared frames of reference are not just the product of historical materialism, although they are related to these forces at some level. The courses of nations often owe a great deal to the conscious efforts of their national adherents. Nationalists who call upon their compatriots to “become a nation”² can also, therefore, be held responsible for the conduct of that nationalism. We need not accept a given nationalism in whatever forms it presents to us.

¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1983), 23.

² Such a call was issued by the eighteenth century Irish parliamentarian Henry Grattan, in his pursuit of an independent Irish parliament. I discuss Grattan’s nationalism in greater detail in Chapter 2.

A shared frame of reference offers a way for a population to achieve security and efficacy in their lives. It facilitates and supports both individual and collective achievements because it provides a common idiom for communication, a cognitive mechanism for complexity reduction, and a reserve of historical precedents for inspiration. Nations are not the only kinds of shared frames of reference that pay this dividend, but they encompass a territorial dimension that gives them particular political significance in a period when political authority is highly territorialised and when jurisdiction is often exercised within borders.

To continue to pay a dividend in terms of security and efficacy, the national frame of reference should keep in tune with the actual circumstances of the population that employs it. If not, the information and options it offers will become increasingly irrelevant and ill-suited, and instead of improving a population's knowledge and efficacy, it can become an obstacle to it. Yet precisely because they bring together and integrate information on the key dimensions that inform our thinking and acting, nations provide a way for a population to collectively revise the options and information with which they work. Re-examining its national character is therefore one way for a group to change the context of choice for the individuals within it.

2. Methodology

My methodology involves using a case-study approach to help understand and evaluate moral phenomena. I employ a contextualist approach, in the belief that observing real-

Henry Grattan, *The Speeches of the Right Hon. Henry Grattan*, ed. Daniel Owen Madden, 2nd ed. (Dublin: James Duffy, 1865), 48.

world experience can provide vital feedback into normative thinking, and I therefore pay close attention to how events and arguments unfold in practice. This methodological approach is outlined in Joseph Carens' *Culture, Citizenship, and Community*³ and is similar in kind to the contextualist approach followed by Michael Walzer in *Spheres of Justice*.⁴

I begin by examining existing theories of nationalism to see whether they are adequate to account for nationalism's moral worth (or lack thereof). I classify the existing normative thinking on nationalism into six theory-types and identify where these accounts prove problematic. I then ask how well these theories help us understand the conduct of nationalism in two historical cases - those of Ireland and Quebec. What makes these two cases interesting from my point of view is not what makes them hot topics for most scholars of nationalism.⁵ Rather, I am interested in the fact that some aspects of these cases are often thought to be morally uncontroversial. In Ireland, changing the political order to establish an independent state in the twenty-six counties seems now to be widely regarded as a morally legitimate measure, although attempts to change the traits of the population - affecting women's rights, language use, and economic development, for instance - proved problematic. In Quebec, efforts aimed at cultural self-preservation - such as regulating language use and fostering economic development - are generally seen as legitimate, but changing the political order is considered problematic. Because similar measures appear in a different light in these two cases I think they can help highlight what factors matter in establishing the moral standing of the nationalist claim.

³ Joseph Carens, introduction to *Culture, Citizenship, and Community: A Contextual Exploration of Justice as Evenhandedness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴ Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (USA: Basic Books, 1983).

My casework involves three main research steps. First, through historical research I identify the social setting in which these events unfolded, the main tactics employed by nationalists, and what the outcome of their efforts were. Second, I examine the arguments that nationalists make on behalf of their cause by returning to original sources such as contemporary journals, speeches, and writings, to see if there are things in nationalists' arguments that are missed in current theories. Third, I ask whether the formulation(s) of the nationalist claim (identified in step two) can help explain why the conduct of these nationalist movements can be judged appropriate in some instances and problematic in others.

Taking the understanding of the nationalist claim that was distilled through this casework exercise, I then proceed to a normative evaluation and ask whether this claim has moral standing. In the final stage of my work I explain how this understanding of the moral worth of nations relates to or differs from the existing theories I discussed at the outset.

3. What I am not doing

As noted this is an ambitious project. Therefore I want to make clear what I will not be trying to achieve in this exercise. To begin with, although I believe that there should be limits to the application of the nationalist claim, identifying those limits is not the main object of this work. I do specify one limit – that nationalism should be characterised by

⁵ In the Irish case, the nationalist policies of the early Irish State have attracted considerable attention in recent scholarship, while in Quebec the issue of political independence has been the focus of much debate.

equal respect for persons,⁶ and more limits may be appropriate, but I do not pursue that question here. Since nations are not the only things we value, we need to develop ways to balance these concerns. In my view, however, the first step in this process is to establish what the moral claim of nationalism consists in, when properly understood.

Neither I do mean to defend every instance of nationalism. Clearly there are nationalisms that employ indefensible tactics. Yet it does not necessarily follow that all nationalisms are indefensible. If nationalism is also associated with certain benefits, then a clear understanding of those benefits and how they arise can only be to our advantage.

I will not be arguing for nationalism as the only (or even necessarily the best) way to conduct political affairs. I think it is one of many possibilities. In truth, I suspect it has already seen its day. But it still serves a purpose for certain people and groups and so it is still a relevant force to understand.

Finally, while I personally believe that the need for a shared frame of reference is a constant feature of the human condition, I will not attempt to establish so broad a claim. Instead I will be content if I can argue that nationalism is evidence of how the nation, as a shared frame of reference, can secure both personal and political benefits, and that these are benefits we should be concerned with providing through our political and social order.

4. Definitions and Terminology

The choice of terminology is always a crucial part of developing an argument. In this section I want to outline what I mean by a few of the basic terms I employ. As well, I want to explain why there are certain other terms I have avoided.

⁶ I discuss this principle and how it relates to nationalism in Chapter 4.

The first term I should explain is, of course, 'nationalism.' By nationalism I mean the doctrine that seeks the establishment of a shared frame of reference in time, space and social relations and that is encapsulated in the ideas of the nation. Nationalism also covers the measures enacted to arrive at a situation whereby a national frame of reference becomes widespread among a population, or whereby the political order is changed to better reflect the population's frame of reference. Nationalism therefore suggests a kind of matching principle⁷ that aims at a situation where the political order and the members of the population all work within a certain frame of reference.

By 'nation' I mean the frame of reference that describes a set of selected knowledge concerning history, territory, and social relations. Once committed to this frame of reference the members of a population may come to see it as so integral to their lives that they think of themselves as part of the nation, rather than as people who employ a certain set of ideas and information. Nevertheless, the nation is a cognitive construct; it is not the population group to which that construct refers.

With these two major terms outlined, I next want to explain my use of certain other phrases that I employ as part of my exploration of nationalism. In the discussion that follows I talk about the nationalist claim as having moral standing under certain conditions. I have chosen to use terms like 'claim' and 'standing' because even where I argue that there is some moral worth to nations, I do not mean to imply that this moral value should automatically prevail over all other concerns. Instead, in real-world conditions moral decisions require us to weigh competing claims of various worth, and we must pay attention to how these claims play out in a particular situation. In advance of

⁷ This aspect of nationalism is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2

addressing any specific moral challenge, however, we can determine whether a moral claim has standing – i.e., whether it should weigh into the process of decision-making. My goal therefore is not to prescribe the moral standing nationalism should have vis-à-vis other things we value (although this is an important task), it is only to argue that it has sufficient moral standing in a general sense to merit consideration, and in some cases perhaps, accommodation.

I should acknowledge, however, that I make one exception to this stance. In specifying that nationalism should be characterised by an equal respect for persons I am suggesting that a concern for a fundamental kind of equality⁸ should not be sidelined in favour of nationalist objectives. This is because I see it as a pre-condition of the kind of moral conversation in which we must engage in order to assess the legitimacy of a nationalist claim. And also because if not for a belief in equal respect for persons, then there is no particular reason to be concerned with the benefits to various populations, benefits that ground the worth of nations. Nonetheless I recognise that this aspect of my argument is not fully developed, and that the relative ranking of the nationalist claim and the principle of equal respect for persons is open to challenge.

Another term where there is room for confusion is that of ‘independence’ as a political status. The way I use the term, independence is not an absolute measure – you either have it or you don’t – but rather can be present in varying degrees. So when I ask about the appropriateness of independence for Ireland or Quebec, what I am concerned with is the move toward *increased* independence, and how far the process should go.

⁸ Of course equality can be defined more or less broadly. I use it to indicate equal freedom from civic restrictions.

I am concerned to clarify this term because for some people nationalism implies the goal of a nation-state, indeed it is sometimes thought to be defined by this goal. As should already be clear, this is not my understanding of nationalism. If nationalism were defined in terms of the goal of complete independent statehood, for instance, this would rule out a vast portion of what is normally accepted as representing Irish nationalist history. In fact, Irish nationalism would barely register throughout much of the nineteenth century, going into a long hiatus after the Republican revolutions of 1798 only to burst back onto the scene with the 1916 Rising. Clearly such an understanding of nationalism misses something important.

For this reason I do not talk about nation-states in this discussion. Statehood is certainly the objective of some nationalists, but I think the more general drive is to change the political order to better reflect the shared frame of reference. These changes can take many forms, several of which fall short of statehood.

Another term that I have tried to minimise my use of in this discussion is 'identity.' This may seem like a curious strategy, given that national identity is generally seen as an important factor in explaining why nations mean so much to people. But I chose this strategy because I think identity can be problematic in two ways. First, there are so many different concepts of identity in circulation, that the word indicates different things to different people.⁹ Second, the term can lead to a false sense of confidence that we understand what is going on when people 'identify' in one way or another. We all know

⁹ I have identified some of these different understandings of identity in a paper entitled "Arguments from Identity" presented at the conference "Migrations, Interactions and Conflicts in the Making of a European Democracy," The University of Bologna, Italy, December 15-19, 1997.

what having an identity feels like, but I am not sure we always know how it works.¹⁰

Instead, I wanted to see what other terms I would use in place of identity, if I had to try to explain the same ideas without using that particular term. I have not always been successful in avoiding the term but I have tried to set out in different ways, whenever possible, what I meant in place of the idea of identity.

Finally, I do not discuss nations as ethnic groups. This is because I don't believe nations are ethnic groups or vice versa. I understand 'ethnic' as an anthropological term for identifying population groups based on descent.¹¹ While ethnic groups also have their unique social forms, this is not sufficient to make nations synonymous with ethnicity. As Ernest Gellner observed there might be plenty of social groups in the world that have potential for nationhood, but only a fraction ever assert themselves this way.¹² Ethnic groups, therefore, may provide fertile ground for the birth of nations but what makes a nation a nation is ultimately something beyond ethnicity.¹³

These, then, are the terms I will use, and those I will avoid as I pursue this discussion. I have discussed only a select few, those that are the most basic. Others I will outline as I proceed.

¹⁰ If I had to venture my own explanation of identity I would say that it arises in the idea that you and I are alike in that we think or act based on the same points of reference. The 'identity' is therefore between our conduct or cognitive practices, which we recognise to be similar in kind. Having an identity means having this experience of recognising a like trait or pattern in another.

¹¹ *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* for instance defines 'ethnic' as "denoting origin by birth or descent rather than by present nationality."

¹² "Most of the potential nations," according to Gellner, "fail altogether even to raise their claim." See, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 49.

¹³ Anthony D. Smith's 'primordialist' theory of nationalism offers an account that stresses the ethnic origin of nations. Basically his argument is that nations are older, with deeper roots than is generally recognised. I think we could concede this and still think that ethnicity and nationality are separate and distinct phenomena. See *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

5. Chapter Outline

The discussion that follows this introduction proceeds in five main chapters. Following the methodology I outlined above, I begin by assessing the existing theoretical perspectives on nationalism. The next two chapters consider the historical experience with nationalism in Ireland and Quebec, and thus provide the contextual content of the argument. The fourth chapter returns to the level of normative assessment and attempts to evaluate a new account of the worth of nations based on the findings of the previous chapters. The fifth chapter then compares this account with the existing theories encountered at the outset, to see how it performs.

In my first chapter I identify and critique six theory-types that suggest a certain moral worth of nations (or in one case, suggest the absence of such worth). My main claim in this chapter is that these theories, while they are right in some parts, prove unworkable on some dimension. I attempt to outline where the particular problems lie, and conclude by specifying those criteria which an account of the moral worth of nations should be expected to meet.

My second chapter is concerned with the experience with nationalism in Ireland. The main argument of this chapter is that there were two formulations of the nationalist claim in the Irish case. The first (the 'good government' formulation) claimed that a difference in understanding between governed and governing harmed the population's interests. The second (the 'national character' formulation) held that the loss of a uniquely Irish idiom undermined the esteem and achievements of the population. Both, I argue, point to the significance of a shared frame of reference for political and personal well

being. Yet I also outline how some of the tactics used did more harm than good and how attempts to legislate certain national traits led in some cases to discrimination and alienation.

Chapter 3 addresses the experience with nationalism in Quebec. In it I argue that we see similar arguments for nationalism being used in Quebec as were encountered in the Irish case (i.e., an emphasis was put on understanding local circumstances and retaining a psychologically important idiom). But while changing the population to support a common idiom may be appropriate in Quebec, I argue that Quebec is a less clear case when it comes to political change in the form of independence, because there is also a certain shared (Canadian) frame of reference involved.

In Chapter 4 I attempt to evaluate normatively an account of nationalism as a shared frame of reference. I argue that as a shared frame of reference the nation is a way to realise benefits at both the political and the personal level. It provides a way to extend personal knowledge, support expression and esteem, address relevant local issues, and adapt to a dynamic environment. The national frame of reference brings together information on time, space, and relations with others, and given the territorialised nature of contemporary politics, this dimension sets nations apart from other shared frames of reference. I also conclude that nationalism is concerned with realising a good, rather than establishing a condition for justice, and I argue that this is an instrumental good but that it derives from a capacity that is intrinsically good.

In the last major chapter - Chapter 5 - I ask how a shared frame of reference account stacks up against the existing theories I outlined in Chapter 1. The main claim of

this chapter is that the 'shared frame of reference' account addresses the weaknesses identified in existing theories while it draws upon and complements their strengths.

In the last part of the project I provide a short conclusion which sums up the major claims and findings, and I contemplate the value of the overall exercise as reflected in these claims and findings.

6. Contribution

I believe this work can contribute to the study of nationalism in two ways – one of them is concerned with a theoretical feature, the other with a methodological approach.

First, at a theoretical level this project aims at refining our thinking on the moral status of nationalism so that we can avoid some of the difficulties encountered in existing theories. The outcome - a 'shared frame of reference' account – is distinct from existing normative approaches in that it uses ideas developed for a personal/individual defence of nationalism (as a context for choice and a source of individual esteem and identity) and argues that these factors also have a collective dimension. In other words, they don't just matter *for* people, but *between* people. In turn it takes the collectivist defence of nationalism (as a basis for better politics) and grounds it in more than affective ties or social trust, either of which can prove unreliable without other factors to ground them.

Second, this exercise takes a novel methodological approach to its theoretical task. It seeks to bring back into the equation a set of voices that have traditionally been excluded – those of nationalists themselves. Doing so provides an opportunity to see whether there is

something about the moral worth of nations that has not yet been fully captured by those who theorise about it. As it now stands, in both the Irish and Quebec case, nationalist arguments are studied mostly for their historical or sociological insights, but rarely as claims about political good. On the other hand, normative debates over nationalism are often conducted without direct reference to how nationalists themselves frame the issue. I think this is a significant omission and my work aims to address this deficit.

7. Conclusion

As already noted, this is an ambitious project. But I am not attempting a project of this scope because I think I can see deeper into the complex phenomenon of nationalism than others have before me. In truth I only began to understand it at all because of the work that has already been done. Yet at the same time, I felt the pieces were not all fitting together. Either the nation was cast as so essential to our ability to survive and thrive that we could hardly do without it, or it was cast as a dark inheritance that we needed to grow out of, or sometimes it could even be both. From what I had already seen of nationalism I understood it to be a powerful force when it came to bringing a population together, but I believed its course was still directed by the way people chose to employ it. I wanted to see an account that reflected this dimension of the phenomenon.

CHAPTER ONE: THE WORTH OF NATIONS

There are a number of possible ways to approach the question “Is nationalism a good thing?” I mean to review a selection of these approaches in this chapter. But I will argue that the leading theories on the morality of nationalism, while right in parts, prove unworkable on some dimension. For that reason I conclude that we need to revisit our thinking on nationalism so that we can better come to grips with the difficult but important question of its moral standing and to explain why we should (or should not) make a place for it in the political or public arena.

In this chapter I focus on six different theories about the morality of nationalism. Nationalism does not appear in the same light in each of these theories, but each aims at explaining the same drive to forge a distinct political and/or social unit based on the idea of the nation. The nation, meanwhile, appears in these theories as a largely socially constructed set of relationships that the population involved tends to regard as a fundamental part of their collective lives.

Yael Tamir says there are two ways of ‘theorising’ nationalism.¹⁴ The first involves the development of sociological or historical accounts about nationalist movements. This is the type more commonly adopted by scholars of nationalism, she says. But she urges scholars to explore a second way of thinking about nationalism, one that attempts to provide “an abstract, normative theory of nationalism.” In her view, it is this second type

¹⁴ Yael Tamir, “Theoretical Difficulties in the Study of Nationalism,” in *Rethinking Nationalism*, ed. Joycelyne Couture, Kai Nielsen, and Michael Seymour (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1996).

that is most properly the work of political theorists, since it involves “prescribing certain norms and modes of behaviour.”¹⁵

I intend to take up Tamir’s challenge to address the moral dimension of nationalism but I also want to include an assessment of the historical/sociological accounts already in circulation. This is because I believe such accounts also have implications for our moral thinking about nationalism. As David Miller has argued, any political theory has two elements to it, one of which amounts to a “philosophical anthropology” and the other consists of a set of “prescriptive principles.”¹⁶ Sociological/historical theories that offer an account of the anthropology of nationalism, while they do not necessarily entail a particular moral stance, do suggest a perspective on the phenomenon that may, in turn, influence the kind of prescriptive principles we are prepared to endorse.

I begin the discussion with the family of theories that answers the question of nationalism’s moral worth in the negative. These are theories that see nationalism as catering to the darker side of our natures. These “dark side” theories point to the problem of ethnic conflict, to the subordination of the will, and to the need for stability and order. Any one of these is thought sufficient to render nationalism a dangerous doctrine, and suggests that while its appeal is undeniable, its morality is dubious.

Second are remedial right theories which, in effect, attempt to bypass the question of nationalism’s moral standing by focusing instead on the question of rights. They argue that where rights are harmed in a systematic and group-wide way, there may be a case for secession. But this approach has unavoidable consequences for the status of nations and

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 66.

the movements that champion their cause. Somewhat optimistically, remedial right theories suppose that the issues raised by nationalism can be solved without having to address nationalism head on. This position proves untenable.

Third are what I am calling “dysfunctionalist” theories. These are theories that argue that nationalism helps us cope with the demanding economic and social circumstances of modernity. It does so by providing a new social structure attuned to the knowledge and mobility requirements of the new economy – both domestic and international – and by compensating for the ills of anomie and inequality. Such theories suggest that without nationalism we would, at a minimum, be unable to realise the promise of modernity in all its industrial and liberal glory, and that we could even face some kind of social or economic collapse without the nation to shelter us.

Fourth are social trust theories, which suggest that shared nationality tends to foster relationships that enrich our moral and political lives by boosting the essential ingredient of trust. Trust born of common nationality is thought to be the key to deepened commitments and to the realisation of distributive justice.

The fifth type – self-esteem theories – is akin to “dysfunctionalist” theories in that it suggests that we can’t get along very well without healthy nations. But they connect nationalism to the more intimate arena of self-esteem rather than to economic or social effectiveness. Secure identity and belonging is so fundamental to individual well being, they argue, that whatever serves to ground these factors acquires value in virtue of its contribution to self-esteem.

¹⁶ David Miller, “Communitarianism: left, right and centre,” in *Liberalism and its Practice*, ed. Dan Avnon and Avner de-Shalit (New York: Routledge, 1999), 172.

Sixth and finally, I consider an autonomy-based theory that grants, somewhat obliquely, a certain moral standing to national cultures. Will Kymlicka holds that ‘societal cultures’ – which include national minorities – provide a way of making choice meaningful, and are therefore essential to individual autonomy. Consequently everyone should have access to a secure societal culture, as this is the foundation of personal autonomy.

I will set out each of these theories as separate claims about the moral standing of nationalism, and discuss how they fare on this score (though particular authors often make use of elements from more than one of these theories). This is not intended as a comprehensive reading of any one of them, however, and I don’t pretend to be able to do justice to them in the space allowed. What I aim to do is identify what each has to say about why we should (or should not) accommodate the claims of nationalism when we encounter them. I then consider how well these answers hold up under scrutiny. I suspect that they all point to some dimension of the truth about nationalism, but it’s just as important to know the limits of these approaches and where they fall short as explanations of the worth of nations.

I. NATIONALISM AS OUR ‘DARK SIDE’

Ernest Gellner called the account of nationalism that reduced it to “atavistic forces of blood or territory” the “Dark Gods” theory, and he promptly dismissed it as untenable.¹⁷ But it is not so easy to banish those associations. While Gellner is right to remind us that

barbarity is not unique to the age of nationalism, it is still legitimate to ask whether nationalism has a tendency to feed (or feed on) backwardness, hatred, repression or chaos. In other words, is nationalism about indulging the darker side of our natures?

Those who argue against the moral value of nationalism point to two nationally-inspired world wars and to more recent exercises in the art of genocide and ethnic cleansing as the repeated incarnations of the same dark purpose. Short of these atrocities, there is ample evidence to associate nationalism with authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. And even where the nationalist cause does not seem to promise an imminent collapse into bloodshed or repression, the nature of the doctrine and the movements it spawns threaten to undermine that delicate balance known as 'the international order.' What sovereignty would be secure, it is argued, if it could be undone because of a constructed fiction like the nation? Thus even if nationalism could be disassociated from the evils of ethnic hatred or totalitarianism, our basic interest in living in a system characterised by stability and predictability militates against regarding nationalism as anything but downright dangerous.

But before I address the arguments of these theories, I want to point to a problem in the way they are sometimes employed. This idea of nationalism as catering to our darker natures is often used in opportunistic ways - to describe movements that challenge existing states. These states, on the other hand, are purported to have escaped the contagion. The good ones, at least, are supposedly held together by an attachment to civic principle. Yet the community based in a purely civic attachment is an ideal that has rarely, if ever, been realised. If there is little chance of realising a truly neutral order and the civic

¹⁷ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 130.

nation is, as Bernard Yack has argued, a myth,¹⁸ then nationalism returns as a pressing question for *all* states, whether existing or aspiring. If it is morally illegitimate then the chances are we are all implicated in its guilt. Just because one nationalism succeeded long ago where another failed does not give the successful one a bye in the moral arena. Therefore it is implausible to apply 'dark side' theories as if only those already excluded from the club of states can fall victim to the malaise of nationalism. If that is how the theory gets employed, it is suspect from the beginning.¹⁹

But if we accept that it applies equally to the nationalism of existing and aspiring states, 'dark side' theories are worth investigating. To make the case against nationalism, 'dark side' theories come in at least three variations, based on different accounts of what constitutes darkness. The variations I review here centre on ideas of progress, the will, and social order. In the case of progress the concern is with the maximisation of social utility via enlightenment and liberalisation. In the case of the will, the concern is with self-determination as the highest good, and questions how this can be preserved in a system that involves multiple wills - to wit, politics. And in the case of social order, the concern is with the value of stability and predictability as a crucial pre-condition of other social goods. As noted, nationalism can be variously construed as threatening progress, subjugating the will, or undermining the basic order of politics, and therein, supposedly, lie its dark tendencies.

¹⁸ Bernard Yack, "The Myth of the Civic Nation," in *Theorizing Nationalism*, ed. Ronald Beiner (New York: SUNY Press, 1999), 103-19.

¹⁹ Louis Balthazar makes a similar point in the introduction to, *Bilan du nationalisme au Québec* (Montreal: L'Hexagone, 1986), and Rogers M. Smith echoes the same idea in his introduction to *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in US History* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 1997).

John Stuart Mill recognised the value of nations as the setting for representative democracy, but he also felt that they could be obstacles to the progress of society (by encouraging sulking over innovation).²⁰ The utility yielded through progress is what justifies both a liberal order and representative democracy, so when nationalism gets in the way, nationalism must yield. Thus where it opposes a liberal and progressive order nationalism should be considered a retrograde or regressive force. Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau used such logic to criticise what he saw as the backwardness of Quebec nationalism.²¹ Yet contemporary Quebec nationalism – the very nationalism that Trudeau was taking aim at – is closely associated with the Quiet Revolution in that province and introduced a social, economic, and political transformation that would have warmed Mill’s heart. So the first thing to observe is that nationalism is not an inherent enemy of social progress. At most it depends on the particular circumstances involved.

But there is a more fundamental problem with this account of nationalism’s moral standing. The problem with Mill’s logic is that it assumes a linear and recognisable path to this thing called progress, and that the so-called advanced nations know better how to run society and politics for the general good. Such logic not only condemns atavistic nationalism; it also justifies imperialism in the interests of bringing the backward out of their darkness into the light of progress. But imperial and colonial experiments, even at their most benevolent, have rarely served the interests of those they were supposed to

²⁰ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism, On Liberty and Considerations on Representative Government*, ed. H.B. Acton (London: Dent, 1972), 395.

²¹ Trudeau argued that independence was not viable for Quebec because: “French Canada is too culturally anaemic, too economically destitute, too intellectually retarded, too spiritually paralysed, to be able to survive more than a couple of decades of stagnation, emptying herself of all her vitality into nothing but a cesspit, the mirror of her nationalistic vanity and ‘dignity’.” See “The New Treason of the Intellectuals” in *Federalism and the French Canadians* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), 170.

enlighten. If we can not legitimately maintain a political order on the grounds of bringing progress, the corollary would seem to be that neither can we call illegitimate those political projects that break with the established order, simply because of claims that this order embodies progress. Thus the Mill-inspired condemnation of nationalism as backwardness cannot hold as a moral evaluation without also endorsing a kind of civilisational hierarchy that invokes the spectre of imperialism in all its misguided optimism.

Yet this is still not sufficient to exonerate nationalism of its dark associations. Elie Kedourie, for instance, argued that the nature of the doctrine itself was at the root of the problem. Arising in a Kantian ideal of self-determination and authenticity, nationalism calls for an ultimately self-negating subordination of the will to a greater social whole. As Kedourie put it, “the essence of nationalism is that the will of the individual should merge in the will of the nation.”²² The freedom that can be realised through nationalism then has all the problems associated with Berlin’s concept of positive freedom and is naturally much out of favour in an era obsessed with negative freedom.²³ What’s more, the central role that will played in the new nationalist ethic meant that nothing could legitimately obstruct it. Nationalism, by “its very nature,” Kedourie said, “ran to extremes.”²⁴

If this were an accurate assessment of nationalism, it would indeed be appropriate to conclude it is a dangerous doctrine. But there is reason to think that the nature of the phenomenon is more complex and more varied than this ‘triumph of the will’ argument suggests. Without denying that nationalism has its extremist and absolutist forms (there

²² Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 4th ed. (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1993), 105.

²³ Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Four Essays on Liberty* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

²⁴ Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 10.

are precious few ideologies that don't), in order to pass final judgement on the doctrine, it still needs to be established that this is the only and inevitable form it can take. If there are nationalisms that do not run to extremes or cast themselves as the only route to (positive) freedom, then the question of moral worth remains an open one. I don't think one needs to look very far to encounter instances where nationalism, while important to people, has not led to rampant political excess or relied upon the subjugation of the will. I would submit that the nationalism of contemporary Quebec is a case in point. Establishing this point is not enough to make nationalism a morally desirable doctrine. But it does mean that the critique of nationalism based on the idea that it requires the submergence of the individual will, while it may hold against some, does not hold against all varieties of nationalism.

Kedourie raised another concern regarding nationalism, and it has been given considerable credence in an age concerned with globalism and the international order. This is the idea that nationalism has a built-in chaos factor. It is how the marginalised and disaffected disrupt and overthrow the established order, ruining things for everyone. Ernest Gellner himself reinforced this idea of the insatiability of nationalism with his famous argument that there simply wasn't room on earth for all the potential nations that are out there, and that few have the level of homogeneity they desire, setting up a situation with multiple sources of conflict. If we open that Pandora's box by endorsing that idea of nationalism then no one will be spared the consequences, or so the argument goes. Allen Buchanan, for instance, uses such a formulation (he calls it the "Infeasibility Objection") to

rule out the legitimacy of secession-seeking national self-determination. He suggests that our common interest in stability overrides any such claims.²⁵

I think there is some truth to this argument. Most nationalist movements are seeking some kind of change, often a change in the political order. And changing the political order undeniably involves disruption. But order and predictability are not absolute values. We often decide that we are better served by systems that are open to change. Why else would we hold regular elections? To establish the legitimacy of the existing international order simply on the basis of the fact that it is precisely that – existing and orderly – is to take up a Hobbesian view of relations in the international sphere, and makes of the international system a new Leviathan.

Allen Buchanan may offer us a Lockean-like escape clause from this system by arguing for the legitimacy of secession where there is rights abuse, but like revolution, this is a rare and extreme recourse in Buchanan's world. Where the abuse is not sufficiently widespread or clear-cut, change is not justified. Like Locke's lone revolutionary, titleless or insufficiently victimised national groups can do little but "appeal to Heaven."²⁶ I will return to Buchanan's arguments in a following section, but here I want to acknowledge that the doctrine of nationalism certainly involves change – whether social, political, cultural or a combination thereof. But I submit that this is not sufficient to render the doctrine pernicious. Some change, even in its most disruptive and disorderly form, can be justified, even desirable. Prudence argues for making changes as painlessly and responsibly

²⁵ See Allen Buchanan, "What's So Special about Nations?" in *Rethinking Nationalism*, ed. Jocelyne Couture, Kai Nielsen and Michael Seymour (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1996), 283-309 and "Theories of Secession," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 26, no. 1 (1997): 31-61.

as possible, but it cannot make change – no matter how much of it is involved – inherently wrong. As with the argument concerning the subordination of the will, the most this argument can do is circumscribe the way in which nationalism can be pursued. It is not, I believe, sufficient to render it morally illegitimate.

In the end, these “dark side” theories of nationalism are not as misguided as Gellner makes them out to be. But neither do they score a decisive victory against the doctrine. It is legitimate to be concerned with stability, individual will, and even progress, but each of these can become harmful in their own right if we construe them as moral ‘trumps.’ Unless nationalism cannot *but* descend into chaos, repression, and backwardness (and this characterisation is not borne out by historical experience), then we cannot rule it out out of hand. Therefore we must continue to pursue the question of its moral worth in instances where these factors are not present.

II. NATIONALISM AS REMEDIAL RIGHT

If the best that can be said for the “dark side” theories is that they tell against some forms of nationalism, we are left with the question of whether there are other instances where it is acceptable, or where it may even serve a desirable moral purpose. One area where the morality of nationalism is generally conceded, even by the most sceptical, is where national independence is thought of as a way for populations to escape a systematically abusive or exploitative situation. This is most likely the intuition behind the

²⁶ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, rev. ed. with intro. and notes by Peter Laslett (New York: Mentor, 1960), 426.

near-universal endorsement of colonial nationalisms. This leads to a position that legitimates nationalism not as a doctrine of self-determination, but as a carefully circumscribed means to remedial justice. Allen Buchanan's remedial right theory is an example of this logic at work.²⁷

First, I should acknowledge that Buchanan does not set out to make a case for the moral standing of nationalism. Indeed, one gets the impression that he believes one of the chief virtues of his theory is that it enables us to side step that thorny issue. To the extent that Buchanan does contemplate the question, he expresses serious reservations about any doctrine that promotes national self-determination, but even this evaluation is based on doubts about its practical feasibility. However, I don't think this deft footwork is enough to distance his remedial right arguments from arguments about nations and nationalism, as I will explain below. But for the time being, it is enough to point out that most of the secession movements that he ends up legitimising through his arguments are also nationalist movements.²⁸ Nationalism is more often than not the doctrine that sets afoot the kinds of claims that Buchanan is addressing, and to that extent, what he has to say about those claims has a bearing on the standing of these movements.

Turning to the instances where Buchanan will contemplate that nationalism can be at least circumstantially associated with a legitimate cause, he argues that in general, secession is justified where a group "suffers what are uncontroversially regarded as

²⁷ See *Secession: The Morality of Political Divorce from Fort Sumpter to Lithuania and Quebec* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

²⁸ This is not to say that no groups other than nations can opt to secede from an existing political unit. But to organise a population to pursue the secession option requires a great deal of mobilisation. The idea of the nation has proven extremely successful at supporting this kind of effort, and non-nationalist secession from state units is, I think, more the exception than the rule.

injustices and has no reasonable prospect of relief short of secession.”²⁹ Buchanan argues that where there have been cases of abuse or exploitation of a group, *and* where there is a valid claim to title, *and* where withdrawing the territory in question would not compromise the rights of others, then secession can be a legitimate action. There may also be instances where cultural survival justifies secession, but these are very rare and require that the seceding group has no other recourse, and that it has legitimate claim to the territory that they want to take with them. But since all habitable territory on earth is already considered to be under the valid title of some state or another, it seems unlikely that circumstances will ever arise to meet Buchanan’s requirement in this category.³⁰ For this reason I will focus my comments on those parts of Buchanan’s argument that justify secession in cases where there has been clear rights abuse. Indeed, this is the most powerful statement of the remedial right theory and should provide the most persuasive argument for answering the claims of the groups involved, even when they are nations.

The rights abuse formula works in Buchanan’s opinion because it also serves to overturn title to territory as part of the remediation package. The abuse can come in two main forms: from ‘unjust incorporation’ or ‘discriminatory redistribution.’³¹ What these two have in common is a focus on material rights, since we can assume that the offence in incorporation centres on the transfer of title and that what is being redistributed is movable material goods or property rights. In essence then, secession is a way to recover one’s losses or to avoid future damages. Buchanan also rules out the idea of secession as

²⁹ Buchanan, “Theories of Secession,” 44. Admittedly secession is only one form of nationalism, but it is the only one Buchanan addresses.

being justified by simple consent – or rather, by the withdrawal of consent to participate in the existing state. Buchanan believes an individual’s consent does not carry with it valid title to territory and so while a group may wish to secede, and under consent theory, should be allowed to do so, the title to the land they occupy would remain with the prior state. Territorial title thus becomes the linchpin of any secession effort. Where it is not a case of liberating a conquered territory, it seems that in the vast majority of cases territory can only be transferred to the group that wants to exit when the original title holder negates it through abuse, or voluntarily relinquishes it. The seceding group, meanwhile, has no rights against this title-holding process and where they don’t already have title, they can achieve it only by inviting abuse or by pleading for generosity.

As noted, Buchanan rules out national self-determination as legitimate grounds for secession, and in addition to the main problem of territorial title, he cites two objections. The “Infeasibility Objection” repeats Gellner’s argument about lack of space and the proliferation of conflict and instability. The “Equal Respect Objection” questions why nations should get special treatment when there are many significant sources of identity for individuals in modern society. The “Infeasibility Objection” I have already addressed, in so far as it concerns the value of social order. But with regard to the idea of ‘feasibility,’ as far as I know there is no set limit on the number of states this planet can accommodate. Buchanan’s argument here seems to rest on a conviction that small states won’t be able to function effectively, or that there is a minimal critical mass for real sovereignty, but oddly

³⁰ As Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz wrote; “It is a natural fact about our world that it is a populated world with no unappropriated lands.” “National Self-Determination,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 87, no. 9 (1990), 440.

³¹ Allen Buchanan, “Toward a Theory of Secession,” *Ethics* 101 (1991): 329-33.

enough I have yet to see any evidence to support this common claim. Yet it appears that many small states are doing just fine. They may even be proliferating without causing the collapse of the international system. In short, with all the complex forces that affect the viability of political authority and economic performance in the current era, why argue that size is such a deciding factor that it should forestall political change? In the contemporary era, given increasing international interdependence, sovereignty is increasingly circumscribed for even the mightiest of states. In which case, the playing field is being levelled, as no one gets to have full and unconditional sovereignty anymore. In the face of these developments there needs to be some more convincing evidence provided for the “Infeasibility Objection” before it can be taken seriously. Otherwise it looks like little more than existing (and often large) states saying they don’t want new members allowed into the club of states because it’s inconvenient to work with bigger numbers. In that case, this objection carries minimal moral weight.

The “Equal Respect Objection,” however, does raise a significant challenge to the recognition of nationalism as a doctrine. But it merely amounts to asking the question that Buchanan uses as a chapter title: “What’s So Special About Nations?” In asking the question, Buchanan is taking aim at theories of nationalism that defend its claims on the basis that it provides a valuable source of identity, belonging, and esteem. He requires, rightly I think, that more than this must be provided in order to validate the doctrine in its fullest implications. But if an adequate answer can be provided to this challenge, then the objection is removed. I think it is appropriate and helpful for Buchanan to raise this question and through my overall project I intend to see if it can be answered.

So under Buchanan's terms in the great majority of cases nationalism is associated with a legitimate cause only when it serves a group with a valid claim to remediation, and which already holds valid territorial title. And it should be reiterated that it's decidedly not the nationalism but the remedial right that's doing the work here. How well does this account work? And what can it tell us about the worth of nationalism?

First, as I suggested earlier, it is necessary to clarify what role nationalism plays in this account. As noted, its worth is decidedly derivative, but I think some worth needs to be acknowledged. If nothing else, nationalism is the movement that points people to a way out of their abuse or a means to reclaim their rightful property. Since there is no external body to introduce secession as a means to avert further abuse, it is up to the injured party to start the process for independence. And this is what we normally call nationalism. But I assume Buchanan would be uncomfortable with even this minimal concession to the moral worth of nationalism. This is because he wants to argue for national secession in some instances without acknowledging there is anything special about nations, fearing the implications of the conclusion that nations or nationalism have a moral claim of their own. Clearly this is a tricky position to try to maintain and I think his remedial right theory ends up in certain inconsistencies as a result.

Take the issue of territory for instance. I, for one, welcome his attention to this most basic of considerations. But I don't believe he can maintain a position that separates political consent from territorial title. If some claim to the lands that we occupy does not go along with our political consent to establish a state project, how could any state ever acquire title to begin with? And if, as a group, we can bring territory into the state by our

consent to participate, why can't a group take some of it out again, if it opts to exit in favour of a new political project? Why is political title to territory a one-way street?

Consider, also, the ambiguity of Buchanan's argument for restoring stolen lands to independence. There is a clear intuitive appeal to this position but unfortunately it is not consistent with Buchanan's dismissal of nations on the grounds of infeasibility and inequity. If nations are not special, then why worry about restoring their political independence? Why isn't it sufficient to, say, compensate for losses and guarantee equal treatment of the newly incorporated national minority? This outcome would also have the virtue of causing less upheaval. One could object this might encourage attempts to take over other people's lands, but again, if nations are not special and the outcome is bigger (and perhaps more viable) and ultimately non-discriminatory multinational states, then while we can criticise the means of expansion, once it has happened there are compelling reasons to leave it be. And while we might agree that some punitive damages are in order, if we deny that there was something special about this group's political independence, we have no reason to make restoring that independence a special priority in the remediation process. It's because we feel that there is something more at stake in these cases that we cannot consider such an outcome as morally acceptable. Buchanan's theories fail to capture what this added value of the nation might be.

But perhaps what I have the most difficulty with is the connection that Buchanan makes between victimhood and independence rights. Tamir objects to this connection because it may encourage people to dwell on or play up national injustices.³² I think this

³² Tamir calls this "the sanctification of suffering." Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), x.

fear is well grounded, but I approach the issue slightly differently. Having grown up in Ireland, I have a certain attachment to that place, and I think it's a good thing that there's an independent Irish state. However, under Buchanan's logic the legitimacy of the Irish State derives largely from a history of abuse ranging from the penal laws to the Black and Tans. In which case am I in the position of being grateful that such abuse took place, since it merited Ireland its independence, and without it Ireland would have stayed a British hinterland? I must admit that I find this situation perverse.

In the end what the remedial right theory suggests is that nationalism can, in some cases, serve a worthy cause, but in most cases it depends on other people's abusive actions to trigger this validation. Seeing nationalism as legitimate-by-association when it coincides with certain narrowly defined political projects is still a step up on the position articulated in the "dark side" theories of nationalism. Yet this approach does not really seem to come to grips with the central question of the moral worth of nationalism. In fact, the main contribution of a theory like Buchanan's may be in how it highlights this very question, and leads us to ask how nationalism relates to the fundamental issue of territory.

A remedial right theory like Buchanan's provides a simple harm-based explanation for why we feel some secessions are justified, but since it tries to side-step the question of nationalism, the explanation does not hold up well under scrutiny. Even if we conclude that nationalism has derivative worth where it serves the cause of remediation, this falls short of an adequate moral assessment and the restoration of statehood to conquered, exploited or even endangered peoples is, I believe, inconsistent with a position that denies

nations any special political standing on prudential (i.e., infeasibility) or principled (i.e., equal respect) grounds.

III. NATIONALISM AS 'DYSFUNCTIONALISM'

If nationalism is not adequately accounted for simply as a means to mobilise for remediation, then we need to look for a more developed account of the phenomenon in an effort to gauge its moral worth. Certain sociological or historical accounts, for instance, suggest we should think of nationalism as a functional corollary of modernity. This approach suggests that nationalism should be seen as something that facilitates the arrival of modernity by reconciling the individual to the conditions that modernity brings about. Whether nationalism made modernity possible by producing individuals who were well attuned to its requirements, or whether it was a response to the conditions created by modernity, the basic relationship stands: Modernity makes nationalism viable and nationalism makes modernity workable. This is a functional rather than a causal relationship, and it presumes a level of interdependency in the absence of which neither side could flourish. By extension, I will argue, this approach suggests a kind of dysfunction, whereby we can't be expected to thrive without our nations, and this dependency underpins nationalism's claim to moral standing - as that which keeps us going in modernity.

Perhaps the classic example of such an account of nationalism is that put forward by Ernest Gellner in *Nations and Nationalism*. Gellner relates the rise of nationalism to the

requirements of modern industrial society for an effective education system. The homogeneity that a common high culture can secure is a necessary condition for economic survival, and this “inescapable imperative” ultimately “appears on the surface in the form of nationalism.”³³ The nation is one of modernity’s most innovative tools for productivity. In Gellner’s view, what it produces is industrial man – mobile, literate and ready to face a division of labour that is “complex and persistently, cumulatively changing.”³⁴

Gellner is not alone in attributing nationalism’s rise to economic developments in the modern era. But not everyone sees its rise as an entirely happy development. Leftist academic Tom Nairn concludes that the origins of nationalism lie “in the machinery of world political economy.”³⁵ The uneven development of capitalism across the globe set the stage for nationalism, making it “a by-product of the most brutally and hopelessly material side of the history of the last two centuries.”³⁶ In the face of marginalisation and inequality, nationalism acted as a “compensatory reaction”;³⁷ it is a “pathology”³⁸ whereby humanity, faced with the challenge of modern economics, “must look desperately back into the past, to gather strength wherever it can be found for the ordeal of ‘development’.”³⁹ Thus nationalism is both a response (to inequality) and a means to advance development where it has been lacking. Nairn’s work is an endorsement of sorts for nationalism. It is, in his view, the international economic levelling mechanism, and it does an admirable job

³³ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 39.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁵ Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1981), 335.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 336.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 343.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 359.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 349.

at that, but it is the regrettable fact of inequality that dictates our need for it in the first place.⁴⁰

One recent account that takes as its starting point the idea of social breakdown and psychological insecurity bred of modernity, is Liah Greenfeld's, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*. In it, Greenfeld argues that, while it took different paths in different times and places, nationalism begins (in all but the English case) with a social or psychological crisis. As she puts it, "A change of identity presupposes a crisis of identity."⁴¹ She points to the condition of "anomie" which sets off this crisis and the "status inconsistency" which fed it.⁴² Nationalisms that came after the original English development are, according to Greenfeld, all tinged with "ressentiment";⁴³ they feed on feelings of envy and inadequacy in the face of another's success. Yet even born of a negative response, nationalism serves a practical end in facilitating the social and economic development of these groups. Nationalism is how groups psychologically 'keep up with the Joneses,' assuring themselves a secure social status and avoiding ego problems.

The three accounts discussed above, while they express the relationship differently, all suggest a "dysfunctionalist" type of theory. They have in common the belief that, whether we like the phenomenon or not, nationalism has served some necessary purpose. It was called into being in answer to some need or requirement that only arose in

⁴⁰ Nairn says of inequality that it "has been the living marrow of actual development." He continues: "Had humankind remained more equal, or been less varied in a social-anthropological sense, then modern history might indeed have assumed the different forms forecast by big-battalion liberalism and socialism." But, he says, "Development could only be uneven." Thus development implies unevenness which implies nationalism. "It couldn't have been otherwise," Nairn claims, without being "far worse" (the alternative being imperialism). See "Beyond Big Brother," *New Statesman and Society* (June 15, 1990): 29-32.

⁴¹ Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992) 14.

modernity. What does this then suggest about the moral worth of nationalism? Perhaps first it should be acknowledged that the examples I have given are all sociological theories and as such they make no pretence to provide moral direction.⁴⁴ But it is not far to go from the descriptive claim that nationalism is a functional necessity in modernity to a prescriptive argument which holds that nationalism has moral worth since it serves to hold together the body and soul of modern society. If this is the prescriptive corollary of “dysfunctionalist” theories (and theorists like Charles Taylor have already borrowed heavily from this approach⁴⁵), then it is, I think, fair to consider this position for its moral implications.

Again, the claim is that nationalism serves to compensate for the difficult conditions of modernity. The strongest statements of this argument, like Gellner’s for instance, claim that nationalism serves to forge a populace which is better suited to the conditions of modernity, be it modernity’s ‘anomie,’ or its economic or political organisation. This is because the challenge of modernity is a daunting one, almost more than we can handle. It implies the absence of the strong social systems and predictable economic behaviours that had held societies together and kept them running smoothly in previous eras. Under the unstructured and ever-changing conditions of modernity, nationalism functions to prepare us for new challenges. Without nationalism we might

⁴² *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ The possible exception to this is Tom Nairn, although I cannot say to what extent he intends his work to be prescriptive as opposed to descriptive.

⁴⁵ Taylor, in fact, set himself the task of completing the functionalist account begun by Gellner by appending an account of our psychological needs. Taylor says he means to “plug the explanatory hole” in Gellner’s work by advancing a complementary, Benedict Anderson-inspired account focusing on personal self-esteem. I will discuss Taylor’s ideas on nationalism below. Charles Taylor,

well be left paralysed in the face of change, and the economic potential of industrialism would be wasted.

But buried within this argument is another idea. This idea suggests that nationalism is not just functional in the Gellnerian sense; it is in some ways indicative of dysfunction. We need nationalism because we cannot deal with life on the scale in which modernity presents it to us: the global scale. Both our social world and our economic world have burst their bonds. Yet it seems that we cannot organise ourselves efficiently in large or flexible units so we make do with smaller, more rigid, and unequal units. In the end, nationalism is in some sense an admission of failure - a concession to our limited capacities and our limited imaginations. We can only extend those capacities by means of a solution like nationalism, which reduces the scale down to more manageable proportions. Thus we become attached to nationalism in an attempt to overcome the difficulties of our current situation. In the end it is simply a matter of knowing our limitations and adapting to them.

Gellner uses an analogy that poignantly illustrates this idea. He talks about modern man as “an artificially produced or bred species which can no longer breathe effectively in the nature-given atmosphere, but can only function effectively and survive in a new, specially blended and artificially sustained air or medium.” Nationalism, he tells us, is the “breathing chamber”⁴⁶ that keeps this fragile species alive.

Even though it may not be flattering, I think that this account, in fact, captures an important truth regarding our need to keep life to a manageable scale. But my concern is

“Nationalism and Modernity,” in *Theorizing Nationalism*, ed. Ronald Beiner (New York: SUNY Press, 1999).

that by accepting this account of the worth of nationalism we may find ourselves in a situation where we can almost never legitimately challenge its claims or conduct. Given that, as the “dark side” theories point out, nationalism can take on quite undesirable forms, it seems to me that we need to be able to specify conditions under which nationalism loses its special standing. Instead, moral accounts which have “dysfunctionalist” assumptions built into them will find that any defence they make of nationalism rests to a great extent on the debilitating effects we would face in the absence of nationalism. This leaves little room for rejecting the claims of nationalism, or setting limits to their extent. So although the approach that stresses the functional connection between modernity and nationalism may have great descriptive power from a historical or sociological viewpoint, that does not mean we should accept it as the basis for prescriptive assessments.

Perhaps it might be argued that if we accept this account we could always opt to keep our nationalisms in check by other means, say, by imposing liberal limits in an effort to curb its more wayward forms. But to do so would mean, under the “dysfunctionalist” logic, that we run the risk of undermining the essential economic or social fabric of a society. Surely then the presumption should be in favour of nationalism? Or so the stronger statements of this approach would seem to suggest. At base then, the problem with this approach is that it runs the risk of over-privileging the nation. If cast in the role of humanity’s last and best defence against the otherwise intolerable or unworkable conditions of modernity, then nationalism becomes near sacrosanct. In which case it is

⁴⁶ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 51.

not the terms of the nationalism that are the chief concern, but rather its simple availability.

While this account credits nationalism with considerable value in the context of modernity, it is a compromised kind of value. As Gellner illustrated, it's valuable in the way an iron lung was once valuable to a polio victim, and any moral worth it has is a product of our unenviable circumstances. Nor is it clear that people are ultimately better off under these conditions. Is there any great value to nationalism if it's part of a system that is productive but inescapable? In other words, the account that casts nationalism as modernity's "coping technique" manages simultaneously to under- and over-play its moral standing. It does so by casting nationalism both as something that merely re-orders our social systems for productivity reasons and also as something that preserves us from the intolerable conditions of modernity.

More to the point, moral theorising about nationalism should not start out from the perspective that we really can't do without it. For if that is the case, the discussion is over before it begins. As with Gellner's 'breathing chambers,' we may lament our circumstances, but we can hardly contemplate leaving them. Unless we mean to give carte blanche to nationalists, we need to keep open the possibility of the denial of nationalism or nationalist claims. This means we must look elsewhere than to "dysfunctionalist" theories for a guide to the moral worth of nationalism.

IV. NATIONALISM AS SOCIAL TRUST

Another way of arguing for the moral worth of nationalism is to claim that nationality supports relationships that enrich our moral and political lives. The common bond of nation, it is said, deepens commitments and obligations between those who share in it and also provides the essential “motivating force”⁴⁷ behind our civic commitments. I call this the “social trust” defence of nationalism

Yael Tamir uses this approach to argue for a version of nationalism that stays within liberal bounds and that is enacted primarily within the cultural arena. Drawing on Dworkin’s account of “associative obligations”⁴⁸ Tamir argues that “deep and important obligations flow from identity and relatedness.”⁴⁹ She applies this to nationalism to conclude that membership in a nation generates deeper moral relationships than can be derived from “general moral duties.”⁵⁰ For this reason it has moral value.

David Miller uses a similar argument in his defence of nationalism, but goes further than Tamir by saying that the level of moral commitment required for modern democracy is unsustainable without the solidarity born of common nationality. A sense of common identity and shared beliefs, as well as a history of participation in the joint project of politics, foster a level of social trust that in turn makes redistributive measures possible. And under the conditions of modern economics, redistribution is a matter of justice. It is advisable then, to conduct politics in ways that tend to reinforce nationality where it

⁴⁷ Roger Scruton, “In Defense of the Nation,” in *The Philosopher on Dover Beach: Essays* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1990), 303.

⁴⁸ Ronald Dworkin, *Law’s Empire* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1986), 195-202.

⁴⁹ Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, 99.

coincides with the state's redistributive responsibilities, and this includes protecting, perhaps promoting, the national identity and requiring that immigrants "come to share" in that identity, for the good of all concerned.⁵¹

Clearly there is something to this line of argument. A shared national identity can make politics simpler than the alternative, by removing one potential source of distrust. And it's also true that most of us do feel some special obligation toward those with whom we share a country, although it can be hard to establish how much of this is attributable to being part of a shared political project – in which case, bare statehood can do the job – and how much to the pre-political national connection.

So the first objection to note is that if nationalism's moral worth arises in the social benefits it makes possible through social trust – both in psychological and material terms – we still need to establish that existing states can't generate the same results. Why create the new public spaces or accommodation regimes that Tamir envisions if Dworkin's "associative obligations" work just as well for citizens as they do for co-nationals?⁵² Why not just build up social trust (as shared beliefs and common identity) around the existing state project, whether national or not? Miller's own championing of the British cause even seems to support this position since for many people – especially the Scots and Welsh – Britain is more of a multi-national than a national project. In fact, one commentator has suggested that an approach like Miller's might even have provided grounds for Britain to

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵¹ David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 26.

⁵² Indeed it is citizens rather than co-nationals that Dworkin ultimately has in mind in the passage Tamir cites.

veto Ireland's secession from the United Kingdom.⁵³ This strikes one as a peculiar endorsement of nationality.

But, in fact, this is nationalism – it's just nationalism as nation building, rather than as secession. And the nation Miller wants to build is a British one. But is it necessary to endorse nationalism in order to uphold the project of a socially and economically progressive British state? Miller would argue that you are unlikely to get those results without the level of trust that relies on a kind of identity that only nationality can provide. Perhaps this is the case, but this still leaves a significant step in the argument obscure. Why is it that nationality can produce a level of trust that citizenship can't? What is the alchemical power of such attachments that they can turn co-existence into commitment?

I would like to put that question on hold, however, and return to it in a later chapter, because it is possible that it can be answered, even if it has not been answered so far. Miller may not be wrong about the moral significance of common nationality; he just hasn't spelled out what its basis might be. Instead, let me address what I see as some of the other ambiguities of social trust theories. The first of these concerns the question of scope. In other words, who gets counted into the national community and therefore into the bonds and rewards of obligation? The ties of nationality are distinct from many other kinds of moral relationship because they are formed with people we may never encounter face to face. But national ties are based on an "imagined community" not just in the sense that we don't personally encounter those to whom we are obligated, but also because we

⁵³ Brendan O'Leary, "Insufficiently liberal and insufficiently nationalist," *Nations and Nationalism* 2, no. 3 (1996): 447.

imagine these communities into being. But if that's the case, why not imagine the whole world as your community? Or at least try to work upwards in scale?

Benedict Anderson, who gave us the term "imagined community," also suggested that such imaginings were ultimately based on the geographically specific political circumstances of these new communities.⁵⁴ But if we look to shared political circumstances to ground our national imaginings, then we return to the problem of distinguishing states from nations and must explain why nations produce a different kind of moral relationship. If affective ties and an imagined sense of common identity with people we'll never know is not a product of particular political circumstances (i.e., state boundaries), then shouldn't we challenge ourselves to expand our imaginations to encompass more and more people? Say, by moving on to multi-nationalism as the next logical enhancement?

Or to put it another way, how do we determine the boundaries that define our nations? If the answer is 'By asking who we share an identity with,' the argument is in danger of becoming circular. To the question "What makes our co-nationals special (and therefore entitled to our trust and obligation)?" we can only answer: "They're our co-nationals.'

In response to this challenge concerning an expanded imagined community, we might suggest that identity and trust could only be expected to hold over a certain social distance. Critiquing the universalist position, for instance, Miller argues that the burden of proof is on the universalist to establish that "in widening the scope of ethical ties to encompass equally the whole of the human species, he does not also drain them of their

⁵⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

binding force.”⁵⁵ But if we accept Miller’s suspicion as true, then the implication is that we should only expect to achieve a limited range of coverage when it comes to certain moral relationships, and unfortunately the relationship that grounds the fundamentals of redistributive justice may not hold over great distances. Given that we know the global economy to be characterised by great international inequalities, we would do well to think carefully before accepting this account.

Aside from the question of whom we trust there is also a legitimate question to be raised about the value of trust itself. Both Tamir and Miller take it to be a good thing, because of the attachments and obligations it grounds. But trust can also be the basis for relations of injustice and exploitation.⁵⁶ Deep attachment and identity, a sense of mutual support and willingness to sacrifice for another could also be features of a Mafia ‘family’, but this is not enough to make it a morally worthy kind of bond. Relations of deep trust can go hand-in-hand with established hierarchies or entrenched patterns of discrimination that we don’t necessarily want to endorse.

Moreover, there is nothing inherent to internal bonds of identity and trust that prevents them from also involving indifference or even hostility to outsiders. This, I think, is a potential problem with Miller’s work, especially when it comes to the case of immigrants. If your claim to participate in the social benefits of the national project is derived from how my co-nationals and I feel about you, then what happens if we decide we don’t trust you, or identify with you? As a newcomer, an immigrant is on the outside

⁵⁵ Miller, *On Nationality*, 80.

⁵⁶ Avigail Eisenberg develops this critique in “Trust Exploitation and Multiculturalism,” a paper presented at the conference “Nationalism, Identity and Minority Rights,” University of Bristol, Bristol, Britain, September 16-19, 1999.

looking in, and is dependent upon those who already share a nationality to acknowledge that they have become enough like the rest to belong among their number. Prior to extending that trust, those who share a nationality have limited obligations to outsiders.⁵⁷ And it is not clear to me whether one of those obligations is to let them in, even when they live alongside us. To make a case that they are entitled to share social benefits because they contribute to the economy, cohabit in our state, or even simply are dependants on our doorstep, requires a basis for social justice other than nationality. So either we base redistributive justice on some other obligations, or we leave open the possibility that we can have a damaging failure to extend trust.

I agree with Miller and Tamir when they argue that nations are ethical communities, but I am not convinced that they have given us the right account of their moral basis. I also think there is considerable evidence for the supposition that shared nationality makes the job of politics easier and more effective. But it's still an open question whether the kind of politics that will be pursued is something desirable. In short, I think the social trust account of nationalism is still not adequate to explain the moral worth of nationalism. For one, it fails to show why nations can yield relationships that states can't. It also does not explain why the boundaries of nationality fall where they do, and why they can't simply be re-imagined at will. And finally, it is not clear that the outcome of greater trust will always be greater justice. Thus for all the insights they provide, social trust theories still seem to leave some significant gaps in their account of the special moral status of nations.

⁵⁷ Miller uses this argument to explain why we have limited obligations to redistribute outside of our national group. See *On Nationality*, 73-9, 191.

V. NATIONALISM AS SELF-ESTEEM

It's not only at the broad social or economic level that nationalism is thought to pay a significant dividend. Nationalism has also been credited with upholding personal self-esteem in the modern setting by providing a secure sense of belonging, and a means to recognition and self-respect. This defence of nationalism's moral worth has much in common with "dysfunctionalist" theories when it argues that under the circumstances of modernity we need nationalism to compensate for the demanding changes being introduced. But in this case, the theories are concerned with systems of identity and personal status more than with industrial organisation or broad-based social patterns. Put another way, this account is concerned with the working of the ego, not the economy.

Charles Taylor is arguing from this perspective when he claims that the transition to modernity involved changes in the concepts of time and social order – or what he calls the "social imaginary"⁵⁸ – that made the achievement of stable and secure self-esteem considerably more difficult. This combines with uneven international development, leading domestic elites to suffer from feelings of inferiority when they compare their lot with that of their counterparts in other parts of the world. The response is to defend one's self-respect via a "call to difference"⁵⁹ which in many cases is expressed as nationalism.

⁵⁸ Charles Taylor, "Nationalism and Modernity," in *Theorizing Nationalism*, 224.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 233.

What is at stake here is “a matter of dignity, in which one’s self-worth is engaged,”⁶⁰ which explains its visceral power.

Margalit and Raz take a similar tack to Taylor’s when they argue that the “moral importance of the group’s interest depends on its value to individuals.”⁶¹ They go on to give reasons why “encompassing groups”⁶² like nations are especially valuable to individuals. One reason is that when “[m]embership is a matter of belonging not achievement,” it meets our need for identity “at the most fundamental level,” and secure identity is, in turn, an important factor in individual well being.⁶³ Indeed, elsewhere Margalit, writing with Moshe Halbertal, says that an individual has “an overriding interest in his personal identity,”⁶⁴ and that this interest grounds his (or her) right to see the cultural context of that identity preserved. Thus a concern for “individual dignity and self-respect”⁶⁵ motivates our concern for the nation, since nationality is a kind of encompassing identity.

It’s not that either Taylor or Margalit and his co-authors Raz and Halbertal are suggesting that nationalism’s association with identity makes it morally unassailable. Margalit and Raz, for instance, conclude that national self-government cannot be “insisted on at all costs.”⁶⁶ What these accounts have in common, however, is that they point to the

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁶¹ Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, “National Self-Determination,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 87, no. 9 (1990): 439-61 at 450.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 448.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 447.

⁶⁴ Avishai Margalit and Moshe Halbertal, “Liberalism and the Right to Culture,” *Social Research* 61, no. 3 (1994): 505.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 449.

⁶⁶ Margalit and Raz, “National Self-Determination,” 461.

instrumental value of nationalism and suggest how value arises in its ability to support – perhaps even repair – self esteem.

Does this work as an account of the moral worth of nationalism? We have already encountered possible objections to this approach in the writings of Allen Buchanan. His “Equal Respect Objection” asks why nations should get special consideration as identity and esteem providing groups. Margalit and Raz’s attempt to define encompassing groups may have been an effort to anticipate such objections, but it’s not hard to imagine groups other than nations that fit their criteria in which case identity and esteem can’t account for the distinct moral standing of nationalism.⁶⁷ Taylor even winds up including religious fundamentalism as another possible response to the dignity-threatening ‘waves of modernity,’⁶⁸ making it difficult to claim nations have a unique capacity to shelter identity and esteem.

In the end, I think Buchanan’s objection holds against these theories. If the value of nationalism rests on its connection with identity and esteem, it still needs to be explained why national identity is a special case among identity types, and how this justifies nationalism a place on the political scene.

But even if we accept the argument that nationality is especially valuable to individuals because of its role in identity and self-esteem, this still may not translate into a workable defence of the moral worth of nations. First of all there is the problem of making

⁶⁷ The six criteria Margalit and Raz set out are: 1) the group has “a common character and a common culture”; 2) “people growing up among members of the group will acquire the group culture, will be marked by its character”; 3) membership in the group “is, in part, a matter of mutual recognition”; 4) members are “aware of their membership and typically regard it as an important clue in understanding who they are”; 5) membership “is a matter of belonging, not achievement,” and; 6) that these are not “small face-to-face groups” but are “anonymous groups where mutual recognition is secured by the possession of general characteristics.” See “National Self-Determination,” 443-7.

emotional security the yardstick for moral success. Self-esteem can be a bottomless pit in terms of what is required to make some people secure. Since it's a subjective condition, anyone can question the legitimacy of a regime under which they feel their dignity is not sufficiently respected, and it's very likely some people will. To maintain any semblance of stability and legitimacy under this regime we will need either to deny these people's ability to judge their own emotional security, or deny their claim to enhanced conditions for self-esteem.

Meanwhile if measures like national self-determination are justified by their instrumental worth to individuals, then where individuals with different national attachments share a political community, a condition of immediate conflict is set up. And since there are precious few locations on earth where some mixing of nationalities has not occurred (and these are the few places where nationalism is *not* an issue), then recognising nationalism as derived from individual esteem-needs means facing a situation of moral stalemate.⁶⁹ Your claim to have your nationality recognised runs smack up against mine. And since we can assume identity and self-esteem to be equally valuable across individuals, and since it is so fundamental to well-being that it constitutes 'an overriding interest,' then why should some people get their esteem needs met and not others? Yet this seems to be an unavoidable outcome of measures like national self-determination or establishing a politics of recognition based on nationality. And I don't think this position can be saved by trying to translate individual self-esteem claims into a collective claim. If we say that

⁶⁸ Taylor, "Nationalism and Modernity," 232-3.

⁶⁹ It is important to note that I am not resurrecting the "Infeasibility Objection" here. I do not assume that chaos or confusion will automatically ensue. I merely mean to point out that in this moral

groups are important because they are the source of our sense of belonging and esteem, then the groups' standing is still only instrumental to, and derivative of, individuals' needs. There must still be a reason why even one person's fundamental identity and esteem-needs should lose out before the group.

I suspect that this is what makes the pairing of multiculturalism and nationalism such a tricky combination, as Canadians and Quebecers⁷⁰ have discovered. If nationalism is based on individual esteem, then while every individual has general grounds to make a claim to recognition, it's hard to make an argument for the special status of any *particular* nationality. Multiculturalism is at least consistent in that it aims to give the same esteem-opportunities to all individuals. Yet in doing so it may be diluting the setting that reinforces esteem for the originally predominant group, and replacing it with one so mixed that its ultimate effectiveness is reduced for all.

Thus esteem-based theories of nationalism may give us insight into how nationality has value for individuals, but they can't explain why nationalism is a good thing in general. There is reason to think that groups other than nations can provide equally important esteem and identity benefits without making the political demands that nationalism involves. And there is also reason to think that when it's grounded in individualised identity claims, nationalism is headed for stalemate in the only setting where it is likely to be an issue – where there are different national identities already in play.

stalemate it becomes nearly impossible to do the right thing. Which does not seem like a helpful or practical guide to moral conduct. Morality should not lead to paralysis.

⁷⁰ The naming of people is often loaded with significance. I want to explain my use of names for the people of Quebec. I use "Quebecer" to designate all people who live in Quebec, and "*Québécois*" to designate the population that is identified with the French Canadian nation in Quebec. Although the English and nationally neutral term "Quebecer" is sometimes used as if to suggest that there is no *Québécois*, I do not employ it in this way. I think both are real and identifiable groups.

VI. NATIONALISM AS A 'CONTEXT OF CHOICE'

The final theory I want to consider here is one that was not explicitly intended as an assessment of the moral worth of nationalism. Instead it is concerned with the value of culture. But to the extent that the culture in question is a national culture or the culture of a national minority, it can furnish an argument on behalf of nationalism, by suggesting that something of worth is at stake in such cases.

Will Kymlicka provides an account of culture as something that provides the foundation for autonomy. He argues that “societal cultures,”⁷¹ which include national minorities (and even those majorities into which immigrants are to be integrated) provide a way of making choice meaningful and are therefore essential to individual autonomy. This autonomy-based theory has implications for the moral standing of nationalism since it suggests that cultures, even national ones, are intimately linked to the realisation of a liberal order. Movements on behalf of such cultures and the people who participate in them can therefore be construed as working to preserve an important source of individual well being.

⁷¹ Kymlicka defines a culture as “synonymous with a ‘nation’ or a ‘people’” – that is, as “an intergenerational community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory or homeland, sharing a distinct language and history.” He defines societal culture as “a culture which provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, educational, religious, recreational, and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres.” Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 18, 76. Because by culture he also means a nation, I will, for the sake of consistency, sometimes talk about his views in terms of nationalism rather than cultures, although I acknowledge this is not his preferred term and that not all of the groups he is concerned with are nations or national minorities.

This is a powerful and persuasive account, but there are two reasons I doubt it can be applied to argue that nations have some special value. One of the reasons is an analytical objection, and asks whether an individual-centred approach can generate a sustainable defence of a collective entity in the face of increasingly complex populations. The other is what I would call an operational objection, and queries how the context-autonomy relationship plays out in real life.

But before getting into these issues it is worth reiterating that Kymlicka's theory is not primarily designed to champion either nations or nationalism. As Allen Buchanan has argued, Kymlicka does not defend nations "as such."⁷² Where Kymlicka does call for special rights for national minorities, these rights are justified primarily by either historical agreements, like treaties or federalism, or by historical wrongs, like conquest or exploitation. In which case, as Buchanan points out, a remedial theory can do the job equally well. But even if Kymlicka does not structure the argument in this way, his autonomy theory does suggest one reason for accommodating the claims of national minorities. National identity may be of important instrumental value to individuals, because like other "societal cultures," nations provide their members with a context of choice by investing the available options with meaning. It might also be argued that Kymlicka is following the "dysfunctionalist" type of approach, in that his defence of minority rights points to the difficulties associated with the denial of one's original societal culture. Yet difficult as such an adjustment is, Kymlicka does not suggest we can't go through it. In fact, he tells us there are circumstances where we *should* go through it. He argues that immigrants are not entitled to the same kind of rights as national minorities,

because they have voluntarily departed their original culture, in recognition that they will have to adjust to a new one.

Clearly the original societal culture of an immigrant is every bit as important as that of a national group in terms of being a system for investing choices with meaning. And, in fact, I am not convinced that Kymlicka is right in his denial of special rights for immigrants.⁷³ But what this position illustrates is that he believes the individual can withdraw from their original national attachments without necessarily facing debilitating consequences. Thus the distinction Kymlicka makes in the case of immigrants is actually evidence of how, in his view, national or cultural identity is not an inescapable condition. And however we might disagree with the specifics of his logic in the case of immigrants,⁷⁴ the underlying idea – that we can handle life outside our nation-of-origin and can live without a single life-long societal culture to buffer our experiences and shape our behaviour – demonstrates a high level of confidence in the capacities of the individual to at least move between “societal cultures.”⁷⁵

But the reason I think Kymlicka sticks by the claim that immigrants have essentially contracted away their rights to their societal culture is because the individual autonomy theory runs into the same difficulty that esteem-based theories do. If the ultimate value of

⁷² See Allen Buchanan, “What’s So Special about Nations?”

⁷³ As Joseph Carens points out, for instance, not all rights can be contracted away, and so we can’t simply assume that immigrants are *able* to waive some of the rights associated with culture, even if they were prepared to do so. See *Culture, Citizenship and Community*, 81.

⁷⁴ For instance, Kymlicka’s rationale for excluding immigrants from special rights would not apply in the case of second generation immigrants, and it is debatable how ‘voluntary’ are some of the choices immigrants make to leave their land of origin.

⁷⁵ Joseph Carens has suggested that Kymlicka’s theory only allows us to move *between* societal cultures, but not to live outside of them. This brings back the possibility of psychological dysfunctionality. But if what Kymlicka is requiring is that the individual have access to a socially-furnished system of meaning, along with institutions that embody this system, then the possibilities

a culture or nation arises in its worth to the individual, then this sets up a conflict between the autonomy-based claims of individuals. We need to account for why the societal cultures of individuals who are immigrants, don't get accorded the same treatment as those who make up the majority. Otherwise we again face moral stalemate.

It could be argued that because both the esteem-based and autonomy-based accounts rate the value of identity groups so highly, this translates into special standing for collectivities. In which case, the argument goes, these should not be considered strictly individual-centred accounts, and therefore the potential for stalemate is reduced. But I find this line of argument unconvincing, since ultimately the only yardstick that counts in these theories is the individual, and value is built up from that level. If culture, national or otherwise, is what makes meaningful individual autonomy possible, and we think it's wrong (as Kymlicka does) arbitrarily to strip people of such important attachments,⁷⁶ then when we have a population with multiple cultural attachments we face a problem in giving people what they are owed. If a meaningful culture requires that certain elements of life should be held in common⁷⁷ then in the case of a mixed population this requires us to either discount the claims of newcomers, or face autonomy rights gridlock.

My 'operational' concern with the autonomy-based defence of cultures, including those of national minorities is this: I believe that under Kymlicka's rendition of this argument the emphasis is on the side of the equation concerned with the individual, and

could be quite broad indeed, and certainly exceed nation alone. See *Culture, Citizenship and Community*, Chapter 3.

⁷⁶ Will Kymlicka, *Liberalism, Community and Culture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 175.

⁷⁷ Kymlicka writes that "Diversity is valuable, but only if it operates within the context of certain common norms and institutions." *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ethnocultural Relations in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998), 16.

this may lead us to lose sight of the context as an ongoing factor. If we need a “societal culture” to provide a context of meaning before we can make meaningful autonomous choices, this seems to me to suggest that there are two parts to this process – one where we acquire a sense of meaning from our cultural environment and another where we draw upon our internalised social learning to exercise individual autonomy.

Now it could be said in response that these two sets of actions are effectively fused in everyday life. But if this is so, then we are more constantly indebted to or enmeshed with our cultural context than a discussion emphasising individual autonomy would suggest. What this in turn means is that there is never a moment of escape velocity, when we’ve been sufficiently equipped with a context of meaning and we graduate to the status of fully-autonomous individuals in the sense that our choices can be considered as having transcended the restraints of our context. I don’t mean to suggest that Kymlicka claims such a moment exists, but I think he does leave the matter somewhat ambiguous, that one could plausibly draw such an idea from his work. The “context of choice” argument makes a substantial contribution to our thinking on the problem of culture, national or otherwise. But it cannot be used to suggest that we can privatise the system of meaning that culture provides, and then go on to act autonomously on that basis.

My concern is that too great a focus on individual autonomy can lead us to lose sight of the context as an ongoing, rather than just a foundational, factor in people’s lives. I think Kymlicka’s willingness to accept the idea that people can opt to exit their original “societal culture” without this having serious implications for their autonomy situation is evidence of this problem at work. I don’t want to quarrel with the value of individual

autonomy, however. Nor do I mean to suggest that it is a fiction. But to the extent that a focus on individual autonomy requires us to privatise a context of meaning, I think there is a danger of sliding back into the liberal atomism from which Kymlicka has done so much to extract us. This, together with a concern over the rights gridlock that would follow from recognising individual autonomy claims, especially if we remove the bar on immigrant claims, leads me to conclude that an autonomy-based theory cannot clearly indicate the moral standing of nations or tell us when efforts to change the political order or integrate those within a population are legitimate.

VII. CONCLUSION

In this discussion I reviewed six types of claims regarding the moral value of nationalism. What I found was the following: that attempts to explain nationalism as the triumph of the dark side of our natures do not cover all the varieties of nationalism we encounter in the world; attempts to explain it as a call for the remediation of abused peoples can't explain why nations should be restored to independence; attempts to explain it as "dysfunctionalism" don't give us enough credit for our ability to get by without our nations if necessary; attempts to explain it as the root of social trust can't account for the grounds or boundaries of these attachments; attempts to explain it as the basis for personal esteem can't arbitrate between individualised claims; and attempts to explain it as the launching pad for autonomy leaves the impression that we can privatise the context of

meaning, and this approach also can't arbitrate between individualised claims without contractual or remedial arrangements.

On the other hand, these theories have taught us that nationalism has its dark associations, and that we must be cautious to avoid unwittingly endorsing them. Nationalism also quite properly comes into play as part of an answer to group-based abuse or exploitation, and it has social and economic features custom-tailored to the modern setting. Shared nationality, we learned, can make politics more effective (perhaps even more just) by the way it makes people feel toward each other, and it can also effect how people feel about themselves. Finally, by investing the context of our lives with meaning, cultural groups such as nations make having the freedom to determine one's own life a worthwhile thing.

In the course of this discussion nationalism has gone from something that dictates to the will to something that empowers it. Clearly a great deal of ground has been covered here. But the exercise is a useful one in that it suggests certain features that should be part of a moral account of nationalism. What we need then, is an account of nationalism that: a) specifies the conditions under which it is legitimate; b) explains why nations are special kinds of groups; c) credits us with adaptive capacity including the capacity to do without our nations; d) posits a base for social trust and for setting boundaries to its extent; e) provides a way to deal with individualised claims; and, f) recognises the collective as well as the individual dimension of autonomy.

What I mean to do next, however, is turn to some real-life experiences with nationalism and to the arguments that nationalists themselves offer on behalf of their

causes. My aim is to see whether there is something to be learned from these experiences and arguments that can help identify an account that meets these specifications and that will help address the question of nationalism's moral standing.

CHAPTER TWO: NATIONALISM IN IRELAND

The object of this chapter is to identify a theory of nationalism that can explain why some form of Irish independence was appropriate. In order to do so I will begin by looking into what Irish nationalists have said about their cause. The theory I am looking for should also be able to identify limits to the conduct of Irish nationalism, so that there is no *carte blanche* endorsement of nationalist measures. In other words, I want to use the Irish experience with nationalism both as a means to clarify the moral claim of nationalism, and as a way to test out that claim against actual nationalist conduct. My hope is that by investigating a case like Ireland, some of the features of nationalism that are missing in existing theories can be brought back into the picture.

For a great many observers, the really interesting nationalism in Ireland is that associated with the provisional IRA's campaign of violence in Northern Ireland, but I do not intend to address this nationalism. I do not mean to deny that it is part of the heritage of nationalism in Ireland, but the historical complexity of the situation in the North demands more attention than I can give it in this discussion, and I will touch on it only peripherally. I suspect that some of the conclusions reached here would also have a bearing on Northern nationalism, however.

Yet away from the limelight of this troubled conflict between Loyalists and nationalists in the six counties of partitioned Ulster, nationalism in Ireland has transformed the political, social, economic and cultural regime in the other twenty-six

counties during two hundred years of history. Because the main events of Irish independence occurred in the first quarter of the last century, they benefit from a comforting 'mists of time' effect that obscures the difficult questions which appear so pressing and inescapable in other current-day nationalisms. But the case of nationalism in Ireland does present these questions, and not just in the North.

Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth century had a population of mixed origin, mixed religion and mixed political identity.⁷⁸ It also had (and still has) a great deal in common with its British neighbours, from whom it sought independence. It was also a small polity, economically underdeveloped, severely lacking in infrastructure, and heavily influenced by a traditionalist Catholic hierarchy. Yet the nationalism that brought independence to this population is very often passed over as unproblematic - as not presenting a challenging moral case. I beg to differ. The fact that Irish independence is so often accepted as a clearly justified case only goes to show that we are still not clear on what that justification is.

I mean to approach the task of clarifying that justification in the following way. I will begin with a brief history of Irish nationalism as a background to the discussion. Then the argument proceeds in three stages. First I ask whether any of the six theories from the previous chapter yield an effective justification for Irish independence and I argue that none do. They all either call for some other remedy such as reform of the existing political

⁷⁸ George Boyce, for instance, highlights the tension between the reality of pluralism and the aspiration to national unity and argues that it fostered a contradictory image of the Irish nation. As he put it "The problem with Ireland was that she encompassed a plural society that did not and could not see itself as plural." See *Nationalism in Ireland*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 1995), 375-88. Boyce also highlights the formative role played by the Anglo-Irish in establishing a tradition of constitutional nationalism.

regime, or they are stalemated by the mix of identities and attachments in the Irish population of the period.

In the second stage I ask about the reasons that Irish nationalists give in defence of their cause, to see whether these reasons suggest a justification of nationalism that can better explain the moral status of Irish nationalist measures. I outline two different formulations of the nationalist claim encountered in the arguments of leading nationalist figures and movements, formulations that I believe suggest a different approach to the justification of nationalism. One - the "good government" formulation - focuses on political benefits and aims at political change. The other - the "national character" formulation - focuses on personal benefits and collective achievements and directs its energies towards changing the consciousness and characteristics of the population. What these two have in common, I argue, is a concern for a shared frame of reference. Moreover, while they may appear to follow a civic/ethnic or cultural nationalism/political nationalism type divide they are, in fact, closer to being mirror images of each other. In each case they appeal to the utility of a shared frame of reference that reflects the real circumstances of the population. For the purposes of this discussion, the nationalism I am considering covers the period from 1782 to the late twentieth century. When Ireland breaks into two legislative units after 1920, I follow the course of nationalism in the twenty-six counties.

The third stage of the argument in this chapter is where I test out the justification suggested by the nationalist writings against the historical experience with nationalism. I ask whether this claim regarding a shared frame of reference can provide a basis for the

move to independence where other theories failed, and I will argue that it can. I'll also ask what this "shared frame of reference" account can tell us about the appropriateness of the objectives and the tactics of Irish nationalism (both as the pursuit of independence and as the promotion of national characteristics) and also what it can tell us about the use of partition.

What this exercise suggests is that the argument concerning the political and personal benefits of a shared frame of reference can provide a justification for Irish independence, and can also indicate when nationalism as the promotion of 'national character' should be reined in. The end result seems to call for a delicate balancing act between what is justified and appropriate and what is not. And this is not entirely unexpected. Experience tells us that situations where nationalism becomes an issue are rarely amenable to simple solutions. But that does not mean that they are without solutions of any kind. By heeding what nationalists themselves say about their cause my hope is that it will be possible to establish some basis for evaluating the experience with nationalism in Ireland.

I. A BRIEF HISTORY OF NATIONALISM IN IRELAND

As a background to this discussion, a brief history of the Irish situation is in order. Inevitably this compressed account will over-simplify an immensely complex situation and will be selective in the figures and forces it highlights, but it is intended only as a starting point for discussion.

In the late eighteenth century Ireland had an independent parliament, known as Grattan's Parliament for the man who had championed its re-establishment in 1782. Only Protestants could enter this parliament and for a period only Protestants could vote. Backed by this political monopoly, the island was ruled by what was called the "English Ascendancy," meaning again, Protestants of largely English extraction. It was the "Ascendancy" which gave Ireland one of its first nationalist figures in Henry Grattan who not only lobbied for an independent parliament, but also vociferously opposed its dissolution in the 1800 Act of Union.⁷⁹

It was also from the Protestant community that the revolutionary leader Theobald Wolfe Tone arose. Due to his humble upbringing, Tone was familiar with the poverty and frustration experienced by the majority of the Irish population excluded from the benefits of Ascendancy, and he agitated for a non-sectarian, republican revolution inspired by (and he hoped, aided and abetted by) the French example. It was largely fear of his United Irishmen movement, and of his repeated attempts at leading a French invasion, that led the Imperial authorities to dissolve Grattan's parliament in favour of legislative union with Britain, which it was thought would better secure the island from revolution.

The next major Irish nationalist leader was a Catholic who first championed Catholic relief from the discriminatory Penal Laws and who later spearheaded a movement for repeal of the union. Daniel O'Connell led a movement that was scrupulously non-violent and clearly identified with the Catholic population. Indeed, it was funded by a "Catholic rent" which consisted of small but widespread contributions from the Catholic

⁷⁹ After the Act of Union, Ireland was governed by the 'Imperial Parliament' which was the British Parliament with 100 Irish seats added in the House of Commons and twenty-eight Irish Peers in the

population. His methods involved mass organisation of the Catholic population, and mass demonstrations of that support in what were called “monster meetings” of up to 200,000. This popular support was used to influence elections by mobilising those Catholics who were qualified to vote as freehold leaseholders.⁸⁰ His election in 1828 to a parliament where, as a Catholic, he could not take his seat, precipitated a political crisis that led to Catholic emancipation measures in 1829. But together with these measures, the property value of vote-qualifying leases was raised, restricting the voting public that O’Connell had so effectively tapped by about 180,000 or 83%, and disenfranchising large numbers of Catholics in the process.⁸¹

In the background to the issues of Catholic emancipation and Repeal was the issue of land – its ownership and its use. The most commonly heard complaint was that Ascendancy landlords in Ireland conducted their affairs in a way that showed no concern for the welfare or fair treatment of their tenants (a traditional responsibility of an estate under the English system). It was argued that this conduct, combined with perverse incentives in the prevailing land law, resulted in the impoverishment or eviction of tenant farmers and the general degradation of the rural sector culminating in a series of devastating famines. What became known as the Great Famine occurred between 1845 and 1849 and is blamed for one million deaths due to starvation and disease, while an emigration exodus accounted for another million, reducing the Irish population by almost

House of Lords.

⁸⁰ Under the Penal Laws designed to contain the Catholic threat to Protestantism Catholics lost the right to vote in Ireland in 1728. Yet although most Catholics could not own property, they could obtain the franchise through holding a ‘freehold’ lease which was a kind of lease-for-life that, if the land involved exceeded forty shillings in value, entitled the holder to a vote. Due to inflation, as time went by more and more Catholics qualified under this provision but the ‘loophole’ was closed in 1829.

⁸¹ K. Theodore Hoppen, *Ireland Since 1800: Conflict and Conformity* (New York: Longman, 1999), 22

one fifth. The famine also coincided with the rapid decline of the Irish language, which was spoken by an ever-shrinking minority in the post-famine years.

Opposition to the land system was intimately tied to the Irish nationalist cause throughout the nineteenth century. Both O'Connell and to a greater degree the parliamentarian and nationalist leader Charles Stuart Parnell made this issue their own. But land agitation was also associated with secret societies like the ribbonmen, known for their violent, intimidatory tactics that were aimed at enforcing non-cooperation with the land system, such as the refusal to pay rent, to take land from which another family had been evicted, boycotts⁸², etc.. This non-cooperation campaign was known as the Land War and although it was championed by recognised nationalists like Parnell, it carried with it a considerable element of rural violence and local coercion.

Following O'Connell's death, the Irish nationalist cause took two directions. One focused on the constitutional route and centred on the elected members of the Irish party at Westminster. This party had its heyday under Parnell, and his Home Rule movement was arguably one of the most celebrated and successful of Irish nationalist initiatives.⁸³ Yet although it was the brainchild of a Northern Tory, Isaac Butt, it was consistently and

⁸² 'Boycott' describes the tactic applied to those who took over lands that had been cleared by evictions. New tenants would find that they were subject to social ostracism and were unable to hire farm hands, sell their produce at market, do business in the area, or otherwise interact with the local population. The tactic is named after one of its first targets, Captain Boycott.

⁸³ Parnell's pact with the British Liberals under Gladstone led to the introduction of three Home Rule bills to establish a jurisdictionally limited parliament in Dublin. The first, in 1886, did not pass the House of Commons. The second, in 1893 passed in the House of Commons but was defeated in the House of Lords. After Gladstone reformed parliament and reduced the power of the House of Lords to a two year suspensive veto, a third Home Rule bill was introduced in 1912. It was again rejected by the House of Lords, but this now amounted to only a two year delay. The Bill went on the statute books in 1914 but was suspended until the end of the war, which was expected to be short. Events overtook the legislation (including an uprising in 1916), and by the end of the war Home Rule was no longer a viable option. The Government of Ireland Act of 1920 substituted a new system of autonomous government along with partition of the six Northern counties, but it was rejected as

forcefully opposed in the North – opposition which included the organisation of a paramilitary force in 1912 to resist its enforcement in the Northern counties once Home Rule had been passed in the House of Commons.

In the later years of the nineteenth century, as Home Rule and Parnell's Land League movement were giving voice to political and economic grievances in Ireland, new movements began expressing concern for Ireland's cultural and social welfare. Publications like *The Nation*, the newspaper of the Young Ireland movement, articulated a desire to re-establish an Irish civilisation and sought to promote awareness of, and attachment to, Irish history and manners. The Gaelic League, meanwhile, added a revival of the Irish language to the cultural agenda beginning in 1893. While the Gaelic Revival of this latter period is often associated with the literary output of such leading figures as W.B. Yeats, A.E. Russell, or J.M. Synge it also coincided with many "self-help" movements aimed at providing the infrastructure needed to improve social and cultural conditions from within.⁸⁴

The suspension in 1914 of much-awaited Home Rule (in light of the war and the armed standoff in the North meant that once again progress on legislative independence was to be postponed indefinitely. In Easter 1916 a small band of republicans began what they hoped would become a widespread revolution by occupying the General Post Office building in Dublin.⁸⁵ It didn't, and the revolutionaries were forced to surrender after a few

inadequate in the rest of the island. So although the goal of a semi-independent parliament had been attained in 1914, Home Rule never saw the light of day.

⁸⁴ For more on the political significance of these cultural movements, see P.J. Mathews, "The Irish Revival: A Re-appraisal," in *New Voices in Irish Criticism* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

⁸⁵ Although now celebrated as one of the most heroic moments in Irish nationalism, the rising was the work of what has been called "a minority of a minority of a minority." See Gearóid Ó Tuathaigh, "Nationalist Ireland 1912-1922: Aspect of Continuity and Change," in *Nationalism and Unionism: Conflict in Ireland 1885-1921*, ed. Peter Collins (The Queen's University of Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies, 1994), 63.

days of much over-matched fighting which involved heavy casualties among the insurgents and among the civilian Dublin population caught in the crossfire. Although initially, popular opinion was against the revolutionaries the ensuing clampdown by British authorities, including the execution of the rebel leadership and the widespread use of an auxiliary paramilitary force known as the Black and Tans, turned opinion in their favour. The British also boosted the electoral fortunes of a small, left wing, republican party, Sinn Féin, by mistakenly blaming them for the rising. Sinn Féin went on to sweep the polls in the 1919 general election, all but wiping out the Home Rule party. Sinn Féin delegates (including the 1916 veteran Eamon de Valera) refused to take their seats in Westminster and instead met in Dublin as a rival legislature under de Valera's leadership. They declared this body to be the sole legitimate political authority in Ireland, and the official successor to the Irish Republic that had been declared in Easter 1916. This was the first Dáil.

From 1919 to 1921 a guerrilla war was waged against the British in Ireland - alternately known as the War of Independence or the Anglo-Irish War. The breakaway Dáil began to exercise control over local administration when Sinn Féin candidates swept local elections in 1920. Also during this period, an alternate justice system known as Dáil courts were established, and popularly employed, while striking railways workers refused to transport troops throughout the country. After sectarian riots in Belfast, the Government of Ireland Act was proclaimed in 1920 establishing a separate parliament and administration for the six counties of Northern Ireland, largely to assure Loyalists that they would not be placed under the authority of a Dublin government. In 1921 talks began

between the British government and Dáil officials with a view to ending the conflict in Ireland. The outcome was a treaty that granted Ireland something modelled on Canada's Dominion status (involving considerably more powers than Home Rule offered) but which continued partition in the North, and denied Ireland Republic status, instead requiring all elected legislators to swear an oath of loyalty to the crown.

The treaty was seen by some, de Valera included, as a betrayal of the Irish Republic declared in 1916, and the issue divided the country. When the treaty passed in a close vote in the Dáil (64 to 57) the forces aligned with the anti-treaty side refused to accept this outcome and began insurrection afresh. Eventually the pro-treaty side was forced to take action against the anti-treaty 'irreconcilables' and civil war followed from 1922-1923. The war was a bitter struggle but dwindling public support for the anti-treaty opposition led to the end of the conflict in 1923. The way was now clear for the new Irish State to go ahead with the difficult business of establishing itself. The first decade of Irish government has been described as "authoritarian"⁸⁶ but in many respects it was remarkable in its continuity with the previous regime, especially as regards the day-to-day management of government affairs by a professionalised and influential civil service. In 1932 the anti-treaty leader de Valera and his new Fianna Fáil party overcame their objection to the oath of loyalty and entered the Dáil, where they formed the new government.⁸⁷

Eamon de Valera led Ireland from 1932 to 1959, with only two three-year stints out of power. While in government he gradually dismantled the connection with the crown,

⁸⁶ R.F. Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600 – 1972* (London: Allen Lane, 1988), 519.

⁸⁷ Eamon de Valera and the anti-treaty Dáil members had previously abstained from the post-treaty Dáil legislature because of the oath. Fianna Fáil won the 1932 election, however, and de Valera decided that he could 'sign the book' – what was needed to meet the oath requirement – without

and also launched a punishing 'economic war' with Britain by refusing to make due payments for land annuities and for the pensions of British officials who had served in Ireland. In 1937 he introduced a new constitution modelled on the idea of a virtuous and Catholic 'Irish' Ireland, and later he maintained Ireland as a neutral state in World War II largely to establish that Irish affairs were distinct from those of Britain. The prolonged process of separation from Britain was formally completed on Easter Monday 1949, when the Republic of Ireland was officially inaugurated and Ireland withdrew from the Commonwealth. But this official break belied a continued close relationship between the two states. For instance special trade arrangements prevailed and Britain remained Ireland's largest trading partner until well into the 1970's. At the same time the practice of reciprocal citizenship was continued, meaning that Irish citizens could live and work freely in Britain and vice versa. To put this in context, the expanded trade and mobility provisions associated with the development of European Union citizenship are only now catching up with what had previously existed between Britain and an independent Ireland.⁸⁸

In the latter half of the twentieth century, although the situation in the North of Ireland became more acute leading to the re-kindling of sectarian violence,⁸⁹ in the Irish

compromising his principles because at that point he felt it was a gesture without significance. One of his new government's first acts was to abolish the oath.

⁸⁸ In fact, the Irish-British relationship remained so close that when Britain's entry into the Common Market was vetoed by France in 1963, Ireland let its application to join the group lapse, since it made little sense for Ireland to be in the Common Market if Britain wasn't. J.J. Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985: Politics and Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 241. There was also some concern in Ireland that the preferential trade relationship between the islands would be held in violation of the 1947 GATT agreement. F.S.L. Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London: Fontana Press, 1989), 569.

⁸⁹ Sectarian violence erupted in Northern Ireland beginning in 1968 and 1969 with attacks on Catholic civil rights marches, and on Catholic communities in Belfast and Derry, along with retaliations against loyalists. By that time, the IRA (representing the last of those republicans opposed to the post-treaty Irish state) had by all accounts wound up due to lack of public support. (See Foster, *Modern*

Republic nationalism continued to evolve in new directions. Under the influence of liberalising and secularising social trends, significant elements of the nationalist legislation introduced during the early years of the Irish State were rescinded, yet a strong sense of national identity persisted. In 1983 senior elected figures from the Republic and the North of Ireland participated in a series of meetings and consultations under the title of the New Ireland Forum.⁹⁰ In the words of its chief architect, Garrett Fitzgerald, the Forum was a “self-conscious” attempt to “re-define nationalism” in Ireland.⁹¹ The object was to bring together those who rejected violence to deliberate on how to shape a new Ireland where “people of differing identities would live together in peace and harmony and in which all traditions would find an honoured place and have equal validity.”⁹²

Also in the late 20th century, historical works began appearing which were increasingly critical of received accounts of Irish national (or nationalist) history. Now termed “the revisionist controversy,”⁹³ this school of history has been characterised as an

Ireland, 576). However, Catholics were still seen by those running the North as a threat to the Northern Ireland state, and were treated accordingly. As one Northern Ireland Prime Minister explained it, most Catholics were “anti-British and anti-Northern Ireland,” and he asked: “how can you give somebody who is your enemy a higher position in order to allow him to come and destroy you?” See *Irish Historical Documents Since 1800*, ed. Alan O’Day and John Stevenson (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992), 213.

⁹⁰ Present for the initial meeting of the Forum were: Taoiseach, Dr. Garret FitzGerald TD, (Leader of the Fine Gael Party); Mr. Charles J. Haughey TD, (Leader of the Fianna Fáil Party); the Tánaiste, Mr. Dick Spring TD, (Leader of the Labour Party); and representing Northern Ireland, Mr. John Hume MP, MEP, (Leader of the Social Democratic and Labour Party).

⁹¹ Garrett Fitzgerald, telephone conversation with author, November 2, 1999.

⁹² Taken from the text of the 1984 *New Ireland Forum Report*, which is available online at cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/nifr.htm (August 15, 1999). The *Report* is published in Dublin by the Stationery Office of the Republic of Ireland.

⁹³ The revisionist school has been criticised in turn for distorting the history it means to expose by writing out the trauma involved and by ‘inverting the anachronism’ to deny the deep-rootedness of the Irish identity. This critique is advanced in Brendan Bradshaw’s 1988 article, “Nationalism and Historical Scholarship in Modern Ireland,” which first broached the revisionist debate. The article is reprinted in a collection devoted to exploring the revisionist question: *Interpreting Irish History: The Debate on Historical Revisionism 1938-1994*, ed. Ciaran Brady (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994), 191-216. For more on revisionism, see also George D. Boyce and Alan O’Day, *The Making of Modern Irish History* (London: Routledge, 1996).

“iconoclastic assault”⁹⁴ on the leading figures of Irish nationalism. Revisionist works such as R.F. Foster’s *Modern Ireland* are seen as marking a break with the previous mode under which, it was argued, history was presented as a ‘teleological’ process culminating in Irish independence.⁹⁵ The controversy received considerable public attention for what has been described as “a rather complex and arcane debate among academics,”⁹⁶ suggesting that attitudes towards nationalism in Ireland are still powerful, and still evolving.

II. WAS INDEPENDENCE APPROPRIATE IN IRELAND?

Now that a brief outline of the historical developments of Irish nationalism is in place, I want to go on to consider how we can morally evaluate this experience. In this section I will ask whether any of the six accounts discussed in the previous chapter would justify the nationalism that aimed at the independence of Ireland. I choose this question because I believe it is relatively uncontroversial to say that some form of Irish independence was appropriate. If that is what our moral intuition suggests in this case, then presumably we can expect sound moral accounts of nationalism to return the same verdict.

But as it turns out, none of the six can provide a solid justification in the Irish context. In each case they offer outcomes involving either the total rejection of the claims

⁹⁴ Bradshaw, “Nationalism and Historical Scholarship,” 207.

⁹⁵ M.A.G. Ó Tuathaigh, “Irish Historical ‘Revisionism’: State of the Art or Ideological Project?” in *Interpreting Irish History*, 318.

⁹⁶ Coverage of the revisionist debate included a dedicated special on a leading current affairs TV program. *Ibid.*, 307.

of nationalism, or call for reformed government from Britain. Or alternately they end in a stalemate situation born of the many identities represented in Ireland at the time.

Let me begin with the “dark side” theory of nationalism. This theory is not likely to suggest that the nationalism that agitated for Irish independence was justified, since by its definition nationalism is an indicator of moral weakness. Yet perhaps it might suggest that independence itself was appropriate, if we put aside the circumstances of its arrival. Therefore I want to consider whether this theory can point toward other reasons for Irish independence or whether it can at least help us make sense of that outcome.

Ultimately, however, I don’t think it is possible to get such results from this theory. The “dark side” theory would suggest that nationalism in Ireland was the manifestation of a desire to surrender the will to a greater cause, or perhaps an atavistic and violence-prone instinct of the population. By explaining it thus the theory almost immediately rules out any other motives for the movement. In which case, Irish independence could not be justified, since it would involve giving in to such base instincts.⁹⁷

Undeniably there were those among Irish nationalists who appear to fit this profile.⁹⁸ And the long association of the nationalist cause with violent secret societies confirms that there was a dark side to Irish nationalism. But I don’t believe the entire movement can be de-legitimised on this basis because even though these movements existed, so did other movements which took quite different forms. There was O’Connell’s

⁹⁷ An argument could be made that were it divorced from nationalism independence might then be justified on other terms – such as remedial right. I address the issues surrounding the applicability of ‘remedial right’ theories below.

⁹⁸ The rhetoric coming from the leader of the 1916 Rising, Pádrig Pearse, supports the idea that at least some nationalists were motivated by a mysticism that suggests transcendence of the will. As will be noted later, Pearse called on all Irish to participate in the purifying sacrament of bloodshed as part

non-violent Repeal movement, or the constitutional nationalism of the Home Rule party. These were the mass movements of Irish nationalism. And if the desire to establish a politically independent nation was driven by a need to sublimate the will, then it is odd that this drive manifested itself in the foundation of the world's first mass-membership political party,⁹⁹ as well as in the exercise of the franchise even under quite difficult conditions. Thus it seems to me that the nationalism which sought some level of Irish independence cannot be dismissed across the board as a mere manifestation of our darker instincts. In which case it's fitting to ask whether, or how, the cause of Irish independence can be justified.

The truth is that few people today argue that Irish independence was unwarranted. But the reason most often given in its defence is that the Irish were so badly treated under British rule that the right to independence was a remedial right derived from their experience of oppression and misgovernment. So now let me consider what a "remedial right" theory might say about the nationalism that aimed at Irish independence.

Clearly there are legitimate grounds for grievance when it comes to the Irish experience under British rule and I don't think it's necessary to go through the litany of abuses to establish this. It's also true that these grievances are commonplace in the rhetoric of Irish nationalism, so clearly they have a bearing on the situation. But what's not clear is that Irish independence was the best way to address this problem.¹⁰⁰ There

of reclaiming the nation. See "Pearse: We may shoot the wrong people," in *Conflict of Nationality*, ed. A.C. Hepburn (London: Edward Arnold, 1980), 80.

⁹⁹ O'Connell's party was founded in 1823, as Tom Garvin puts it, "pipping Old Hickory Jackson's Democratic Party at the historical post by one year." See, "Ambivalent Charisma: The Phenomenon of de Valera," Merriman Lecture, 5th draft, January 1997 (paper on file with the author), 5.

¹⁰⁰ George Boyce raises a similar point when he suggests that Irish nationalism need not have led to a demand for an independent legislature and government. It might instead have led to a movement

were other possible solutions - for example, reform of discriminatory laws, the removal of restrictive trade laws, the reform of the land system, proportionate representation in the House of Commons, or democratic input into the structures of the Irish executive.

Perhaps reparations could have been paid to dispossessed or disadvantaged families, a "truth commission" could have been established to address human rights violations, the list goes on. If rights abuse was the problem, why is it that a reformed, non-discriminatory Imperial government was not the solution? Because if it was, then a 'remedial right' theory cannot account for the moral legitimacy of Irish independence.

It could be argued that the Imperial government could not have managed this turnaround, but this doesn't give British authorities a great deal of credit.¹⁰¹ Reform was not inconceivable, but it was not what Irish nationalists were after, except as temporary relief on the way to independence. Ultimately, then, the remedial right argument, with its natural conservatism and preference for the maintenance of existing state units, cannot justify Irish independence while there was a chance that internal reform could have addressed the problem.

The next account of nationalism that I want to consider is the one I have termed the "dysfunctionalist" account. Under this theory Irish nationalism would be understood as a way to adjust to the conditions of modernity. Given the sociological law that explains

focused on Westminster and aimed at pressing claims on behalf of Catholic rights (since the Catholic minority in Ireland was the population with a remedial right claim). See *Nationalism in Ireland*, 383.

¹⁰¹ I am not suggesting that it would be easy to convince Irish nationalists to accept this outcome. Clearly a sustained history of misgovernment and religious discrimination made it difficult for many Irish to trust a London-based government. But trustworthiness is not necessarily a factor in 'remedial right' theories. Their more straightforward aim is to correct or curtail rights abuses (rather than anticipate them) while showing a preference for the preservation of state units wherever possible. It could be argued that the reformed government approach had been tried in the Irish case and failed, in which case the theory might support independence. However, it could also be argued that the British

our need for nations, it would be legitimate for the Irish to pursue independence as a means to psychological security and material prosperity. But I don't think this account works either.

Let me address the prosperity side of the formula first. An interest in the prosperity of the island and its population certainly did run through the various movements of Irish nationalism, from a concern with land law and trade practices to forms of economic nationalism based on the promotion and protection of domestic industry. But this was rarely the central theme of these movements. Nor did the realisation of an increasingly independent Irish nation-state lead directly to a prosperous, well-adjusted, and modernised economic order. Quite the opposite was true during the early years of Irish independence. Because it was identified with the national character as a rural, Catholic people, agriculture was made a priority in the new state. There was an assumption, for instance, that "agriculture was and would remain the most important industry in the Free State."¹⁰² Further evidence that the new Irish state was not girding itself for modernisation were the reductions in unemployment relief, and the 1922 decision to disband the Department of Labour as an independent ministry (not to be re-established until 1966).¹⁰³ Even though Ireland did eventually become more prosperous (much thanks to its European Community connections) the initial experience under an Irish national government would not support the suggestion that independence was a way to ease the transition to a modern, industrialised economy.

government was beginning to reform in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and if so, it would presumably be preferable to maintain an existing state unit.

¹⁰² Mary Daly quoted in Ronan Fanning, *Independent Ireland* (Dublin: Helicon Limited, 1983), 76.

¹⁰³ Fanning, *Independent Ireland*, 72.

Did it, perhaps, provide other less material advantages, that eased the transition to modernity? Again, the early experience of the Irish State suggests otherwise. Leaders like Cosgrave (Taoiseach 1922 to 1932) and de Valera have been described as social reactionaries and their governments emphasised traditional values like family, frugality, religious devotion and social deference. Moreover it seems that this approach was not at the time objected to by the Irish population.¹⁰⁴ Whether this reactionary and sometimes authoritarian approach to social affairs was warranted or not, it is just not convincing to argue that independent nationhood was a vehicle for the adjustment to modernity during the early years of the Irish state. In which case the “dysfunctionalist” account does not seem adequate to explain Irish independence.

Moving on to “social trust” theories, if applied to the Irish case such theories suggest that the closer bonds of nationality would facilitate redistributive justice or other evidence of deepened moral commitments, making an independent Irish state a superior moral and political entity. But again, this theory does not seem to fit the Irish experience. The early Irish State was so concerned with establishing a track record of financial security that it pursued a strict course of austerity politics. As already noted this involved cutting people off unemployment relief, and it also involved cutbacks to already meagre old age pensions in 1924. Likewise health care, which had already been poor under British rule, did not see much improvement under Irish rule for a considerable period of time. And even though Ireland, like other western states, faced difficult economic conditions from the thirties to the end of the war, it is still hard to explain why there was not even an

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 131.

independent Ministry of Health until 1947. As FSL Lyons describes it, until the end of World War II:

[T]he provision of health services for people who could not afford to pay for private treatment changed little, either in scope or in character from what it had been in the last years of British rule. It was scanty, old-fashioned and frequently humiliating to those whose property left them with no other alternative.¹⁰⁵

Rather than the bonds of common nationality fostering a deepened concern for others, sometimes it seems as if the reverse was the case. People were expected to accept greater sacrifices for the cause of common nationality. Only this can explain the remarkable statement made by one minister defending the limited redistributive efforts of his government. He explained "There are certain limited funds at our disposal. People may have to die in the country and die through starvation."¹⁰⁶

Even if the expectations of a "social trust" payoff are lowered from redistributive justice to more basic conditions of trust and mutual commitment, Ireland still presents a problem. The shared condition of Irish nationality did not, for instance, prevent the most profound distrust from prevailing between the Irish of Ulster and the Irish of the rest of the island. The Loyalists of the North and elsewhere did identify as Irish, they just disagreed on what was good for the island and on how the Irish nation should conduct itself. According to one scholar of unionist thought, the idea that there were two nations in Ireland, separated by the partition of the island in 1920, developed only after that event,

¹⁰⁵ Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 661.

¹⁰⁶ Fanning, *Independent Ireland*, 100.

not before it.¹⁰⁷ As late as 1905 the rhetoric of Irish nationality still involved calls for all Irishman to rise above creed, set aside matters of Union or Repeal, and recognise that the future salvation of Ireland lay in “the mutual inclination of Irish hearts and minds along the common plane of nationality.”¹⁰⁸ The group that issued this proclamation was the steadfastly loyalist Independent Orange Order and it reflects the pre-partition thinking which still saw the debate as being between co-nationals with a mutual interest in the well-being of the whole island. So evidently, common nationality was not a sufficient condition for mutual trust, redistribution or deepened common commitment in the Irish case. Therefore these conditions cannot be what justified an independent Irish state.

Next, I will consider the “self-esteem” theories, which would suggest that Irish national independence was a means to re-establishing self-respect and secure belonging. A national state would therefore be an institutionalised expression of that self-respect. Undeniably the language of pride and self-respect is everywhere in the arguments of Irish nationalists. Some even suggested that if the Irish failed to reclaim management of their own political affairs then they deserved the degradation and disrespect implied in being governed by outsiders.¹⁰⁹ However, by gaining independence, it was argued, the Irish would prove their own worth and give themselves something of which they could be proud. So it is true that self-esteem was at stake in the Irish case.

¹⁰⁷ Jennifer Todd, “Unionist Political Thought, 1920-1972,” in *Political Thought in Ireland Since the Seventeenth Century*, ed. D. George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall and Vincent Geoghegan (New York: Routledge, 1993), 195.

¹⁰⁸ “The Independent Orange Order,” in *Irish Political Documents 1869-1916*, ed. Arthur Mitchell and Pádraig Ó Snodaigh (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1989), 119-20. The proclamation also argued that democracy must be limited in its application “by the ability of the people to govern.”

¹⁰⁹ Daniel O’Connell warned that: “He who entrusts his business to others is sure to have it neglected.” He argued that “Each nation has a sacred duty imposed on it, to attend to its own

But attachment to the Irish nation was not the only possible source of esteem and belonging that was in play. For some, it was attachment to the Empire that served as a source of identity and esteem. Or, alternately, in the case of northern Loyalists their attachment to the union had its origins in a contract-based view of political authority associated with the settler societies that had been established on cleared lands.¹¹⁰ This view held that these settler populations had come to Ireland and taken these lands as part of a pact with the crown. That pact (which promised they would be looked after by the British government, so long as they remained loyal and kept Ireland loyal for the crown) was the basis for the loyalist identity and honouring that commitment became a source of self-esteem and belonging. These loyalist attachments were real and important to the individuals who held them, even if they were in the minority, and even if the pact was based on the unfair expulsion of native landowners.

Thus secure self-esteem cannot be a justification for Irish independence without factoring out the loyalist perspective in Ireland. It could be argued that this is precisely the purpose that partition served, but even so, this only dealt with the situation of Northern loyalists and there were still sizeable loyalist populations in the twenty-six counties. The justification of Irish independence as a self-esteem measure is therefore stalemated by the loyalists' claims to have their basic esteem needs accorded equal respect.

The final theory I want to consider is that derived from Kymlicka's account of how societal cultures provide a context of meaning essential to the realisation of autonomy.

affairs," and that to neglect this duty by accepting the union with Britain was "the height of wicked absurdity." *Observations on the Corn Laws...* (Dublin: Samuel J. Machen, 1842), 40.

¹¹⁰ Jennifer Todd managed to identify distinct (if not fully coherent) loyalist modes of thought. The contract-based idea of loyalism was among them. See "Unionist Political Thought," 196.

Based on this idea it could be argued that the Irish needed access to a viable 'societal culture' in order that they could achieve liberal freedom. But I am not sure that this approach could ever, in fact, suggest a justification for Irish independence. In the first place, it could be argued that the Irish already had adequate cultural through their access to a British or Imperial 'societal culture.' If this conclusion is rejected on the grounds that British or Imperial 'societal culture' was discriminatory towards the Irish, then the argument has no option but to slip back into a remedial right claim, with all the problems associated with that approach.

Alternately, it could be argued that the Irish already had an adequate 'societal culture' even without reference to the British connection. There was a language (admittedly dwindling but still celebrated), an education system (admittedly more dedicated to promoting Imperial than Irish content), and there was even special representation in parliament (admittedly established on a territorial rather than a cultural basis). In short, Ireland continued to function under a distinct and comprehensive set of social institutions, some good, some bad, throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Perhaps these institutions needed to be better accommodated, or perhaps they needed to be reformed. But it is not clear why they would need to be transferred to an independent Ireland to provide a context of meaning and a basis for individual autonomy.

But again, a history of conquest or oppression might be thought to make Ireland a special case. Remediation or historical obligation might require that the Irish societal culture be granted special political status, perhaps including some measure of

independence. Yet in this case, the argument for Irish independence is not being made on the grounds of autonomy and its setting, rather it is made on the basis of past experience. And as with “self-esteem” theories, moves to privilege an Irish societal culture would have to explain why the needs of Loyalist populations (attached to a different societal culture – the British/Imperial one) should take a back seat. Given the fundamental importance of autonomy and of ‘societal culture’ as a context of meaning for individuals, the autonomy-based account cannot help but run into a stalemate situation in Ireland. Either that, or it does not call for independence at all.

So it seems that the six existing theories of the morality of nationalism run into difficulty when it comes to explaining why independence might have been justified in the Irish context. This being the case, I think it advisable to look for new sources of insight into what was at stake in the Irish situation and whether the measures involved with nationalism were appropriate. As noted, I mean to start this search by looking at the arguments nationalists themselves offered on behalf of their cause.

III. TWO FORMULATIONS OF THE IRISH NATIONALIST CLAIM

First let me say that the discussion that follows does not attempt a comprehensive review of nationalist views in Ireland. The aim, rather, is more limited – it is to ask in a general way how nationalists justified their own cause and what steps they thought should be taken to assure its realisation. It should also be acknowledged from the start that among the reasons Irish nationalists gave are many arguments about oppression, economic or

social development, self-esteem, etc. – all factors cited by the theories reviewed above. But because those theories don't seem to yield a workable tool for establishing the moral worth of nations, and can't account for Irish independence as an appropriate measure, I am interested in arguments that go beyond what these theories already represent.

After looking into the writings and speeches of leading nationalist figures from the late eighteenth to the mid twentieth century – covering the main bulk of Irish nationalism – I am led to conclude that together with the already cited concerns, these figures were motivated by a concern for the political and personal benefits that could be realised when a population shared a common frame of reference. Common endeavours are made easier and possibly even more fruitful when the participants work within a common frame of reference. Even purely private goals can be easier to advance under such conditions. The arguments of Irish nationalists often return to a discussion of this idea, in terms of the price one pays when a shared frame of reference is lacking in political or social relations. This suggests that nationalism is, in some ways, a claim about the utility of having a shared frame of reference that supports common endeavours and that equips individuals with the skills to work within the circumstances that they face in their day-to-day lives.

But this claim about the need for a shared frame of reference was formulated in not one, but two ways. One formulation is what I call the “good government” formulation and focuses on the political situation. It argues that unless there is a shared frame of reference between the governed and the governing, political mismanagement is the likely outcome. It therefore calls for political change to better match the governing order to the different circumstances of different populations, as reflected in their distinct circumstances –

whether social, cultural, economic, or involving some other measure. The second formulation is what I call the “national character” formulation and it focuses on the situation of the population itself. It argues that without a common idiom and a known inheritance of cultural and historical achievements, a people will not thrive because they will lack the necessary emotional and psychological resources. Advocates of this formulation, therefore, tend to direct their energies toward changing the national consciousness of the population by reinforcing or re-introducing certain national traits, such as language, social conduct, or artistic pursuits.

This may sound like no more than the much-rehearsed distinction between civic and ethnic nationalism, or alternately between political and cultural nationalism. But this would be a mistaken conclusion. These are not, as I said, two distinct types of nationalism. They are instead two angles on the same problem. The “good government” formulation and the “national character” formulation are, in effect, mirror images of one another, but as in a mirror the main features have been reversed. In order to illustrate this point I want to first begin by providing a fuller account of these two formulations of the nationalist claim and how they appear in the arguments of Irish nationalists.

1. The “good government” formulation

Henry Grattan, who led the movement for an independent Irish legislature in the eighteenth century and who also led the movement against its dissolution, was making an argument about the requisites for good government when he held that a union government would lack the competence to govern Irish affairs. Grattan was of the opinion

that Irish “interests” and “sympathies” were distinct from those of the English, and would be better served by the country being governed by Irishmen.¹¹¹ Under a union government these interests and sympathies would be “alienated”¹¹² rather than served by the arrangement. Instead he held that: “there is no body of men competent to make laws to bind this nation except the King, Lords, and Commons of Ireland.”¹¹³

Half a century later another prominent nationalist leader was still making the same argument about the competence of a London-based government to recognise, understand, and serve the interests of the population in Ireland. Daniel O’Connell, who led the movement for Repeal of the union, held that Ireland could not get good government from London because the Imperial parliament took insufficient interest in Irish affairs. He believed there were unique features to the Irish situation, which framed political issues for the island in a way that was distinct from the way the same issues appeared in England. O’Connell realised that the English were often mystified by the unrest they saw in Ireland, but this bafflement was, in his mind, further evidence of the problem. He said of English politicians’ disbelief in the face of Irish demands:

I believe it is because they are unacquainted with the state of Ireland that they feel as they do. But our great complaint is that they will not take the trouble of being informed; and if there were no other reason of showing the absolute necessity of Repeal, it would be found in this, that the governing people of this country are radically and perversely ignorant of the wants, of the wishes, of the

¹¹¹ Henry Grattan, “Anti-Union Speech,” in *The Speeches of the Right Hon. Henry Grattan*, ed. Daniel Owen Madden, 2nd ed. (Dublin: James Duffy, 1865), 255. It should be noted that the governing Irishmen he had in mind would not be members of the majority Catholic population, who could not sit in the legislature because of their religion. Likewise, few Catholics could vote because the Penal Laws limited their right to own property and to vote.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 76.

situation, of the feelings, of the distresses and of the determination of the Irish people. It is that we complain of.¹¹⁴

The distinct situation in Ireland had not been well represented under Imperial government, O'Connell claimed. Irish interests either went unrecognised, or they were over-ruled by English interests. The solution, he argued, was to "transfer our legislation to a body knowing, living in, and solely occupied with Ireland."¹¹⁵

O'Connell believed that the governing body had no choice but to share in the situation and the interests of the governed, so that politics would better serve the people.

As he explained:

Is it not evident that no person can have so great an interest in there being good laws in Ireland, as the inhabitants of Ireland? Having then, the most deep interest in there being good laws in Ireland; having our properties, our lives, our comforts, our liberties, all at stake in the good government of our country; must we not be the most fit persons to take care of those properties by wise laws; to protect our lives by just institutions, to attend to the promotion of our comforts and by salutary regulations, to establish our liberties by sound legislation? Who else can have the deep, the entire, the perpetual interest we have in these things?¹¹⁶

For many Irish nationalists further evidence of the Imperial government's inability to appreciate the Irish situation seemed to have been decisively and tragically provided by the inadequate response to the successive famine crises experienced in Ireland throughout the nineteenth century. Bad land laws were blamed for impoverishing tenants and encouraging irresponsible landlords, and these developments were in turn blamed for setting the conditions for famine. By reducing the peasantry to a diet based on the only

¹¹⁴ Report of a speech by Daniel O'Connell, *The Nation*, 4 November 1843, 55.

¹¹⁵ Report of a speech by Daniel O'Connell, *The Nation*, 30 September 1843, 808.

staple that provided a sufficiently high yield on small plots of land – the potato – the land system primed Ireland for a food crisis. This experience is what led Isaac Butt to re-issue the call for an independent Irish legislature, since the Imperial parliament had demonstrated by its handling of the crisis that it did not understand the Irish situation. Butt also concluded that the English took a limited interest in Irish welfare since even when the extent of the famine crisis was finally recognised, it was left to Irish property alone to shoulder the burden of famine relief. Butt's movement went on to become the celebrated Home Rule cause under the leadership of Parnell.

The Home Rule movement built on these older arguments about the need for first-hand knowledge of the Irish situation, and the need for governors to share an interest in Irish affairs. In an attempt to explain to English audiences the drive behind the movement, one Anglo-Irish correspondent to the *Times* of London put it thus:

[T]hat feeling which is at the bottom of the Home Rule idea, even among loyal Irishmen, [is] that Englishmen and Scotchmen will talk, write, and legislate on Irish affairs – will do everything, in short, but go there and see the country with their own eyes, which meanwhile is allowed to drift.¹¹⁷

But it was not only those nationalists who pursued a constitutional path that voiced the “good government” formulation. Consider, for instance, the argument of eighteenth century republican revolutionary Theobald Wolfe Tone. Tone complained that the King had never visited Ireland, nor had many of the Peers, proving, he thought, that the English

¹¹⁶ O'Connell, *Observations on the Corn Laws*, 40.

¹¹⁷ *Home Rule: A Reprint from The Times of Articles and Letters*, Vol. 2. (London: George Edward Wright, 1896), 79.

political leadership had “no common interest with the people.”¹¹⁸ He held that Ireland’s right to independence rested on the “axiom” that “an independent nation will better regulate her own concerns.”¹¹⁹ He also argued that to distribute its benefits equally, a government must be in the midst of the people it serves, saying: “In order that life and heat should be equally distributed to all the members of the body politic, the government, the heart of society, ought to be in its own centre.”¹²⁰

This, then, provides the main outlines of the “good government” formulation of the nationalist claim, as articulated by Irish nationalists. But before going on it is reasonable to ask whether this really amounts to a moral claim. “You just don’t understand” is a facile defence that can be used to cover an inadequacy in argument. But I believe that the “good government” formulation suggests something more than a difference of opinion or perspective, although it is that too. The emphasis on having people visit Ireland, to experience it first hand, suggests that these nationalists were confident that there were real and tangible differences in the Irish situation that could be experienced and witnessed by those who were prepared to learn about them. These differences in the Irish situation ground the “good government” formulation in the actual and observable circumstances of the population. These circumstances included the economic situation, the legal regime (which, because it discriminated against the Catholic majority, functioned differently than in England), and social and cultural features like language difference, family patterns, etc. These are the differences that would confront a visitor, and they are

¹¹⁸ Theobald Wolfe Tone, “Address,” in *Life of Theobald Wolfe Tone*, ed. Thomas Bartlett. (Dublin: The Lilliput Press, 1998) 667, 678, 680.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 685.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 707.

the real and practical factors that set the frame of reference for Irish politics. The “good government” formulation, therefore, is merely the claim that to govern well, the political order should be in touch with these circumstances so that the legislators of this population work from within a frame of reference shared by the population they govern.

2. The “national character” formulation

One formulation of the nationalist claim held that politics must change to come into better accord with the distinct circumstances of the Irish population in order that government might understand and better serve the interests and aims of that population. The second formulation of the nationalist claim, however, seems to take that argument and turn it on its head. The “national character” formulation argues that the Irish population needed to *become* more distinct, so that they might realise common achievements, provide secure personal identity, and even so that the case for having a separate legislature could be reinforced. Let me elaborate on this formulation of the nationalist claim by giving some examples of this argument at work.

The effort to proactively inculcate certain traits and characteristics in the Irish populace was the mandate behind the work of the Young Ireland movement of the mid- to late nineteenth century. Young Irelanders created *The Nation* newspaper with the aim of readying Ireland for political independence. This was to be achieved by making or re-awakening the Irish nation. The tools at their disposal were popular history, public monuments, maps, manners, and the arts – in other words, materials calculated to generate a renewed pride in things Irish. One *Nation* writer complained in the early 1840’s that

“the materials of nationalisation ... are scanty and defective,”¹²¹ but the Young Irelanders intended on changing that. The writer pledged to develop “the seeds of permanent nationality” and to sow them “deep in the People’s hearts.”¹²²

Clearly there is a self-consciously constructivist bent to this approach and the idea of heady young intellectuals campaigning around the country in order to ‘invent’ a tradition of nationality may not ultimately lend much credibility to the Irish nationalist cause. But while the Young Irelanders were making a calculated effort to encourage a national consciousness, the materials they were basing their work on, however “scanty and defective” were real enough in their opinion. Take the case of Irish history; in an effort to point out that there was no distinct Irish civilisation one sceptical correspondent challenged a *Nation* writer with “Where’s your history?” The answer given was to point out that Ireland had a long and busy history by any standards, and that it was only the awareness of this history that was lacking. This awareness was only now on the rise, meaning Ireland was “young as a nation.”¹²³ In other words the historical raw material was there, but work needed to be done to inject it into the common consciousness. As one *Nation* writer put it, “In other countries the past is the neutral ground of the scholar and the antiquary; with us it is the battle field.”¹²⁴

The Young Ireland arguments about the existence of a distinct Irish history suggest that there were real differences in Irish circumstances, but that these were poorly reflected

¹²¹ Charles Gavan Duffy, “Patience and Propagandism,” in *The Voice of The Nation: A Manual of Nationality* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1844), 5.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹²³ T.M’N, “Letter on Ireland and Irish Matters, to a Connaught Squire,” *Voice of the Nation*, 75.

¹²⁴ Even though history is, of course, a “battlefield” for other peoples too, the important point to note here is that the Young Irelanders felt they had to prove that Ireland had *any* history worth thinking

in the popular consciousness, except as a consciousness of inadequacy. It was felt that only by re-embracing these features of the Irish condition could the Irish population expect to achieve what other peoples were achieving.

The same kind of argument was made by the leaders of the Gaelic League movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The League was intended to inspire a return to the original “Irishness” of Ireland, with a special emphasis on the Irish language. Gaelic Leaguers believed that at the root of Ireland’s intractable social and political problems was a kind of existential disconnectedness. The Irish had lost touch with the historic civilisation that once provided a frame of reference for life on the island, but had not succeeded in making the English civilisation fit Irish circumstances or the Irish personality. Thus League founder Douglas Hyde wrote of the “curious certainty” that an Irishman would never adjust to English rule, “even though it should be for their good.” Yet this inability to assimilate to the new political reality left people without a context. The Irish were, he said, “cut off from the past, yet scarcely in touch with the present.”¹²⁵ In attempting to re-establish or even re-introduce afresh identifiably Irish traits and characteristics, the Gaelic Leaguers were trying to provide a new frame of reference for the Irish population – one they felt was more suited to their circumstances, that reflected their situation, and that supported shared achievements.

And it was no use blaming the British for their situation. The Irish had helped create their own dilemma, Gaelic Leaguers held, by trying to imitate English ways but the

about, quite aside from normal debates about its interpretation. Charles Gavan Duffy, “Public Monuments,” *Voice of the Nation*, 156

¹²⁵ Douglas Hyde, “The Necessity for De-Anglicising Ireland,” in *Irish Political Documents*, 82, 84.

attempt had ended in failure. It was now time to try another approach if the Irish were to have any civilisation at all. D.P. Moran put it thus:

[W]e must make the population of Ireland either thoroughgoing English or thoroughgoing Irish. No one who knows Ireland will entertain for a moment the idea that the people can be made English; the attempt has been made, and a country of sulky, dissatisfied mongrels is the result. Ireland will be nothing until she is a nation, and as a nation is a civilisation, she will never accomplish anything worthy of herself until she falls back on her own language and traditions, and, recovering there her old pride, self-respect, and initiative, develops and marches forward from thence.¹²⁶

But it was not just cultural achievements or secure personal identity that was thought to need renewal as a characteristic of the nation. For Sinn Féin founder Arthur Griffith, who championed protective tariffs and a buy-Irish campaign, re-establishing the nation went hand-in-hand with building up domestic industry. In Griffith's view economic achievements were not only the product of national mobilisation (as Ernest Gellner argued years later), but economic resources could also be built up in order to preserve an otherwise embattled nationality by reinforcing distinct economic characteristics. He held that national units served to "make the weak strong, the half-civilised more civilised."¹²⁷

And like the "good government" formulation, these "national character" arguments were also heard from active revolutionaries. The Young Ireland movement spawned a

¹²⁶ Moran's disparagement of the 'mongrel' identity is, of course, in marked contrast to the contemporary thinking of a writer like Salman Rushdie, who instead celebrates it as something that represents his own experience. I think Moran's point is, however, that mongrelisation is not an easy route to follow, and that it should not be forced on people when there are other alternatives. While Rushdie's case proves that the mongrel identity need not stop anyone from achieving great things (indeed the experience can be the source of inspiration), I think Rushdie himself would be the first to acknowledge that the transition is a demanding experience, and that failure can be costly. D.P. Moran, "The Battle of Two Civilisations," in *Ideals in Ireland*, ed. Lady Gregory (London: At the Unicorn, 1901), 39. Rushdie's thinking on identity is explored in Bhikhu Parekh, "The Rushdie Affair: Research Agenda for Political Philosophy," *Political Studies* 38 (1990): 695-709.

¹²⁷ "The Sinn Féin position," in *Irish Political Documents*, 121.

failed rebellion attempt in 1848, but it was the Gaelic League that ironically had the most impact in motivating revolutionary types.¹²⁸ Ironic because the League steadfastly rejected all traditional forms of political activity. However, many among the 1916 revolutionaries were Gaelic League members and the leader of the insurrection, Pádrig Pearse, took the Gaelic League idea of disconnectedness and turned it into ‘disinheritedness’ and ‘dispossession’ of both a spiritual and material kind. He thought the “cleansing and sanctifying,” experience of bloodshed would lead the Irish to “re-enter” their “mystical birthright.”¹²⁹ While not representative of the mainstream of Irish nationalist thought, Pearse’s ideas nonetheless have their roots in the “national character” formulation of the nationalist claim, and are evidence of how far this logic can be taken.

And in a final example, when the Irish state began its oddly gradual process of formation (beginning, arguably in 1916 and ending, arguably, in 1949) the need for national characteristics continued to be a theme of the early Irish state. Eamon de Valera, the man who dominated Irish politics for most of the new state’s first fifty years, never lost his conviction that the Irish needed to be re-confirmed in their distinct characteristics. Reflecting in 1943, de Valera described the idyllic Irish character he wanted to see restored:

That Ireland which we dreamed of would be the home of a people who valued material wealth only as the basis of right living, of a people who were satisfied with frugal comfort and devoted their leisure to the things of the spirit – a land whose countryside would be bright with cosy homesteads, whose fields and villages would be joyous with the sounds of industry, with the romping of

¹²⁸ The vice-president of the Gaelic League, Eoin MacNeill, for instance, was later a founding member and Chief of Staff of the Irish Volunteers, a local defence organisation which contained within it the secret council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. It was this latter group which planned and carried out the 1916 Rising.

¹²⁹ “We may shoot the wrong people,” in *Conflict of Nationality*, 80

sturdy children, the contests of athletic youths and the laughter of comely maiden, whose firesides would be forums for the wisdom of serene old age. It would, in a word, be the home of a people living the life that God desires man should live.¹³⁰

He went on to cite Young Irelander Thomas Davis's call to develop the material and spiritual resources of the nation, saying that it was "the solemn, unavoidable duty of every Irishman" to do so.¹³¹ In particular he singled out the restoration of the Irish language as a priority and his reasons for this are instructive. The Irish language was critical to Irish nationhood because:

In it is stored the accumulated experience of a people, our people, who even before Christianity was brought to them were already cultured and living in a well-ordered society... As a vehicle of three thousand years of our history, the language is for us precious beyond measure. As the bearer to us of a philosophy, of an outlook on life deeply Christian and rich in practical wisdom, the language today is worth far too much to dream of letting it go. To part with it would be to abandon a great part of ourselves, to lose the key of our past, to cut away the roots from the tree. With the language gone we could never aspire again to being more than half a nation.¹³²

Thus it is the cultural resources and accumulated experience accessible through the language which de Valera was concerned with preserving, in preserving this national trait.

This was how the "national character" formulation appeared in the arguments of leading Irish nationalists. The danger is, of course, that such a formula will slide into essentialism; the suggestion being that the Irish can't be anything but Irish speaking, farm-dwelling, devout consumers of Irish cultural products if they want to thrive. This indeed

¹³⁰ Eamon de Valera, "The Ireland that we Dreamed of," in *Speeches and Statements by Eamon de Valera 1917-73*, ed. Maurice Moynihan (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1980), 466.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 467.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 467-8.

appears to have been the problem that developed with the nationalism of the early Irish State, but for many of the originators of the “national character” argument, the causes they championed were about re-acquainting the population with resources suited to their circumstances. Even so, the idea of an immutable cultural heritage does not seem to be borne out in fact. Irish, for instance, was never effectively revived as a living language, but it appears that in its absence Irish nationality has done better than de Valera predicted. This is a mystery worth contemplating, because it suggests that while a distinct idiom may be important, it may not require that national traits remain static.¹³³ But for now I will limit my comments to what nationalists themselves had to say about the nature of the national cause. For these nationalists, the history, language, and arts of Ireland preserved an appreciation of the Irish situation that no foreign civilisation could adequately reflect. By re-acquiring these traits and characteristics, they believed that the population in Ireland could equip themselves with a cultural context – a frame of reference – better suited to their circumstances.

3. The two formulations: mirror images not dichotomous types

As previously noted, the “good government” and the “national character” formulations of the nationalist claim can sound very like the standard civic/ethic or political/cultural distinctions made between types of nationalism. But I believe that this would be a misinterpretation of what these arguments involve. Instead of being separate types, both

¹³³ Indeed one student of Irish identity, Declan Kiberd, explained it by saying that the Irish are “remarkably unsentimental about the past.” He was suggesting that despite appearances, traditional characteristics were not so revered in Ireland that they couldn’t be adjusted to fit the necessities of a new situation. Personal interview with Declan Kiberd, September 14, 1999. For an elaboration on

formulations contain elements of the other, and the attempt to impose a dichotomous distinction quickly collapses upon itself.

The “good government” formulation might seem to lend itself to a civic account of the nation, for instance. It is, after all, about the benefits of citizenship. Creating a new political structure to better realise those benefits seems like a worthy civic goal. But if civic nationalism is the idea that “the nation is nothing over and above willing individuals”¹³⁴ then the “good government” formulation does not fit the bill. Instead of nationalism being a principled choice and something which rises above mere necessity of circumstance, the “good government” formulation argues that distinct circumstances and distinct ways of thinking about these circumstances make change imperative. This serves to dull the civic shine on this argument. Further complicating the picture is the fact that many of those who voiced the “good government” argument also called for the population to actively reinforce its sense of nationhood in order to further justify political change. Henry Grattan, for example, called on Irishmen to “become a nation” in order that their right to an independent parliament might be asserted. He announced in 1780: “The nation begins to form; we are moulding into a people.”¹³⁵ And in 1782 at the opening of the new Irish parliament he congratulated the Irish for “mould[ing] the jarring elements of your country into a nation.”¹³⁶ This encouragement of national cohesiveness seems to go beyond the

Kiberd’s thoughts on the evolution of Irish identity see his book *Inventing Ireland: The Literature of the Modern Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

¹³⁴ Michael Seymour with Jocelyne Couture and Kai Nielsen, “Introduction: Questioning the Ethnic/Civic Dichotomy,” *Rethinking Nationalism*, ed. Jocelyne Couture, Kai Nielsen, and Michael Seymour (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1996), 3.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹³⁶ Grattan, “Triumph of Irish Independence,” *Speeches*, 71.

bounds of the civic ideal, by promoting an active program to exhibit the features of nationality.

The ethnic conception of nationalism, on the other hand, is thought to involve “more or less objective features of our social lives” and the nation is a body which “transcends each individual.”¹³⁷ The “national character” formulation may appear to meet this description because it argues that the population in Ireland had at least latent characteristics which set them apart and which established their case for political independence. But while it may suggest such arguments, the “national character” formulation was developed out of a concern that these supposedly objective or transcending features were in danger of passing away, leaving the population ill-equipped to face the future. It took the active participation of the population to re-establish these characteristics, for the reason that they provided a good guide to the Irish experience, or at least a better one than the practices of any foreign civilisation could. And as far as political objectives go, although some saw traditional political avenues as a needless distraction from the real work of re-building the nation, there were others who supported the re-establishment of national characteristics as a means to political change. Their aim was to achieve the “good government” that Grattan, O’Connell, and Home Rulers had sought, they just started from a different point. For example, the Young Irelanders saw their work in promoting the national consciousness as a preparatory step for an independence claim.

The two formulations of the nationalist claim may have more in common with the distinction between cultural and political nationalism, but even here there is a problem in making the categories stick. The cultural/political distinction in nationalism is often

defined by whether the movements choose to concentrate their actions in the political or the cultural arena. But the two formulations I have identified here involve methods and goals relevant to both arenas. So, for instance, while the “national character” formulation may seek cultural change for its own sake, it may also seek it for political ends, or alternately it may seek political change for cultural ends. Just because the focus is on the character traits of the population, it cannot be assumed that the ambitions of the movement are limited to the cultural sphere.

Even those cultural nationalists who most publicly rejected the standard political nationalist agenda were, in fact, still intimately involved with political reconstruction in Ireland, though they took a different approach to the task. The Gaelic League, for example, was typical of a new “self-help”¹³⁸ style of movement that proliferated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These were voluntary groups that bypassed traditional institutional channels and instead aimed at ‘doing for themselves.’ In addition to the areas of arts and languages, there were self-help movements in education, sports, and agriculture. The cultural aspects of such movements, then, cannot be neatly separated from their role as self-conscious creators of infrastructure and know-how in the interests of political and material well being.

The same is true with regard to the “good government” formulation and the political arena. Political nationalists drew on the cultural aspect because, again, culture supplied not only the rationale but also the resources and the goals for their endeavours. It is this

¹³⁷ Seymour, Couture and Nielsen, “Introduction,” 3.

¹³⁸ For an outline of the political dimension of the Gaelic Revival see P.J. Mathews, “The Irish Revival: A Re-appraisal,” in *New Voices in Irish Criticism*, ed. P.J. Mathews (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), especially 12-19. Mathews defines a “self-help” movement as “a voluntary grouping

crossover effect in the two formulations of the nationalist claim that explains why so many of the leaders of the 1916 Rising and of the early Irish State began their careers with the Gaelic League. Indeed it has been estimated that half of all government ministers and senior civil servants in the first fifty years of the Irish State had been Gaelic League members in their youth.¹³⁹

Ultimately, I am in agreement with those who question the usefulness of dichotomies as an approach to understanding nationalism.¹⁴⁰ In particular, it does not seem to me to be possible to define the 'civic' or 'ethnic' ideal in a way that accurately reflects what motivates actual nationalist movements. Certainly I do not believe that the Irish case is well represented by these typologies.

4. Irish nationalism as a shared frame of reference

I have discussed the arguments of Irish nationalists at length because I think they point toward an important insight into what is at stake in nationalism. Both these formulations of the nationalist claim converge around a single idea – which is the significance of a shared frame of reference. A shared frame of reference, based on a common situation and common experiences, is what enables governments to govern well, and it also supplies a common idiom which supports the pursuit of cultural, social and even economic achievements.

organised outside the institutions of the State dedicated to a wider social or cultural programme, not to be confused with the current interest in the possibilities of self-rehabilitation," *ibid.*, 13.

¹³⁹ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 450.

¹⁴⁰ Seymour's, Couture's and Nielsen's introduction to *Rethinking Nationalism* is devoted to raising such a challenge.

The “good government” and the “national character” formulation of the nationalist claim further argue that a mismatch between the frame of reference of those in political authority and the frame of reference in use in the general population puts these benefits at risk. Thus one important element of the nationalist claim, at least in the Irish case, consists in the idea that there should be a match between the political order and the population, so that they use the same frame of reference. As the “national character” formulation illustrates, this matching process is not a one-way street. The population can be brought to acquire (or re-acquire) traits that will establish among that population a shared frame of reference – one that lines up with a given political order (in this case long-awaited Irish independence). This nation-building approach can be employed before or after political independence, and although you won’t find many Irish nationalists making this argument, it could even be used to work against demands for political change by assimilating distinct populations where circumstances permit.¹⁴¹

Alternately, where a mismatch exists, the change might focus on adjusting the political order. More likely it will involve, as in the Irish case, a bit of both. But ultimately the aim of both formulations seems to be the same: the government and the population should work with the same frame of reference in order to secure both political and personal benefits. This, I believe, is one of the leading ways in which Irish nationalists justified their cause.

The goal in searching out a new perspective on the nationalist claim is to identify a better basis for evaluating the experience with nationalism. Yet it remains to be seen

¹⁴¹ I should add that I am not suggesting this is an equally morally appropriate course of action, merely that it is one possible way to achieve a match.

whether a “shared frame of reference” account has promise in terms of providing such a basis. The next task, therefore, is to turn Irish nationalism back on itself, and to use the “shared frame of reference” account distilled from nationalists’ arguments to evaluate the conduct of nationalist efforts.

IV. THE “SHARED FRAME OF REFERENCE” ACCOUNT AND THE CONDUCT OF NATIONALISM IN IRELAND

Efforts to realise nationalist objectives in Ireland, while driven by a loosely unified logic, manifested themselves in two areas. One was in political change aimed at independence, the other was in attempts to change the population by reinforcing the national character. I will consider these two separately but both will be evaluated against the virtues of a shared frame of reference, since the motive in each case was intimately related to this idea.

1. Was independence appropriate in Ireland?

Since I have used Irish independence as a test case for other theories of the morality of nationalism it is only fair that I put the “shared frame of reference” account to the same test. In other words, can a “shared frame of reference” account fare any better than the previous six theory types in justifying Irish independence? To recap, this account would argue that it was legitimate to pursue independence if the Irish shared distinct circumstances and therefore a distinct frame of reference, which needed to be reflected in the political order.

In which case the first question to ask is: Were the circumstances of the Irish distinct? As a general rule, the economy of Ireland was significantly less industrialised than that in Britain, with the notable exception of certain parts of Ulster. The historical experience of the population, meanwhile, included a history of religious oppression, land system problems, severe famine and emigration, and a recently displaced language. And at the risk of stating the obvious, the Irish also lived on a separate island, and what's more they saw themselves as a distinct group, and were also viewed this way by most British. As noted, the experience of repeated famine crises and their disproportionate impact in Ireland illustrates how circumstances differed there, the considerable potential for misunderstanding, and the limited degree of responsibility that Imperial authorities felt the British population shared for the welfare of the population on the other island.

These are all factors that have some basis in objective reality. But these circumstances in turn frame the experience of life in Ireland, indicating not just what to expect, but how to interpret what happens in this setting. The subjective element thus becomes part of the frame of reference in this way, creating something akin to Kymlicka's 'context of meaning.' The subjective element is harder to observe, and it often comes down to taking people's word for it. Given the sustained popularity of nationalist causes in Ireland over several centuries, it seems reasonable to conclude that the Irish didn't just live differently, but felt differently, than their British neighbours.

Since what was involved in independence was a change in the political order rather than a change to the population, this justification primarily draws on the "good government" formulation. This formulation suggests that the government would better

understand and serve the needs of the population if the governors and the governed worked within the same frame of reference. Given the early Irish State's track record, however, it may seem that good government was precisely what independence did not secure. How can independence be justified as a means to better politics when the outcome was austere and reactionary government?

This is presuming that the "good" in "good government" consists in material prosperity, a modernised economy, and secular and liberal social mores. Yet while these features have their undeniable appeal for modern liberals, we should be wary of projecting them on to other people, unless those people demonstrate that these goals are indeed what they interests them. And it is difficult to argue with the fact that the Irish population repeatedly returned to power leaders who took a conservative direction on economic and social measures. What is more, the two major parties of the early Irish State both followed similar economic and social agendas, while other parties with more socially ambitious agendas did not have a comparable constituency.¹⁴² One possible explanation is that the Irish of the time felt their government was addressing to their priorities.

The early Irish State was indeed remarkable in its emphasis on rural lifestyle, the agricultural economy, and on being a Catholic society. But it appears that the population of the time was still working within a frame of reference where they saw themselves in accordance with these characteristics - as a rural, agriculturally based, Catholic people. A large agricultural sector and a majority Catholic population really were features of the Irish situation (or at least of the twenty-six counties) in the early to mid twentieth century. And

¹⁴² For instance, since 1923 the more progressively-minded Labour party has generally received in the range of ten percent of the popular vote.

while it is debatable how rural the Irish population was by this time, it is true that the modern conveniences of life, like electricity or phones, took a little longer to become widespread in Ireland.¹⁴³

At the same time, the management of government throughout the difficult transition to independence was in some ways remarkable in its own right. For a fledgling state, and especially one hamstrung by internal dispute and civil war, the everyday business of government was managed surprisingly efficiently and there were few of the crises of power that can often plague new states.¹⁴⁴ Much of this is attributable to the decision to retain both the personnel and the practices employed under the Imperial system. But not to be overlooked was the willingness of the Irish population to accept both a “frugal” image and Catholic Church authority that made possible the transition to a new system where fiscal resources were limited and where the Church was relied upon to provide key social services like health and education.

There may be aspects of the Irish situation in the early years of the state that don't strike us today as good government. But, given the circumstances of the period, an independent Irish government appears to have understood, and made efforts to answer, the priorities of the population.

It is legitimate to ask whether full-blown independence was necessary in order to achieve an adequate match between the frame of reference of the government and the governed. I think this is to some degree an open question. It's hard to say whether Home

¹⁴³ After the 1944 general election de Valera committed himself to a bringing electricity to the rural areas of Ireland.

¹⁴⁴ Witness the handover of power to de Valera's Fianna Fáil Party in 1932 not even a decade after he had led a schism among political nationalists over the Treaty that ended in civil war, and despite his

Rule, for instance, might have achieved much the same ends, or whether the efforts to entirely sever the connection with Britain were justified by the need for political change. It seems to me that the less willing British authorities were to listen to Irish arguments concerning the need for change, the more the case for independence was strengthened. In turn this suggests that when Britain recognised and accommodated the need for a better match between politics and the population in Ireland, severing all connection with Britain became less imperative. The fact that the final formal break with the crown – symbolised by withdrawal from the Commonwealth in 1949 – was an impromptu initiative announced quite possibly by accident while the Taoiseach was on tour in Canada seems to confirm that by then the official trappings of the British connection were not a weighty matter either way. In the end, the degree of independence Ireland needed from Britain may be something that evolved along with the Irish situation, but it's reasonable to say that it needed more independence than it had been granted prior to 1922.

It appears then that a “shared frame of reference” account can provide compelling arguments for why some degree of independence was appropriate in the Irish case in order that politics might better serve the interests and priorities of that population. Let me now turn to a consideration of the tactics used to advance this change.

2. Were the tactics used to attain independence appropriate?

A more difficult question is whether the need for political change towards independence justified the various tactics used in the name of Irish nationalism. Broadly

having previously led a party which refused to accept the vote of the Dáil or to recognise the legitimacy of any subsequent legislative sittings.

speaking the tactics of independence-focused nationalism fall into three categories. First are those popular movements that aimed at constitutional change, like Repeal or Home Rule. Second are the attempted revolutions, risings, and the Anglo-Irish War of Independence, all aimed at large scale insurrection or military engagement. Third are the secret societies such as the ribbonmen, or the post-treaty IRA, which used intimidatory methods or targeted violence in an attempt to promote a certain definition of national liberation, with or without popular support. In the first case, popular, constitutional movements are clearly a legitimate means to advance political change. In the case of the third type of tactic – secret paramilitary or enforcement-type societies – it is likely that such tactics do more harm than good for the national population so whatever other objections we might have to them, it is also fair to conclude that even where the national claim is legitimate, this means of pursuing it is not.

But the second category – attempted popular uprisings – is a more difficult case. Several attempted revolutions took place in Ireland and it could be argued that the reprisals they drew did little to serve the Irish situation (take the dissolution of Grattan's 1782-1800 parliament for instance). And it was an Irishman, Edmund Burke, who made some of the most powerful arguments against revolution based on the consequences of undoing a system of government, no matter how corrupt or troubled. But, on the other hand, progress on the claims of Irish nationalism and on the complaints surrounding the Irish situation, whether they involved religious discrimination, land law problems, or coping with poverty, was often scandalously slow and recalcitrant. If the Irish had a legitimate right to expect political action in these areas, or else to expect that the political

order would be reformed so that they could address their problems independently, then the failure to respond to popular, constitutional demands may have yielded a Lockean-like right to revolution. The corollary of this, however, is that while there was any realistic prospect of progress using other more constitutional means, then revolution was not justified. What constitutes a “realistic prospect” is, admittedly, debatable. But the point is that there is no immediate connection between having a legitimate case for political change, and having the right to pursue that change with all means available, including violent conflict.

3. *Was 'character building' nationalism appropriate in Ireland?*

I have tried to show how a “shared frame of reference” account could support claims to Irish independence while is also says something about the appropriateness of tactics involved and about the status of minorities. Now I want to consider what it has to say with regard to the efforts to encourage certain traits and characteristics in the population.

The argument here was that shared traits and characteristics support a common idiom in the population, which in turn supports secure identity and facilitates common achievements. For this reason the pre-independence nationalist movement was associated with a drive to renew the Irish idiom by re-acquiring traits like the Irish language, knowledge of Irish history and geography, the recovery or development of indigenous literature, etc. In post-independence Ireland this movement continued, now with the force

of legislation behind it, and was expanded to take in confessional and socially conservative characteristics.

Since it is devoted to reinforcing or re-creating the national character, I call this category of actions by the term “character-building” nationalism, although in essence what we are talking about here is usually called nation-building. The first possible response to the question of the appropriateness of these measures might be that so long as people have access to an adequate frame of reference, why be dogmatic about which one it should be? Perhaps the Irish would have been better off to put their effort into adapting to the British/Imperial frame of reference? In fact the Irish population did adopt much of the British idiom. For example, English was the main language of the Irish by the 1850’s and the British parliamentary system was the basis for the Irish system of government, with a few modifications.

The impact of British rule on Irish national characteristics was clearly pronounced, and the Irish came to share to some degree in a broader Imperial frame of reference. However, there were limited possibilities to this strategy because under the Imperial frame of reference the Irish had a decidedly inferior status, as evidenced in their political administration. But there is a further question about how well the Imperial frame of reference suited Irish circumstances. Ireland was distinct in its religion, economics, political history, demographics, and class structure. If an indigenous Irish frame of reference were better able to reflect those realities, then it would likely better serve the interests of the population by attuning that population to the conditions they lived in, the challenges they faced, and the resources upon which they could call. This, then, would

suggest that retaining or encouraging particular traits and characteristics would be appropriate where they had the advantage of better reflecting the realities of the Irish situation. If speaking Irish put people in touch with each other and with the resources of the island's cultural history (as de Valera and Thomas Davis before him suggested) then it conferred advantages that were relevant to personal and collective well-being and was, therefore, to that degree appropriate.

But it should be acknowledged that this is a difficult thing to measure. How one language can 'better reflect' realities like economic and social patterns is difficult to establish. Likewise the contribution of domestic literature to the realisation of say, economic goals, is an obscure link at the best of times. But however indirect or obscure, the link seemed real enough to many Irish who agreed with the nationalist logic which held that the population needed to affirm its attachment to homegrown practices.

4. Were the tactics of 'character-building' nationalism appropriate?

There were two broad approaches to 'character-building' nationalism. One used popular opinion movements; the other used legislative and constitutional measures under the new Irish State. Movements like the Young Irelanders or the Gaelic League sought to persuade the Irish population to recover its distinct traits by generating a popular opinion in favour of things Irish. While this kind of approach can lead to a somewhat self-absorbed or self-congratulatory ethos, it is not something that should be classed as illegitimate.

Legislative or constitutional measures, on the other hand, are a more difficult case. As already noted, in its economic agenda the government of the early Irish State made

agriculture a priority with the goal of preserving the virtues of the rural lifestyle. But the Irish government went further in its attempts to re-establish the “Irishness” of Ireland. Take, for instance, the measures enacted as regards the dominance of Catholic doctrine, the role of women, and the use of the Irish language.

In 1937 the new Irish constitution granted the Catholic Church a “special position” in Irish politics.¹⁴⁵ The Church later used this influence to block the introduction in 1950 of a scheme to provide free health care to mothers and children under sixteen, on the grounds that it represented “a ready-made instrument for future totalitarian aggression.”¹⁴⁶ The Catholic Church’s prohibition on divorce, abortion and contraception were all mirrored in the law of the early Irish state, and state censorship – legendary in its scope – likewise reflected Church concerns over unsuitable materials including the banning of a medical textbook written by a Catholic gynaecologist.¹⁴⁷

The 1937 Constitution also held that a woman’s place was in the home. This was in addition to the existing requirement that women leave public sector employment upon marriage, and the 1935 Conditions of Employment Bill whereby a maximum level was set for the proportion of women in the workforce. Indeed the bill reserved for the minister the right to entirely prohibit women in the workforce.¹⁴⁸

Another item on the early Irish State’s agenda was the resuscitation of the Irish language. Even though by 1922 the number who could speak Irish was put at 200,000,¹⁴⁹ the government made competency in Irish a qualification for civil service employment and

¹⁴⁵ “The 1937 Constitution: Selected passages,” in *Irish Historical Documents*, 195.

¹⁴⁶ “National Health: An issue of the gravest moral and religious importance,” in *Conflict of Nationality*, 138.

¹⁴⁷ “The fiercest literary censorship this side of the Iron Curtain,” *Ibid.*, 144.

for the Leaving Certificate qualification (the Irish equivalent of a high school diploma). Irish was also to be stressed in school, even at the expense of “non-essential” subjects like higher math.¹⁵⁰

As with the reactionary or authoritarian features of early Irish government, it could be argued that these measures were in accord with the priorities of the Irish people at the time. What is perhaps most interesting to note, however, is how few of these legislative or constitutional provisions are still in place. In 1972, for instance, the ‘special position’ of the Roman Catholic Church was abolished by referendum. In 1973 the marriage bar to public service employment for women was formally removed, and this was later followed by employment equity and anti-discrimination legislation. Also in 1973, the compulsory Irish language qualification was dropped for public sector employment and for secondary school graduation. Agriculture, once considered the premier Irish industry, has had to make way for an economic strategy aimed at cashing in on the knowledge economy, and Ireland is now in the odd position of offering incentives to small farmers to encourage them to retire. In 1985 the sale of contraceptive devices was legalised and ten years later divorce was legalised by referendum. There are also government green papers due out shortly on abortion and censorship and there is a movement to introduce a public referendum on the abortion issue.

Add to this picture the “revisionist” historiographical trend, which challenges the once reverential approach taken to Irish history, especially its nationalist history. As one authority explained it, revisionism was attributable to:

¹⁴⁸ Foster, *Modern Ireland*, 546.

¹⁴⁹ Lee, *Ireland 1912-1985*, 134.

[A]n understandable if, at times, undisciplined revulsion on the part of significant sections of a new generation of historians against the consequences of the Gaelic republican triumph so evident in the utopian terrorism of the IRA and the repressive character and economic failures of the Irish Republic.¹⁵¹

If in the long term the reaction of the Irish population to attempts to legislate adherence to national traits was to undo those movements, this suggests that the attempt to mandate the Irish national character by legislative or constitutional means was not in keeping with the situation faced by the Irish population.¹⁵²

Similarly with the constitutionalisation of a Catholic identity, the impact of such measures for Protestants in Ireland, even just at a symbolic level, argue against such tactics. Even efforts to enforce language use, although they equally impacted all but a small minority of fluent Irish speakers, because they disadvantaged the vast majority of Irish schoolchildren in their opportunities to learn other subjects, was a questionable tactic to promote the national character.

In the final analysis, since the circumstances of the population will inevitably change with time, a shared frame of reference must likewise remain open to change. By 1973 although the country had seen dramatic change, as a people the Irish were not in grave danger of losing their distinct frame of reference. The attempt to enforce one using government authority was therefore inappropriate. As the twentieth century progressed, the attempt to keep the characteristics of the Irish population unchanged may, in fact, have

¹⁵⁰ "These embankments of Irish," in *Conflict of Nationality*, 142.

¹⁵¹ John Hutchinson, "Irish Nationalism," in *Making of Modern Irish History*, 108.

¹⁵² It also seems to me that in cases where discrimination was involved – as in the case of women's employment rights – the benefits of a distinct Irish shared frame of reference do not seem concrete enough or weighty enough to justify such tactics. But discussion falls outside the scope of my current project.

had the effect of creating a population that was maladjusted to, and unequipped to deal with, the real circumstances of their situation. Yet this is precisely what makes the shared frame of reference so valuable.

Therefore it appears that while shared traits and characteristics can aid a population by attuning it to a common idiom, the attempt to permanently fix a population's characteristics, to 'freeze it in time', will undercut the benefits that an ever-evolving frame of reference can offer. The fact that the Irish population of today is secular, urbanised, English speaking, and attuned to the knowledge economy, is not evidence that the distinctly Irish frame of reference has collapsed. Nor is it evidence that the Gaelic-based, rural, Catholic, agriculturally driven frame of reference was a mere myth. What it indicates is that a population's frame of reference can, and indeed should, change over time, and that what counts is that it is both shared and appropriate to real circumstances.

5. What about partition?

Finally, I want to address the issue of partition. As noted, Ireland had a population that was mixed in terms of attachments and identity, and it's this complexity that stalemates some of the other moral accounts of nationalism. Can a "shared frame of reference" account provide any better guidance about appropriate outcomes given the reality that a large section of the Irish population wanted no part of the project of independence?

We've already seen that the Loyalists in the North held a different view of politics and political authority than was common in the rest of the population. It is also significant

that the North was much more industrialised than other parts of the country and that Loyalists in Ulster were concerned that *their* circumstances would not be adequately understood by a government in Dublin. As the Belfast Chamber of Commerce put it in 1893: “the manufactures and commerce of the country will necessarily be at the mercy of a majority which will have no real concern in the interests of the vitally affected, and who have no knowledge of the science of government.”¹⁵³ Another source of concern for northern Loyalists was the religious divide in the country. Mostly Protestant, they feared that Home Rule meant ‘Rome Rule’, and that their religion would not be adequately protected in an Independent Ireland. In sum, the Loyalist communities in the North had their own shared frame of reference. In which case, if the moral force of nationalism rests on the importance of matching the political order to the population based on the frame of reference they share, then the same imperative that underwrote Irish independence also required that the form of independence should accommodate at least these territorially concentrated Loyalists. If the new state could not manage to reflect their frame of reference (and its Catholic, rural, and agrarian character does not suggest much effort to do so) then establishing a separate political order in the North was, in fact, an appropriate alternative.

This still leaves unanswered the problem of Loyalists in the twenty-six counties, and of nationalists in the six counties. Clearly independence and partition left both these groups in very difficult situations. Both were isolated within a new political order that did not coincide with – indeed was premised on the need to break with – their own frame of reference. It is here that the “shared frame of reference” account departs from the current

¹⁵³ “Ulster objections to home rule, 1893,” in *Irish Historical Documents*, 122.

tendency to privilege individual claims above all else. Whereas other moral accounts, such as those concerned with esteem or autonomy needs, ground the moral force of their arguments in the fundamental requirements of individuals, the “shared frame of reference” account is grounded in a combination of personal and political utility. In which case, while it certainly presents a complicating difficulty that minorities can find themselves isolated under governments that don’t accord with their own frame of reference, it does not produce a stalemate as the other theories do. This is because while the minorities have a claim, it must be weighed into the calculation together with the claims of the other, larger group being accommodated. Of course, who is a minority has everything to do with whom you count in and whom you count out. But establishing political authority in any form requires us to make those kinds of judgements, however arbitrary.

What the “shared frame of reference” does for minorities is to suggest that the better a new political order can reflect the frame of reference of all those in its population, the more legitimate is the project. The corollary is that if a new regime is actively hostile to dissenting groups, it may undermine its own case for political change. Although in Ireland the privileging of Catholic ideals was inhospitable to Protestant communities, in many other regards Loyalist communities were not disadvantaged. In the North, however, those identified as Catholics were materially disadvantaged, politically discriminated against, and were subject to sanctioned civil rights violations.¹⁵⁴ It is indicative of how such conduct affects the legitimacy of political authority that in 1972 the Northern Ireland Assembly was suspended. It has only recently been re-established under an ongoing peace initiative.

V. CONCLUSION

What I have tried to establish in this chapter is that a survey of Irish nationalist argument can point toward a new moral justification for the worth of nations and that this justification can, in turn, be used to critique the actual experience with nationalism in Ireland. From among nationalist arguments I identified two different formulations of the nationalist claim, based on whether they focused on first changing politics or the population. But these formulations have a common basis in the benefits of a shared frame of reference.

The two formulations do not line up with the traditional civic/ethnic dichotomy, or even with the standard political nationalism/cultural nationalism distinction, although they are reminiscent of both. Instead they are mirror images divided by whether they aim at the political or the personal benefits of a shared frame of reference, or if they aim at both, by which they opt to pursue first.

And unlike the moral theories of nationalism reviewed in the previous chapter, the “shared frame of reference” account can suggest a justification for Irish independence, while also explaining why some of the “character-building” nationalism of the early Irish state was taken too far.

Finally, what I have not attempted to establish in this chapter is that this “shared frame of reference” account holds up under scrutiny as a moral account of the worth of

¹⁵⁴ Two British commissions of investigation of the 1969 period (the Cameron Commission and the Hunt Commission) found the official police and paramilitary forces of Northern Ireland culpable in

nations or nationalism. I do mean to address this question but I would first like to compare the experience in Ireland with that of Canada/Quebec. I am interested in whether any of the same ideas appear in nationalist arguments in Quebec and in how these ideas might relate to the conduct of Quebec nationalism.

However, before I close I want to add that I do not mean to suggest that a “shared frame of reference” account is how all Irish nationalists saw the issue. This is my own reading of the overall direction of Irish nationalist argument and it is unavoidably interpretative. There is a great variety of opinion on the nationalist question and it is not possible for one account to accurately reflect it all. Rather, my aim was to seek out new themes and ideas, particularly those not already represented in existing moral accounts of nationalism. When it comes to moral accounts of nationalism then, what we have as a result of this discussion is a possibility worthy of further investigation.

civil rights abuses.

CHAPTER THREE: NATIONALISM IN QUEBEC

In this chapter I explore the applicability of a “shared frame of reference” account to the experience with nationalism in Quebec. I contend that it can provide a justification for ‘character-building’ nationalism such as language promotion, but not necessarily for independence, at least not at this time.

Just as independence is often taken for granted as an appropriate outcome in the Irish case (or at least for parts of Ireland), the effort to preserve or even promote a national culture in Quebec is often regarded as an unremarkable activity for a French speaking population on a largely English speaking continent, which has been subjected to constant bombardment from American and English-Canadian popular culture. But as with the Irish case, this does not suffice for a moral defence of such activities. Like Ireland of the early twentieth century, Quebec too has a mixed population, many of whom identify with the larger Canadian or even North American way of life. At the same time, thanks to technological developments that have expanded the reach of mass communications, as well as the massive popularity of the quasi-mass media of the Internet, English is becoming ever more essential as a global lingua franca. It is not self-evident, therefore, that Quebec has a moral case for requiring its own language and culture to predominate.

If we look to the existing theories of the moral worth of nationalism for a defence of such measures, the results are disappointing. The six theories I outlined in Chapter 1

can't explain why Quebec has a case for promoting its national character. At best they can provide reasons for why it is legitimate to defend cultural attachments where they already exist, but they do not necessarily support the active encouragement of such attachments.

In this chapter I will argue that a case can, in fact, be made for the kind of nationalism that involves the promotion in Quebec of a particular language or other elements of a shared idiom. Drawing on the "shared frame of reference" account developed in the previous chapter, I argue that the case for what I call 'character-building' nationalism in Quebec rests on the significance of the idiom to contemporary life in Quebec and its ability to facilitate political and personal well-being in that setting. As we learned from the Irish case, this kind of nationalism can be taken to the point where a rigid definition of the national character hampers the ability of individuals to come to terms with the real circumstances of their lives. This may have been a problem with Quebec nationalism in the past; however, it does not seem to be a feature of nationalism in the province today.

I begin this chapter with a brief history of nationalism in Quebec. As with the Irish case, this is intended to be a very broad and very basic survey. Following this brief history primer, I pursue the discussion in three stages.

In the first stage I ask whether one of the six other theories I reviewed in the first chapter can supply an adequate defence of the 'character building' nationalism in which Quebec has historically engaged. I will argue that although they offer certain insights into the situation, each fails to provide a complete answer to why Quebec's promotion of its

national character is legitimate. So I return to the idea that the moral worth of nationalism may arise in the value of a shared frame of reference.

In the second stage I review the ideas of several leading voices of Quebec nationalism to establish that a “shared frame of reference” account is in accord with what Quebec nationalists have to say in defence of their cause. Among the arguments offered by these nationalists are some that sound similar to the “good government” and “national character” formulations encountered in the arguments of Irish nationalists. While these two formulations are not the only arguments nationalists appealed to, I believe that there are grounds enough to further explore the idea of a shared frame of reference as the basis for the moral claim of nationalism.

One way to test out the workability of the “shared frame of reference” account is, of course, to see what it can tell us about the appropriateness of various measures and conduct in the Quebec case. This is the task I undertake in the third stage of the discussion. When the shared frame of reference standard is applied to the Quebec case, I argue, it returns a result that looks like the reverse of the Irish case. Whereas ‘character-building’ nationalism proved a problematic measure in Ireland – especially when it aimed at promoting an idealised and outdated national image – efforts in Quebec to reinforce the national idiom have been largely to the advantage of the Quebec population since the mid-twentieth century.

On the other hand, Quebec faces an obstacle when it comes to independence that did not feature predominantly in the Irish case. The population has emotional and pragmatic attachments to the two spheres of Canada and Quebec, and there is evident

reluctance to sacrifice either. There is also considerable overlap between the Canadian and Quebec frames of reference, to the extent that the population inside and outside Quebec share many common circumstances and share an attachment to the idea of Canada as a political project. For this reason I argue that independence would come at the cost of breaking the wider Canadian frame of reference, along with all the attendant advantages (and potential) of that connection. Inevitably this would be experienced as a disorienting loss by many inside and outside Quebec. Therefore I conclude that there is not a clear case for independence at this time. This condition is subject to change, however, and despite efforts to add a bilingual and multicultural flavour to the Canadian national character, the indications are not good for the Canadian project. Due to an unresolved constitutional standoff and sometimes hostile resistance to Quebec priorities in the rest of Canada, there appears to be increasing detachment in Quebec from the Canadian sphere evidenced in the proportion of the population willing to endorse the independence side in a referendum.

Thus the case of Quebec demonstrates first, that appeals to a shared frame of reference and common idiom are not unique to the Irish case; second, it illustrates how this frame of reference idea is (again) linked to the benefits of good government and can serve as basis for collective achievements; and third, it shows how a “shared frame of reference” account performs as a standard against which to evaluate the conduct of nationalism.

I. A BRIEF HISTORY OF NATIONALISM IN QUEBEC

For much of Quebec history there are two distinct sides to the story, depending on whether it is viewed from French-Canada or from the rest of the country (often badly classified as English-Canada based on language rather than place of origin). In the following outline I attempt to provide a synthesis of the historical events that inform those perspectives. It is a radically digested version of events, touching only superficially on what are complex and protean historical questions. It is intended, therefore, only as a starting place for discussion for those not already familiar with the Quebec situation.

In 1791 The Constitution Act divided in two the territory of New France which had barely thirty years earlier been at war with British forces.¹⁵⁵ The measure was designed to accommodate the growing population of loyalists who had fled the newly independent American Colonies and who were increasingly unwilling to live under the traditional French institutions of the existing system. The portion of New France that became the primary refuge of the colonial loyalists was known as Upper Canada (and later Ontario); the portion that went on to become Quebec, and which continued to have a French-speaking majority, was known as Lower Canada. The Act also established a bicameral legislature in Lower Canada. The lower house was elected and therefore dominated by French-Canadians, but its powers were severely limited by the concentration of authority in

¹⁵⁵ New France was conquered in 1760, and its fate sealed in the 1763 Treaty of Paris when it was conceded to the British victors.

the appointed upper house, which was almost exclusively drawn from the English¹⁵⁶ community.

The elected assembly gave rise to a political faction that claimed to represent the *Canadien*¹⁵⁷ population (as opposed to 'the English'). At first they were known as the *Canadien* Party, and later as the *Patriote* Party. Heavily influenced by liberal European thinking and the ideals of popular sovereignty, the movement was made up of professionals committed to the promotion of commerce and industry. And although it would be going too far to call the party anti-clerical, it opposed the dominance of the Catholic hierarchy insofar as this hierarchy tended to hold back economic modernisation. Among them was Louis-Joseph Papineau, who became Speaker of the House and leader of the *Canadien* Party in 1815 and who was, in effect, Quebec's first nationalist leader. Papineau and his followers had as their objective the achievement of reforms that would grant Lower Canada something close to the ideal of Home Rule status, i.e., more autonomous management of local affairs within the context of the British Empire.

An increasing incidence of deadlock between the two chambers, and an increasing sense of impotence among the French-Canadian representatives contributed to building

¹⁵⁶ English or anglophone is used for want of a better term, to describe those individuals, sometimes from the British Isles, sometimes from the other American colonies, or sometimes the descendants of these families, that made up the elite most connected to political authority in Lower Canada. What they had in common generally was that they were English-speaking, hence "English" is the best way to group these disparate individuals together.

¹⁵⁷ During the early period of nationalism in Quebec, the French-speaking portion of the population still thought of themselves as *Canadien*. This later became modified to French-Canadian and then to *Québécois*. Louis Balthazar outlines this development in *Bilan du nationalisme*. A lingering ambivalence over the connection to 'Canada' and being 'Canadian' persists to this day in Quebec, however. A.I. Silver observed on this peculiar effect by citing the results of a 1992 poll, which found that 54% of respondents wanted Quebec to remain a province in Canada. But when asked how they would feel about an independent Quebec that was called by the name 'Canada' and that kept the national anthem as 'O Canada,' the number who wanted Quebec to remain a province in the larger

frustration and animosity on the part of both the *Canadien* and English communities. By the 1830's this frustration was playing itself out in the form of armed volunteer movements among the English and *Canadien* populations. In 1834 the Legislative Assembly under Papineau issued the "Ninety Two Resolutions," an ultimatum calling for, among other things, reform of the legislative system to ensure American-style accountability to elected representatives. When it became clear that reform was not in the offing, a group known as the *Fils de la liberté* led a series of rebellions in Lower Canada between 1837 and 1838, but the uprising met with limited tactical success. Condemned by the clergy, the insurgents succeeded only in having the *Canadien* political leadership temporarily exiled. Papineau had supported the revolutionaries and had endorsed their position until almost the moment of rebellion. Even though he was not directly involved in the rebellions that followed, Papineau was forced to flee to avoid prosecution.

In the wake of the rebellions, British attention was focused on their troubled Canadian colonies.¹⁵⁸ This attention took the form of Lord Durham's 1839 investigation into the state of affairs in Canada. He concluded that the Canadian problem resided in having "two nations warring in the bosom of a single state."¹⁵⁹ Durham's recommendation was, in essence, to do away with the lesser nation by assimilation.¹⁶⁰ To that end the two colonies were re-united under the Union Act of 1840. Despite a population differential

Canadian system dropped to 34%. A.I. Silver, *The French-Canadian Idea of Confederation 1864-1900*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 265.

¹⁵⁸ A similar uprising had taken place in Upper Canada in the same period.

¹⁵⁹ Durham, John George Lampton, Earl of, *Lord Durham's Report: An abridgement of Report on the Affairs of British North America*, ed. G. M. Craig (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992), 23.

¹⁶⁰ It should be noted that Durham was sympathetic to the *Canadiens'* situation and expressed regard for elements of their culture, even as he recommended its submergence. Along with assimilation he also recommended that responsible government (meaning a democratically accountable executive) should be granted to the colonies, but this was rejected by the Imperial authorities.

that favoured the *Canadiens*, the same number of seats were assigned to each of the Canadas in the hope that the English community would dominate the new entity, and that the French presence would be blended out.

However, the assimilation plans did not turn out quite as anticipated. The union resulted in an *entente cordiale* between the leaders of the two old colonies, and for almost all of its twenty six-year existence, the re-unified Canada was administered by a ministry jointly led by one *Canadien* and one English political leader. *Canadien* leader Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine was one half of the duo that led the first stable ministry of the newly unified Canada.¹⁶¹ Since the *Canadiens*' main concern was to avoid assimilation, LaFontaine's strategy was to work with anglophones as a means to preserve the *Canadien* identity and interests within the broader framework of union. But this strategy meant accepting that *Canadiens* were destined to be the lesser power under the new system both in terms of population and political clout. It is at this point that the *Canadiens* become French-Canadians - a minority within the larger Canadian political sphere.

At the same time as LaFontaine was seeking a means of co-existence with English political power, others were exploring new solutions to the problems of the French-Canadian community. *Les Rouges* for instance were a group that contemplated annexation to the United States, believing that the Americans would be less hostile to the French identity and more open to liberal reforms. Later, a movement known as ultramontanism assumed the mantle of national saviour. Ultramontanism was characterised by a dogged attachment to the Catholic faith and to the parish-centred rural life. Under the influence

¹⁶¹ No *Canadien* was included in the first executive under union, but the attempt at English political dominance proved unworkable.

of this movement, the national identity became fused with the Catholic faith and it would be over a century before the two were disentangled again.

In 1867 legislative union was replaced by Confederation¹⁶² – a new political pact intended to expand the political and economic opportunities of the British colonies in North America and which granted each province significant autonomy under a decentralised federal arrangement. French-Canadians saw Confederation as a way to repeal Lord Durham's legislative union and regain their own separate governing authority, albeit one limited by the terms of the federal connection.¹⁶³ However, in the early days of Confederation the always delicate relationship between French and English political power was shaken by a series of events which were taken in Quebec as evidence that the French presence in Canada still faced a hostile English majority.

Among the first and most dramatic of these was the decision to hang Louis Riel. Louis Riel was the leader of the Métis, a new ethnic group (born of mixed European fur trader and native Canadian origins) that hunted buffalo on the lands of the Northwest Company. Between 1869 and 1885 Riel was involved in a series of small scale revolts against the purchase and planned colonisation of the territory by Canada. Riel's efforts at first won recognition of the Métis's aspirations in the form of the Manitoba Act of 1870, which established bicultural rights in the new province, but unrest continued in the territory until the Métis insurrection was decisively put down in 1885. In that year Riel was arrested and sentenced to hang, much to the satisfaction of English-Canadians. By

¹⁶² Two other colonies joined Canada under Confederation, making for a total of four original provinces: Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

¹⁶³ For an outline of how Confederation was viewed from Lower Canada, see Silver, *French-Canadian Idea of Confederation*.

1885, however, the French speaking and predominantly Catholic Métis had earned considerable sympathy in Quebec, and because there was increasing evidence that Riel was mentally ill, French-Canadians called for the sentence to be commuted.¹⁶⁴ At the news that Riel's sentence had been carried out 15,000 protested in Montreal, where they were addressed by Honoré Mercier. Out of the outrage over the events in Manitoba the *Parti nationale* was born, which under Mercier's leadership came to dominate the political scene in the new province. Mercier made provincial autonomy the watchword of his administration and ran the government of Quebec as a national government to the greatest extent possible while seeking to push the boundaries of provincial authority.¹⁶⁵

Meanwhile outside Quebec, on four other occasions in the period between Confederation and the First World War, French and Catholic education rights were revoked or reduced in the other provinces of Canada. First, in 1871 New Brunswick (with a sizeable French-speaking population of Acadians) restricted Catholic education rights. In 1890 Catholic and French language education rights which had been guaranteed under the Manitoba Act were abolished in that province, although they were restored on appeal to the Privy Council in 1895. In 1892 the Northwest Territories followed Manitoba's lead and overruled separate education rights, and finally in 1912 Ontario introduced "Regulation 17" which restricted the use of French as a language of instruction. Inside Quebec, English language school rights continued secure.

¹⁶⁴ Riel had spent time in an asylum in Quebec, and apparently thought himself a prophet of some kind. A.I. Silver, meanwhile, proposes the theory that French-Canadian awareness of, and sympathy for, the Métis cause was largely a consequence of being blamed for the uprisings in the English Canadian press. See *ibid.*, especially chapter 8.

¹⁶⁵ This included efforts to expand Quebec's geographical boundaries, which were finally realised in 1898 and the province was expanded again in 1912.

In 1899 another event shook French-Canadian confidence in their position under the Canadian federation. It was the first of three controversies over military participation that would divide French and English in Canada. In each case French-Canadians strenuously objected to the commitment of troops to what was seen as a British war, and one that Canada was not obligated to take part in.

In the first case, in 1899 a decision was made to send Canadian volunteers to support Britain in the Boer War. It was this dispute that prompted Henri Bourassa to found *la Ligue nationaliste canadienne* to promote the idea of Canada as based on a pact between two founding races. In the second case, conscription was introduced in 1917 to support the Allies in World War I, but the decision was protested in Quebec and troops were sent in to Quebec to restore the peace. In 1918 the conflict culminated in a Montreal crowd being fired upon, resulting in five deaths. And again in 1942, after having pledged to avoid conscription, largely out of consideration for French-Canadian feeling on the question, then Prime Minister Robert Borden held a nation-wide plebiscite to approve 'releasing' him from that commitment. The plebiscite passed in Canada as a whole, but was rejected in Quebec by 70% of the population. Canadian troops were once again dispatched overseas against widespread French-Canadian objections.

Inside Quebec the years of the First World War proved difficult times. When depression hit in the 1930's Quebec proved especially vulnerable, as its highly conservative ethos did not lend itself to state-sponsored relief efforts. The Catholic Church became the biggest player in the new system, dominating the arenas of education, social services and unionisation. Out of this environment was born the *Union nationale*, which brought the

socially conservative and authoritarian leader Maurice Duplessis to power. Duplessis governed in accordance with the traditional national image of Quebec as the home of a devout, deferential people with a taste for the simple life.¹⁶⁶

Nationalism in this period showed a decidedly Catholic cast and tended to celebrate its attachment to the land and to the past. Clergyman Lionel Groulx became spokesman for this perspective and became a nationalist hero for building up the discipline of Quebec history through his work at the University of Montreal. Groulx preached the miracle of '*la survivance*' – the idea that the French-Canadian nation had been preserved by divine providence first from the godless French Revolution and then from assimilation by the English. French-Canadians were therefore obligated to honour this miraculous cultural salvation by continuing in their traditional way of life.

Beginning in the 1950's there was a change in the direction and expression of Quebec nationalism, however. There was increasing concern over the economic dependency of the province¹⁶⁷ and increasing frustration with the traditional religious and land-based interpretation of the national idea. This was the opening of the Quiet Revolution, a period of rapid political and social liberalisation that coincided with a reinvigorated nationalist agenda. Ironically, the CBC television and radio network, designed to be a tool of Canadian unity, served a crucial role in both modernising and reinforcing the Quebec identity, because of the territorial concentration of French speakers

¹⁶⁶ The similarity between the leadership style and personal philosophy of Duplessis and de Valera is notable. Both were strong, some would say authoritarian, leaders who held socially conservative if not reactionary ideas yet who presided over a period of considerable modernisation and growth in their societies. Both men had remarkable political staying power and were at the height of their influence between the 1930's and the 1950's.

within Canada. From its ranks rose one of the province's most influential nationalist leaders, René Lévesque, who was radicalised by the experience of being a francophone broadcaster in a primarily francophone province yet being surrounded every day by English, as the *Radio Canada* offices were located in the heart of anglophone Montreal. In fact, because of the anglophone minority's traditional economic and political influence the language of work in much of Quebec was still English. Promising young functionaries likewise found their path to the federal centre of power was often obstructed by the language barrier, and if they wanted to work in French they concluded they would have to focus on the Quebec state as an alternative.¹⁶⁸

The Quiet Revolution turned this pent-up frustration with the marginalised status of French and of francophones into an impetus for change. The aim was to re-claim control of the significant levers of Quebec's economy and society and to use the political power of the Quebec State to bring this about.¹⁶⁹ The home of French-Canadian nationalism was now well and truly Quebec, and the nationalist identity became *Québécois*.

Some of the measures that followed in the wake of the Quiet Revolution included the creation in 1964 and 1965 of agencies to promote the development of Quebec's natural resources in mining and the steel industry. In 1965 *la Caisse de dépôt et placement*, which used Quebecers' pension and savings investments to foster Quebec enterprises, was

¹⁶⁷ The Tremblay Report of 1954 sounded the alarm over Quebec's economic exploitation and its marginalisation within the Canadian federation, and it became as one observer put it, "la Bible du néo-nationalisme." Balthazar, *Bilan du nationalisme*, 119.

¹⁶⁸ Note the similarity between this process and that identified by Benedict Anderson as the source of the nationalist sentiment of Creole functionaries who find their career path blocked by the fact of their colonial birth. See Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, chapter 4.

¹⁶⁹ One key nationalist phrase of the Quiet Revolution became "maîtres chez nous," meaning "masters in our own house." Interestingly this phrase was also occasionally used by Irish nationalists many years before.

created as an alternative to the traditional banks that had been slow to invest in new Quebec businesses. Other initiatives included nationalisation of the Quebec electricity system and later, massive dam-building projects in the Cree-occupied territory of James Bay.¹⁷⁰

In the years following the Quiet Revolution,¹⁷¹ education, health care, and social services were increasingly reclaimed from clerical control, while there was a dramatic rise in secularisation in the province. A series of controversial language laws were introduced with the goal of establishing French as the *lingua franca* of the province,¹⁷² and there were escalating struggles with the federal government over the extent of federal authority within the province, and over designs to repatriate the constitution.¹⁷³ Although it was initially a Quebec initiative, repatriation was subsequently rejected by Quebec's leaders because of the concern that it would be enacted in a way that undermined the special status of Quebec in the federation.

Nationalist groups of many kinds sprang up throughout the province during the 1950's and 60's, including a terrorist group known as the FLQ (*Front de libération du*

¹⁷⁰ This nationalisation of Quebec's electricity system was originally proposed by René Lévesque in 1962. The James Bay project was initiated in 1971.

¹⁷¹ Strictly speaking the 'Quiet Revolution' is used to indicate the years of the Liberal regime under Jean Lesage – 1960 to 1966.

¹⁷² In 1969 Bill 63 gave parents the right to enrol their children in English-language schools, but proposed that new arrivals to the province would master French. In 1974 Bill 22 made French the official language in Quebec, introduced measures to make French the language of the workplace in Quebec, and restricted francophones' access to English-language schooling. In 1977 Bill 101 added fines and penalties to language requirements, further restricted access to English-language schooling, and required French to be predominant on public signage, although parts of Bill 101 were subsequently declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court of Canada. In 1988 Bill 178 was introduced to again establish the predominance of French in public signage, and in 1993 Bill 86 was introduced to permit English on public signage, under certain conditions.

¹⁷³ As a former colony that never agitated for independence, responsibility for the Canadian constitution remained entrusted to the authority of the Privy Council in London until 1981. Before that date any constitutional changes had to be forwarded from Canada to Britain where they were enacted by the British government.

Québec) which launched a bombing campaign in 1963 aimed at the federal and crown presence in Quebec. In October 1970 the FLQ kidnapped a British diplomat and days later kidnapped and killed the Quebec Minister of Labour. Although the FLQ was a fringe group, the federal government under Pierre Trudeau responded to the “October crisis” by invoking the War Measures Act which suspended civil liberties and granted broad emergency powers to the federal government. Hundreds of people identified as nationalists were arrested and imprisoned under its powers.

The new nationalist movement in Quebec reached its zenith under the leadership of René Lévesque. Lévesque was brought to power when his recently founded *Parti Québécois* (PQ) was elected in 1976, becoming the first political party elected to government in Quebec that was openly committed to the political independence of the province under a formula he called “sovereignty association.” However, the PQ had been forced to tone down its sovereigntist agenda in order to win power, since the majority of Quebec voters were not convinced of the need for independence. Nevertheless the PQ had committed themselves to holding a referendum asking for a mandate to negotiate a sovereignty association relationship with the rest of Canada. That referendum was held in 1980, and was lost by the sovereigntist side, which garnered only 40% of the vote.

After the referendum victory Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau proceeded immediately with plans to repatriate the Canadian constitution. Quebec continued to object to the process and refused to sign on to the repatriation deal, which it argued compromised provincial autonomy and failed to recognise the special position of Quebec in the federation. The constitution was repatriated in 1982, at which time a Charter of

Rights and Freedoms was also added. Notably, the chief architects of repatriation, Pierre Trudeau and Jean Chretien, were from Quebec.

Repatriation left a considerable constitutional hangover, however. Another federal leader from Quebec, Brian Mulroney, committed himself to correcting this problem by finding conditions that would persuade Quebec leaders to sign on to the Canadian constitution. Together with provincial leaders he reached a deal in 1987 which addressed the special status of Quebec. The Meech Lake Accord, as it was known, had three years to be ratified by the provincial legislatures of all the provinces. It failed in two (Newfoundland and Manitoba). In 1992 a second attempt was made to bring Quebec into the constitution but this agreement, known as the Charlottetown Accord, was defeated in a national referendum (rejected by a majority in Quebec and in Canada as a whole) that same year. In much of Canada these successive constitutional deals were objected to on at least three levels. First, there was a feeling that “asymmetrical federalism,” which granted special status to Quebec, was a recipe for favouritism, abuse, or disunity. Second, there was a concern that Quebec could not be trusted to respect minority rights, given its nationalist agenda, and third, there were claims by groups other than provinces (such as aboriginal or women’s groups) that they should have a place at the table and that in their absence no deal should be considered legitimate.

Following the failures of 1990 and 1992 the constitutional question was consciously left “in abeyance” in Canada. In 1995, however, Quebec held a second sovereignty referendum. This second referendum was lost by the slimmest of margins – less than one percent. Concerned by these results a 1998 Supreme Court decision based

on a Federal government reference case found that Quebec could not unilaterally separate from Canada, and that certain minimal conditions needed to be met in terms of the majority required in a referendum and the framing of a referendum question on Quebec independence. The Court also indicated that the Canadian government had a role in defining the requirements for clarity. The Federal government subsequently sponsored a bill specifying that any future sovereignty referendums would require a “clear majority on a clear question” before Canada would recognise the results. However, the “Clarity Bill” does not specify what “clear” actually means. Today, parties dedicated to the sovereigntist position represent almost half of the official opposition in the Canadian parliament and are the official governing party in Quebec, and Quebec remains the only province that has not signed on to the Canadian constitution.

II. WAS ‘CHARACTER-BUILDING’ NATIONALISM APPROPRIATE IN QUEBEC?

The question I want to explore in this section is whether any of the theories reviewed in Chapter 1 can help make sense of the general intuition that Quebec’s efforts at cultural promotion are legitimate. It should be acknowledged that this issue is not without controversy in Canada, especially when it comes to Quebec’s language laws. Yet it does not seem right to ask the population of Quebec to stand by and watch their culture transformed under the effects of external influences, without doing anything about it. I want to determine, therefore, whether any of the six existing theories provide an adequate account for why “character-building” nationalism, which proved so problematic in Ireland, is an acceptable (or perhaps why it is an unacceptable) measure in Quebec. In the final

analysis, while each theory isolates an important truth about the Quebec situation, I will argue that none can adequately account for the legitimacy of Quebec's efforts to actively promote its national character.

I will begin with the account of nationalism that casts it as the expression of the darker side of our natures. Under this account Quebec nationalism should be understood as the manifestation of a desire for the sublimation of the will, which is expressed in an attachment to social and economic backwardness and reactionary politics. As such, this account would say it was never legitimate to promote a national culture as it means promoting negative features of the human personality. As previously noted Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau used this idea to criticise Quebec nationalism as a retrograde influence on the population of Quebec. At one point Trudeau characterised the nationalist movement as being led by a minority that seeks "to make the whole tribe return to the wigwams by declaring its independence."¹⁷⁴

I do not debate the charge that the history of nationalism in Quebec has been marked by reactionary periods. The era of Lionel Groulx and Maurice Duplessis (which inspired the liberal spirit of a young Trudeau) was certainly marked by dogged traditionalism and deferential politics. Descendants of original Québécois stock have traditionally been identified as 'pure laine,' (literally translated it means 'pure wool'), and in an infamous statement after the 1995 referendum an embittered Parizeau blamed the defeat on 'money and the ethnics.' But there are other features of the Quebec case that do not so easily fit

¹⁷⁴ Pierre Trudeau, "Separatist Counter Revolutionaries," in *Federalism and the French-Canadians* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1968), 211. It should be noted that Trudeau himself was a firm believer in the promotion of the French language both in Canada and Quebec. His aim was to make Canada bilingual throughout as a means to combat separatist nationalism, which he thought of as endangering social and political progress in the province.

the “dark side” model. For instance, despite many frustrations and disappointments there is a marked commitment to the democratic process among Quebec nationalists. There is also a relative lack of open conflict, with only two periods of violence in over two hundred years of nationalist history in the province, both of which were limited to a fringe minority within the population. Instead, the preference has been for constitutional struggle, combined with an apparent willingness to coexist with other Canadians under some broad scheme of cooperation. And as for the connection with backwardness, this account of nationalism cannot explain how it is that the rapid modernisation associated with the Quiet Revolution coincided with, indeed may owe its existence to, a marked renewal in Quebec nationalism.

Since it does not seem applicable to the Quebec situation, then, the “dark side” theory of nationalism does not seem like a good guide to evaluating the appropriateness of nationalist conduct in Quebec. At best it could hold against certain brands of Quebec nationalism, but it certainly does not serve to account for it in all its forms.

I will turn therefore to “remedial right” theories of nationalism. These contend that rights abuses yield a right to secession, or that very rarely cultural preservation may also yield a right to secede, provided the culture is so much imperilled that it can survive no other way, and provided the population involved already has claim to territorial title.

It is not hard to make a case that French-Canadians in Canada have grounds for historical grievance and arguably that a historical pact that guaranteed them special status within the federation has not been honoured. The problem is that under “remedial right” theory the threshold for proving a case for remediation is set very high. In fact, the

threshold may be too high for Quebec to qualify, either based on historical grievance or on cultural preservation since the theory conservatively favours state preservation. In the absence of systematic rights abuse or exploitation, meanwhile, the theory has little to offer regarding other ameliorative options. In which case it has little to say regarding the legitimacy of 'character building' nationalism. Instead, to make a case based on this theory, affected populations have an incentive to construe their case in terms of the rights abuse/secession formula. But the population of Quebec may not desire complete secession, preferring some kind of continued political coexistence with the rest of Canada. Unfortunately there does not seem room in the theory for this kind of outcome, any more than there is for measures to preserve or promote the national culture.

Let me therefore move on to the "dysfunctionalist" theory of nationalism. To recap, this theory suggests that the demanding conditions of modernity require us to marshal ourselves into nations to realise the benefits of economic progress and to avoid incapacitation by feelings of anomie or inadequacy. Once again this theory points to a truth about the Quebec situation. Quebec nationalism has repeatedly involved efforts to assert control over the population's social structure and economy, often with the aim of enhancing local capabilities. What's more, the Quiet Revolution appears to be a trademark case for the Gellnerian economic account, whereby the rise of nationalism coincides with a dramatic increase in economic competitiveness.

A theory that is concerned with enhancing our capacity to adjust to modernity may seem particularly apt when thinking about Quebec of the Quiet Revolution. But it does not do so well when what is being considered is the traditionalist drive associated with 'la

survivance.' And yet the economic success of the 1960's was in some regards dependent on the attachments and social resources that had been preserved through '*la survivance*.'¹⁷⁵ If what we are dealing with is some sociological imperative, how is it that the same imperative among the same population in roughly the same setting leads to such different results in these two periods? And if nationalism is about reconciling us to modernity, why did it at one point manifest itself in an unrealistic drive to escape it?

At the same time the nationalist aim of switching back from English to French as the language of work seems counter-productive in an English-dominated North American economy. How can this be part of a drive to reconcile the population of Quebec to modernity, when the ultimate goal is the best (i.e. most productive and least emotionally disturbing) adjustment to modern conditions that can feasibly be achieved?

Now it could be argued that all this has been anticipated in Ernest Gellner's work. Gellner tells the story of the people of Ruritania within the Empire of Megalomania, and of how the Ruritarians' experience of relative deprivation and cultural alienation in the Megalomanian metropolis led them to withdraw and create their own social setting, where their origin and experience as Ruritarian would not be a source of disadvantage, and where they could feel they are among others like themselves.¹⁷⁶

But I do not believe that Quebec can be explained in terms of Gellner's Ruritarian revival model because the period of time involved is too long. Gellner suggests that the revival imperative follows quickly on the arrival of industrialisation (perhaps affecting only

¹⁷⁵ For instance, the willingness to make pensions and savings investments available to Quebec enterprises through the *Caisse de dépôt* probably owes something to widespread enthusiasm for the national cause in the wake of the Quiet Revolution.

¹⁷⁶ See Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 58-62.

one generation).¹⁷⁷ But Quebec started off as the most developed of the Canadian colonies, and while economic leadership may have passed into English-Canadian hands, the province maintained its industrial and commercial base. The moment of being shocked into consciousness of one's culture is not in the Quebec case a by-product of industrialisation because on the one hand it pre-dates industrialisation, and on the other hand it goes on long after industrialisation is an established fact.

Ultimately, what the Quebec case illustrates is that the goal of cultural preservation may conflict with the imperative that seeks a more productive unit of economic organisation, and therefore Quebec's efforts to promote its national character cannot be explained on this basis.

Next, let me consider "social trust" theories of the moral worth of nationalism. These theories claim that shared nationality supports deepened moral commitments that make for better politics, including more redistributive policies. This would seem to provide a justification for preserving national attachments where they exist, and where they can enrich political life. And it is true that in the 1960's the Quebec State was socially active and that much of its program owed its support to national sentiment. But it must also be recalled that prior to 1950, the Quebec State was also nationalist but minimally redistributive. The social trust associated with nationalism instead manifested itself as clerical deference, which fed into reactionary politics. There is no apparent link in

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

Quebec, therefore, between nationalist politics and redistribution, or even with entirely desirable forms of social relations.¹⁷⁸

As for the legitimacy of preserving or promoting a national culture: the problem with “social trust” theories is they suggest that promoting an internal nationality may tend to undermine the possibilities for justice at a broader level, by reducing the sum of solidarity or political commitment. In this case they may actually argue *against* the continued promotion of the Quebec culture, since it would be better to integrate that population into a Canadian national unit. In which case these “social trust” theories cannot explain why Quebec rather than Canada should be the moral foundation of the nation.

Turning to “self-esteem” theories, Charles Taylor specifically bases his arguments for this theory on the experience with nationalism in Quebec.¹⁷⁹ In this case the idea is that national identity is a vital source of attachment and belonging that supports healthy self-esteem. Undeniably, an attachment to the Quebec national culture is important to many in the province and contributes to the self-esteem of many individuals. However, the problem with this account is that so there can be an equal or comparable attachment to Canada in many cases. To the extent that some individuals do not want to identify with the Quebec national project, and wish to maintain an undiluted Canadian identity, the self-esteem needs of these individuals stalemate Quebec’s right to promote a uniquely Quebec national character, since self esteem is of such fundamental significance that it must receive equal respect.

¹⁷⁸ Even if the argument is that a sense of co-nationality is a necessary but not sufficient condition for deepened moral relationships, when there is an upturn in the nationalism represented in the social and political order of a population, it is not unreasonable to look for evidence of the supporting effect nationality is supposed to have on redistribution.

This problem is illustrated in the conflict over the Quebec law that requires French to be predominant on public signs. For many anglophones this requirement is experienced as an affront to their cultural attachments and to their equal standing before the law, and challenges have been launched against the measure on this basis. So while the “self-esteem” idea offers an explanation for why promoting a national culture can sometimes be a legitimate measure, the difficulty is that this theory also provides a reason for halting such initiatives. So it is necessary to look elsewhere for a defence of Quebec’s cultural measures.

Finally, let me address how an “autonomy” theory might deal with the question of Quebec’s ‘character-building’ nationalism. Will Kymlicka’s theory suggests that access to a secure societal culture is the foundation of personal autonomy, and that existing societal cultures have special rights based on this role. Clearly Quebec qualifies as a distinct and complete societal culture that is the basis of many people’s context of choice, so presumably it is legitimate to make efforts to preserve this culture where individuals are already attached to it.

Indeed Kymlicka reaches just such a conclusion, and goes further. He argues that societal cultures have the right to regulate those who live among them in a manner that is in keeping with the prevailing way of life (and that does not violate liberal limits), because of the importance of preserving the existing societal culture. Any newcomers must know what they are getting into, and should accept that a given societal culture will reign in a given territory. But in Quebec, the mixed population is not entirely a product of recent immigration. Many of those who have been there for generations are reluctant to

¹⁷⁹ See, for example, “Shared and Divergent Values,” in *Reconciling the Solitudes: Essays on Canadian Federalism and Nationalism*, ed. Guy Laforest (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995).

participate in efforts to promote the Quebec national character. Why should these people be faced with a government that is determined to alter the society of which they are a part?

In the end, if this theory is based in the autonomy needs of individuals, it is not clear that Quebec has a right to *promote* its national character, as opposed to merely preserving it, and surely that is the object of much of the 'character-building' measures at work in the province? In other words, efforts at 'character-building' nationalism in Quebec would run into the same problem of conflicting individual rights that was encountered in "self-esteem" theories. And since Quebec already has a complete societal culture, there can be little call to do much more for the national cause than, say, regular maintenance. Applied in practice, therefore, it appears that this theory calls for no more than the status quo in Quebec, and does not support promotion of a cultural identity or 'character-building' nationalism.

So although these six sets of theories each have some descriptive power when it comes to understanding the Quebec situation, they do not provide a workable account of why we should consider "character building" nationalism appropriate in Quebec. For that reason I next turn to consider what Quebec nationalists have said about their cause, to see if there is something in their arguments that suggests a new perspective on the Quebec case.

III. HOW THE QUEBEC NATIONALIST CLAIM WAS FORMULATED

As in Ireland, there appear to be two formulations of the nationalist claim in Quebec, and I believe that they again suggest the idea of a shared frame of reference. Beginning in the nineteenth century a formulation concerned with the capacity of existing

institutions to properly represent French-Canadian interests is evident in the arguments of figures such as Louis-Joseph Papineau or Henri Bourassa. Starting in the early twentieth century another formulation appears, which focuses on the preservation of national traits and characteristics. This trend is evident in the writings of leading nationalists such as Lionel Groulx and René Lévesque, for instance, as well as to a certain extent in those of Bourassa. This may be the more prevalent of the two formulations in the Quebec case, but as I will explore in the discussion below, the two are related and one often implies the other to some degree.

These formulations suggest to me a parallel with the “good government” and “national character” formulations which I outlined in the previous section, and I will use the same categories to discuss the Quebec case. But like the Irish case, in Quebec neither category is watertight. The two formulations are, again, mirror images of each other with certain elements reversed. I will first outline how nationalist argument in Quebec makes use of these two formulations, then discuss how closely the two forms are related in practice, and finally I will ask whether it is fair to consider them as representing a “shared frame of reference” account.

1. The “good government” formulation

Probably the first widely recognised voice raised on behalf of the *Canadien* cause was Louis-Joseph Papineau. As Speaker for the Legislative Assembly, Papineau challenged the limitations on the power of the elected house and the concentration of authority in the hands of an appointed few drawn from an unrepresentative minority. He appealed to the

ideals of European liberal thought and to the example of the American Colonies to argue that political change was imperative. To a great extent Papineau's logic was therefore that of a liberal (perhaps even a republican-style) reformer, arguing for enhanced democratic measures. But there was another strain to his argument. Papineau stressed not just that the colony had received only a poor shadow of the English constitution, but also that the English constitution, however well enacted, would never suit the Canadian situation. The practicalities of life in Canada were just too different. He explained (in none too complimentary a fashion):

Institutions suitable to an old country, where laws, customs, and practices differ from our own; where the distribution of wealth is unequal; where, more than anywhere else in the world, one finds on the one hand pride of opulence, and on the other the degradation of beggary – these cannot be right for a new country, where the inhabitants are scattered over a vast territory, where hard work is the only way for anyone to attain some degree of comfort, where luxury is unheard of. Such people need institutions different from those of Europe.¹⁸⁰

Papineau pointed out that the head of government in Lower Canada was a foreigner who often lacked either knowledge of, or attachment to, Canadian affairs. He wrote that the Governor of the colony arrived “sans affection pour les pays, sans liaison avec ses habitants,” and that he would invariably install in power men with “aucune connaissance de lois.”¹⁸¹ Worse still, he claimed, these men had little intention of staying in Canada and sharing in the colony's future. Instead they were “set over it for a season, to

¹⁸⁰ “Papineau on Constitutional Reform,” in *Canadian Political Thought*, ed. H.D. Forbes (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1985), 19.

¹⁸¹ “Nationalisme et Démocratie,” *Papineau: textes choisis et présentés par Fernand Ouellet*, ed. Fernand Ouellet (Québec: Les Presses Universitaires Laval, 1970), 49.

enrich themselves at full gallop and afterwards to digest their enormous [ill]-acquired gains three thousand miles off.”¹⁸²

The root of the problem, Papineau held, was that the major decisions concerning the colony’s fate were being made by an Imperial legislature that was too distant for the colonists to participate in, and was also too far from the “the ‘Mother Country’... to legislate for the internal affairs of the Colonies with advantage.”¹⁸³ Papineau felt this problem was especially evident in the decision to unite Upper and Lower Canada under a single legislature. Appealing to the British authorities to reconsider the decision, he raised the concern that given the differences and the distance involved between even the two Canadian colonies, any representatives would lack the capacity to understand and address effectively all the issues under their jurisdiction. For the member of a legislature to address “local circumstances and wants of the place for which they are constituted,” Papineau argued, “[l]ocal knowledge is an indispensable qualification.”

Thus Papineau, while championing liberal rights of representation, appended to these arguments the idea that good government requires a genuine appreciation of local affairs. To realise all the advantages of representative government it was necessary to have representatives who shared in the circumstances of those being governed. And it was not just geographic distance that was the problem, it was social distance. One had to have a clear stake in the society being governed (i.e. to live in that society), in order to know it and govern it well. If their governors were not drawn from Quebec society and they did not

¹⁸² Louis-Joseph Papineau, “Speech of the Hon. L-J Papineau, at the meeting of the County of Montreal on May 15, 1837” (Montreal: Louis Perrault, 1837), 9.

¹⁸³ Louis-Joseph Papineau, “Letter from L-J Papineau and J. Neilson, Esqs., Addressed to His Majesty’s Undersecretary of State on the Subject of the Proposed Union of the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada” (London: W. Clowes, 1824), 5-6.

plan on living in Quebec past the term of their appointment, then they would have less appreciation for the situation of the population there, and less interest in seeing it improved.

Henri Bourassa makes an interesting contrast with Papineau, because his political doctrine was focused simultaneously on the affairs of Canada and of Quebec. Bourassa argued for the increasing independence of Canada within the imperial context, and the enhanced autonomy of Quebec within the Canadian context.

Bourassa was first moved to address the Imperial link by the decision to send Canadian troops to the Boer War. In response to the argument that Canada had a responsibility to support Imperial wars, Bourassa offered what was, in a way, a reverse version of the “good government” formulation. If Canada had no interest in other Imperial colonies, no stake in the Imperial system, and no say in the Imperial government, then it should not be involved in Imperial affairs (especially wars) that had no bearing on Canada. Far from being involved with Imperial policy, Bourassa pointed out that seven million Canadians had less voice in Imperial policy, “than one single sweeper in the streets of Liverpool or one cab-diver on Fleet Street.”¹⁸⁴ This, in Bourassa’s view, justified Canada’s refusal to participate in supporting Imperial ventures.

Since it is about questioning an external commitment, this argument is a more self-serving version of the “good government” formulation than that which focuses on the need

¹⁸⁴ “Imperialism and Nationalism,” in *Henri Bourassa on Imperialism and Bi-culturalism 1900-1918*, ed. Joseph Levitt (Toronto: The Copp Clarke Publishing Company, 1970), 64. Bourassa also wrote: “so long as we have nothing to say, nothing to do, no opinion to express, no interest to show, in the conduct of the foreign affairs of the Empire; - so long as the rulers of Great Britain do not even think of us when they make their foreign treaties and entertain those foreign relations in support of which they need their army and their navy, - what moral claim, what legal claim, what equitable claim is there upon us that we should go and pay the piper.” *ibid.*, 71

for local understanding and shared interests to ensure good laws. However, it has in common the logic that political authority and political responsibility call for a genuine connection to the interests at stake. It was the absence of that connection that disqualified (or exempted) Canada from involvement in Imperial wars.

Even within Canada Bourassa felt the need for a separation of powers where there was a separation of interests, and he called for the provincial domain to retain “all that is essential to the maintenance of our national character.”¹⁸⁵ In other words, while his defence of Canada’s independence drew on a version of the “good government” formulation, his defence of Quebec autonomy lent toward a “national character” type of formulation. For that reason I will continue the discussion of Bourassa’s ideas under this new heading.

2. The “national character” formulation

Henri Bourassa argued that the preservation of French was “absolutely necessary for the preservation of the race, of its genius, its character and its temperament.”¹⁸⁶ In language that is reminiscent of Douglas Hyde’s concern with the Anglicisation of the Irish, Bourassa argued that nothing would be achieved by attempting to assimilate the French in Canada.

... the day we lose our language we lose precisely this very peculiar character, these special faculties which can make us a desirable element in the construction of the Canadian nation... The day we lose our language we will

¹⁸⁵ “French-Canadians and Canadian Nationalism,” in *ibid.*, 104.

¹⁸⁶ “Language and Nationality,” in *ibid.*, 134.

perhaps be mediocre Englishmen, passable Scotsmen or bad Irishmen, but we will no longer be truly Canadian.¹⁸⁷

But as noted, Bourassa had a complex kind of bi-level nationalism. He thought that “the normal development of the powers of self-government” would lead to Canada becoming “an absolutely independent nation.” Alongside the national character of the French-Canadians, Bourassa envisioned all Canadians developing “a civilisation of our own, a mental development of our own, an intellectuality of our own.”¹⁸⁸ Although French-Canadians might be concentrated in one part of Canada, they were attached to the entire entity. He argued: “The fatherland, for us, is the whole of Canada... The nation which we want to see developed is the Canadian nation.”¹⁸⁹

Yet this appears to present something of a contradiction at first. How was the national character of French-Canadians to be preserved while a new Canadian nationality was constructed around it? This contradiction becomes less stark when it is noted that Bourassa’s image of Canadian nationalism was based on what he saw as the inherent duality of the Canadian situation. Canada was “a nation of two elements separated by language and religion and by the legal arrangements necessary for the preservation of their respective traditions, but united by a sentiment of brotherhood in a common attachment to a common country.”¹⁹⁰ Bourassa felt that this kind of nationalism would not imperil the French fact. This may still present a problem, however, since it raises the question of whether you can have one nation nested within another, and have both grow and thrive.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ “Imperialism and Nationalism,” in *ibid.*, 77.

But this certainly seems to be what Bourassa had in mind. He believed that the true 'Canadian' way involved a sort of 'live and let live' attitude among the two major communities. What's more, he believed that French-Canadians were the most "Canadian" of any group in the Dominion.¹⁹¹ And in a twist on Lord Durham's predictions, Bourassa believed that once the relative newcomers (the English, Americans, and other Europeans) were finally assimilated to the point of view already held by French-Canadians, national harmony would be secured.

If Bourassa represented a complex bi-level nationalism, the Quebec national character had few more single-minded champions than the clergyman and teacher Lionel Groulx. Groulx entered the nationalist debate just as Bourassa was retiring from it, and his arguments accorded well with the socially conservative political style of the thirties, forties and fifties. Groulx had a racially based idea of the French-Canadian nation and he cast the national character in mystical and teleological terms. He promoted an image of the devout French-Canadian family and claimed it epitomised the essence of Quebec's cultural inheritance, although perhaps his most enduring legacy was his impact on the revival of French-Canadian historical studies.

Groulx believed that a lack of awareness of their history and achievements was at the root of French-Canadians' political and economic subordination. He wrote that he was "convinced that our indifference arises from ignorance of our history. We lack

¹⁸⁹ "Canada: a Bi-Cultural Nation," in *ibid.*, 107. There is, of course, a certain ambiguity in Bourassa's use of the term 'Canada' for reasons I discuss *supra* at an earlier note. But at the very least we can assume Bourassa was conscious of this ambiguity.

¹⁹⁰ "Canada: a Bi-Cultural Nation," in *ibid.*, 107.

¹⁹¹ "The French-Canadian in the British Empire," in *ibid.*, 177. Again, the ambiguity over "Canadian" re-appears. And once again, Bourassa may have been consciously using this ambiguity to connect the French-Canadian cause more intimately to the larger Canadian sphere.

patriotic conviction because we do not really know our own country,” and he felt that it was imperative that they begin the task of “exhuming” their history.¹⁹²

Groulx felt the history of French-Canadians in Canada illustrated the differences between their nationality and the other races in Canada. He eulogised the French-Canadians’ “agricultural vocation,”¹⁹³ their sense of adventure and “missionary spirit,”¹⁹⁴ the role of the family¹⁹⁵ and the miracle of ‘*la survivance*’ whereby the traditional French way of life had been preserved despite all efforts to the contrary. These features, when added to a distinct economic and juridical framework and compounded by linguistic and religious differences, made Quebec a province apart. Holding on to these differences was the key to preserving the French-Canadian nation.

In case there was any doubt about what was at stake in the loss of national traits, Groulx warned his fellow French-Canadians that the fate of those nations that strayed from their national calling was “incoherence, disintegration, acceptance of mediocrity and servitude, the impossibility of a collective life, the triumph of every kind of individualism – all signs of ultimate doom.”¹⁹⁶ Alternately, by being true to their inherent character, French-Canadians could realise great gains. Groulx promised that “through faithfulness to their origin, history, culture and inborn strength will they be able to create the most

¹⁹² “L’Action française,” in *Abbé Groulx: Variations on a Nationalist Theme*, ed. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing, 1973) 77.

¹⁹³ “History as a Guardian of Living Traditions,” in *ibid.*, 149.

¹⁹⁴ Lionel Groulx, “Why we are Divided: an Address Delivered on November 19, 1943” (Montreal: L’Action Nationale, 1943), 8.

¹⁹⁵ Groulx devoted an entire article to this topic. See “The Role and Traditions of the French-Canadian Family,” in *Abbé Groulx*, 101-120.

¹⁹⁶ “History as a Guardian of Living Traditions,” in *ibid.*, 156.

favourable climate for developing their human and cultural personality and for acquiring the pride and dignity of a free people."¹⁹⁷

Like the Gaelic Revivalists, Groulx saw the goal as involving spiritual or cultural achievements that were outside regular political channels. But unlike many of the Gaelic Revivalists, Groulx was not shy about staking a claim in the political realm too. Groulx makes explicit the justification for national institutions in Quebec. The ultimate goal of the French-Canadian people in Canada must be self-government,¹⁹⁸ because political independence was necessary in order to realise "the survival and flowering of our particular personality."¹⁹⁹ Unlike the "good government" formulation of Papineau, who argued that the distinct local circumstances of the French colony merited special political structures, Groulx held that political autonomy was necessary to *keep* Quebec distinct. The alternative was to allow their national character to seep away, squandering their potential for spiritual or material achievement in the process.

And where is Canada in all this? Despite a deep-seated suspicion of the English and despite his aspirations to political independence, Groulx did not rule out some connection between the populations living in Canada. He admitted there was still a possibility that "they may meet and come to an understanding through a common affection for the same country," and he added, "I am not a separatist whatever may be said."²⁰⁰ But Groulx was pessimistic about the prospects for Canadian Confederation: "Since our country has been built as it has, with geographic differences, a mixture of races and beliefs, the federal

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁹⁸ Groulx wrote that Quebec must attain: "full self-government, full political power: that sum of powers which enables a people to keep its own attributes and national character and to ensure above all an organic life, a complete fulfilment of material and spiritual potential." *Ibid.*, 151.

character of its political constitution, let us ask objectively what can be humanly achieved."²⁰¹ What could be achieved, Groulx suggested, was a political connection between the peoples of Canada, but one that did not attempt to submerge their distinct characters and situations under a common model. "We can unite," he announced, "we cannot and we never should become unified."²⁰²

Groulx formulated the nationalist claim in a way that argued from the necessity to preserve the setting and characteristics of the existing population. He extended that into a call for political change – on the one hand to acquire increasingly independent institutions, on the other to check Canadian aspirations for a unified people. Failure to answer this call, he warned, would leave French-Canadians a debased and dissolute people who could offer little to the world or to their own people.

Finally, I want to consider the arguments of a leading Quebec nationalist from the post-Quiet Revolution period. René Lévesque founded and led the *Parti Québécois* (or PQ) – a party committed to achieving a relationship with the rest of Canada based on his idea of "sovereignty association." Sovereignty association amounted to political independence for Quebec combined with extensive political and economic ties with the remaining Canadian provinces. Lévesque rejected the traditional passivity of '*la survivance*' and aimed at something more ambitious. He wanted to see Quebec realise its full potential in politics, economics, and culture through its own efforts. He envisioned a modern and in many regards a politically and socially liberal society for Quebec.

¹⁹⁹ "Our Political Future," in *ibid.*, 182.

²⁰⁰ Groulx, "Why we are divided," 14-15.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 17.

Lévesque's thinking appears to be the antithesis to Groulx's traditionalist ideal of Quebec, yet although the two had different ideas on the national character, they actually drew on similar formulations of the nationalist claim. Both placed great emphasis on the need for the population of Quebec to remain true to a certain set of characteristics – characteristics rooted in Quebec history – in order for that population to thrive. Lévesque had a significantly updated idea of Quebec national traits, but even in a trimmed down version, the national character needed to be preserved and protected, or Lévesque saw Quebec facing the same kind of existential crisis that Groulx had predicted.

In outlining the nationalist position Lévesque wrote that being *Québécois* meant being “attached to this one corner of the earth where we can be completely ourselves.” Being ‘ourselves’ he went on to explain “is essentially a matter of keeping and developing a personality that has survived for three and a half centuries.”²⁰³ Unlike Groulx who enumerated the specific traits of the national character, Lévesque offered a more elusive definition of the Quebec personality. As he explains, it is “our own special wave-length on which, despite all interference, we can tune each other in loud and clear, with no one else listening.” This connection was so essential to the population of Quebec that to sacrifice this feature of their way of living by, say, giving up on their own language, would amount to the amputation of some part of themselves. It would be like “living without an arm or a leg.”²⁰⁴

Lévesque stressed that the responsibility for ensuring the security of the national character belonged with the population of Quebec. If the struggle to preserve the national

²⁰³ René Lévesque, *An Option for Quebec* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), 14.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

personality was lost, he warned, “it is not ‘the others’ we would have to blame, but only our own impotence and resulting discouragement.”²⁰⁵ It is this imperative – to secure the collective personality – that determined in Lévesque’s mind the range of powers Quebec needed to assume and therefore the extent of political independence it required. But even Lévesque left room for continued connection with the other Canadian provinces. He argued that what was needed was “some breathing space” allowing the “two societies” of Canada to “re-discover themselves, freely and without prejudice, creating little by little new points of contact as the need arises.”²⁰⁶

And lest it appear that only those calling for independence articulated their nationalism in terms of an attachment to the national character and idiom, similar arguments were heard from federalists. André Laurendeau, who went on to co-chair the influential Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism,²⁰⁷ explained that Quebec had a mission of authenticity and self-realisation; as he put it, “the great duty is to be oneself, to become oneself fully.”²⁰⁸ And he believed the basis for that authenticity was the cultural heritage of Quebec. It was “the wealth of experiences, lived through collectively, that have imprinted a stable character on our people; the social forces that, acting in time and space, have built our milieu and thus conditioned our being.”²⁰⁹

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁰⁷ The aim of the commission was to renew the way Canada recognised its English and French communities. The final volume of the final report was received by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau who enacted the recommendations on bilingualism, but substituted the idea of “multiculturalism” for the bicultural ideal, pointing out that there were more than two groups that made up the modern Canadian population. In Quebec Trudeau’s move was perceived as an attempt to undercut claims to special status for the Quebec population by substituting a universalised image of the Canadian identity – in essence making French-Canadians a sub-category like all other ethnic minorities.

²⁰⁸ “The Conditions for the Existence of a National Culture,” in *Canadian Political Thought*, 281.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 270.

In this way Quebec nationalism entered the modern era with leaders who were offering a defence of their political platforms grounded in the “national character” formulation of the nationalist claim. Admittedly in this period there was also great emphasis on the need for emancipation from the foreign dominance (English-Canadian and American) of the Quebec economy. And some of the Quiet Revolution’s most impressive political and economic projects were launched on this basis. But the justification for these initiatives was linked to the preservation of the Quebec personality. Although best known for their political agendas, both Lévesque and Laurendeau (like Groulx and Bourassa before them) believed economic and political change was necessary because of the essential role the national idiom played in connecting the population of Quebec to the territory of Quebec, the history of Quebec, and ultimately to each other.

3. *The “mirror” effect in Quebec.*

In Chapter 2 I argued that the “good government” and “national character” formulations of the nationalist claim were in fact mirror images of each other, and drew on the same basic logic with the elements recombined. I have discussed the arguments of Quebec nationalist figures in terms of these two formulations because I believe that similar ideas appear in the Quebec case too. But as with the case of Irish nationalism, I do not mean to suggest that either formulation is an exclusive type used by one nationalist or another. Allow me to illustrate this point.

Take, for example, the arguments of Papineau in the eighteenth century. Although he drew on the “good government” idea when he stressed the need for local

understanding, this is an individual who broke with Quebec's revolutionary movement because it was committed to undoing the seigniorial system. While there may have been some personal interest here (Papineau had purchased a seigneurie) his stand on the issue also suggests he felt that some elements of the French-Canadian way of life needed to be preserved even under a new political order. Likewise Bourassa combined elements of the two formulations in defending his political aspirations for both Canada and Quebec.

At the other end of the historical spectrum we find the spiritually motivated Groulx appealing to the practical differences in the historical and geographic circumstances of Canada's populations to explain why it was unrealistic to think Canadians could be well governed under a single unified authority. And René Lévesque, while he grounded his nationalist arguments in the *Québécois*' need to "be themselves," also argued that the federal system was causing unnecessary chaos and conflict. More independence for Quebec was a way to avoid "the incredible 'split-level' squandering of energy"²¹⁰ that characterised the existing system. And though Lévesque does not make an explicit claim about the advantages of local knowledge for government, since the federal conflict is due to a disagreement between the two levels over what should be done, we can presume that he felt that those in Quebec were in a better position to make the call on Quebec questions.

So although I have discussed these nationalist figures in terms of the "good government" and "national character" formulations, I do not believe the two formulations are ever all that far from each other. As I argued in the previous chapter I certainly do not want to suggest yet another dichotomy of nationalist thought or conduct. Instead I want to emphasise the common themes between what appear on the surface as different

formulations, and how in the ideas of leading Quebec nationalists there are elements of both formulations, even if the combination of elements is reversed.

Finally I want to note one potential puzzle presented by the Quebec case. In Quebec the “national character” idea appears to be the more popular of the two formulations, especially in comparison to the arguments Irish nationalists gave for their cause. But I think this can be at least partially explained by the fact that Quebec was under the authority of an independent legislature for much of the period under consideration, and so it was less pressing to make arguments aimed at political change, whereas in Ireland this need was more acutely felt.

4. Quebec nationalism as a shared frame of reference

Even though I have been discussing this case in terms of the “good government” and “national character” formulations, it is still appropriate to question how well the Quebec case fits with the idea of nationalism as an appeal to a shared frame of reference, which was the inference I drew based on a consideration of Irish nationalist arguments. I believe that the shared frame of reference idea does have relevance for the Quebec strain of nationalist thought, but in a slightly muddier way. What I mean is that in the Quebec case the frame of reference is not always clearly limited to Quebec or to French-Canadians.

In the eyes of some Quebec nationalists, political change is necessary because the circumstances of the population are different, and there needs to be a government in charge that understands this. For others, the pressing need is for the population to reflect its distinct situation in its collective personality or else they will be left disconnected from

²¹⁰ Lévesque, *Option for Quebec*, 25.

their real circumstances. So whether focused on changing politics or the population, for reasons of political or personal benefits, there appears to be a common formula at work here that turns on the actual circumstances and characteristics of the populations involved. But unlike in Ireland, it is less clear that all of the circumstances under consideration are unique to the population in question. While the common idiom may be uniquely French-Canadian there are grounds for thinking some elements of the French-Canadian situation are shared with other Canadians.

Louis-Joseph Papineau, for instance, appealed to the need for local understanding to inform good government in the colonies. In particular he argued against the imposition of a political structure designed for an "old" country on a "new" one. But many of the circumstances Papineau points to (such as distance, lack of luxuries or natural aristocracy, harsh climate, etc.) are common circumstances among the British colonies of North America. As noted, Papineau felt that the English minority in Lower Canada was not displaying a great understanding of local affairs in their political conduct, and he had even less hope for the English population of Upper Canada under a legislative union. But aside from the difficulties of travel and communications in eighteenth century Canada which made a legislative union impractical and undesirable, it appears that for Papineau it is less the lack of shared circumstances and more the lack of goodwill that concerns him in his dealings with his fellow English-Canadians. It was this hostility between the so-called 'races' that necessitated a division of political affairs, even where shared circumstances existed.

Bourassa too seems caught between the shared circumstances of the Canadian State and the special situation of the French-Canadians, who were living in a different idiom within that state. It is never immediately clear in Bourassa's writing and speeches which 'nation' he is actually championing. Yet he undoubtedly remains attached to the French language and committed to upholding the French-Canadians' most 'Canadian' point of view. These were the elements that made Quebec a worthy part of the Canadian project, in his view. So while French-Canadians have a shared frame of reference based on their distinct culture and history, this frame of reference did not necessarily exclude participation in a broader Canadian scheme, provided the mutual goodwill was there.

In contrast to Bourassa, Groulx – probably the most insular of the nationalist figures I have discussed – insisted that French-Canadian circumstances were markedly different. In his view, Quebec's culture, economy, geography, history, and spiritual existence all set the population apart. And for its own good this separation needed to be maintained. But even Groulx, and later Lévesque, believed that there might be room for some eventual détente with the rest of Canada, once the Quebec national sphere was secure. Nevertheless, for both men the central fact remained that there was a cultural connection among French-Canadians that was the basis for common achievements – whether those achievements involved an idealised family life or a reinvigorated and reclaimed economy. And the Canadian connection should not be allowed to endanger that.

In sum, there seems to be some basis for thinking that these leading nationalist arguments contain appeals to a frame of reference shared by the majority of the population

of Quebec, even if this frame of reference was not always exclusive of the wider Canadian sphere. Quite the contrary, Quebec nationalists have argued that there were many practical reasons for maintaining some relations with Canada as a whole, but because of a historical lack of goodwill between the communities, most preferred it kept at a safe distance.

IV. THE "SHARED FRAME OF REFERENCE" ACCOUNT AND THE CONDUCT OF NATIONALISM IN QUEBEC

The arguments of Quebec nationalists, while not a perfect fit, do suggest a concern for a shared frame of reference based on specific circumstances, some of which they may share with other Canadians, and based on a common idiom which they do not share with other Canadians.²¹¹ The important question now is whether this account of nationalism's moral worth can help us to evaluate the actual conduct of nationalism in Quebec.

As with the discussion of the Irish case, I want to address this question in several parts. First, I will ask about the appropriateness of efforts to promote or preserve the national character. Next I will review the range of tactics that have been employed on behalf of this objective, and will ask how these tactics relate to the benefits said to be at stake. And finally I'll ask whether independence is appropriate for contemporary Quebec, and whether the tactics used for that objective have been appropriate.

²¹¹ There has been a great effort to promote bilingualism in Canada, largely in an effort to counteract the isolation of Quebec. But in speaking of an idiom, I mean something more than language. I mean to include the elements of popular culture and historic memory that inform the metaphors of the everyday vernacular.

1. Was 'character-building' nationalism appropriate in Quebec?

I want to begin by considering the appropriateness of 'character building' nationalism, or the goal of changing the population to ensure it reflects some supposedly authentic ideal. In the Quebec case I think there is considerable room for this kind of approach, provided it is done in a way that recognises that even the national character will evolve over time. But where 'character-building' nationalism attempts to 'freeze' a culture in time, disconnecting it from the changing circumstances around it, the attempt will ultimately come at the cost of the population's own well being.

One example of how 'character building' nationalism can go wrong is Groulx's articulation of the French-Canadian way of life in Duplessis-era Quebec. Groulx's image of a devout, rural, non-materialistic population was not representative of the changing reality of his time. Worse still, it served to justify a lack of political resources to assist with depression-era hardship or to capitalise on opportunities for economic development that followed. By ceding responsibility for an enormous range of social services from health care, child services, and education to the clergy, Quebec political leaders upheld the Catholic dimension of the national character at the price of ill-regulated and often inadequate public services.²¹² Groulx's thinking was out of touch with the real circumstances of the Quebec population. It was becoming an urbanised population²¹³ with more complex needs and expectations, and Groulx's response was to isolate the Quebec

²¹² For example, Laurendeau writing in 1951 could complain that Quebec offered no public secondary schooling opportunities while the rest of the continent did. "Conditions for the Existence of a National Culture," 277. Quebec is also currently dealing with the consequences of the inadequate childcare provided to those known as "Duplessis' orphans," who experienced abuse or neglect in church-run childcare institutions during Duplessis' administration.

population from the surrounding North American culture as a means to preserve the national character. He preached, for instance, against the evils of cinema as an Americanising force.²¹⁴ But the attempt at isolationism was futile. American cinema found an audience in Quebec, but in a twist that Groulx did not anticipate (and probably would not have welcomed) so did Quebec cinema. The Quiet Revolution transformed Quebec culture and society into something that he would hardly recognise.

Yet at the same time the period is seen as a tremendous flowering of the culture, politics, and economy of the province. And through it all, the sense of a common idiom, a constant personality, persisted. In a sense, the Quiet Revolution was made possible because of the realisation that while Quebec had a responsibility for the fate of the national character – that “conscious choices” would influence its direction – this did not mean that the only choice was to reify the past. Writing in the 1950’s André Laurendeau warned that while the Québécois should remain conscious of their past traditions, “neither should we believe that these things are eternal.”²¹⁵

To the extent that ‘character-building’ nationalism becomes an obstacle to that natural growth, it fails to secure personal or political benefits for the population because it hampers rather than facilitates collective achievements. In this case it cannot be considered justified in terms of the worth of a shared frame of reference, because the frame

²¹³ In 1941 over 61% of Quebec’s population was already living in urban centres. By 1961 this number was over 74%. Yves Bourdon and Jean Lamarre, *Histoire du Québec: une société Nord Américaine* (Quebec; Beauchemin, 1998), 200.

²¹⁴ “L’Action française,” 73. Elsewhere he inveighs against the introduction of Santa Claus, calling him a “repulsively obese, decrepit old man.” “The Role and Traditions of the French Canadian Family,” 113.

²¹⁵ Laurendeau, “Conditions for the Existence of a National Culture,” in *Canadian Political Thought*, 272. Although Laurendeau chaired the Federal Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission, he remained a strong believer in the distinct Québécois nationality.

of reference will progressively become mismatched with the real circumstances of the population.

However, this leaves significant room for the political promotion of the national character when what is involved is a living idiom that is not rigidly defined. So for instance, it is appropriate that French be promoted as the dominant language in Quebec because it really is the majority language of the population. Likewise it is appropriate for both political and popular authorities to support and encourage cultural and literary expression that grows out of the Quebec/French-Canadian experience and helps inform and fill out the shared frame of reference. And finally it seems no less arbitrary to select immigrants based on their language skills than on their education or wealth level.

But there is one significant limit on these measures. Quebec, like most modern polities, has a mixed population. There is a sizeable English population, a significant native population and a considerable proportion of the francophone population has roots outside of the province and often the continent. As Quebec engages in 'character-building' nationalism, there is often concern among these minorities or those watching these developments from other parts of Canada. The concern is that these minorities will be seen as undesirable obstacles to the national revival, or won't be seen at all, and their rights and needs overlooked.

In reality, Quebec has no worse a track record in regard to its minorities than any other jurisdiction in Canada. Indeed if rights to 'own-language' education is the measure, Quebec has historically fared much better in this regard. But there remains the issue of equal respect - can this be combined with a course of 'character-building' nationalism? Or

to put it another way, if the political authorities and popular culture favours one idiom over another, doesn't this imply a kind of rejection or debasement?

This may in fact be how 'character-building' nationalism is experienced by some minorities, especially those who feel most entitled to equal time in the public arena. But given the mixed basis of most contemporary populations, to refuse to promote one idiom because it might imply disrespect to another could result in no common idiom being available at all. And in the long run I think this is the less desirable outcome given the benefits supposed to flow from a shared frame of reference.²¹⁶

What would be required in the Quebec case, as with any other case of 'character-building' nationalism, is that where a minority has and wishes to maintain its own idiom, it should not be forced to abandon it. Likewise it's not legitimate to make the environment so hostile that a minority must either leave or stay at the cost of its own well being. The host population that seeks to promote its national character can either adjust its nationalism to accommodate this minority idiom, or it must respect its continued separateness.

In sum then, 'character-building' nationalism is appropriate in Quebec because there is a living idiom in use among the majority of the population in the province, and because it is no longer focused on an attempt to reify idealised cultural features, but instead recognises the need for ongoing adjustment and evolution. So long as this

²¹⁶ The impossibility of having a neutral public arena has already been recognised in the work of theorists such as Will Kymlicka and Joseph Carens. Therefore, which of the admittedly non-neutral alternatives we pursue in terms of shaping the public sphere is a crucial question. And still, the fact that neutrality is not an option does not nullify the experience of alienation that some may feel if their idiom is not the one that is publicly established. See Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 105-13, and Carens, *Culture, Citizenship, and Community*, 69-73.

continues to be the case, 'character-building' can be a means to secure the personal and political benefits of a shared frame of reference.

2. *Are the tactics of 'character-building' nationalism appropriate?*

The tactics of 'character building' nationalism in Quebec can be classed into two broad areas. First is the promotion of national attachments by popular movements, and second is the regulation of communication and education by government authorities.

From Groulx's efforts to 'exhume' the history of the French-Canadian people to the post 1950's proliferation of nationalist movements, nationalism in Quebec in the twentieth century moved outside the traditional political sphere and cultivated support among individuals in their everyday lives. On the other hand the traditional political sphere has become increasingly involved in promoting popular consciousness of the national character in the form of measures to establish French as the dominant language in Quebec. This latter tactic includes the series of language laws passed in the province, but also commitments to encourage francophone immigration as well as requirements that immigrants send their children to schools where French is the language of instruction.

In Canada these latter measures have been seen by some as involving an intolerable compromise to liberal rights. But an expectation that members of a community should gain competency in the language most in use in that population is not usually seen in such an illiberal light.²¹⁷ Being required to use that language in commercial displays and

²¹⁷ For the argument that linguistic integration is a reasonable civic expectation, see Joseph Carens, "Liberalism, Justice, and Political Community: Theoretical Perspectives on Quebec's Liberal Nationalism," in *Is Quebec Nationalism Just?: Perspectives from Anglophone Canada* ed. Joseph Carens

favouring speakers of the language in immigration selection may raise some questions about equality of respect, however. So although it is not necessarily illiberal to promote the use of the dominant language in a population, how these measures are enacted plays a large part in determining their justifiability.

Ultimately it seems to me that contemporary Quebec conduct on both these tactics has been within the bounds of what is appropriate for a population and a government's social and political conduct.²¹⁸ This is not to say that these tactics don't have consequences that some would rather avoid. An effort to promote a certain national personality may leave some people feeling shut out if they do not relate well to that personality, and this problem is especially acute when a government gets behind the initiative. But sharing a common idiom, especially one suited to the circumstances of the population in question, can involve certain advantages too. For that reason it is appropriate to pursue reasonable efforts to promote this idiom.

3. Is independence appropriate for Quebec?

In Canada there is probably no question more volatile than that of Quebec independence. Few other political questions have raised the hostility and intransigence on both sides that this one has. The price of political peace in Canada lately has been to stop talking about the question almost entirely. But I don't believe this is a useful way to deal with difficult issues, so although many who are wiser than I have opted to hold their

(Montreal: McGill-Queen's university Press, 1995) and Will Kymlicka, *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ethnocultural Relations in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988).

²¹⁸ See Carens' discussion of Quebec immigration policy in *Is Quebec Nationalism Just?*

silence on this question, I will not be so prudent. Instead I want to ask what a shared frame of reference account can tell us about the appropriateness of Quebec independence.

On the face of it, Quebec in the new millennium has arguably a better case for independence than Ireland had in the 1920's. Its population speaks a different language from the group it seeks independence from, and it has a proven track record of peaceful and responsible self-government. Opponents of independence protest, however, that unlike places like Ireland, Quebec was not subject to systematic oppression and therefore it has little case for secession today. This assumes that remedial right is the only legitimate route to independence and as noted this theory proves problematic in practice. Yet even were we to accept this standard, there's still reason to think Quebec has a strong case. While Quebec under Canada was not as badly treated as Ireland under the Empire, it was still conquered and political rights were restricted. The fact that French-Canadians made the best of their situation is not a legitimate reason to dismiss these historical facts.²¹⁹

Yet it could be argued that the relationship between Quebec and Canada was not a colonial relationship, but rather a real political partnership – a compact – and that Canada's attachment to Quebec is genuine, meaning that the existing relationship is not an exploitative one. This may be true, although many Quebec nationalists would argue that there was an exploitative economic relationship at work for much of Quebec's history. But even if Canadians are more personally attached to Quebec than the British were to Ireland, this could be for self-serving reasons (such as wanting a strong, united Canada, or a

²¹⁹ It could be argued that Quebec willingly entered into the Canadian union at Confederation, or that its continued participation in the Canadian union is evidence of consent to the Canadian arrangement. But as I said, this could also be explained in terms of Quebec making the best of its situation.

desire to maintain a bilingual identity as a bulwark against Americanisation). As such, it should not limit Quebec's options.

But some Canadians object that as Canada represents something equally valuable in terms of political, cultural and/or social objectives and they ask: "don't we also have a right to fight for our vision?" This position was succinctly articulated in the widely popular bumper sticker slogan that coincided with the 1995 referendum. It read: "My Canada includes Quebec." This position appeals to the idea of a shared frame of reference. It is the demand that "My Canada" should stay a fixed point of reference because for those involved it has become a basic component of how they view, understand, and act within, their world. What it illustrates is that there are important issues at stake here, and not just for the people of Quebec. An independent Quebec would require all Canadians to adjust their frame of reference and because of the fundamental role it plays, it would be a demanding transition: it is, after all, this role that gives nationalism its moral value, as I have been arguing. But without minimising the consequences for other Canadians, the fact that Canadians outside Quebec have a frame of reference that includes Quebec is not a good enough reason to exclude the goal of independence. The "My Canada" position is a one-sided account and once again, it should not limit Quebec's political options.

During a discussion of Quebec independence among a Canadian audience the issue of minorities will inevitably be raised at some point. The argument generally holds that as a nationalist measure, independence will ultimately disadvantage minorities in Quebec by disconnecting them from rights they would otherwise enjoy under the

Canadian system, leaving them at the mercy of a population with an agenda to enforce a national character that leaves little room for multiculturalism.

It is true that nationalism in Quebec has involved measures designed to promote the national character – most particularly in terms of the use of French. And while there is reason to believe that the majority population of Quebec has no less commitment to responsible liberal principles than does the rest of Canada, there are no guarantees as to the conduct of an independent Quebec. But even this is not sufficient to veto the goal of independence. If Quebec cannot accommodate its minorities in a way that does not disadvantage their well being, this only requires that they must allow for these minorities' continued separateness, not that they abandon the idea of their own independence.²²⁰

I am not suggesting, however, that this is a simple option, especially given that minorities may be scattered across the province, or may be intermingled in one city – as in the case of Montreal. But if Quebec is to make a nationalist claim for independence based on a shared frame of reference, it must respect that same claim when it is made by others. By the same token, the minorities' right to maintain a shared frame of reference cannot be appealed to without recognising the claim of the majority too. There is a moral requirement that minorities be considered and accommodated either inside, outside, or alongside an independent Quebec, but this constitutes a qualification on, rather than a veto over, the independence goal.

²²⁰ I am not suggesting that it would be easy to convince some Quebec nationalists of this condition. But although I attend to the arguments that nationalists make in order to understand why they believe their cause has merit, this is not the same thing as taking the morality of nationalism as dictated by these figures. My aim is to take what I can learn from their arguments and consider them for their normative implications. It may turn out that some of those implications are things that nationalists themselves would prefer not to face, but all the more reason to articulate these implications in connection to principles that they do recognise.

What all this suggests is that the standard objections to Quebec independence do not hold. They do not tell us how appropriate independence is in the Quebec case. If we are trying to judge this question based on a “shared frame of reference” account on the other hand, what matters is whether this frame of reference is serving a useful function in helping the population relate to its actual circumstances and to each other. In Quebec’s case there is a distinct common idiom that involves the main language of the province, ideas of history, popular culture, etc.. The province also has a separate legal code (the French civil code was retained in Quebec) and federalism has allowed public policy to evolve in its own direction there. So there are grounds for a distinct Quebec frame of reference.

But this is not the whole of the story. Quebec shares a colonial history with the rest of Canada, even though parts of it were experienced in different ways. It also has an economic relationship with the other provinces, and the entire Canadian population shares certain political ideals and practices. In fact, the very project of Canada was itself once seen as the major political heritage of French-Canadians, and there is still significant attachment to that ideal. In the past these shared circumstances have led many in Quebec to feel connected to Canada as a whole. To the degree that *both* the population in Quebec *and* in the rest of Canada share a certain frame of reference, this Canadian frame of reference becomes an important factor.

Yet this frame of reference may not represent the same thing for all the people involved. Some people maintain a roughly equivalent attachment to both Canada and Quebec as national frames of reference, while others believe that only one national frame

of reference can prevail in a territory and therefore that a decision must be made between Canada and Quebec, with the other relegated to a lesser political standing. This amounts to an idea that two national bodies cannot occupy the same space. Although this has traditionally been the case, I am not sure that it must necessarily be so if there is a realistic possibility of co-existence. If these frames of reference can accommodate each other then it may be possible to live together, even in the same territory. If this proves impossible then it may be necessary to make arrangements to live separately. Should a coexistence arrangement be reached, some degree of tension between the Canadian and Quebec frames of reference would be unavoidable within the Quebec setting, however. Yet few nations are without their internal tensions. It is the ability to adjust the frame of reference to better manage those tensions that provides the staying power of a nation. While it continues then, the Canadian connection can provide for esteem, group achievements, and the consideration of shared interests, and it therefore complicates any claim for political independence by Quebec.

We already encountered this ambiguity about the frame of reference for the Quebec population in the writings of Bourassa, but this ambiguity surrounding attachment to the Canadian nation (did it mean the project of Canada at large or just Quebec?) also explains the popularity of Pierre Trudeau's campaign to create a bilingual Canada. In effect this was Trudeau's effort at 'character-building' nationalism, only in this case he set his sights on the Canada-wide population.²²¹ And finally, this Canadian frame of reference explains why the Quebec population, while strongly supportive of Quebec nationalism, has

been reluctant to issue a mandate for independence. This does not disprove the existence of a unique Quebec frame of reference. It does mean, however, that the national claim is complicated by attachments and understandings that reach outside the province.

But the situation is not a static one. The attempt to 'unify' Canada, as Groulx warned, has left Canada-Quebec relations in a worsened state. Constitutional negotiations that led to a settlement without Quebec and that did not allocate new powers to Quebec, reinforced a popular sense of alienation and of being "misunderstood," while unsuccessful attempts to 'bring Quebec back in' to the constitution have led to frustration and increasing alienation both inside and outside Quebec. The idea that Quebec is a 'distinct society,'²²² and that this has political implications, is now well established within the province, but is not widely endorsed in Canada as a whole. Meanwhile political change up to and including independence continues to be seen as an appropriate goal by a significant and increasing proportion of the population in the province (as witnessed most persuasively in the increased support for sovereignty in a referendum), but again it is not widely accepted in Canada as a whole. In other words, the conditions are set for an increasing experience of misunderstanding and hostility between the populations inside and outside of Quebec. While there are grounds for Canadians inside and outside Quebec to share a political life in some areas, these can be undermined by negative encounters, and

²²¹ Thanks to these efforts, multiculturalism and bilingualism have been established as cultural standards both inside and outside Quebec, although there are differences in their significance for Quebec and Canada.

²²² This was one of the terms used in the Meech Lake constitutional round in 1990. In an attempt to provide acknowledgement of the special situation of Quebec, the accord proposed that the constitution should recognise that Quebec was a 'distinct society' within Canada, but there was considerable popular opposition to the initiative since it was feared it could be used by Quebec to exempt itself from certain elements of the constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

lack of goodwill can lead to misunderstanding and poor government, even where shared circumstances exist.

So long as there is, among the Quebec population, an attachment to a shared Canadian frame of reference, the preference should be to maintain that connection in the interests of the political and personal benefits it offers those inside and outside Quebec. This does not prohibit political change, however. In fact political change may be the best way to preserve these overlapping frames of reference. But if the Canadian frame of reference stops being the source of political and personal benefits for those in Quebec, if it becomes an obstacle to collective achievements and if the psychological and practical withdrawal to Quebec, which gained momentum through the twentieth century, should become complete in the twenty-first, then independence may well be an appropriate course for Quebec at that point.

4. Were the tactics of independence appropriate in Quebec?

Even though I argue that the independence goal is not appropriate for Quebec, so long as there is an option to retain the Canadian connection and all its associated benefits, I still want to consider whether the tactics employed by those who are pursuing the independence goal have been legitimate measures. The nationalist tactics concerned with independence for Quebec can be classed into three categories. The first and perhaps most characteristic tactic involves popular movements and constitutional nationalism.²²³ The

²²³ I anticipate that there will be some who want to object that some of Quebec's actions have not been constitutional (i.e., saying it can never be constitutional to seek to break up a country). But I am using the term "constitutional nationalism" in the same sense that it is used in the Irish case. It describes the preference to use (or even abuse) the existing political rules to advance the nationalist cause. Thus Daniel O'Connell standing for election to a parliament where he knew he was barred from taking a

second involves insurrection and violence as experienced in the 1837-38 rebellions, and the third involves the terrorism encountered in the FLQ.

Reviewing these tactics, it seems to me that the first of the three should be considered legitimate. Both constitutional campaigns and popular movements are generally recognised as an essential part of a democratic system. Even though it is clearly disruptive and disturbing to debate the most fundamental facts of the political system, if we were to rule out the expression of nationalist views on this basis this would involve pre-censoring what could be democratically or popularly debated, and that is a step that should be taken only in the most severe circumstances. There may be some things that we feel should not be allowed on the public agenda (such as hate propaganda for instance) but I don't believe that state boundaries are due such special consideration. I believe that the state itself should be open to legitimate challenge and democratic reconsideration.

As with the Irish case, the question of political violence is a more difficult one. While the right to rebel against arbitrary government is defended by as respected an authority as John Locke, if the justification was nationalism rather than liberal-democratic rights, it's not so clear that nationalism could legitimate these tactics in the case of Quebec. If the moral worth of nationalism is that it can improve the well being of the population involved, the outcome of the two cases of political violence in Quebec were quite the opposite. The 1837-38 rebellions brought on legislative union and a commitment to "obliterating"²²⁴ the French-Canadian race. The FLQ's later activities resulted in the Canadian federal government invoking the draconian powers of the War Measures Act.

seat was in some sense a challenge to the British constitution, but in a deeper sense it was about using the existing system as a way simultaneously to make and to legitimate one's point.

While in both cases the response may have been unjustified, unenlightened, or excessively punitive, that is not the issue here. The issue is whether the original violence can be justified by an appeal to nationalism.

Even if the popular revolutionaries of the 1830's could claim to be opposing arbitrary government, this legitimates the tactic on liberal grounds, rather than national ones, and it does not require us to address what moral standing the nationalist claim lent to these activities. Meanwhile in the 1970's Quebec was hardly so harshly repressed or without hope for political reform that violence became the only route to change. As noted with the Irish case, given that it is likely to involve considerable injury to the population it is meant to serve, political violence is at best a tactic of last resort, and that point had not been reached in the case of the FLQ activities. As in the Irish case, I would contend that the ultimate harm done to the immediate well being of the population involved suggests that violence has not been a legitimate tactic to achieve national independence for Quebec.

V. CONCLUSION

With Quebec, as with the case of Ireland, there is often a sense that some measures associated with the nationalist cause are self-evidently legitimate. In Ireland it was political independence that was thought of as an open and shut case. In Quebec it is the cultural self-defence that I call 'character-building' nationalism that gets passed over as unremarkable. But what explains the fact that the national cause in both cases terminates

²²⁴ Durham, *Lord Durham's Report*, 154.

in such different positions? And why is it that what is legitimate in one case may prove inappropriate for the other?

The tendency to consider these situations as relatively uncontroversial as nationalist conflicts go has meant that these questions are rarely asked. But I think one reason that these markedly different moral outcomes do not raise more questions is because the outcomes have been justified by appeal to arguments that attempt to by-pass nationalism. So, for instance, Ireland is thought of as a simple case of remedial right while Quebec can be explained in terms of the liberal rights of societal cultures. But as I have discussed in Chapter 1, these attempts to explain the moral worth of nations in terms of other rights or advantages prove unworkable at certain points. So we end up back at the start, asking why we feel there are legitimate claims involved in these cases, while believing that the conduct that is justified is quite different in each case?

In this chapter and in Chapter 2 my approach has been to start with the idea that at the root of both these cases must be the appeal to the moral worth of the nation. If some sense can be made of what that claim involves, then it should shed light on why conduct that is appropriate in some cases is inappropriate in others.

In Quebec, among other arguments employed to defend the nationalist cause, we encounter similar formulations to those used in Ireland – specifically arguments concerning the need for an understanding of local circumstances to ensure good government and the need to preserve a common idiom to support personal esteem and group achievements. As in the Irish example, these arguments suggest again the idea of a

shared frame of reference and its political and personal benefits, although it does not necessarily imply that the Quebec frame of reference excludes a connection with Canada.

And if this “shared frame of reference” account is then taken and applied to the Quebec case as a standard of evaluation, an interesting thing happens. What a “shared frame of reference” account would call for turns out to be markedly different than in the Irish case because of the different circumstances of the Quebec case – the fact of its continued attachment to a Canadian frame of reference and the fact that the idiom it means to promote is based on living, open, and evolving national traits. In other words, promoting the national character through political measures is appropriate for Quebec, while political independence is not – at least not at the moment.

But in both Ireland and Quebec a major qualification on these measures is that participation cannot be forced on unwilling minorities. Where an alternative shared frame of reference opposes the national one, the only options are adjustment and accommodation, or arrangements for continued separateness.

Taken together the Irish and Quebec cases illustrate through the contrasts involved how a “shared frame of reference” account can help identify legitimate outcomes based on a nationalist claim, without endorsing every tactic that enthusiastic nationalists would like to employ. It shows that the right to promote the national character is not an uncomplicated given in the Quebec case and instead depends on how well the measure serves to deliver the benefits of a shared frame of reference, while staying relevant to the actual circumstances of the population.

In sum, I have argued thus far that the “shared frame of reference” account suggested by the arguments of nationalists in Ireland and Quebec can explain why some nationalists measures seem appropriate when others do not. Yet I need to acknowledge at this point that I have pursued this discussion without questioning too deeply whether the benefits of a shared frame of reference really are morally worthy goals. It is to that task that I must therefore belatedly turn in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE MORAL WORTH OF A SHARED FRAME OF REFERENCE

In this chapter I directly address the question of whether nations have any moral worth. I argue that when we understand nationalism as an effort to establish a shared frame of reference there are grounds for granting it some moral standing. But I also argue that this acknowledgement does not mean that every nationalist claim should be accommodated on its own terms.

The discussion of this argument proceeds in five stages. I begin with a summary and review of the two formulations of the nationalist claim that I identified from the arguments of Irish and Quebec nationalists. This summary will also cover the assessments I made concerning how these formulations are related to each other, as well as the idea that I drew from these cases; that of nationalism as a shared frame of reference.

The next stage I devote to clarifying what the national frame of reference consists in, and I propose that it consists in points of reference in time, space, and our relations with others. The practice of constructing and using shared frames of reference is one of a series of practices we have developed to reduce complexity and to manage systems characterised by multiple changeable factors. By understanding it in these terms, it becomes apparent that the national frame of reference will work best as a digest of reality when it is reasonably (although not precisely) in tune with that reality. A shared frame of reference that is out of accord with the circumstances that a population faces will not serve to support security and efficacy and may instead be a source of injury.

Having discussed what nationalism consists in as a shared frame of reference, I then move on to ask why nationalism merits any moral standing. My argument here is that the moral standing of nationalism arises in the political and personal benefits nations offer to a population. They support individual and collective achievements by providing a basis for expression and comprehension, highlighting relevant information, and grounding political authority. Of these benefits, it is the last one – grounding political authority – that sets nations apart, given modern thinking on territory and authority. I will argue that because it brings together information on three dimensions including territory, the nation has relevance for the political order in a way that few other shared frames of reference do.

Following this, I ask whether the moral standing of nationalism involves issues of justice or the good. I conclude that nationalism is about securing certain goods, but that if populations are denied the chance to establish their frame of reference this can in some cases become an issue of justice since this can affect the population's efficacy and security, in both political and psychological terms. This does not mean that nationalism can never be denied its aspirations without creating an injustice, however. Sometimes justice might require us to do just that, in order to uphold other moral principles or to preserve other goods we value. In sum, I argue that nations are instrumentally good although the capacity to create and re-create shared frames of reference is an intrinsic good for the human condition.

In the final section I address three important objections to granting moral standing to nationalism and I concede that all three are well-founded concerns, but that they require the limitation of nationalism by other moral principles rather than its entire prohibition.

One such principle, for instance, is a requirement that nationalism should show equal respect for persons.

Put together, these elements of the discussion argue for understanding nationalism as an adaptive and resourceful strategy for dealing with change and complexity and as something that can create a basis for security and efficacy. If everyone's opportunity to use this cognitive strategy or to employ similar strategies that may not be centred on the nation is given equal weight, then the nationalist claim to establish a shared frame of reference should be granted moral standing.

I. REVIEW: THE TWO FORMULATIONS OF THE NATIONALIST CLAIM

Because the object of this chapter is to examine the moral standing of the nationalist claim in general terms, I will begin by reviewing the arguments I have made so far about the formulations of this claim and about its underlying logic and operation. This outline will then provide a basis for identifying the imperatives implied in the nationalist claim and how they can affect the people involved.

The two formulations of the nationalist claim are distinguished by where they focus their efforts toward change and by the kinds of benefits they promise this change can secure. The "good government" formulation focuses on changing the political order to ensure a better appreciation of, and concern for, the situation of the governed. It promises that when the governors share in the circumstances and experiences of the governed population, when they have first-hand knowledge of that situation, there will be better laws and better government.

The “national character” formulation focuses its efforts on changing the population itself – in terms of its conduct and characteristics. It promises that by maintaining, even enhancing, the distinct collective personality of the population, those within the population will be connected (or re-connected) to a shared idiom that is suited to the circumstances of that population. This idiom can then provide a basis for collective and even for individual achievements.

In some senses these formulations represent radically different (although equally ambitious) approaches to the nationalist question. But my argument is that they are not all that different. Instead they are more like mirror images than distinct types. This is because they are concerned with the same basic factor. They both begin with the belief that to live together successfully, to secure both personal and political benefits, people need to share a common frame of reference. The changes that these formulations call for are thus aimed at bringing about a match between the frames of reference embodied in the political order and that used by the population, or a match between the frames of reference used by different people within the population itself.

At the root of nationalist claims, then, is an imperative that holds that people should adopt or adhere to a common idiom and to certain patterns of social conduct, and that they should support having that idiom and conduct reflected in the political order. In other words, it is the demand that all people with whom I share a political and social life should share my frame of reference and it leads, rightly or wrongly, to the idea that people may be socially or politically induced to comply with this imperative.

There are good reasons to be wary of this demand. We have been warned by one theorist that nationalism, by its nature “ran to extremes.”²²⁵ For those inside the nation, one extreme can involve a threat to their personal authenticity and autonomy. This happens when life and expression becomes circumscribed within narrow boundaries and when non-conformists face penalties for any innovation that threatens the existing system. But the demand also creates a moral dilemma for outsiders. In recognising and accommodating the nationalist claim, outsiders are taking a risk that the political order can turn out to be exclusionary, discriminatory, authoritarian, or worse.²²⁶

Further, since frequently we face situations with mixed populations, there will almost inevitably be outsiders who find themselves inside the national population and who therefore may get dealt into the national project unwillingly. Or there may be parts of the national population that find themselves stranded outside the political borders of the national community. In each of these cases (the outsider inside, and the insider outside) there is potential for a great deal of emotional and political dislocation. In addition they may be viewed as a political threat because they are mis-matched with the surrounding population and this in turn can invite victimisation of varying degrees.

Anyone familiar with the history of nationalism is already familiar with these potential outcomes. My purpose in raising them here is to clearly acknowledge that there are serious matters at stake in this question and that any nationalist claim involves

²²⁵ Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 10.

²²⁶ This concern includes, for instance, what Ayelet Shachar calls the ‘paradox of multicultural vulnerability.’ Even as outsiders, she argues, we have a responsibility toward those individuals who can be put at risk by the well-meaning accommodation of cultural practices, when those practices unfairly disadvantage or injure vulnerable group members. Shachar develops this argument in *Multicultural Jurisdictions: Cultural Differences and Women's Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).

considerable risks. For that reason the moral worth of nationalism would need to be sufficiently compelling to merit consideration in the face of these risks.

I have argued in the previous two chapters that existing theories of the morality of nationalism have not adequately captured the idea that nationalists are making an appeal to, or a demand for, a shared frame of reference. If so, then the next step is to carefully assess what a shared frame of reference represents in moral terms in order that we can make more informed decisions in the face of nationalist claims.

II. IN WHAT DOES A NATIONAL FRAME OF REFERENCE CONSIST?

To better understand what else may be at stake in cases of nationalism I will begin by looking at the elements that make up the national frame of reference. These elements, I argue, boil down to points of reference in time, space, and social relations. These points of reference provide a way to reduce the complexity we encounter in the world and thereby to increase our security and efficacy. But these effects only appear when the frame of reference stays within certain parameters defined by the situation of those employing it. If a frame of reference is too far out of touch with the real circumstances that it is trying to reflect (albeit in a simplified and artificially stabilised way) then it may hinder security and efficacy more than help them.

I begin this discussion with a very basic question: What does a national frame of reference involve? Or to put it another way, what is it that is being framed in terms of the nation? From the Irish and Quebec experiences we already saw that history, the boundaries of political authority and the practices of social conduct were all items

contested by nationalists. I'd like to investigate whether there is a pattern here, and if so, why these items are repeatedly the object of nationalists' efforts.

One theorist who attempted to draw general conclusions from the historical experience with nationalism is Benedict Anderson. Anderson suggests nationalism is the surface manifestation of an underlying "form of consciousness,"²²⁷ and that the modern consciousness that makes nationalism possible is only the latest in a historical succession of such "modes of apprehending the world."²²⁸

Anderson thinks we can learn a lot about nationalism by considering the kind of consciousness it replaced. Previous to nationalism, he tells us, we displayed a consciousness steeped in religious content. In the pre-modern era three main forces "crossed"²²⁹ to create the sacred consciousness. These were: sacred languages which dominated for administrative and ontological purposes, a system of dynasties supported by "hierarchical and centripetal" loyalties,²³⁰ and a view of time as "omnitemporal" or involving "simultaneity-along-time."²³¹

The fate of these three elements appears to be linked somehow, since they all stand or fall together. Evidence of this is that all three components weaken and a new compound takes their place once the powerful combination of printing and capitalism arrives on the scene. It is this new conceptual mix that makes it possible to 'imagine' the nation. But, as it turns out, the base composition of the new consciousness contains familiar elements. These elements again involve our ideas about time, territorial

²²⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 23.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 22.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

²³⁰ *Ibid.* 36.

sovereignty, and social solidarity. Let me illustrate this with examples from Anderson's account of the transition from sacred to modern consciousness.

In place of the old idea of simultaneity-along-time, for instance, Anderson suggests that the modern consciousness is characterised by an awareness of simultaneity *across* time. Rather than seeing "prefiguration and fulfilment"²³² as structuring the pattern of events through time, the modern view focuses on multi-spatial coincidence in otherwise "empty time."²³³ As regards territory, the sacred consciousness saw territorial authority in terms of dynastic systems where "states were defined by centres, borders were porous and indistinct and sovereignties faded imperceptibly into one another."²³⁴ When we move to the modern consciousness, Anderson tells us that what changed was that sacred communities were "territorialized."²³⁵

Finally, Anderson suggests that sacred languages had served in the past to shape and uphold a fraternity based in religion and views of the truth. But these languages were replaced in the modern era by vernacular languages that rose to prominence through the influence of publishing. The book, Anderson says, engendered a new experience of solidarity among speakers of the popular vernaculars.

What the sacred and the modern modes of consciousness have in common, then, is distinct ways of thinking about time, space (as defined in terms of territorial authority) and

²³¹ *Ibid.* 24.

²³² *Ibid.* 24.

²³³ *Ibid.* 24.

²³⁴ *Ibid.* 18.

²³⁵ *Ibid.* 19.

relationships with others. If we can call the social realm a dimension of sorts, then in effect these could be called the three dimensions of human life.²³⁶

But even so, this only answers the question of what is being framed in these frames of reference or modes of consciousness. We still need to understand why we take this approach in the first place. Anderson's explanation for this phenomenon is that we form and re-form these modes of consciousness because they are ways to help deal with the turns of fate that we encounter in life. Making sense of the conditions of life we find ourselves faced with is a considerable task. Sorting it all out is made that much easier when there are tried and true ways of imagining such fatalities into a system of order and meaning. According to Anderson, the pre-modern sacred consciousness and the modern consciousness yields the idea of the nation have in common that they:

... rooted human lives firmly in the very nature of things, giving certain meaning to the everyday fatalities of existence (above all death, loss, servitude) and offering, in various ways, redemption from them.²³⁷

The national consciousness, it appears, is like the sacred consciousness in its capacity to transform "fatality into continuity" and "contingency into meaning."²³⁸ Anderson tells us that there is a fundamental question people ask themselves as they pursue their various journeys through life. It is: "Why are we... here... together?"²³⁹ If we take 'we' to address the social dimension, 'here' the spatial one, and 'together' to suggest temporal coincidence, then the question identifies the three basic categories for which we must find positive

²³⁶ Perhaps properly one should speak of four dimensions, since space already counts for two, but it is not the geometric sense of the term we are invoking here, except as metaphor.

²³⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 36.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

content. The answers we develop to this question then outline the shape and type of our new imagined community.

1. *Why create frames of reference in time, space and relations with others?*

What is it about these three categories that makes them the building blocks of a mode of consciousness? I suggested earlier that we could call them the three dimensions of the human world. Now I'd like to address why these dimensions are special for us, and why we build frames of reference to organise our temporal, spatial, and social experiences.

I will start with time. Time is important not just because we live in time, but because the way we think about time affects how we live. This effect functions on a number of levels. At the most basic level, the content of the past helps indicate what to expect in the future. For this reason it may seem that the more knowledge we have about the past, the better we can guide our future actions. But it is not necessarily as simple as that. Nietzsche, in reflecting on the role of history, claimed that too much or too accurate history would exact a high price. There is another level, therefore, which involves how we select our historical knowledge so that we don't overdose on a "surfeit of history."²⁴⁰

Nietzsche argues that we need history in various forms to spur us on to great achievements but that the modern fascination with history as scientific knowledge has had a crippling effect, reducing the positive power of history and making it instead something that hinders us. We need history to inspire us and to give us courage through the knowledge that "the great which once existed was at least possible once and may well again be possible

²³⁹ Ellipses and italicisation in original. *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁴⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life*, trans. Peter Preuss. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1980), 28.

sometime.”²⁴¹ But in order that the past does not “overgrow”²⁴² man, we also need to know how to forget. This act of forgetting is how we establish horizons to our existence.²⁴³ Such measures are necessary, Nietzsche instructs, because “every living thing can become healthy, strong and fruitful only within a horizon.” If we do not select our historical knowledge then “everything which once was rushes in upon man” and we are weighed down with “indigestible knowledge.”²⁴⁴

And there is yet another level to our thinking about time that affects how we act within it. This level concerns our ideas about the structure of time. Anderson’s work already points to the impact that the idea of simultaneity had on modes of consciousness. In the change from cyclical to linear concepts of time it became possible for time to double up, with two events happening simultaneously.

Simultaneity may not be the only novel feature of our thinking on time in the modern era, however. In the 1950s, Canadian theorist Harold Innis sounded a note of concern over our relationship to time by suggesting that we were seeing time speeding up, as a concern for immediacy displaced a focus on durability. Like Anderson, Innis linked these time changes to the dominant media of communication and he too thought the fallout from these changes involved the re-structuring of political communities along national lines. But the “modern obsession with present-mindedness,”²⁴⁵ indicated for Innis an imbalance in our relationship to time that manifested itself in an attempt to restore

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁴³ As Ernest Renan observed: “Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is essential to the creation of nations.” *What is a Nation?* (Toronto: Tapir Press, 1996), 19.

²⁴⁴ Nietzsche, *Advantage and Disadvantage of History*, 23-4.

²⁴⁵ Harold A. Innis, “A Plea for Time,” in *Staples, Markets, and Cultural Change*, ed. Daniel Drache (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), 368.

older concepts of community.²⁴⁶ Innis believed that these attempts went terribly wrong, and in the end culminated in the tragedy of nationalist war.

In the end, what this discussion is meant to illustrate is that time is not a neutral factor. How we think about events, history, and the structure of time, all profoundly affect our behaviour within it.

Likewise space is a dimension that we live within, but one we also shape by our stance toward it. It is perhaps easier to recognise how we have imposed order upon space through processes such as surveying and mapping, and measures such as political boundaries or the idea of territorial jurisdiction; even citizenship by birth reflects the primacy of the spatial factor. Innis claimed that how we managed our relationship with space and time determined the kind of civilisation we would create.²⁴⁷ And he felt that in the modern era our stance toward space had amounted to a triumph over it, as space had been shrunk through new technologies of transportation and communication.²⁴⁸ Where space once presented an obstacle to say, centralised management, it is now possible to manage closely even widely dispersed operations.

But as with Nietzsche's history, even though we are technically capable of acquiring detailed information on vast amounts of territory, it's possible to overdose on too much space. Centralised control of large territories (for example in terms of corporate operations, political management, social organisation or otherwise) while technically

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 377.

²⁴⁷ As he put it: "Culture is concerned with the capacity of the individual to appraise problems in terms of space and time and with enabling him to take the proper steps at the right time." *Ibid.*, 375.

²⁴⁸ See Innis, "The Problem of Space," in *ibid.*, 390-426.

possible, has not always proven desirable. Selecting what space is significant for us, therefore, becomes an important process.

Territory alone does not make a nation. But the integrates package of information that the nation represents (involving information about time, space, and relations with others), when shared by a population, provides territorial attachments that can serve to ground political authority.

Finally, the social dimension also calls for 'horizons': for selection and interpretation so as to achieve at least a minimum of order and meaning. We achieve this through the formation of social roles and the establishment of social indicators. These kinds of roles and indicators are not unique to nations, but nations offer a new way of organising, transmitting, and understanding those roles, and they can come to be thought of as a hallmark of the population involved. From the basics of everyday courtesy to the relative ranking of social standing, certain aspects of the social dimension need to be to some degree stabilised in order to avoid misunderstanding, insecurity and distress. Of course, some of these social structures may also create distress and insecurity - by perhaps stipulating that a woman's place is in the home, or by giving political responsibilities to democratically unaccountable figures such as the clergy. This would require that we pay close attention to the kind of social factors that a nation establishes as stable. Nonetheless, social roles and rituals help indicate what we can expect from the people around us, what to think of ourselves, and can be especially significant when we encounter strangers. Indeed such social information can even help us in dealing with strangers that we never encounter but whose conduct affects us all the same. Increased interdependence is one

important feature of modern existence but it is often dependence on strangers. One basis for solidarity with these strangers can arise from shared circumstances and shared idioms. Thus we select from among all those with whom we are interdependent a group with whom we expect to have more in common. So it is important in the social dimension, not just that we select the knowledge on which we focus, but also that we share this selection of knowledge with those around us.²⁴⁹ In this way it provides a basis for communication through a common idiom.

This idea of selecting the structure and content of knowledge has already been anticipated in theories concerned with complexity reduction in a social context.²⁵⁰ Niklas Luhmann argues, much like Nietzsche, that “a surplus of complexity” leaves an individual “incapable of action.”²⁵¹ Luhmann believes that we create systems that can select from among complexity the “possibilities of experience and action” on which we focus and in relation to which we can “orient” ourselves.²⁵² Luhmann suggests, for instance, that trust is one such mechanism we have developed to reduce the complexity of our social world. But it is not the only one, and in fact it cannot work in isolation. Trust works best when other

²⁴⁹ This, for instance, is the factor that Jeremy Waldron overlooks in his version of cosmopolitan utopia, where everyone selects his or her own cultural baggage. But it is not simply that to have adequate cultural resources we should, for instance, hear some broad selection of childhood story-tales. What is important is that we hear the *same* stories that others like us hear. In this way we learn a common cultural vocabulary that we can trade on throughout our lives. See Jeremy Waldron, “Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative,” *University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform* 25, nos. 3 & 4 (1992): 751-793.

²⁵⁰ I suspect there is also a connection between this idea and what is known as the “frame problem” in computational intelligence. The frame problem deals with the difficulty of knowing what changes to expect in a dynamic environment. Or to put it another way, it is hard to determine what we should expect to stay constant when any one element in a situation changes. This is a problem that as humans we seem to overcome without too much effort, but it has proven a stumbling block in attempts to model human cognition using computers. See *Reasoning Agents in a Dynamic World*, ed. Kenneth M. Ford and Patrick J. Hayes (London: JAI Press Inc., 1991).

²⁵¹ Niklas Luhmann, *Trust and Power* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1979), 71.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 32.

mechanisms of complexity reduction are taking up some of the burden thereby freeing up our resources in the process.²⁵³

If we think back for a moment to theories of nationalism as social trust this suggests an explanation for the grounds of trust between co-nationals. If co-nationals are people who already share a frame of reference in terms of time, space, and social relations, then they are likely to have more resources free to devote to social trust than otherwise. Note that this does not guarantee that trust will develop, but it could increase its chances. What's more, this does not cast nationalism as an expression of social trust, rather it is a mechanism that functions like trust by increasing security and efficacy in a world of otherwise daunting potentiality.

2. *Functionalism all over again?*

Before I go any further I want to acknowledge that the idea that we create selective systems of meaning to help us cope with the complexity of our world can start to sound like functionalism all over again. And there is, I concede, a kind of functionalist idea at work here. Yet I don't believe that is necessary to conclude that because we create frames of reference we can't confront life in its fullest reality. Instead, it may be that we create these systems in order to realise certain advantages. If it is part of our normal functioning to imagine communities out of the conditions we experience on our personal journeys through life, then we do not necessarily adopt this behaviour simply because we find

²⁵³ In fact, Luhmann says that trust cannot work at all without a system to structure our understanding of time. He argues that "a theory of trust presupposes a theory of time." This again suggests that the social dimension is inter-related with our ideas of at least time at a very basic level. *Ibid.*, 10.

modernity hard to live up to, or live under. In which case it is not evidently a modern pathology.

So even though this too may be classed as functionalism, I think it is a different formulation of the problem than appears in 'dysfunctionalist' type theories. It is one that leaves open the possibility for changes to these frames of reference if that is what is called for. It may be that to act effectively in the world we need some method to transform complexity and change into order and intelligibility. But as Luhmann points out, there is more than one way to achieve that end.

3. Currency and relevancy as features of a frame of reference

But why even assume that the national frame of reference helps us contend with the complexity of modernity? Perhaps all it does is help us fly from it into a simpler, imaginary past? No doubt there are instances where nationalism has amounted to just that, but I believe that its real *raison d'être* lies elsewhere. Recall that nationalists in Ireland and Quebec claimed that those who shared in the national frame of reference were more likely to appreciate the local situation and to have knowledge relevant to decisions concerning that situation. Then consider that Luhmann tells us that another necessary feature of complexity reduction systems is that they must have relevance for the situation at hand. Speaking of trust, for instance, Luhmann argues that it cannot be willed *ex nihilo*; that "a minimum of real foundation is required."²⁵⁴ Otherwise, where relevant circumstances are overlooked they can come back to invalidate the system.²⁵⁵ But given conditions of

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

constant change it is not just the one-time relevancy but also the ongoing currency of the system that matters. As Luhmann put it:

... each system must to some extent, in some fashion, 'match' the complexity of the environment: it must on the one hand reflect little enough of that complexity to differentiate itself from the environment, on the other reflect enough of it to stay tuned with it.

For the national frame of reference to provide a basis for shared knowledge and meaning, therefore, it needs to stay in tune with the circumstances of the population that employs it. Failure to do so will create a mis-match that undermines potential benefits. I want to stress that I am not suggesting that a national frame of reference or national idiom can never break loose from its roots in the reality of a population's situation, but only that when such drift occurs, the national frame of reference begins to diminish in value.

In fact, this seems to describe some of what went wrong with the authoritarian nationalism of Ireland and Quebec between the 1930's and 1950's. Moreover, both Ireland and Quebec experienced a dramatic period of re-adjustment in their nationalism following this period. And perhaps most importantly this re-adjustment was in both cases a conscious effort. It involved a decision to retain but overhaul the national frame of reference. This suggests that even if the national frame of reference serves a function in modernity, it is not entirely the work of impersonal forces, or Gellner's "inescapable imperatives."²⁵⁶ And if it is not an impersonal, immutable operation then there is good reason to pay heed to what nationalists have to say, because their ideas are likely to influence the direction that a given nationalism will take.

²⁵⁶ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 39.

I do not mean to overstate our capacity to influence the national frame of reference. Because it is shared, and its value is derived from its being shared, change requires a concerted effort. The frame of reference must also keep within certain parameters set by the real circumstances of the population. But within these terms there is still room for change and variation, and experience suggests that we have the capacity to bring about such adjustments.

In other words, we can realise the most benefit from the knowledge available to us not by overdosing on precise content, nor by steeling ourselves against change, but by relying on what Nietzsche called “the plastic powers of life”²⁵⁷ to strike a healthy balance between the two.

At its most fundamental level then, our ideas about time, space, and our relations with others appear to provide the basic elements of the national frame of reference. The national frame of reference is distinguished from other older “taken-for-granted frames of reference”²⁵⁸ by differences in the way we think about time, territory, and social solidarity. In turn each nation is distinguished by how it fills in the positive content of these categories. These categories have special significance in that they help people achieve security and efficacy in their lives; and the system of structuring common frames of reference can also work as a mechanism of complexity reduction. But like other such mechanisms, it must operate within certain parameters to realise benefits for those who employ it. This exploration thus provides a starting point for an assessment of the moral value of nationalism.

²⁵⁷ Nietzsche, *Advantage and Disadvantage of History*, 62.

²⁵⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 12.

III. WHAT IS THE MORAL STANDING OF THE NATION AS A SHARED FRAME OF REFERENCE?

I propose that the reason so many people are prepared to take the risks associated with nationalism is because there is something to be gained by sharing a common frame of reference. We've already seen how a shared frame of reference like that which the nation can provide acts like a complexity reduction system provided it keeps within certain parameters. But, as I will discuss below, a shared frame of reference can also serve to facilitate expression, extend knowledge resources, and customise information to a given situation. What distinguishes the nation from other kinds of frames of reference, is that it packages information on the three dimensions – time, space, and relations with others – into a single compound. By doing so it quite literally grounds political authority in a way that few other such constructs can. From that grounded political condition, certain political and personal benefits can be realised. These benefits are, I think, what give nationalism moral standing.

As I discussed above, thinking of the national frame of reference in terms of a complexity reduction system explains some elements of what is involved in the process. But the complexity reduction theory focuses on a challenge to be overcome. Here I want to focus instead on three ways that a frame of reference can confer advantages on its users.

The first advantage is something already encountered in the arguments of nationalists and it concerns the availability of a common idiom. Expression and comprehension are a fundamental part of the human experience. But in order to achieve

this we need to have a basis for communication – a language that draws on an established set of meanings. So every idiom presupposes some shared frame of reference.

Secondly, a shared frame of reference not only reduces the complexity of knowledge, it can also add to our range of knowledge things that we might not otherwise have had the opportunity to learn. Only a limited amount of knowledge can be derived from personal experience. But especially in a modern environment we may need to know about a great many things we don't experience first hand. A shared frame of reference can extend our knowledge resources by providing information through something other than personal experience. Rather than having to work it all out afresh for each person, we can benefit from accumulated experience and collectively devised solutions.

But if there is a great deal we can learn about our world this way, there is also a danger that we could return to a state of complexity that complicates action. This is where the third advantage of a shared frame of reference comes in. Out of the range of possible knowledge a frame of reference provides customised information by focusing on the information that is most relevant for certain purposes. For instance climate patterns or the state of repair of road infrastructure so dramatically impacted mobility and economic options that this information was crucial for effectively government in early Quebec. In Ireland it was much less necessary to understand how to cope through a severe winter, but the island had its own weather patterns that effected the lives and livelihood of the population. A national frame of reference gives primacy to what people should know best, given the local circumstances. and thereby explains their common experiences.

These are some of the advantages that attach to having a shared frame of reference. But none of them is unique to the national frame of reference. Therefore I want to return to the difficult question that I postponed in Chapter 1. That question was 'What's so special about nations?'

1. *What's so special about nations?*

I believe that what is special about nations is the way that they package together content on history, territory, and social relations. And because they cover these three basic dimensions with a single integrated frame of reference they take on special significance for people. Further, I think that for political purposes the key element here is territory, since in the modern era we define political authority primarily in geographic terms. Sovereignty, jurisdiction, and citizenship are by-and-large tied to particular spaces, and we know when we enter one such jurisdiction that we are in a new sphere of authority. I do not claim that this territory-authority connection is a universal rule or that it can never be surpassed by new thinking about space and authority. Indeed I expect that is very likely to happen.²⁵⁹ But for the time being I think, like Benedict Anderson, that our concept of political authority is "territorialized"²⁶⁰ and set within borders.

But this may not appear to differentiate sufficiently nations from states. And clearly there are states that are nations too, so the two can coincide. But in some cases states represent a frame of reference that does not reflect the circumstances of some part of

²⁵⁹ See for instance, David Elkins, *Beyond Sovereignty: Territory and Political Economy in the 21st Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

²⁶⁰ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 19. Also illustrative of this point is the fact that when two political sociologists set out to define the terms of a new methodology of "contextual analysis" they chose to define the fundamental units of political context as "geographically bound." John W. Books and Charles L. Prysby, eds., *Political Behaviour and the Local Context* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 2.

their population. In such cases the frames of reference at work at these two levels may be different. In other words, the problem is that being within a state does not guarantee that you share a frame of reference with the rest of the population within its boundaries, whereas being part of a nation is defined by this characteristic. I think it is quite possible to have such things as multi-nation states, and they can be effective means of providing for the security and well-being of the populations involved. But if the multi-national nature of the state is forgotten, or if an effort is made to deny that reality, then this involves a difficult process that may lead to lesser nations being submerged in favour of the national frame of reference of the most powerful population group.

2. 'Becoming' a nation: the political and personal benefits

The nationalist dictum, as articulated in the Irish case, calls for a population to 'become a nation.' So beyond the characteristics that define a nation we also want to know what reasons we have for becoming a nation and for establishing that nation politically. These reasons, I contend, involve the personal and political benefits associated with having a politically established shared frame of reference.

The political benefits of having a shared frame of reference in national form have already been previewed in the "good government" formulation of the nationalist claim. They come down to the idea that differences in circumstances lead to differences in perspective, even differences in interests. When those differences are comprehensive enough to lead to repeated and serious misunderstanding and mismanagement of political

and social issues, the alternative is to find a means to ensure that the relevant understanding and perspective do inform the political decision-making process.

I believe that we can see the leading edge of this connection between circumstances, perspective, and enhanced political decision-making in the arguments that Melissa Williams has made concerning minority representation in representative democracies.²⁶¹ Williams is concerned with the political position of marginalised groups in the United States, and her point is that a distinct historical experience (i.e., slavery in the case of Blacks) means some groups will experience legislation in different ways. This alone calls for us to be especially conscientious in hearing their views. But if, in addition, trust has been disabled by repeated failures to address issues fairly or adequately, then it is imperative that these groups be allowed institutional avenues to inject their own perspective directly into the political system.

The groups Williams is concerned with in her work on this topic generally share in the same national frame of reference as other Americans, and I do not mean to suggest by referencing her work that these groups represent a kind of proto-nationalism.²⁶² But I do think that her work illustrates that where significant differences exist in circumstances and consequently in perspectives, there is an argument for having politics give voice to these differences.

At an even more general level, Hannah Arendt's work suggests that politics requires a setting within which action can take place and have meaning. In order to appear to

²⁶¹ Melissa Williams, *Voice, Trust, and Memory: Marginalized Groups and the Failings of Liberal Representation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

others, and to have one's actions immortalised in the stories that historians tell, we need two things. First, there must be a basis for mutual understanding, since the "sharing of words and deeds"²⁶³ is what gives birth to politics. And second there must be boundaries that hold this sharing experience together. As Arendt explained in *The Human Condition*:

It is as though the walls of the polis and the boundaries of the law were drawn around an already existing public space which, however, without such stabilising protection could not endure, could not survive the moment of action and speech itself.²⁶⁴

Arendt tells us that we extract ourselves from the necessities of the factual world through politics. In doing so we create a kind of falsehood, but it is only through this exercise that we can make ourselves manifest in the world, by escaping the web of "necessary development[s]"²⁶⁵ that threaten to ensnare us. This falsehood²⁶⁶ is what the storyteller gives a final polish to when she creates history. So politics, it seems, requires us to devise a new account of our place in the world, something that sidesteps the raw facts. But the outcome of this process must also be something we can share. I believe that this new shared account of the world is what the national frame of reference is trying to provide. And as with the national frame of reference, the political actor/liar must keep within reasonable bounds. Arendt warns that this process of falsification cannot be taken

²⁶² The case of Black Americans illustrates the importance of agency in asserting a nationalist claim. Although it has many distinct circumstances, this population has not made a sustained effort at asserting a nationalist claim.

²⁶³ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 198.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 198.

²⁶⁵ Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," in *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), 259.

²⁶⁶ I think there is a parallel here with Plato's idea that all methods of representation or imitation were a kind of falsehood or lying. In *The Republic*, the creative arts such as poetry are supposedly banned from the perfect city, but in fact, these arts are the metaphor Plato chooses to explain the work of the

too far without undermining the original benefits. Even though as political animals we are born liars in Arendt's view, still she warns that any attempt to entirely manipulate facts "out of the world" will prove futile in the end, and will lead to the destruction of politics.²⁶⁷

Let me be clear that as with Williams, I am not trying to construe Arendt as defending nationalism. What I am suggesting, however, is that her ideas about the nature of politics are relevant to understanding what nations bring to the political arena.

Turning from the political to the personal level, there are other advantages associated with a shared frame of reference like the nation. These benefits have also been previewed in the previous discussions of Ireland and Quebec in the form of the "national character" formulation. This formulation promised that people would feel more 'connected' and that they would have a basis for pride through the establishment of their nation.

Because they include content on the temporal dimension, nations connect people with a historical past from which they can draw inspiration. As already noted, Nietzsche believed we learn from history that people like us, in situations like ours, were once capable of great things. Thus when presented properly, history serves "the purpose of life."²⁶⁸ By establishing a historical frame of reference from which a population can draw strength, a nation can yield important personal benefits in securing esteem and individual and collective efficacy.

philosophers, who alone are qualified to practice them using the raw materials of humanity itself. See Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, ed. Allan Bloom, 2nd ed. (U.S.A.: Basic Books, 1991)

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 259.

²⁶⁸ Nietzsche, *Advantage and Disadvantage of History*, 23.

More broadly, the nation can provide some relatively fixed points of reference in an otherwise rapidly changing landscape defined by the three dimensions of time, space, and relations with others. In doing so it enables people to take their bearings and orient themselves in those dimensions, providing another kind of connectedness. But whether you take your cue from Luhmann's complexity reduction or Arendt's political lying,²⁶⁹ these points of reference are at best abstractions from the realities of the situation. This has led to the idea that such processes offer us amelioration rather than fresh benefits (what I have called the 'dysfunctionalist' view).

In place of this view I suggest that the effort to extract relative stability and meaning from the raw facts of the world indicates a creative and adaptive capacity. It is as if in the presence of the national idea, all that is air crystallises into solid and in the process we give ourselves some firm ground on which to stand. What's more, by injecting constancy into some elements of our world we can free up personal resources to direct to other efforts. Luhmann observes this dynamic at work in the case of trust, which, by positing a belief in the predictability of certain others' conduct, frees up energies that can be directed toward other challenges and opportunities in life. So rather than nationalism being evidence of a flight from complexity or the demanding circumstances of modernity, it offers a way to economise the standard demands on our personal resources. Rather than having to work out afresh what we need to know about a situation - who we can consider trustworthy, what changes to pay attention to, what previous experiences are relevant to new

²⁶⁹ Arendt outlines this practice in "Lying in Politics," in *Crises of the Republic* (San Diego: HBJ, 1972)

developments, etc. – we can have some of that information supplied in advance.²⁷⁰ This makes it possible both to tolerate higher complexity and to pursue individual achievements within a complex environment.

Putting them together, then, these political and personal benefits promise to support collective and individual achievements by providing a way to adapt to rather than shelter from the modern environment. The shared frame of reference known as the nation can yield these benefits because it represents a package of integrated information on time, space and social relations, and the nation is distinguished especially by how it can ground political authority in the territorial dimension. And like all shared frames of reference, the nation can also provide a basis for expression, can extend our personal stock of knowledge, and can customise that knowledge in relevant ways. With these considerations weighing in favour of the nationalist claim, I think there is reason to recognise it as having some moral standing.

IV. WHAT IS AT STAKE: JUSTICE OR THE GOOD?

To better understand the kind of moral standing nationalism has, I next want to ask whether it concerns a matter of justice or the good. I believe it can concern both, under certain conditions. Although nationalism is an effort to secure certain goods (and therefore is instrumentally good), if certain populations are systematically denied the

²⁷⁰ There is no guarantee that this nationally-supplied information won't ever be wrong, however – just as based on personal experience we might be misled about a person's trustworthiness. But even though trusting someone can in some instances expose you to injury, trust itself remains an essential part of social life, because of the benefits it provides when it does work out.

chance to make these efforts, this can “graduate to the ranks of a harm,” to borrow a phrase from Charles Taylor.²⁷¹

As the previous discussion outlined, establishing the national frame of reference is a means to securing certain goods. It can be a means to expression and comprehension through a shared idiom; it can provide a basis for esteem by relating to the achievements of those in like circumstances, and it can enhance efficacy through expanded knowledge and through knowledge tailored to local circumstances. None of these guarantee that these resources will be directed toward good ends, but as attributes that support and extend human capacities I think that shared understanding, shared knowledge, personal esteem, and collective and individual efficacy can at a minimum be considered the basis for other potential goods. It is these basic goods that nationalism is concerned with building. For these reasons I conclude that nations are instrumentally good. However, I think that our capacity to create and re-create shared frames of reference – national and otherwise – represents something intrinsically good, because they are the basis of collective life.

But the issue of nationalism may also involve justice. In a representative political system having your interests misunderstood, overlooked, or discounted can result in those interests being harmed. And notably, this corresponds to the “good government” formulation of the nationalist claim. Likewise degradation and alienation are thought of as harms to esteem and belonging, respectively, and these too can constitute an issue of justice. For those on the receiving end, this harm arises not only in being denied the equal

²⁷¹ Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 64.

respect due to them as persons, but also in the experience of alienation and degradation which undermines the capacity to achieve either collectively or individually.

This requirement for equal respect for persons might seem to raise the danger of moral stalemate once again – can we not claim that to be shown respect, and to be protected from degradation and alienation, each individual has an equal claim to have their shared frame of reference politically or socially established? But this is not necessarily so. No one gets a complete guarantee that his or her nation or societal culture will be protected or promoted. What they should be guaranteed is an equal opportunity to seek that outcome, but as with any nationalist claim this opportunity will be limited by the circumstances in which the individual or individuals find themselves. If their number is too small to support unassisted the range of cultural or political resources to which they aspire, then while they may ultimately be denied their attachment to their original shared frame of reference, this is not necessarily an injustice. This means mixed populations or minority groups do not necessarily lead to moral stalemate under a ‘shared frame of reference’ account.

Although nationalism involves an attempt to secure certain goods, when reasonable efforts to secure these goods are systematically obstructed it can become an issue of justice.²⁷² The justice issue turns on the right to pursue your own good (in a manner that does not unfairly compromise this right or capacity in others) and the denial of this right can imply an injustice of some degree.

²⁷² The key term here is reasonable efforts – what we regard as reasonable will depend on the specifics of the situation and on how we evaluate the claims of nationalism against other things we value. But as a minimum I would expect that reasonable nationalist efforts would observe the principle of equal respect for persons, as I outline in the last section of this chapter.

I also want to note that this idea cuts both ways. It can weigh in on behalf of a population seeking to establish its national frame of reference or it can apply to the case of minorities within the national population that do not want to be part of the national project. To deny their efforts to pursue their own routes to political representation, esteem, and achievements, would make that national population guilty of the same injustices that they want to avoid for themselves.

In sum, becoming a nation is about securing certain goods for a population – mostly basic kinds of goods that make other goods possible. Obstructing reasonable efforts to attain these goods can amount to a matter of justice in light of the harm involved. This is a formulation that can argue on behalf of the nationalist claim, but that can also serve to limit its exercise in the case of minority populations.

V. OBJECTIONS TO THE MORAL STANDING OF NATIONALISM

Before I close I want to specifically address three objections to the arguments I have made for the moral standing of nationalism. The first argues that the national frame of reference could represent pernicious content. The second raises the problem of internal minorities or mixed populations, and the third questions why the national frame of reference should get privileged political accommodation. In effect my answer to all of these objections is that they are well founded but that they call for limitations on nationalism rather than its moral condemnation.

Let me first discuss the case of pernicious content. The national frame of reference can easily contain ideas that support discrimination, domination, or aggrandisement, in which case establishing the national frame of reference will mean establishing these practices. I do not believe that we should accept this outcome. If the moral standing of nationalism rests on how the national frame of reference serves to benefit people, then in cases where that frame of reference causes harm instead of good (even to a different population) this moral standing is wiped out. As I believe the Irish and Quebec cases show, people are not left helpless when elements of their nation are denied them, although they may not be as effective or secure without them. And they also show that it is possible to reconstruct a national frame of reference or to establish new shared frames of reference, national or otherwise.

This much is true, however: the grounds on which we censor nationalism have their basis in some principle other than nationalism. So nationalism needs to be modified by an external principle or principles. It seems to me that one such principle should be a requirement for the equal respect for persons. The reason is that unless we already acknowledge this principle, the whole moral argument for nations falls apart. Why should I be concerned with your claim to establish your national frame of reference unless you recognise that others a) are equally entitled to benefit from the political and social order, and b) have an equal claim to pursue their own good. If we cannot discount the harms done to one person because of the benefits reaped by another, the potential for pernicious content requires that we limit the moral standing of nationalism to cases where it meets the equal respect requirement.

The second objection that I want to address arises in cases where there are internal minorities or mixed populations. In these cases there may be people inside the territorial boundaries of the nation who may not want to participate in the national project. This can leave such people socially or politically excluded, or worse, it can draw aggression against these 'outsiders inside' in an effort to either break down and absorb these populations, or to expel them.

In the process of addressing this objection I don't want to water down the account of nationalism as a shared frame of reference. Clearly it relies on sharing quite fundamental ideas. Where this shared element is missing, the national frame of reference is in trouble. Neither do I deny that nationalism has a tendency to make life more hazardous for the 'outsiders inside.' That tendency is evident both in the logic and the history of nationalism. Yet the moral standing of nationalism cannot be extended to cover such conduct as oppression or discrimination, given the requirement discussed above for the equal respect for persons.

The requirement for equal respect, combined with an expectation of reciprocity in our moral conduct, leads to a requirement that the shared frame of reference of others deserves the same consideration as is claimed for the nation. Thus Loyalists in the North of Ireland have a legitimate case for accommodation. Likewise Protestants in Ireland or Natives in Quebec cannot be willed out of existence when a population is in pursuit of their own national project. Either the national frame of reference must be adjusted to accommodate them, or some means of continued political separateness must be devised.

Any attempt to deny the reality of a mixed population or the existence of internal minorities would involve an attempt to deny the practical circumstances in which the population lived. The chief benefits of the national frame of reference arise in its capacity to provide a digest of reality. By going too far outside the reality of the situation in an effort to undo some parts of it, exclusionary nationalism devalues itself as a complexity reduction mechanism. Thus I expect that for prudential reasons alone such nationalism will ultimately prove a counter-productive strategy.

The third objection I want to deal with arises from the requirement for the equal respect for persons. There are other shared frames of reference that can serve as a basis for esteem and for collective and individual achievements and that can be equally important, or sometimes more important to people than the nation. So it seems unfair to privilege the demands of nationalism. Or there can even be cases like the Canadian one, where depending on how you look at it there may be two national frames of reference in play, and some people may be attached to both. So again, privileging one national project over other attachments can force an unfair choice on people, or can disable an important source of esteem and achievement.

I don't see, however, that establishing a national frame of reference need necessarily be incompatible with the establishment of other shared frames of reference on other terms. For instance there may be groups that function within the population based on their own frame of reference - such as professional groups, religions or gender or sexual identity movements. There can also be frames of reference that are shared with populations outside the nation, at a multi-national or international level. For instance, the

European union might qualify as one such supra-national frame of reference, or depending on what it represents for you, Canada may qualify as another.

However, in this case the bottom line remains much the same as with minorities and mixed populations: Where people have a distinct frame of reference they have the same claim to having it accommodated. If an arrangement for the coexistence of these frames of reference cannot be worked out, then an arrangement for their separation should be.

These three objections together point to the potential for nationalism to lead to undesirable outcomes if it is not modified by a requirement for the equal respect for persons. They all represent legitimate concerns and focus attention on the most difficult aspects of establishing the nation. These challenges include ensuring that the content does not involve harm to either insiders or outsiders; balancing the claims of different population groups; and protecting a space within which other shared frames of reference can operate. In no way do I mean to diminish the significance of these concerns. Nor am I suggesting that reconstructing the national frame of reference or working out arrangements for the co-existence or continued separateness of some populations are easy tasks. They are immensely difficult. But experience suggests they are not impossible, and they are the minimum requirements for retaining, in a morally acceptable way, the benefits of the shared frames of reference that are at stake in these situations.

VI. CONCLUSION

The defence of the moral standing of nationalism outlined here rests on the nation's role as a shared frame of reference – as a way of organising experience and knowledge to increase security and efficacy. In other words, it is a kind of cognitive shortcut that is not unlike other complexity reduction mechanisms such as trust. But like trust we can say of nationalism that while we need some such mechanism, we also make choices about how it is deployed.

It may be that we need some shared frame of reference in order to orient ourselves in the temporal, spatial, and social dimensions, and that the nation may be special in the way that it integrates information about these dimensions. But we are not obliged to be certain kinds of nationalists or to accept nationalism in certain forms, any more than we are obliged to trust certain people just because we need *some* trust in our lives. Sometimes people don't deserve trust, and likewise sometimes the claims that nations make do not deserve moral standing. Knowing when to accommodate certain nations, just as with knowing when to trust certain people is a complex calculation in its own right. I have not even touched on the practical difficulties associated with making this calculation, although I acknowledge they are many. Based on the exploration of the moral issues conducted here, the basic guideline I offer is that nationalism must meet the requirement for the equal respect for persons, to preserve its moral standing.

Throughout this discussion I have freely made use of terms like esteem and trust, or raised ideas like functionalism or socially constructed contexts of meaning. These are

terms and ideas that I criticised as a basis for the moral standing of nationalism when others employed them. In the next chapter, therefore, I want to explain how I think the ideas outlined in this chapter both draw on and differ from those of the theories encountered in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER FIVE: A COMPARATIVE EVALUATION OF A 'SHARED FRAME OF REFERENCE' ACCOUNT

In this chapter I revisit the six theories of nationalism that I discussed in Chapter 1. More precisely, I ask how each of them compares to a shared frame of reference account, to see whether this new approach can deal with some of the difficulties highlighted in these existing theories. In Chapter 1 I argued that existing theories of the moral worth of nations each had certain troubling features or left important questions unanswered. Yet at the same time each emphasised a certain feature of nationalism that was helpful to our understanding of the phenomenon. I think that a shared frame of reference account builds on these strengths, integrating them into its perspective, while suggesting solutions to some of the aspects that raised problems before.

The account of the moral worth of nations outlined in the previous chapter draws on much of what is powerful and persuasive in existing theories of nationalism. It calls for limits to nationalism based on a recognition that it can lead in a dangerous direction, and it acknowledges the special political significance of territorial attachments as well as the moral significance of harm. It recognises a functional relationship between nations and efficacy in a modern setting, and recognises that co-nationality has the potential to support desirable ethical relationships like trust and reciprocity. And finally, it endorses the idea that nations support self-esteem, and that they provide a context within which individual freedom can be realised.

What a shared frame of reference account adds to these insights is a view of nationalism as an attempt to secure a situation that supports the security and efficacy of a population, simultaneously at an individual and collective level. It holds that nationalism seeks to equip a population with a cognitive mechanism that sorts and selects knowledge according to their circumstances. But it also argues we can still hold the population responsible for how they collectively conduct themselves, since it is possible for them to collectively revise the terms of this mechanism. This last element is a feature crucial to individual freedom - which requires a collective context within which to flourish.

To illustrate these points, I separately address each of the six theories of the moral worth of nationalism that I previously criticised, and explain how they differ from a 'shared frame of reference' account.

I. HOW IS A 'SHARED FRAME OF REFERENCE' ACCOUNT DIFFERENT FROM 'DARK SIDE' THEORIES?

The differences between the understanding of nationalism that I have proposed and that contained in 'dark side' theories of nationalism can be summed up in two points. First, 'dark side' theories seek to preserve us from outcomes that a 'shared frame of reference' account suggests can have some value for us. Second, a "shared frame of reference" account proposes that even if these outcomes are harmful when taken to extremes, this does not apply to all cases of nationalism and therefore it is possible to distinguish between situations where nationalism has legitimacy and where it loses its

moral standing. I will explain these points with reference to the three factors of progress, individual will, and social order.

Beginning with a concern for social progress, which nationalism is said to obstruct or endanger, I suggested in Chapter 1 that this argument also served to justify cultural superiority or an imperialist stance toward 'lesser' peoples. A 'shared frame of reference' account of nationalism, on the other hand, suggests that we construct nations partly as a way to extract stability from an otherwise radically unpredictable world. So we would have to concede that nationalism has a naturally conservative bent. But this natural conservatism can be the basis of things we value – like a sense of security in a dynamic world or enhanced efficacy when it becomes possible to share ideas about how the world works. It was these kinds of advantages that led Edmund Burke to provocatively praise the virtues of prejudice which he claimed, when endorsed by reasoned reflection, lent an extra motive to action as well as an “affection which gave it permanence.”²⁷³ Burke also believed that it was a good thing if we tended to stick with the tried and true ways of social organisation since there were considerable risks involved with an over-enthusiastic taste for change.

But even Burke did not want to rule out change entirely, only to inject sceptical caution into the pursuit of progress. Attempts to completely freeze a social or political order in time, therefore, are not necessary to preserve the benefits Burke had in mind. 'Dark side' theories are right to condemn such extremes. But as noted in Chapter 1 and as illustrated in the Irish and Quebec examples, nationalism can also be an agent of change.

²⁷³ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 183.

In these two cases nationalism was, at points, associated with both a reactionary and a liberalising trend in each society.

What we can take from this social progress version of the 'dark side' theories is that nationalism's natural conservatism can become an obstacle to progress within society, but we must qualify this conclusion in two ways. First, that the people best positioned to judge what constitutes progress in a social system are the people living within it, and second, that there are advantages to social stability that should not be overlooked in the pursuit of progress.

To relate this back to the account of nationalism as a shared frame of reference: the national frame of reference when used as a dead weight to anchor a population by restricting them to an unchanging set of traditions, loses its value. But if instead of being an anchor, it is used as a kind of ballast, it can be a valuable source of stability and can be a means to continuing our journey securely rather than a means of preventing it.

The 'shared frame of reference' account therefore is in accord with 'dark side' theories in denying the moral worth of nationalism when it is aimed at freezing a population in time, but it does not put all nationalism in this category.

Turning to the idea that nationalism calls for the submergence of the individual will, I want to begin by conceding that a national frame of reference does influence the will-formation of individuals. It does so by providing the framework within which individuals operate. But this effect is not entirely a bad thing. As Will Kymlicka explains, we need some context of meaning in order for our autonomous will to have meaningful options to choose between. The national frame of reference is one system for providing

such a context. But it is also a cognitively constructed entity, so there is a sense in which we consciously or unconsciously will the nation. This is why we hear nationalists appealing to people to *become* a nation, not just to realise they already are one.

But none of this necessarily requires the submergence of the will. That is not to say that no nationalist ever took it in this direction, only that the moral worth of a shared frame of reference does not support this extension. The account of nationalism as a shared frame of reference while it admittedly involves the will in constructing the nation, and while it can serve to shape the context within which individual will operates, disagrees with the 'dark side' accounts that claim that nationalism ultimately seeks to undermine our capacity to function as individuals.

As for the idea that nationalism has a built-in chaos factor, it should be recalled that the national frame of reference has if anything a naturally conservative bent. Where it seeks changes in the political order it is generally in an effort to bring the political order into line with an existing shared frame of reference in a given population. Granted, the political change that nationalists seek is often considerable and fundamental. But if the value of a shared frame of reference arises in its ability to yield security in a world of dynamic potentiality, then the moral roots of nationalism lie in its contribution to stability as opposed to chaos.

Nationalism is about introducing changes)- either to the character of a population, or to the political order. Often these changes are aimed at reinforcing or promulgating a frame of reference that is already active. But to preserve the value of the national frame of reference, these changes should be introduced in a way that preserves security for the

populations involved. If nationalism is pursued to the point where it degenerates into chaos, it loses its moral standing. Therefore a shared frame of reference account of nationalism agrees with the prohibition on nationalism as the unrestrained upheaval of the political or social order, but it disagrees with 'dark side' theories which conclude that this is the only possible outcome of recognising a moral worth to nations.

At the end of Chapter 1 I said that what 'dark side' theories established was not that nationalism should be rejected *tout court*, but that we need to specify conditions under which it could be considered legitimate. Based on the shared frame of reference account I would propose that there are at least three conditions that circumscribe legitimate nationalism. And by legitimate nationalism I mean a nationalism that can claim to have some moral standing, although this does not mean it is the only factor to be considered, only that it has a valid claim to be considered.

The first condition is an external limitation and involves the principle of the equal respect for persons. This limitation means that any one nationalism must come to terms with the existence of other nations and other shared frames of reference that also have legitimate moral standing. It also means that nationalism loses its legitimacy if it is internally discriminatory or oppressive to those inside or outside the nation. Some may say there is no nationalism that meets this condition. I disagree. But if they are right, then the problem of nationalism is solved either way, since even if it is possible to have legitimate nationalism in theory, if in practice it never meets this requirement then we will end up prohibiting nationalism in practice. The point is that we should not condemn it without considering it first.

The other two conditions serve to limit nationalism based on the way nationalism functions as a shared frame of reference and therefore can be thought of as internal limitations. In one case we can specify that to have moral standing based on the benefits it can offer a population, a national frame of reference must be in touch with the real circumstances faced by that population. In other words, a nationalism that proves too reactionary and that represents an effort to deny or prevent changing circumstances, will not support security and efficacy. In the second case, to have moral standing nationalism should not act to undermine whatever is already serving to provide a population with a sense of security and efficacy, or whatever is already providing a basis for a shared idiom. Nationalism can legitimately question whether an existing order is in fact adequately providing these benefits, but in order to move to change that order it needs to be clear that the result will not be a worse one for the population or populations involved.²⁷⁴

Put together, these three limitations help to identify the conditions under which nationalism has some legitimate moral standing. This does not mean that if it meets these conditions the nationalist claim should always prevail, however. It merely means that the nationalist claim can legitimately be weighed into a calculation of our choices in a given situation. We should give such claims consideration because they represent things we value such as stability in a dynamic world, a constructed framework to make sense of that world and to help us exercise individual choice within it, and a system for introducing changes to the structure of our social and political world, if need be.

²⁷⁴ As an aside, I think this is the condition that currently tells against a move to Quebec independence unless or until it can be established that the Canadian connection obstructs the capacity of Quebec's political and social systems to serve as a source of security and a basis for the individual and collective achievements of its population.

II. HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM 'REMEDIAL RIGHT' THEORIES?

Next I want to explore how a 'shared frame of reference' account of nationalism differs from 'remedial right' theories such as that offered by Allan Buchanan. In effect I believe these theories' emphasis on harm and territory is correct, but they are wrong about how their significance factors into the moral equation. Thinking about nations as shared frames of reference on the other hand, gives us a basis other than victimhood for political change, and it gives us a basis other than a property rights model for territorial claims.

Buchanan is led to emphasise harm to rights as the most morally weighty reason for secession but in principle he does not rule out other reasons, such as cultural preservation. Yet because of his requirements on territorial title I submit that reasons like cultural preservation are ruled out in practice. If we trace backwards from harm to the conditions under which we encounter systemic group-wide harm I believe the idea of a shared frame of reference has to be part of the picture.

Take, for instance, the idea that a group or a people have had its rights infringed. How is it that we consider those who have been injured to be a people, one that can claim a group right like secession? It cannot be simply a collection of all those harmed, because you would need to try each individual case and then perhaps separate out those who weren't really harmed. It cannot be a pre-existing citizenship or jurisdictional division because we can face situations where the victims have no special political status.

I would argue that we can recognise those injured as a group by the way they share circumstances, patterns of living, a common idiom, and ways of thinking. In other words, we know the group as a population working within a shared frame of reference.²⁷⁵ Even if every individual within that population is not directly harmed, we recognise their lot as a shared one. So sufficiently widespread harm can count as a group-wide harm.

Now consider the question of what harms we should be counting as significant. Clearly intentional harm should count toward a right of secession. But what happens in the case of unintentional harm? If the harm caused was inadvertent, is it fair to revoke historical title and hand it over to the seceding group?²⁷⁶ Perhaps it still is, but the case is not quite so compelling. Such a hand-over appears to be the implication of Buchanan's arguments, but it lacks the same intuitive fairness when you take out intentionality.

So what is the basis for a collective right to exit a polity if we have no reason to think the group is being intentionally victimised? Rather than this being a weaker, more complicated case for secession I think the very fact that they are being unintentionally harmed makes for a *more* convincing case. Intentional harm, because it is consciously done, can be curtailed, and given Buchanan's conservative preference for the status quo this should probably be the first solution to which we look. But if the harm results from a lack of awareness of how certain policies affect a population group, then chances are we are

²⁷⁵ Even then, such groups are not always nations. For instance, Iris Marion Young has argued that when it comes to minority rights for disadvantaged groups, one way of determining who is at risk in society is by asking who identifies with those who have directly experienced discrimination or disadvantage. See, "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship," *Ethics* 99 (1989): 250-74.

²⁷⁶ Buchanan believes that a third party may have to give up territory to a persecuted group, even if the third party was not involved in intentionally harming anyone's rights, if that is the only possible solution to the situation. Yet in the example he uses (persecution of Jewish populations leading up to

dealing with different frames of reference, which is leading to some basic misunderstandings between groups. It may be possible to overcome this awareness-deficit in some cases, however if different frames of reference are still leading to harm then there is a case for making changes to the political order so that each group can have direct input into the political system and perhaps even govern itself in relevant policy areas. This can involve different levels of independence up to and including outright secession.

But if this is the case, then Buchanan is wrong to require that harm should have occurred first. If we can establish that there are significant differences in the shared frames of reference of two or more population groups, and we can anticipate that these differences will have political relevance, a case can be made for independence or secession as a means to prevent harm. So where a shared frame of reference account would differ from 'remedial right' theories is that it allows for proactive measures to avert harm. Its moral force does not rest, even in part, on penalising the 'rump' population for intentional victimisation or exploitation.

But Buchanan's 'remedial right' theory focuses on another crucial issue - that of territory. In fact, he makes it central to the morality of secession. I agree with Buchanan that territory is a key factor, but I disagree that we should think of territorial title as if it functions like property rights. There can be other attachments to the land that should be granted moral significance. The case of aboriginal people is a good example. It underestimates the moral significance of native land claims to suggest they are simply a matter of property damages. There is something about a group's historical tenure on a

World War II) intentional harm is still active in the scenario. If we substitute an example based on unintentional harm, I think the intuitive power of the argument is diminished. *Secession*, 66.

territory, and the way that territory is integrated into their everyday practices, that changes mere property into something more. In such a case title to the land rests to some degree with the people living on it, and not simply with the state. This does not negate the claim a state has to maintain its territory on behalf of its entire population, but it means it is not so easy to rule out a group's claim to the land that it inhabits, if it chooses to exit a state.

It is precisely the territorial dimension that sets nationalism apart as a shared frame of reference. Because it integrates ideas about space into an overall way of thinking about the world, the national frame of reference can provide a territorial basis for changes to the political order. And since contemporary ideas of political authority are, as Buchanan's arguments aptly illustrate, closely tied to territory, this gives nationalism a political status distinct from other shared frames of reference. This connection to territory, which is an integral part of every national frame of reference, does not suffice to switch territorial title to an existing group, however. But it does give the group a claim on that territory, one that can be stronger or weaker depending on other factors like potential for, or past evidence of, harm.

'Remedial right' theories are right to draw our attention to issues of harm and territory. These are key indicators of the grounds for a nationalist claim because they point to the presence of a distinct shared frame of reference in time, space and relations with others. Unlike 'remedial right' theories, a 'shared frame of reference' account does not privilege the status quo, and does not look for harm or victimhood as a prior justification for separation. But it is also much less elegant and executable than the system Buchanan offers. It requires us to judge questions of territorial title under more complex terms than

apply under a simple property rights model. And we must also decide when differences between populations are sufficient to lead to political misunderstandings. While these tasks are much more daunting than the 'remedial right' calculation, they will, I think, take us closer to an outcome that recognises all relevant moral factors.

III. HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM 'DYSFUNCTIONALIST' THEORIES?

As I already noted in the previous chapter, a defence of the moral standard of nationalism that is based on the idea of the nation as a shared frame of reference can start to sound like functionalism all over again. But the account I have outlined differs from the approach taken by "dysfunctionalist"²⁷⁷ theories in two important ways. The 'shared frame of reference' account credits human beings with having more options first in terms of agency and second in terms of standard capacities. Together these factors mean we are able to do something about the kind of nationalism we are involved in, and that we can do without nationalism if it proves morally untenable.

Gellner bases his theory of nationalism on the idea that the modernisation imperative transformed the way we organised ourselves as social units for political and economic purposes. Variations in circumstances from place to place produced pockets of relative success or failure, advantage or disadvantage, and in some (but not all) cases these variations lead to nationalism and then to nations.²⁷⁸ The basic consideration in this

²⁷⁷ I outlined in Chapter 1 why I believe Gellner's functionalism amounts to the idea that moderns are in danger of becoming dysfunctional in the absence of nationalism.

²⁷⁸ Gellner estimates that out of ten potential nationalisms only one is likely to become effective. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 45.

process is to achieve a certain level of cultural homogeneity and this means sharing common ideas based on a generalised education, and on the “sharing of explicit meaning” or a “standard idiom” as a basis for communications.²⁷⁹ So far, Gellner’s account of nationalism has a good deal in common with the idea of nationalism as a shared frame of reference. Where they part company is when Gellner suggests that this process is in some ways out of our hands. It doesn’t much matter what nationalists have to say because they do not “really make much difference.”²⁸⁰ The process is driven on by inescapable imperatives of economic development.

I don’t think Gellner can have meant to discount entirely the significance of active nationalists. His remarks are instead aimed at their theories, which in his view offered a more self-indulgent explanation of their cause than he was prepared to tolerate. But in his own theory he recognises that the real puzzle with nationalism is why so few groups with national potential actually assert themselves as nations.²⁸¹ Many factors play into this sorting process and it cannot be turned into a predictive science, as he put it.²⁸²

But Gellner acknowledges one essential requirement for success – a defining feature of nationalism – this is that it involves groups with which “men willingly and often ardently identify.”²⁸³ Nations, he says, “are the artefacts of men’s convictions and loyalties and solidarities.”²⁸⁴ And if individual nationalisms depend on a multitude of factors for their success, including the preparedness of individuals to will their formation and continuation, then we have a means to affect its course of development and eventual form.

²⁷⁹ Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 34.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 47.

In his dismissal of nationalists Gellner is setting out to prove (contra Kedourie) that nationalism as an idea or individual will alone, in the absence of other circumstances, will not produce nations. I think we can accept Gellner's point, and recognise his modernisation theory (and the variations on it offered by those like Nairn and Greenfeld) without surrendering the expectation that we can still influence the direction of individual nationalisms.

A 'shared frame of reference' account of nationalism suggests that there needs to be certain plasticity built into our ideas about time, space, and relations with others. We need to adjust these ideas to keep them current with our circumstances or they will stop yielding the benefits that Gellner believes a common high culture offers. So consciously or unconsciously we need to modify what the nation represents for people. To put it another way, a 'shared frame of reference' account accords with Gellner's idea that changing circumstances of modernity led us to organise ourselves into nations but it adds to that the idea that the process doesn't end there. If nations have something to offer, we need to keep them in tune with relevant circumstances, in order to secure those benefits. Since willing an attachment to the nation is a factor both in a nation's formation and in its continuation, it is not possible to write human agency out of the picture. Perhaps we are powerless to resist the modern imperative - this is the strongest possible statement of Gellner's theory - but a 'shared frame of reference' account suggests that nations are in part the work of accumulated human agency, in which case we are still responsible for how

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

individual nations turn out. This then means we can set moral limitations on the kind of nationalism it is legitimate to engage in, and hope to be able to apply them.

The second way in which the account that I outlined in the previous chapter differs from 'dysfunctionalist' theories is that it does not suppose nations to be a necessity, even in modernity. Nations, even while serving as the basis for a shared frame of reference, undergo dramatic shifts and transformation. More importantly, the populations involved can manage through such transformation even when they amount to a social and cultural revolution. This is not to suggest that such change is without costs or consequences. It can often be a painful and disruptive experience. This is because a shared frame of reference has a functionalist element in its connection to certain benefits like security and efficacy. But added to this relationship is the idea that humans have an adaptive capacity that enables us to construct and re-construct frames of reference to help us sort out our world to a level of manageable complexity. Given this capacity, we are always able to start again, if need be.

This capacity shaped the way we organised ourselves in eras previous to the arrival of nationalism (witness Anderson's sacred consciousness). Therefore, so long as we have a way to share our frame of reference in time, space, and relations with others, there is reason to think we can still employ this process even in the absence of nations, and even in the wake of modernity. Granted, given our territorialised understanding of political authority, nationalism is a likely form for such a shared frame of reference to take. But while I agree with Gellner that we could have predicted the eventual arrival of

nationalism,²⁸⁵ I do not agree that in the modern era we can expect nothing *but* nationalism.

Thus the account I have offered based on the idea of nationalism as a shared frame of reference differs in two important regards from ‘dysfunctionalist’ theories. First, it emphasises the possibility for agency and therefore for moral responsibility, and second it recognises a capacity that enables us to manage our attachments to our nations, to choose to change the way a particular nationalism unfolds, and even suggests we can perhaps choose against nationalism entirely. Once these features are part of a theory of nationalism, developing guidelines for the moral conduct of nationalism – guidelines that may require us to limit or reject certain nationalisms – becomes a meaningful exercise.

IV. HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM ‘SOCIAL TRUST’ THEORIES?

A ‘shared frame of reference’ account is akin to social trust accounts in many important regards. But there is one important difference. Nationality, instead of being a matter of affective ties of identity and culture, is a by-product of cognitive practices based on shared experiences and circumstances. Thought of in this way, nationality no longer presents the same problems in terms of scope, boundary setting, and our relationship to outsiders. The moral significance of nationalism, meanwhile, rests in its capacity to function *like* social trust not *as* social trust. Yet by generating an environment of increased

²⁸⁵ Although the emergence of individual nations was contingent, Gellner says “in no way does it follow that the principle of nationalism... is itself in the least contingent and accidental.” *Nations and Nationalism*, 6, 56.

security and predictability, through the reduction of complexity, shared nationality can make social trust a more likely outcome.

A 'shared frame of reference' account does not presume that people will feel closer to those they share a nationality with, or will be more likely to trust them. It does, however, assume that co-nationals will recognise each other as people who share an understanding of their common circumstances and who are fluent in the common idiom. And although I have tried to limit my use of identity as a way of explaining the claims of nationalism, I think there is a commonality – an identity in the sense of parallelism – between the basic ways of thinking that co-nationals employ. But this does not mean that they will *feel* obligated to each other, even if on reflection we think that such obligations really exist.

So where does such an obligation arise, if not in the trust relationship that is supposed to naturally grow from co-nationality? The argument that Irish and Quebec nationalists gave in answer to this question was that people who shared a nationality also shared the same circumstances of life, and were therefore better positioned to know what their co-nationals needed as a collectivity. Translated into the political realm this became the “good government” formulation of the nationalist claim. David Miller actually acknowledges the strength of this argument as a universalist defence of nationality. As he puts it: “cultural similarities mean that co-nationals are better informed about one another than they are about outsiders, and therefore better placed to say, for example, when their fellows are in need, or are deprived of their rights.”²⁸⁶

²⁸⁶ David Miller, *On Nationality*, 63.

But Miller thinks this argument fails, because vast inequalities in the international order means we would be putting “the well off in charge of the well off and the badly off in charge of the badly off.”²⁸⁷ But I think the argument can be rescued from this problem. Our common humanity sets the terms for some very basic shared circumstances – we can say that we all need to eat regularly or we risk starvation, that we all need to have opportunities to succeed and develop ourselves in order to achieve anything, and that we need to live free from fear in order to function effectively day to day. These are not conditions that vary much from population to population. So our national frame of reference may be nested within a broader frame of reference from which obligations continue to flow. On the other hand, these obligations are not as extensive as those associated with co-nationality because our information on precise circumstances – what solutions work better than others do, for instance – is just not as good.

This understanding of nationality – as a function of cognitive practices rather than affective ties – sorts out some of the problems encountered in terms of scope, boundary setting, and relations to outsiders. The scope of nationality, or in other words who gets counted into the national community, is not a matter of whether we feel an immigrant really belongs among our number. What matters is whether a newcomer has acquired enough fluency in our shared frame of reference to be able to operate effectively within it. This means using the common idiom, being familiar with cultural landmarks and social patterns, etc.

It does not even require, I think, that these newcomers should show special patriotism, since it is not dependent on emotional attachments. Even a severe critic of a

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

national community, who immigrated into that community but who has become fluent in the frame of reference used in that community, has earned a right to be counted among its number if he or she chooses. The scope of nationality in terms of who is counted in and out is therefore set by a person's ability to employ the national frame of reference in their communication and in relating to others in their social world. It does not mean that living in a manner atypical to the nation counts you out of it, however, only that this social rebel must be conscious of what those lifestyle differences will mean to her or her co-nationals who observe them.

The boundaries of nationality, therefore, are in a large part derived from the distribution of ways of thinking, communicating, and relating to others. But this can be further grounded in the kind of economic and social changes that underpins functionalist accounts of nationalism. Differences in circumstances require different shared frames of reference to best represent those circumstances. So the boundaries of nationality also owe something to the actual circumstance of history and geography and to the patterns of interpersonal relations that prevail in an area. For instance, a common economic structure, perhaps based on certain key industries or resources, will be tied to a certain social structure and heritage.²⁸⁸ Such boundaries are rarely precise and will tend to shift as circumstances shift, but unlike social trust theories, these boundaries are grounded in more than identity and personal cultural attachments.

²⁸⁸ Harold Innis was a political economist before he was a communications theorist, and in that capacity he developed a theory of economic development whereby economies dependent on certain key resources or staples for export and trade developed a social and political structure aligned with the characteristics of these staples. Thus the early development of Canada can be explained in terms of the trapping and trade in beaver. See, Innis *Staples, Market and Social Change* and *The Fur Trade in Canada*, rev. ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956).

Finally, with regard to our obligation to outsiders I have already suggested that we still have obligations to those outside our national frame of reference. Our obligations to those inside our nation are more extensive because we are better equipped to understand the situation and the needs involved. Yet there are some circumstances we share with people everywhere. When a clear cut case of need arises, therefore, and we are in a position where we can assist, the obligation to do so cuts across national boundaries.²⁸⁹ Thus cases of famine, genocide, terrorism, and political repression require a response from responsible people, regardless of the nationality of the victims.

Because a 'shared frame of reference' account is based on shared cognitive practices it avoids some of the problems associated with counting people in and out of our nationality, it helps explain why the borders of our nationality fall where they do, and it is consistent with continued obligations to those outside our nation. As with 'social trust' theories, it matters that people have a common culture and that people can recognise in their fellow nationals that they use the same points of reference in time, space, and relations with others (even if they use them for different purposes or to live an atypical life). From this situation, political and social benefits can be realised, and moral obligations can flow.

Nations are therefore ethical communities not because of the relationships they foster, but because of the knowledge environments they represent. We are more likely to achieve social trust within these environments because a shared frame of reference has

²⁸⁹ Even if we accept Miller's argument that responsibility for addressing these needs falls first on co-nationals, when we know that responsibility is not being met, some element of obligation returns to us. So for instance, even if the responsibility for saving a drowning victim falls first upon the designated lifeguard on a beach, if we can see that the lifeguard cannot or will not help the victim, then we have the same responsibility to help as if there had never been a lifeguard.

made communications and common action less complex or risky ventures. Nationality tends to align with social trust not because it represents a kind of trust but because as a social mechanism, it serves a like purpose in terms of complexity reduction. In turn because it can inject an air of predictability and stability into a situation, it also helps create the conditions for trust.

V. HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM 'SELF-ESTEEM' THEORIES?

The 'shared frame of reference' account of the moral worth of nations draws on many of the same elements that 'self-esteem' theories employ. The difference between these approaches arises in the kinds of rights they associate with nationality, how subjective and individualised their measure of national value is, and how conservatively they view the claim to protect or promote a national culture.

First, however, I want to acknowledge the similarities between these approaches. I have argued that a shared frame of reference and the individual and collective achievements it helps facilitate can be the basis for enhanced self-esteem. Feeling you can relate to past achievements by people situated like yourself is, as Nietzsche points out, a further support to esteem and encourages future efforts to achieve great things.²⁹⁰ Meanwhile, Charles Taylor's ideas on a "social imaginary" – as involving an evolution in the way we think about time and social relations – is in keeping with the discussion of

²⁹⁰ Nietzsche, in my view, is talking about esteem when he writes that a healthy relationship to history is one in which an individual "finds himself, his strength, his diligence, his pleasure, his judgement, his folly and rudeness" and leads him to say "we are tough and not to be uprooted overnight." Contrast this with the consequences of an unhealthy relationship to history. In this case, the

frames of reference in Chapter 4; and Margalit and Raz's six characteristics of encompassing groups aptly sums up at least the social dimensions of the national frame of reference.

I also concur with 'self-esteem' theories when they state that the worth of nations arises, ultimately, in their value to individuals while they also acknowledge that there are collective benefits to nations which cannot be reduced to an individualised interest.²⁹¹

Yet the 'shared frame of reference' account that I have outlined does not posit a special right associated with nations or nationalism. Nations are only one species among other shared frames of reference, albeit one with particular political salience in the contemporary era because of their territorial dimension.

Instead of introducing a new right especially designed to cover national self-determination, as Margalit and Raz do, we should allow national populations the same rights as other groups to organise to pursue their collective good - even if that involves changing the political order or the character of the population. These rights, however, should still be limited by the requirement for the equal respect for persons and therefore should respect the claims of other shared frames of reference.

In Chapter 1, I expressed concern about the consequences of rooting the moral value of nationalism in the self-esteem needs of individuals. My concern was that this measure of a nation's value, especially since it was described as representing an "overriding interest"²⁹² for the individual, would lead to moral stalemate. It's fair to ask then whether a

individual "becomes timid and unsure and may no longer believe in himself." *Advantage and Disadvantage of History*, 19, 29.

²⁹¹ Margalit and Raz, "National Self-Determination," 450.

²⁹² Margalit and Halbertal, "Liberalism and the Right to Culture," 505.

'shared frame of reference' account runs into the same difficulty, since it also includes self-esteem as a basis for the value of nations? I don't think that it does, and the reason is that a 'shared frame of reference' account counts self-esteem among the potential benefits of a national frame of reference, but it does not count it as a sufficient condition for establishing the moral worth of nations.

The 'shared frame of reference' account appeals to the value of nationalism as a cognitive strategy through which we can order our information in time, space and relations with others, thereby increasing personal and collective efficacy. This process will most likely pay a dividend in terms of personal esteem, and so it should be recognised as entailing these benefits. But they do not stand alone. And if self-esteem is not the central feature in the worth of nations, then we will have to consider other factors when evaluating nationalist claims - factors such as whether the national frame of reference describes existing patterns of social organisation and reflects the real circumstances of the population involved. While I do not want to exaggerate the objectivity of these factors, I believe they are more objective than a measure of national value that rests on individuals' self-esteem, and so they can avoid the stalemate of individualised claims.

Putting emphasis on the role of self-esteem as a basis for establishing the moral worth of nations can also leave an important part of the picture unexplained. Self-esteem theorists like Margalit and Raz are not aiming at a situation where nations are kept static. They acknowledge that there are occasions where nations should yield to other concerns.²⁹³ But even gradual evolution will have consequences for our level of self-esteem and may require a painful transition. Whereas self-esteem theories suggest a conservative approach

to national character to minimise these effects, because it links the value of nations to their capacity to reflect real circumstances of a population's situation, a 'shared frame of reference' approach actually *requires* nations to evolve as circumstances change, in order to preserve this value.

If it is necessary to update a feature of the nation, even one deeply linked to people's esteem, this outcome can be better explained using a 'shared frame of reference' account than one that rests its value primarily on individual esteem. In a sense then, what a 'shared frame of reference' account does is trace the self-esteem effect of nations back to its source. The source lies in systems for managing and communicating information and knowledge, systems that enhance our security and efficacy as individuals. But a defining feature of this effect is that it must be *shared*. Even if we observe its consequences in terms of its impact on individuals, it can only operate *between* individuals.²⁹⁴

To recap this discussion of 'self-esteem' theories, I have proposed that while their territorial dimension makes them particularly well suited to political incarnation in an era of territorialised political authority, nations are not unique in terms of providing a shared frame of reference, and therefore they do not require special rights. Meanwhile, nations are more than just what we feel about our co-nationals and ourselves – they are rooted in actual social practices and the actual circumstances of history, economics, etc.. Therefore we should not employ an exclusively subjective measure, even if subjective attachment is necessary for the existence of any nation. And since they are linked to external

²⁹³ Margalit and Raz, "National Self-Determination," 461.

²⁹⁴ Margalit and Raz recognise this feature of nations when they argue that the last of the Mohicans can't expect to be able to enact his right to culture, since there is no-one left with whom he can share this right. "National Self-Determination," 499.

circumstance at least as much as to inner affective ties, nations may be required to change and evolve in order to stay in tune with changing circumstances.

In sum then, a 'shared frame of reference' account does not necessarily contradict self-esteem theories which see nations as having fundamental value for individuals when they serve as a basis for personal esteem, belonging, or security. It merely suggests that the account should not stop there, and that this esteem value should not be considered central to the moral worth of nations.

VI. HOW IS IT DIFFERENT FROM A 'CONTEXT OF CHOICE' THEORY?

I noted in Chapter 1 that an autonomy-based 'context of choice' theory acknowledged that 'societal cultures' such as nations have value because they enable individuals to revise their personal ends. Given the significance of the collective dimension in realising personal autonomy and freedom, then, we need ways to work out what meanings we want to share with those around us. A 'shared frame of reference' account argues that the worth of nations is due in part to the way they enable populations to collectively revise and update the information and range of options that are offered to individuals through the culture.

There are many common features between a shared frame of reference account and Kymlicka's 'context of choice' theory of cultures. So, as with many of these other theories, it is not so much that a "shared frame of reference" account contradicts the arguments already being made, rather it aims at supplementing them. Kymlicka's account of how

cultures provide a necessary setting for individual freedom is not at odds with the idea that nations provide a package of information about time, space, and our relations with others, which while it reduces complexity also enhances efficacy and security. But personal freedom is not managed at the individual level alone and so a theory that derives its value from the significance of cultures for individual autonomy can miss an important part of why nations have moral worth.

They have moral worth, according to a 'shared frame of reference' account also because they represent a collection of meanings and knowledge that is shared by a given population and that can be changed and adapted in a way that affects the collective life of that population. If there were no common idiom, no shared base of knowledge, we would not be able to affect the context within which we make our choices – bringing in new possibilities and excluding others we no longer see as legitimate options. In other words, part of the value of cultures, including national ones, is irreducibly collective in that it enables us to form and revise shared elements of our lives including communal goals and what defines the group as a collective.

These are important elements of a system of individual freedom as Kymlicka has recognised,²⁹⁵ but he has not counted it as part of what makes cultures morally valuable. To do so would mean that there could be occasions where these two levels of value – individual and collective – can conflict. And in these cases we might find ourselves recommending a course of action that seeks to preserve a prevailing shared frame of reference while requiring individuals to adjust their personally-defined choices. If we value

²⁹⁵ Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, 104.

the 'shared' part of cultures as well as the individual choice part, we may sometimes favour the preservation of one at the expense of the other.

This may sound unpalatable, especially to liberals, but I think it accounts for our expectation that immigrants should achieve a certain level of integration in their new home country. Acquiring a language, for instance, is generally accepted as a legitimate expectation of immigrants and is often a requirement for citizenship. Kymlicka explains this requirement as being partly derived from the immigrant's own acceptance of the terms of immigration. David Miller explains it in terms of our need for affective ties to underpin social justice. Both are true to a certain degree.

However, a 'shared frame of reference' account would argue that integration such as learning a common idiom is a pre-requisite for the continued well being both of immigrants and of the population they are joining. If there is no shared frame of reference then the efficacy and security of both parties will be impaired. Note that this does not require immigrants to conform to some national character ideal any more than any other individual in the population. It merely suggests that they should be equipped to work with the same set of reference points – in a very broad sense, to speak the same language – as those they now live among, so that all involved can reap maximum benefit from their situation. This process works both ways, however, and should also involve the majority population, which may need to adjust its existing idiom or social practices to recognise, accommodate, and integrate the new immigrant members.

We need to recognise the value and importance of the shared element in a national frame of reference in order adequately to explain the special situation of immigrants.

Neither the 'choice to emigrate' explanation or the 'need to feel ties' explanation can do the job in the absence of this element. In turn, a 'shared frame of reference' account is less likely to lead to moral stalemate because its worth is tied to more than the single individual's need for his or her societal culture.

There is one more difference suggested by a 'shared frame of reference' account of the worth of nations. In setting out his 'context of choice' theory Kymlicka stressed the differences between external protections and internal restrictions as measures associated with the protection of minority cultures. And he argued external protections were sometimes justified, even necessary, while internal restrictions could at best be permitted under a *modus vivendi*, but should otherwise be discouraged. While I agree with Kymlicka that there should be limits on what is done in the name of the nation, I don't believe it is possible to separate these measures quite so cleanly.²⁹⁶

As I argued when discussing the "good government" formulation of the nationalist claim that focused on political change and the "national character" formulation that focused on changing the population, these two tactics are not really that far apart. What is more they are even harder to distinguish in terms of justification since they both appeal to the value of a shared frame of reference. Often one measure is being employed as a means to the other – such as establishing political independence in order to direct the development of the national character, or re-constructing the national character to strengthen the case for independent institutions. I think we have no choice therefore but to recognise the two as related. Liberals may still prefer external protections to internal

²⁹⁶ Ayelet Shachar makes this point in "Group Identity and Women's Rights in Family Law: The Perils of Multicultural Accommodation," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 6 (1998): 285-305.

restrictions, but since maintaining a distinct national character is often the key to claiming and retaining external protections, when those protections involve self-governing powers it is very likely that a national minority will sooner or later get into the business of internal restrictions to maintain their distinctness.²⁹⁷ What I think we can say at this stage is that certain restrictions serve to undermine the benefits of a national frame of reference, and for this reason we are justified in rejecting them.

Thus a “shared frame of reference” account differs from a ‘context of choice’ account in that it focuses on how freedom and autonomy are managed at the collective level, as well as at the individual level. The value of having a basis for shared understandings and for revising the options and information provided by a culture is irreducibly collective. It can even come into conflict with the individual-level exercise of freedom and it is not always the case that the individual level should prevail, as the case of immigrants illustrates.²⁹⁸ And while there are two distinguishable strategies to preserve a national culture – change the political order or change the population – in reality the two are so closely related that addressing them separately does not provide a reliable way to set limits to the conduct of nationalism or to identify the measures that may merit accommodation. We should, instead, be asking about the worth of nations, asking what supports and what undermines the benefits of a shared frame of reference, and finally asking what other principles we think override this worth.

289-291. She develops this argument in *Multicultural Jurisdictions*.

²⁹⁷ See *ibid.* According to Kymlicka, internal restrictions are at their most problematic, when they limit the right of members to question and revise their culture. I share this concern, for the reason that if we cannot revise our cultures they will become increasingly irrelevant to our changing circumstances. Yet not all civil and political liberties directly bear on this process of revision - for instance, language of the workplace or school. See *Multicultural Citizenship*, 37.

VII. CONCLUSION

In the conclusion to Chapter 1, I set out certain criteria that we could expect a theory of nationalism to meet based on the problems I identified after considering some of the leading theories of the moral worth of nations. A 'shared frame of reference' account may not address each one perfectly, but I hope it has moved in the direction of meeting these requirements.

To review how a 'shared frame of reference' account fares on these criteria, consider the following. First, this account provides a basis for specifying the conditions under which nationalism can count as a valid moral claim - i.e., when it reflects the real circumstances of the people, when it serves as a basis for communications and for informing people's understanding of their situation, and when it is characterised by equal respect for persons. Second, it explains nations as special kinds of groups because they represent a collectivity brought together by shared circumstances, shared cognitive practices and ways of communication, and a shared connection to a given territory. Third, it credits us with the capacity to revise this collective cognitive mechanism and therefore makes us morally responsible for its final form. Fourth, it explains how social trust is more likely among co-nationals, since other mechanisms are sharing the task of complexity reduction, and it explains how the boundaries of social trust are therefore likely to follow those of the national frame of reference. Fifth, it gives us a basis beyond individualised subjective

²⁹⁸ For example, immigrants may be required to gain competence in a major or official language or may not have rights to own-language education for their children.

experience that can indicate the status of a national frame of reference. And sixth it re-integrates the collective dimension of freedom back into the picture, whereby nations are a way for us collectively to revise the available information and options that in turn set the context for individual autonomy.

At the same time a shared frame of reference account owes a great deal to the understanding of nationalism developed by each of the six theory types discussed in this chapter. Ultimately this whole exercise has been an attempt to take what is most powerful in existing theoretical approaches and to see whether those elements can be integrated into a new account. That exercise, together with looking at what actual nationalists had to say about their causes, has yielded up a perspective on the moral worth of nationalism that is, I hope, both novel and familiar.

CONCLUSION

The project I laid out in the preceding chapters is, as I acknowledged at the outset, an ambitious one. The claims I have made along the way are admittedly broad in scope. But I hope that they represent a reasonable attempt to consider what nations mean for people, how they contribute to collective and individual well-being, and under what conditions these benefits are best realised.

To conclude this discussion, I provide in this chapter a brief synopsis of the main points of the argument, then say a few words about the implications of this account and suggest that these implications are not unlimited. Next I touch on questions concerning the applicability of these ideas, and finally I indicate what further work needs to be done in order to develop this account.

1. Review of main points

I'd like to review the steps I followed to arrive at my main claim, which is: that nations have moral worth and that this moral worth derives from the benefits a shared frame of reference can provide to a population.

I began by criticising six theory types that suggested, directly or indirectly, a moral evaluation of nationalism. I found that theories that dismissed its moral standing entirely did not reflect a fully accurate picture of how nationalism (or politics in general) has historically operated. On the other hand, theories that based their moral argument on

individual rights or needs ran into problems when it came to the case of mixed populations, and those that based their moral argument in the collective benefits of enhanced political relations didn't fully explain how these benefits came about.

Turning to some specific cases involving nationalism, I found that existing theories of nationalism did not adequately explain certain common moral intuitions about these cases. Looking to what nationalists had to say on this score, I identified two formulations of the nationalist claim employed by both Irish and Quebec nationalists - the "good government" formulation and the "national character" formulation. The formulations had in common an interest in establishing or reinforcing a shared frame of reference among a particular population, either by changing the political order or changing the habits and thinking of the population. Moreover, the two formulations were not so much distinct types as mirror images - they aimed at the same end, but stressed different strategies.

The historical experience with nationalism in the Quebec and Irish cases provided an opportunity to assess ideas about a shared frame of reference in action. In the Irish case a move toward political independence seemed called for, but some of the socially conservative measures of the early Irish State were not. In the Quebec case, efforts to maintain particular national traits such as a common idiom seem legitimate measures, but moves toward independence in the Quebec case are more complicated because many in Quebec share a frame of reference with other Canadians. Attention to the particular circumstances of a national population is therefore crucial to understanding what kinds of measures are appropriate to their situation.

Querying the moral value of a shared frame of reference, I then argued that nations were mechanisms for selecting, integrating, and transmitting information and knowledge about the three basic dimensions of human life – those of time, space, and relations with others. This mechanism serves to reduce complexity and enhance efficacy by customising knowledge resources to the local circumstances, and this knowledge base has a lot to offer to political decision-making. By extension it also supports a sense of security and esteem in past achievements.

But all these benefits are conditional on the frame of reference being reasonably in tune with the real circumstances of the population employing it; otherwise it can lead to maladjustment and dissonance. And since circumstances are constantly changing, a national frame of reference will need to evolve to stay current with the circumstances of its population. I concluded from this exercise that nations are instrumentally good, and that they do not necessarily involve issues of justice unless a people are denied, without good reason, an opportunity to pursue their collective aims. Yet behind the nation lies a capacity to create and re-create shared frames of reference, and this activity is intrinsically good.

Returning to the six theories I outlined at the outset, it seemed that the conclusions drawn about nationalism based on a review of two historical cases bore a striking resemblance to certain features of these accounts. But a shared frame of reference account of nationalism also suggested ways to close the gaps identified in these theories. What makes nationalism dangerous, for instance, is also what makes it valuable. And while we should be attentive to and concerned with the individual-level experience with harm,

esteem, trust, interests, and autonomy, each of these is affected by what happens at the collective level. The goal, therefore, is to ensure that they are affected for the better.

The conclusion to which my work on the moral standing of nationalism has led is this: Nationalism involves the effort to establish a shared frame of reference – politically, socially, or both. It is a way to provide a communal cognitive mechanism that supports efficacy in collective and individual achievements and to enhance our sense of security in personal esteem and interpersonal relations. These benefits – sometimes personal, sometimes political – are what give worth to nations.

2. Implications of a 'shared frame of reference' account

The implications of acknowledging a moral worth to nations are often thought to be both enormous and enormously disruptive. But I believe that the implications of the account I have outlined in this work, while significant, are limited in certain important regards.

If we accept that nationalist claims can have moral standing based on the benefits of a national frame of reference, then there will be cases where we may need to accommodate these claims. This will most likely involve upheaval and change in the political order or the organisation of social life within the population. Either way there will inevitably be people who would prefer to avoid such change.

But another implication of a shared frame of reference account is that we should carefully consider which nationalisms merit accommodation and under what terms. So this is not a blanket endorsement of every nationalist claim. Under this account it is not

merely a matter of what nationalists feel for their nation or co-nationals, nor a question of their attachment to traditional ways. These feelings and attachments may be strong but we might still conclude that the nationalist measures being pursued will not yield the benefits that give nationalism its moral standing.

One consequence of this approach, therefore, is that while we may recognise nationalism as aiming at an outcome with moral worth, we cannot presume that each particular nationalism has equal standing. We need to investigate whether the conditions exist to realise the promised benefits, and we need to be conscious of what can be lost through the changes that nationalism may seek. Such investigations are a science unto themselves and I have not set out to address them here, although to be fully operable a theory of nationalism should provide some guidance in this area. For that reason it must be acknowledged that the account of nationalism provided in this work remains at a very general level. But even at this general level we can say that not all nationalist claims are equal and therefore that to recognise a moral worth to nations is not equivalent to endorsing every claim a nationalist might make.

The implications of this account of the moral worth of nations are limited in a number of ways. This account requires that there should be a reasonable expectation that we'll see real benefits from the changes involved in establishing the national frame of reference. It requires that we respect the shared frame of reference of other populations including their right to opt out of the national project. And it still requires that we evaluate our concern for a nation against other things that we value. Given these

requirements, I do not think we need anticipate a nationalist free-for-all, although I think we can anticipate that the task of evaluating a given nationalist claim will be substantial.

3. *Confirming the status quo?*

I want to address specifically one concern about the way I applied this account of nationalism in the Irish and Quebec cases. In both cases I argued that a shared frame of reference account called for outcomes that turned out to be similar to the existing status quo. In the Irish case I argued independence had been an appropriate goal, but that some efforts to change social patterns and practices had been misguided. In the Quebec case I argued that there was a case for efforts to preserve significant cultural traits, but that independence was not a clear-cut case. Because many in Quebec also share a frame of reference with other Canadians, something valuable could be lost if independence came at the expense of this other connection.

The way that this account appears to endorse the status quo may seem suspect, however. If it serves to confirm the already favoured course of action, a theory could either be in line with moral intuitions or, on the other hand, it could simply be legitimating self-interested preferences.

I think a 'shared frame of reference' account goes beyond legitimating preferences. In the Irish case, for instance, it indicated that the partition of the island in order to accommodate Loyalists' preference to opt out of an independent Irish legislature was a morally justified measure.²⁹⁹ This is a controversial claim in the Irish context and can

²⁹⁹ However, particular elements of the partition solution were not justified. For instance, the inclusion of counties with non-Loyalist majorities that wished to remain under a Dublin government.

hardly be considered as confirming the preference of those concerned with Irish nationalism.

In the Quebec case, a 'shared frame of reference' account indicated that the population of Quebec (or at least those parts of it that want to participate) can legitimately choose to pursue either independence or efforts to inculcate national traits, including a national consciousness. The independence route, because it may involve the loss or compromise of a Canadian frame of reference, is more limited in its moral standing. But Canadians outside Quebec still do not have a right to block these efforts. This is a position that is far from confirming the preferences of those who champion either Quebec sovereignty or Canadian unity.

And finally, the requirement to allow an 'opt out' option – providing for either accommodation within the national frame of reference or a means to continued separateness – may appear almost unworkably complex. What if there were several such groups? Who looks out for them and ensures their rights and interests are protected? How do you manage relations between a new national political order and the groups that have opted out?

I don't pretend to have worked out the answers to these difficult questions. But one thing is clear; to embark on an approach to nationalism that employed this principle would require a set of tactics and strategies that are far from ordinary. So again, a shared frame of reference account does more than just dress up the status quo in moral language.

A 'shared frame of reference' account does, to some degree, confirm our existing approach to the nationalist claims made in Ireland and Quebec. But it also challenges

those involved to come to terms with other conditions that they may not like so much. And it challenges all those who would recognise a moral worth to nations to come up with strategies for accommodating or living alongside those who, for one reason or another, fall outside the national project. For these reasons I think it has potential to do more than merely endorse the status quo.

4. Further research

More work is needed in two areas to complete this account of the moral worth of nations. First, the difficult matter of application must be worked out, and second, the larger moral and historical questions raised by this account should be addressed.

In terms of application, as already noted this is an incomplete element of the argument. To be complete, we would need to be able to say with more precision what indicates the presence of a shared frame of reference, and to what degree it should differ from other shared frames of reference in order to qualify as a nation. We should also be able to articulate ways to accommodate nationalist claims without undue disruption, ways to provide for 'opting-out,' and ways to ensure a national frame of reference is reasonably in tune with a population's real circumstances. This is no inconsiderable task (or set of tasks) and goes beyond what I set out to do in this project, which was to trace the basis of the moral worth of nations.

This account of nationalism also calls on us to consider the standing of nations and nationalism in a broader moral and historical context. On the moral side, we need to evaluate the nationalist claim vis-à-vis other things we value, such as individual freedom of

choice for instance. Kymlicka has proposed that societal cultures such as national minorities are a pre-condition for individual autonomy. But despite his prohibition on internal restrictions, I don't think we can avoid having these two (autonomy and culture) come into conflict. In short, I don't think we can avoid the tension between our need to know who we are, and be whom we choose. This tension must be directly addressed as part of an effort to develop a complete account of the moral standing of nationalism.

On the historical side, there is another potential complication. If nations are historical artefacts, as Benedict Anderson has suggested and as a series of modernisation theorists starting with Ernest Gellner have argued, then what if their day is already passed? What if something else better suited to our ever-evolving social and material conditions is ready to take the place of nationalism as a basis for a shared frame of reference? I don't dispute this possibility and I find the question a compelling one. At the same time, whatever the answer, I don't think this line of questioning need diminish our interest in understanding nations as one instance of a shared frame of reference at work. If anything, such research can only better prepare us for whatever comes next.

There is a considerable amount of effort required, therefore, to further develop the account of nationalism outlined in the previous chapters. However, I would like to think that a better understanding of the sources from which nations derive their moral worth could at least provide a good starting point for these efforts.

5. Conclusion

I started this project with an Irish idea of nationalism: as something that could be dangerous, but also something that could be worthy of respect. I have learned that among North Americans and especially Canadians the image of nationalism is more dubious. This is because of a concern that nationalism can serve as a cover for xenophobia or cultural or ethnic prejudice. I do not believe nationalism is always this way and in defending the moral standing of nationalism I am not trying to defend this kind of conduct.

At the same time I realise that the account I have set out here implies certain risks. It might be safer and easier to stick with the status quo and to discourage or stave off the demands of nationalists for as long as we can. But I do not believe that this is the morally right thing to do. To follow through on any set of moral principles usually requires us to navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of morality and practicality. This account of nationalism is no exception. How we actually steer a course through these waters is, however, another matter.

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