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Symposium on David Miller's *On Nationality*

edited by BRENDAN O'LEARY*

The publication of David Miller's *On Nationality* provides an excellent opportunity to reflect on what political philosophy can bring to the subject-matter of this journal, nations and nationalism, a field in which ethicists and political philosophers have rarely tread, and when they have it has usually been to express analytical contempt, their professional vice. *On Nationality* makes a refreshing contrast to most previous writings within Anglophone political theory, being at once sympathetic towards nationality, yet guarded in its liberal reasoning. Below, David Miller first presents readers with a précis of the core arguments of his defence of liberal nationalism, though readers are advised to consult the text of the book for Miller's fully fledged case.

It is on the full book that our reviewers focus their attention, and there are five of them. The first three responses are by the political theorists Margaret Moore, Brian Barry and Kelvin Knight. They display varying degrees of sympathy for Miller's intentions. Moore highlights the tensions between Miller's intrinsic and instrumental justifications of nationalism, and their contradictory implications for national self-determination. Barry suggests that Miller's argument is fatally compromised by its apparent abandonment of ethical universalism, although he regards with equanimity the British prescriptions that Miller derives. Knight maintains that Miller does not resolve the tension between his commitment to liberal nationalist and communitarian socialism and the nature of the bureaucratic, hierarchical state of modernity. The last two reviews are by political scientists with interests in political philosophy, James Kellas and Brendan O'Leary. Kellas highlights the domestic provenance of Miller's arguments, and questions Miller's political judgements in a range of specific ethno-national conflicts, while O'Leary criticises Miller for being insufficiently liberal and nationalist in his logic and prescriptions.

The reviewers between them represent a range of national, ethnic and religious backgrounds (*inter alia* Canadian, Quebecois, British, English, Scottish, Irish, Anglican, Protestant, Catholic, atheist), but their responses

* The editor thanks the contributors to this symposium for the rapidity and punctuality with which they met their voluntarily incurred obligations.

are not stereotypical. They reflect, however, the tacit assumptions of Anglophone political science and political theory, and for that reason amongst others the editors of *Nations and Nationalism* would welcome any further broadening of the debate occasioned by the publication of David Miller's pioneering essay.

On Nationality*

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I

In writing this book, I sought to counter two beliefs about nationality and nationalism that are very widely held in contemporary liberal societies. One is that nationalism, although unquestionably a potent force in the modern world, is something that resists rational explanation and therefore rational argument, whether in its favour or against it. Our national identities and national loyalties, it is said, are not things we can reason about; they are feelings or emotions which can be fanned into flame or dampened down to some extent, but which resist rational analysis. On this view it makes no sense to propound a political theory or political philosophy of nationality, because one would be trying to apply reasoned argument to a phenomenon on which it can get no grip; it would be as pointless as King Canute ordering the waves to retreat.

The second belief is that nationalism is a creed of the political right, that it lends support to authoritarian regimes and is hostile to liberalism and social democracy. Anyone who holds progressive values, who is committed to liberty and justice, ought to resist nationalist ideas, which on the one hand can be used to justify states in repressing internal dissent in the name of national unity, and on the other provide the cloak under which external projects of territorial expansion and domination of neighbouring states can be carried out. If we could rid ourselves of these ideas, if we could see ourselves simply as human beings who happen to belong to different cultural groups, the world would become freer, more just and more peaceful.

These two beliefs have one feature in common: they both regard nationalism as having a fixed essence, so that although the content of nationalist doctrine may vary from place to place, nationalism itself has the same intellectual standing and performs the same functions wherever it is found. Against this, I want to argue that nationality is both more diverse and more fluid than popular belief suggests, so that it makes good sense to distinguish morally defensible from morally indefensible forms of nationality, and to argue in favour of the former; equally, it makes sense to distinguish politically progressive from politically reactionary forms. There is space for moral and political argument about the form that our national identities and loyalties *should* take. Of course such arguments must always begin from a historically given understanding of nationality in a particular

* This paper presents in summary form some of the main arguments of my book *On Nationality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.

place – what it means to be part of the British or French nation in 1996 – but these understandings can be changed through political argument, and indeed in some cases can be transformed in a relatively short period of time – a generation, perhaps. So without in any way detracting from the value of the historical-sociological studies of nationalism undertaken by Gellner, Smith, Hobsbawm and others (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Smith 1986), my aim is different: it is to articulate principles which should guide us in thinking about national questions, whether these are questions about the borders of states, about sovereignty, about minority rights, or about the ethical significance of nationality.

I prefer the term 'nationality' to 'nationalism' here, because the latter term is too heavily loaded with unwelcome implications for my purposes. It is true that several writers have suggested typologies of nationalism which may also be regarded as distinguishing more acceptable from less acceptable forms: the distinction between 'Western' and 'Eastern' nationalism, for example, or between 'ethnic' and 'civic' nationalism (for these distinctions see Ignatieff 1994; Kohn 1944; Plamenatz 1976; Smith 1991). But even when qualified in this way, the term 'nationalism' continues to suggest an all-embracing political creed in which individuals' first duty is to serve their nation, and national self-determination is an overriding political goal. The principle of nationality that I wish to defend is more modest than this. It consists in three interconnected claims.

First, national identities are valid sources of personal identity. Someone who sees it as part of their identity that they belong to this or that nation is not simply the victim of an illusion. Nor is it irrational to want to have that identity protected against outside forces that threaten to destroy or erode it. It is no more dubious to see yourself as French, say, and to want to remain so than to see yourself as a Catholic or a homosexual.

Second, nations are ethical communities. We owe special obligations to those we regard as our compatriots, and we are justified in making sacrifices on their behalf that we would not make for outsiders. Equally it is legitimate to create institutions such as welfare states that provide goods and services only to fellow nationals, even though those outside the nation may stand in greater need of those same goods and services.

Third, nations have a valid claim to be self-determining. We should try to create political structures that permit the people who form the nation to decide for themselves matters that they regard as important and which primarily concern their own community – whether in the traditional form of a sovereign state or through some other arrangement which caters to a more complex pattern of national allegiances (for instance, a federal system that provides self-determination for national minorities within a nation).

These three claims might at first sight appear innocuous enough. But all of them have been fiercely challenged in recent debate. Against the first, it is argued that national identities are, in an important sense, fictions. They have been created and manipulated by powerful groups whose interests are

served by having populations bound by ties of loyalty to their states. Moreover, they correspond to nothing real: you may believe that you share something in common with other Americans that makes you part of an American nation, but in fact Americans exhibit an almost infinite diversity of personal characteristics, and each will have as much in common with a member of some other 'nation' as with any fellow American. People who think national identities matter, therefore, have been duped into a false belief in social and cultural homogeneity which is belied by the facts.

The second claim runs directly against a central proposition of contemporary ethics, that in our moral reasoning we should show equal concern and respect for every human being regardless of personal features such as race, religion or nationality. This proposition underlies, for instance, liberal doctrines of human rights. From this perspective, the principle of nationality seems to allow our emotional and sentimental ties to compatriots to distort our sense of moral obligation, which ought to be impartial. It represents, in other words, the victory of what Popper once called 'our tribal instincts' over our capacity to think rationally about ethical questions (Popper 1945: II, 47).¹

Against the third claim, two main charges are brought. First, the value of national self-determination is largely illusory. What matters to people – or what should matter – is good government, whether this is supplied by some distant oligarchy, an imperial power, or a national authority. The source is irrelevant: what counts is whether the governing power respects people's rights, applies the law fairly and so forth.² Even where national self-determination is achieved, there is no guarantee for any given person that he or she will receive the benefits of good government. She may find herself in a minority facing an intolerant majority who want to suppress her way of life. In other words it is a grave mistake to regard national autonomy as individual autonomy deployed in a larger arena. At best, national self-determination means being governed by a majority of those who compose the nation, and it does not ease the burdens of oppression to know that your oppressors are your compatriots.

Second, except in a small number of favoured cases, national self-determination is impossible to achieve. Almost every contemporary state is multi-ethnic; so if we took seriously the principle of national self-determination, we would first have to break these states up to allow self-determination to the minorities. But the problem would not end there, for some of these minorities will be territorially mingled with other groups, so any redrawing of boundaries is likely to create as many problems as it solves. As Gellner argued, there are very many more potential nations on the earth than there are possible viable states (Gellner 1983: 2). The implication is that national self-determination is nothing more or less than a recipe for political chaos.

I believe that these counterarguments, which I have expressed as forcefully as possible, represent the considered opinion of many people, especially many liberals, about nationality and nationalism. If so, then the

principle of nationality I have set out, though moderate when put alongside the more bellicose forms of nationalism to be found in both nationalist literature and in the political utterances of nationalist politicians, is far from innocuous. It needs to be defended on several fronts. This defence I shall now try to provide.

II

In order to defend national identities against the charge that they are illusory, we need to say more precisely what they consist in, in other words what it means to belong to a nation as opposed to a collective group of some other kind. Imprecision on this score has bedevilled a good deal of the recent debate. In particular, the distinction between nations and ethnic groups is either not drawn at all, or not kept firmly in mind: the charge that national self-determination is a recipe for political chaos often rests on the assumption that what the principle demands is self-determination for each and every ethnic group. Now it is one thing to explore the ethnic origins of most national identities, as Smith has done (Smith 1986), or to examine the points where ethnic and national identities come into collision, as they frequently do; but it is quite another to assume that nationhood is simply the political expression of ethnicity, or that every ethnic group is a nation-in-waiting. These assumptions do have fatally damaging consequences for the principle of nationality. But they are false.

We need instead to have a clear grasp of what nations are, and what it means to identify yourself as a member of one. If we ask Renan's famous question 'What is a Nation?', we find that broadly speaking two answers have been given (Renan 1939). On one side stand those who claim that nations are essentially voluntary associations of people held together simply by the continuing will of their members. We form a nation because we *want* to be politically associated. The reasons behind this desire are irrelevant: all that finally matters is that each of us wants to associate with this group of people rather than that. On the other side we find those who maintain that nations are marked out by certain objective characteristics that their members share – by racial descent, by language, by religion, by common traits of character and so forth. On this view it makes sense to speak of dormant nations whose members have in common whatever is taken to be the essential defining characteristic of nationality, but who as yet display no consciousness of nationhood or desire to form a political community.

Neither of these answers seems adequate as it stands (for further discussion, see George 1996; Gilbert 1993). Objective accounts of nationhood fall down when we take the proposed characteristics one by one, and see that none is adequate to distinguish all those communities that we recognise to be separate nations (see Renan 1939 for this). If we take a feature such as language, we find on the one hand that there can be distinct

nations with a shared language – the English-speaking countries for instance – while on the other hand there can be bi- or tri-lingual nations such as Belgium or Switzerland. The subjective account avoids this pitfall, but leaves it mysterious why people should care so much who they associate with politically. A more adequate answer must combine elements of both. A nation exists when its members recognise one another as belonging to the same community, and as bearing special obligations to one another, but this is by virtue of characteristics that they believe they share: typically a common history, attachment to a geographical place, and a public culture that differentiates them from their neighbours.

This answer is likely immediately to raise the further question 'But what if the beliefs are false?' Can a nation exist because its members *think* that they share a common history, a common culture and so forth, even if they do not in fact share these things? Here a simple distinction between true and false beliefs may mislead us. There are no nations whose beliefs about what their members have in common are wholly and literally false. But on the other hand every nation has in the background beliefs that we may describe as mythical, in the sense that they idealise historical and contemporary reality so as to make it appear that the nation is more monolithic than it really is. Let me give two examples. First, nations create for themselves, at any moment in time, stereotyped 'national characters' – pictures of how a genuine Frenchman or Japanese is supposed to behave, what tastes in food he has, how he dresses, what aspirations he has and so on. In fact, nobody fits the stereotype with complete accuracy. Insofar as we can speak about a national character at all, it consists in a set of traits of which any one individual will only display a sub-set, and then through variation on a common theme. In other words, average differences between nations may exist – there will, for instance, be measurable differences across nations in values and beliefs – but in the national myth each member is supposed to occupy the average position.

This homogenising tendency can also be seen at work in the construction of national histories. Since it is essential to national identity that we should see ourselves as continuing the work of our ancestors, but since in fact many things will have changed in the interim, we rewrite history so as to project back our own traits and our own values on to those ancestors. Our understanding of primitive Britons or primitive Dutchmen is coloured by our idealised beliefs about present-day Britons or Dutchmen. Equally, historical events – battles, revolutions, massacres – are reinterpreted to fit into a story that culminates in the politics of the present (our glorious heritage of liberty derives from the heroic revolutionaries who overthrew the oppressive regime of emperor *E* in year *Y*, etc.).

But although these distortions mean that when we speak of national identities we must also speak of national myths, it does not follow that the myths are completely false or that we should be better off without them. If national identities are valuable, as I shall argue shortly, and if they cannot

be sustained without a certain amount of mythologising, then this is the price we must pay. As I suggested above, national characters may be exaggerated and simplified, but they are not wholly inaccurate. Moreover once they have been formed, they may influence behaviour by serving as models which people try to emulate (or in some cases rebel against in an exaggerated way). National histories, too, are rarely literally false, except perhaps in the case of regimes whose very legitimacy depends on beliefs about the manner in which they were founded. They are interpretations – for a purpose – of events whose occurrence at the most basic level is not in question. Furthermore, they are potentially always open to reinterpretation by political groups who want to use an appeal to ‘who we are’ to support radical policies. Thus rather than thinking in terms of a contrast between the truth of real history and the falsehood of national history, we should contrast ‘open’ national identities that have emerged through debates and discussions over time between a variety of social groups and ‘closed’ identities that have been imposed from above by a ruling elite trying to perpetuate its rule (for further discussion, see Archard 1995).

The fact that national identities depend in this way on the stories we tell and retell ourselves about who we are and what we have done – Anderson has conveyed this well in his description of the nation as an ‘imagined community’ (1991) – is one distinguishing feature that marks nationality off from other sources of social identity such as religious confession or ethnicity. Another feature is that nationality is an active identity which always carries with it the demand for political self-determination. Nations see themselves as collective actors who should be given the right to express their identity and decide their own futures. This activist character has both good and bad aspects. The potentially bad aspect is the nations expect everyone residing within the national territory to be a loyal member, which, depending on the circumstances and the way that national identity is defined, may lead to problems with minority communities (to the internment or expulsion of aliens in time of war, for instance). The good aspect lies in the link between nationality and representative government. If a regime legitimates itself by claiming that it acts on behalf of the nation or embodies the national will, then it is immediately placed under pressure to seek a democratic mandate. Although early theorists of the nation, such as Burke, depicted nations as hierarchically ordered internally, this depiction was easily replaced by a more inclusive and egalitarian view in which every member had a part to play in constituting the national will. Ideas of nationality and of popular sovereignty were natural bedfellows.

To sum up, a nation has five main distinguishing marks as a community: it is (1) constituted by shared belief and mutual commitment; (2) extended in history; (3) active in character; (4) connected to a particular territory; (5) marked off from other communities by its distinct public culture. These features distinguish nations from ethnic groups and other such communities. We have seen that in the case of (2) and (5) in particular, the shared beliefs

which constitute the nation are likely to contain some elements of myth. But I have argued that this need not be fatally damaging to national identities. Of course the argument presupposes that these identities serve valuable functions. So let me now turn to the second charge, which is that nationality requires an indefensible narrowing of our sense of moral obligation.

III

The force of this charge derives from the ethical cosmopolitanism that holds such a prominent place in the thinking of contemporary liberal societies. We are encouraged to see ourselves as moral agents in a universe of other such agents whose practical thought should not be influenced by our particular loyalties and attachments. Whether the ethical system proposed its utilitarian, Kantian or rights-based, our moral obligations are derived by reason, and our sentimental or emotional attachments to particular people, places or communities must be set aside as irrelevant.

If we were to embrace this picture wholeheartedly, it would revolutionise our ethical outlook. We would have to weigh the interests and the rights of every human being equally when deciding how to act. If we adopted a form of utilitarianism, for example, we would be obliged to distribute resources in such a way that their marginal utility was the same for every inhabitant of the globe – which in view of existing per capita resource inequalities would mean redistribution on a massive scale from rich countries to poor countries. Other cosmopolitan moralities may be less demanding than this, but the point remains that whatever good or value the morality requires us to provide for one individual must be provided on an equal basis for all. Thus a sharp line is drawn between moral agency on one side and personal identity and personal motivation on the other. Are human beings so constituted that they can set aside their sense of identity and sense of belonging and act simply on the basis of a rational conviction about what morality requires of them?

To this critical question the cosmopolitan may reply that a universalist ethics can make room for particularity by distinguishing direct, first-order moral reasoning from critical second-order reasoning. When deciding how to act, we may take account of existing practices and conventions which may impose obligations to particular people and particular communities. But if asked to justify those conventions and practices, we should move to the second level and apply to them universal criteria of justice, rights or welfare (for a position of this kind, see Barry 1995: chs. 8–9). To take family relationships as an example, we give special priority to members of our own family when deciding how to use our time and resources. But, universalists claim, this preferential practice can be given an impartial justification by showing how family relationships meet the needs of children, provide emotional security and so forth.

It is difficult, however, to see how this justificatory strategy can be applied to the obligations of nationality, particularly once we take into account the hugely different standards of living currently enjoyed in different nations. In such circumstances, how can it be right to acknowledge special duties to promote the welfare of compatriots when our resources might be used to far greater effect through an international scheme of redistribution? Yet the great majority of people do acknowledge such duties – indeed very often these are the widest duties that they acknowledge. The cosmopolitan view seems starkly at odds with the patterns of ethical reasoning that we find in practice.

The alternatives we face, it appears, are either to adopt ethical universalism and apply it unflinchingly, in which case national loyalties will carry no ethical weight, or to acknowledge that our ethical thinking is particularist. By this I mean that our particular relationships – familial, local, associational, national – provide the contexts in which we develop our sense of right and justice, and there is no single external standpoint from which we justify the obligations that we acknowledge. We have duties as family members, as neighbours, as community representatives, and so forth, and in each case the duties stem directly from our understanding of the relationship. This perspective has the great advantage that it ties together identity and membership with obligation: in seeing who I am and where I belong, I also see what I am required to do. It follows, too, that the conflict between morality and self-interest is softened, because in acting as morality requires, I am promoting the interests of communities whose flourishing has value for me; my action is not one of pure self-sacrifice.

From this particularist perspective, we can also understand why national communities make special claims upon us. It is within such communities that a strong sense of social justice is able to develop, so that extensive obligations to those in need, to victims of bad luck, and so forth, are recognised. Two factors seem important here. First, nations are not voluntary associations, but communities within which most members are born, live and die, so that we are bound together with our compatriots in a community of fate; moreover these communities, as we have seen, conceive of themselves as historically extended, so our obligations are not only to contemporaries but to past and future members as well. This gives national loyalties their particular strength, most obviously visible in their members' willingness to sacrifice their lives in defence of the nation. Second, because nations are either actual or incipient political communities, their members' sense of justice can be given concrete expression in law and social policy. Where this comes about, people can discharge their obligations in the knowledge that they are involved in a practice whose other members will, if necessary, be compelled to play their part (for instance, they pay taxes knowing that others are legally required to pay their fair share).

Although the absence of any comparable practice at the international

level means that (for the foreseeable future) the idea of social justice will only have practical force within national communities, the particularist view I am sketching does not rule out all international obligations. The obligations that we have towards other human beings considered simply as such, i.e. apart from any particular relationships that we have with them, are probably best understood in terms of basic human rights – rights to bodily integrity, personal freedom, a minimum level of resources, and so forth (for a good account, see Shue 1980). In resisting ethical universalism and cosmopolitanism, I am not denying the validity of such claims. I am rather suggesting that the ethical claims of nationality, and other such particularist claims, are equally fundamental. Our duties as human beings and our duties as members of a particular nation may sometimes conflict, and where they do, there is no Archimedean point from which to resolve the conflict.

IV

Nations are communities of people who aspire to govern themselves. But, as we saw, this aspiration has been challenged on the grounds that national self-determination has no particular value, and that it is in general impossible to achieve. In response, let me suggest three reasons for valuing self-determination where a nation-state is achievable; then I will turn to the problems posed by secessionist demands.

Imagine a community ruled by a benevolent foreign prince or a colonial power which protects its subjects' basic interests and applies the rule of law impartially. Why might they nonetheless claim a right of self-determination? We have seen that nations are communities of obligation, and in particular they are communities which foster ideals of social justice. The precise form these ideals take varies, however, from one country to the next: national communities generally recognise an obligation to provide for their basic needs, but what counts as a need differs to some extent from society to society. Equally, outstanding social contributions may be recognised and honoured, but both the ground and the form of the honouring will vary according to the public culture of the country in question.³ A self-governing nation is able to translate such ideals into practice in a way that no outside authority could. In this way social justice can become an effective force governing relationships throughout the society in the manner suggested in the previous section of this paper.

A second reason has to do with the expression and protection of public culture. I shall assume here that individuals have an interest in the preservation of a common culture which provides them with a sense of identity as well as a rich variety of cultural life-forms to choose between.⁴ But such a culture cannot be relied upon to reproduce itself spontaneously. It may need protection both from the narrowly self-interested actions of

individuals – for instance, those who for reasons of personal gain destroy historic buildings or landscapes, or downgrade the content of the public media – and from outside forces that seek to promote a homogeneous but impoverished global culture. Such protection can only be securely provided by the state. And in order to bring this about, the state must be directed by people who themselves participate in the culture to be protected. Why should outsiders take steps to promote cultural values that may seem quite alien to them? Or again, if the state houses two distinct national groups, their mutual jealousies will mean that the state is forced to adopt a stance of cultural neutrality, lending its authority and promotional power to the culture of neither.⁵

The third reason favouring national self-determination concerns the value of democratic government. It is hardly an accident that all successful democracies on the large scale have also been nation-states. Democratic government cannot function unless citizens trust one another, and such trust is difficult to achieve where numbers are large. Even the more minimal forms of democracy require individuals or parties who lose elections to stand down and hand over the instruments of power, which requires sufficient faith that the victors will not use their new position to quell opposition or indeed abandon the democratic constitution entirely. If winners and losers belong to separate communities with no overarching ties, why should such faith be present? And if we want to go beyond minimal democracy to a more participatory version, where decisions are made after public deliberation to which everyone has an opportunity to contribute, the need for trust is stronger still. To argue on grounds of principle, rather than of sectional interest, and to moderate my demands in order to achieve a working consensus, I must believe that my fellow participants in the deliberation are similarly motivated by a desire to reach a fair agreement. Only among people held together by common loyalties and a common identity can we expect such mutual confidence to emerge.

National self-determination, therefore, is not valuable simply because nations themselves seek it; it is valuable because it allows social justice to become an operative ideal, because it maximises the chance that a strong public culture can be sustained, and because it makes possible weaker or stronger forms of democracy. So anyone who values those ideals ought also to find self-determination a worthy goal. But the critics further allege that it is an unattainable goal, insofar as giving self-determination to the *As* will almost always in practice mean denying it to the *Bs*.

Here we must first insist again on the distinction between nations and ethnic groups: nearly all nations are multi-ethnic, in the sense that they include groups with separate identities who nonetheless share in the common national identity. Although unjust or intolerant treatment at the hands of the majority community may over time transform such groups into nascent nations, this is not pre-ordained, and may be pre-empted by

multicultural policies that show equal respect for group cultures within the nation. Boundary questions arise only where a state as presently constituted contains two or more groups with separate (and mutually hostile) national identities. Even here, national self-determination does not automatically favour splitting the state. The question to be asked is whether the successor states will achieve this goal more or less effectively than the original one. Can the state be divided into two homogeneous communities, or will the successor states contain minorities whose position is more vulnerable than is presently the case? (If Quebec were to separate from Canada, for instance, what would be the position of the English-speaking and indigenous communities in Quebec, and what would be the effect on French-speaking communities elsewhere in Canada?) The pertinence of these questions means that all-round self-determination can very often be achieved most successfully not by secession or the division of existing states, but through constitutional arrangements that give partial self-determination to minority groups, by giving them control over local territory or areas of policy in which they have a vital interest – through federal systems, for instance, or through self-governing institutions of the kind that the native peoples of North America have tried to establish. If we rid ourselves of the fetish that national self-determination must mean state sovereignty in its traditional form, and focus instead on the reasons for valuing it, we can avoid the charge that it must entail a free-for-all in which minority groups grab slices of territory only to face similar demands from minorities-within-the-minority who now find themselves on the wrong side of the border – a kind of reiterative Balkan nightmare.

V

Even if my arguments for the principle of nationality are seen to have merit, many people may find them anachronistic. It is often said that among the citizens of liberal democracies, national identities are rapidly dissolving, partly as a result of growing cultural pluralism within the state, partly because of the emergence of new transnational sources of identity, whether regional (most notably the European Union) or cultural (such as the international environmental movement). In places where nationalism remains rampant, it takes illiberal and authoritarian forms; whereas the liberal democracies can sustain themselves without reliance on national identities in their traditional form – for instance, by fostering a ‘constitutional patriotism’ of the kind favoured by German writers such as Habermas, where loyalty to constitutional principles and institutions replaces nationality proper (see Habermas 1992–3: 1–19).

My own view is that these claims are frequently exaggerated; in particular, they overlook the fact that national identities have never been exclusive and uncontested, but have always competed for people’s

allegiance with class, religious and local identities. What is perhaps true is that the absence, over the last half century or so, of conflict among the liberal democracies, together with convergence in their institutions and ways of life, has made it more difficult to see what distinguishes one of these countries from the next, or to take pride in national achievements that set this nation apart from the rest. (I have tried to show how British national identity, which was formed in explicit opposition to the other nations of Europe, especially France, has undergone a series of crises which have left the British people still conscious of their distinctness, but uncertain what this distinct identity consists in (Miller 1995: 153–66; 1995: ch. 6). On the other hand, we have reason to be sceptical of the proposed alternatives to nationality. Let me in conclusion consider two such positions briefly.

One I shall label radical multiculturalism. This is the view that national identities were always biased in favour of rich and powerful groups, so we should encourage their dissipation in favour of the many specific group identities that people may come to share in civil society. Politics, on this view, should become the expression of group difference (Young 1990).⁶ Against this, I should argue that radical pluralism of this kind will do little to help the deprived and oppressed groups it is meant to help. In the absence of a shared sense of nationality, there is no reason to expect powerful groups to deal justly with their weaker brethren. Rather than social justice, we should expect to see social fragmentation, and a form of interest group politics in which success depends on the bargaining power of each group.

The second position accepts the need for a common focus of loyalty, but argues that this can be provided by citizenship itself: as citizens we owe allegiance to the constitution, and we owe obligations to our fellow citizens not as bearers of a common national identity, but as participants in a common practice. This position is better founded than the first. It rightly recognises the importance of shared principles and their constitutional enactment in binding together the citizens of contemporary liberal states. But I do not believe that it can bear all of the weight that nationality has carried in the past. For it does not connect political principles and practice to a shared culture and a shared history in the way that national identities have done, and so does not give citizens the same sense of their place in the world and in the flow of historical time. Nor does it give any guidance when the boundaries of the political community fall into dispute: it cannot explain why political cooperation should be carried on between this set of people rather than that.

Although national identities are under pressure, the alternatives to nationality so far proposed seem quite unsatisfactory. I conclude that we must hold on to the principle of nationality, while striving to forge national identities that can accommodate the pluralism and mutability of contemporary culture.

Notes

- 1 Very similar opinions can be found in the writings of another Viennese liberal, F. A. Hayek (1976: ch. 11).
- 2 Among recent statements of this view, see especially Kedourie (1966).
- 3 For the idea that distributive justice depends on context-bound social understandings, see Walzer (1983), and the critical discussions in Miller and Walzer (1995).
- 4 For a fuller defence, see Margalit and Raz (1990: 439–61) (reprinted in J. Raz, *Ethics in the Public Domain* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1995)).
- 5 This is on the assumption that the two groups have achieved a political balance. If one group is dominant, then we may expect the national culture of the minority group to be suppressed, as for instance Slovak and Romanian culture was in nineteenth-century Hungary, and Kurdish culture is in Turkey today.
- 6 I have discussed Young's position in *On Nationality*, ch. 5 and in 'Citizenship and Pluralism', *Political Studies*, 43 (1995), 432–50.

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Miller's ode to national homogeneity

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David Miller begins his book *On Nationality* by noting the proliferation of nationalist claims and national conflicts since the collapse of communism and the uncertainty among those in Western liberal democracies about how to respond to these claims. Socialists (and liberals) have tended to dismiss nationalism as primitive, atavistic and particularistic, and to align themselves with what they feel is a more progressive conception of universal brotherhood. But Miller suggests that social democrats, especially, have been mistaken to ignore or reject the claims of community in the modern world (and communities in the modern world are national in form). His argument attempts to bridge nationalism and social democracy by pointing to the benefits of a non-aggrandising form of nationalism.

Miller's basic thesis is that nationality should, as far as possible, coincide with the boundaries of the state. The argument in the first three chapters abstracts from the heterogeneous character of most states – very few states are in fact culturally homogeneous (Japan, Poland, Korea and a few others are the rare exceptions). Most are either composed of coexisting national communities, i.e. historical communities on what they perceive to be their 'ancestral territory', and who aspire to national status, or people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds who have immigrated to countries like Australia, Canada and the United States. Miller is anxious to point out that nationality is not the same as ethnicity: in the United States, the very idea of hyphenated Americans (e.g. Irish-Americans), presupposes that common nationality is not derived from common ethnicity. Miller also argues that a nation can encompass a variety of ethnic groups in non-immigrant societies, if the ethnic group has no national consciousness. However, the line between ethnic group and nation may be very fluid, given that ethnic groups which are culturally or linguistically different and residing on their historic territory, can be mobilised easily along national lines.

Miller has two kinds of justificatory arguments for why states should be nationally homogeneous: one points to the intrinsic value of national attachments; the second, to their instrumental value.

Miller's central argument for the intrinsic value of nationality is that a proper account of ethics should give weight to national identity and national attachments, for these have ethical significance. This idea is explored through a discussion of universalist and particularist ethical theories. The first step involves dispelling the idea that universalism can account for the ties we feel to our co-nationals. A subsidiary argument is that universalist theories have difficulty explaining the motivational force of the obligations which they contend we have to all human beings (p. 80).

Miller also advances several instrumental justifications for endorsing the idea that national and state boundaries should coincide. Where a nation is politically autonomous, it is able to implement social justice (redistributive welfare), to protect and foster a common culture (against the mass culture of McDonald's and the unintended consequences of the self-interested decisions of individuals), and collectively to determine its own destiny (because people have a commitment to live together and are more likely to compromise). The weight of these instrumental arguments is on *trust*, but little is advanced to show that trust is strongly correlated with nationality, although Miller takes it as intuitively plausible that trust is difficult to establish *across* national groups. He argues that politics between national groups tends to degenerate into self-interested bargains and *modus vivendi* type compromises.

What is noteworthy about Miller's intrinsic defense of nationalism is that it gives weight to the ethical attachments which people *have*, whereas the instrumental justifications support nationalism as a means to realising other goods. In practice, the two might cut across each other. It does not seem to matter from the perspective of the intrinsic justification whether people conceive of themselves as a member of a large people (e.g. German, French) or a small people (Estonian, Chechen). But it does seem to matter for the instrumental justification: this seems to be biased towards a state which is large enough to support a viable redistributive practice. Miller does not seem to be aware of the tension, and so does not discuss the relative weight or importance that he thinks should be attached to the different justificatory arguments.

Having advanced his argument in the first three chapters for the ideal that the borders of states should coincide with national divisions, Miller applies his definition of the nationality principle to a range of areas: international justice, secession, minority rights, education and language policy, to name a few. However, his procedure of abstracting from the national heterogeneity of states has important implications for his discussion of international justice and secession. Because all the benefits that Miller describes accrue only when political borders coincide with national divisions, there is insufficient attention given to the very likely case that they will not coincide.

International justice

The arguments that Miller advances in the first three chapters allow him to reach the conclusion that there is ethical importance attached to political autonomy for each nation. Miller faces squarely the possibility that considerations of autonomy sometimes point in a different direction from those of justice; and interprets granting autonomy to nations to mean that each should be held responsible for the decisions that it makes. The implication for international justice is that there is no general obligation to help poorer states (although he does not rule out the possibility that some nations might wish to aid the worst off).

However, only in very few states do the territorial frontiers coincide with national communities. The autonomy that Miller grants to *states* based on an argument about the ethical significance of *nationality* is problematic, because most states are not nationally homogeneous in the way that Miller assumes for the purposes of a fairly abstract ethical argument in the first three chapters. And given his emphasis on trust in national communities, and the difficulty of developing trust across national groups, we really do have to worry about the vulnerability of people in many parts of the world, most of whom live in multinational states, and whose elites seem unconcerned with their fate.

It seems unjustified, in this situation, to ignore the plight of the vulnerable, most of whom do not have the political means collectively to determine their nation, or the institutional mechanisms approaching Miller's deliberative democracy ideal. It is especially troubling, given that state sovereignty – the right to non-interference in internal matters – is often most vigorously defended by state elites intent on violating the basic rights of people in their jurisdiction.

It is unclear whether Miller's proposals regarding international justice are taken to apply only when we have a world divided into a 'family of nations'; or whether he intends to draw conclusions about the present autonomy of states from his argument about nations. His smooth transition from an argument about nations to that of states suggests the latter, but it is hard to see that an ethical argument about the autonomy of the nation should translate into support for the political sovereignty of states.

Secession

Just as in his discussion of international justice, Miller slides too easily from a discussion of nation to that of state, so, in his discussion of secession, the argument tends to support a statist status quo. Here, again, the assumption that Miller makes in the early chapters about national homogeneity is reflected in his discussion of the conditions of justifiable secession; and these assumptions have the unfortunate effect of making secession an unrealistic option for most nations in multinational states.

After trenchant criticisms of Beran's, Birch's and Buchanan's liberal theories of secession, Miller advances his own theory, which focuses on the political conditions for securing national identities. His principle tells us to further the cause of national self-determination where possible. It also argues that existing boundaries should be put in question only when a *nationality* (as distinct from an ethnic group, or other kind of group) is currently being denied self-determination.

Miller's justificatory arguments for the importance of nationality have different implications for a theory of secession. Giving weight to people's subjective sense of identity and attachment to others (the intrinsic

justification) would seem to point towards fairly relaxed ethical conditions on secession, perhaps simply ensuring (a) that a *nation* was being denied self-determination, and (b) that the overwhelming majority of people in that nation do indeed identify with each other and support the political expression of that identity. The instrumental justification, on the other hand, would tend to consider whether self-determination would be a means to realise other goods, such as an effective redistributive practice.

In his discussion of secession, Miller ignores the implications of the intrinsic justification, and the importance which a small people, with a strong sense of identity towards each other, might place on self-determination. Miller's argument that the would-be state 'would need to be viable in the sense that it could secure itself territorially; at the same time, it should not radically weaken the parent state by making it difficult to defend militarily' (pp. 114–15) reveals a distinct bias towards large states.

Of course, Miller contends that viability is merely a practical consideration (p. 114). However, viability depends on an international context. (In what sense is Luxembourg 'viable'?) Miller does not argue for the existence of conditions which would enable a small people to determine their own fate, within the context of international bodies of mutual defense and economic association. Instead, he argues that each state should be viable on its own; and this would seem to be biased towards states with a fairly large territory and population. If this is so, it is also difficult to see how this is consistent with giving ethical weight to the attachments which people *have*.

Even more problematic in Miller's list of conditions for secession is his stipulation that secession is only permitted when a state can encapsulate a (nationally) homogeneous political community within its territory: 'we need to be convinced that the territory demanded by *G* [the seceding national group] did not contain minorities whose own identities were radically incompatible with that of *G*, so that, rather than creating a viable nation-state, the secession of *G* would simply reproduce a multinational arrangement on a smaller scale' (p. 113). This condition seems to follow from Miller's idealising assumptions in the first three chapters, in which he identifies the benefits which flow when national communities and political boundaries coincide. Now, in dealing with the very likely event that there is no way to draw boundaries which will completely encapsulate only one national group, Miller is led to reject the prospect of creating two smaller multinational states (instead of one large multinational state), with national groups rearranged in different proportions.

The requirement that secession is permitted only when the would-be state is composed of a nationally homogeneous community is unrealistically stringent. Although Miller points out, accurately against Beran's individual consent theory of secession, that determining whether secession is justifiable is not just simply about 'counting heads', surely numbers *do* matter. When Slovenia declared independence in 1991, 5 per cent of its population was

Serb, and Serbs, on most accounts, were not a mere ethnic group but were nationally mobilised (either with a Serbian national identity or a Yugoslav identity). Is this 5 per cent Serb minority a good reason to prevent Slovenia from seceding? As Miller recognises elsewhere (p. 84), in a different context, what good reason could you give Slovenians to agree to remain in a Yugoslav federation and redistribute to people with whom they didn't identify?

Miller's conditions would also rule out the secession of Quebec from the rest of Canada on two distinct grounds (pp. 114, 117). First, Miller contends that, even if all Francophones in Quebec sought separation from the rest of Canada, still the separation of Quebec would violate the 20 per cent of Quebecers who are non-Francophone and whose self-understanding is Canadian. Moreover, the separation of Quebec would leave small Francophone communities in the rest of Canada more isolated and helpless than before. At the root of this condition is the view that there must be no movement from the status quo unless no-one's national identity is violated. This seems unfairly biased toward maintaining the status quo, which itself might be unacceptable. On Miller's argument, the 80 per cent of Quebecois, who, say, for the sake of argument, sought the secession of Quebec, would be prevented from realising this. This would not only be a violation of their ethical bonds of attachment, but it is also hard to see how a political entity which retained these people against their will would have the bonds of community necessary to support a sound redistributive practice and effective democracy.

On Miller's conditions for justifiable secession, it would also seem that the Republic of Ireland could not have justifiably seceded from the United Kingdom in 1921. The Irish Free State contained a small (10 per cent) Protestant minority, who did not think of themselves as Irish, and the partition settlement of 1921 also left a significant Irish-Catholic minority in Northern Ireland. There were many problems with the partition of Ireland: most notably, the United Kingdom was not merely attempting to separate two rival groups into two homogeneous units; it was attempting to guarantee an in-built Protestant majority within what became Northern Ireland, and to secure maximum sustainable territory for this majority. This meant that the partitionist settlement was aggrandising, for two provinces, Fermanagh and Tyrone, with Catholic majorities, were unjustly included in Northern Ireland. However, *no* partition arrangement would have satisfied Miller's requirements for justifiable secession. Because the border could not be drawn in a way which would completely encapsulate *all* members of a national community, and which would exclude all members of a rival national community, the secession of Ireland from the United Kingdom would seem to be unjustified, on Miller's theory.

Reconciling the claims of people with divergent, incompatible national identities who are commingled on the same territory is obviously a very difficult issue to resolve, and Miller, unlike many other political philoso-

phers, is at least aware of the difficulties. However, his conditions on secession seem far too stringent. In the case of both Quebec, and Ireland in 1921, Miller's concern not to make anyone worse off leaves him supporting a status quo which is patently unacceptable to large national minorities. The result is counterintuitive: Miller's theory of justifiable secession would violate the self-understanding of the vast majority of Irishmen who sought to secede from the United Kingdom in 1921, and would have required them to remain in a state that they did not identify with. Miller is led to this conclusion because his earlier discussion is focused mainly on the advantages which flow from a nationally homogeneous political community, and it seems to follow that secession would be permissible only when the would-be state can encompass all members of a particular national community and only that national community.

Not only are Miller's conditions on justifiable secession unrealistically stringent, but they do not necessarily follow from the basic argument of the book, which should be concerned with what would be a *fair* way to accommodate equal national claims.¹ Mechanisms to accommodate different national communities, who perhaps live on the same territory, or who claim the same land, are not given as much attention as they deserve, because Miller's discussion has been so focused on the ethical and practical advantages which flow from having national and political boundaries coinciding.

Conclusion

Miller's two justificatory arguments point in different directions: the intrinsic justification suggests that national attachments are intrinsically valuable; the instrumental justification points to the importance of national ties in supporting a state which is attempting to realise traditional social-democratic goals. The instrumental justification, in particular, links Miller's defense of nationality very closely with a reasonably large redistributive state. The close link between nation and state, which is established in this justificatory argument, affects Miller's discussion of international justice and secession. The movement from an argument in defense of nations to one defending the rights of states is troubling in the first case because the two rarely coincide, and the kind of autonomy which Miller supports for states is often used by state officials intent on violating basic human rights and perpetrating injustices. It is troubling also in the case of secession, because it tends to make the secession of a national group very difficult to justify. Miller's theory of secession would be welcome reading for those political leaders in multinational states intent on preserving its territorial integrity against the wishes of the people it governs, people who might experience the state as hostile to their national identity. This is an odd result indeed, for a book which argues both that national attachments are intrinsically valuable

and that politics in multinational states frequently degenerate into self-interested *modus vivendi* arrangements.

Notes

¹ This issue *is* recognised in the book, particularly in the excellent but brief discussion of Northern Ireland, p. 190, but not in the discussion of secession.

Nationalism versus liberalism?

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David Miller's *On Nationality* is motivated by the belief that the dominant liberal school within Anglophone political philosophy has tended to treat nationalism as an irrational force, to be accommodated as necessary within liberal politics, rather than as an intellectually defensible conception of the appropriate basis on which to organise human society. His objective is to make nationalism respectable – not, of course, to endorse every atrocity that has ever been carried out in the name of a nation, but to argue that nationalism is not *per se* a disreputable notion. How far does he succeed in achieving this ambitious aim? The verdict must, I suggest, be a mixed one.

I want to focus on two lines of argument in the book. The first is contained in the third chapter, entitled 'The Ethics of Nationality'. The second occurs in the fifth and sixth chapters. These are concerned to work out (with special attention to the case of Britain) the practical implications of a defensible conception of nationalism. This second line of argument seems to me essentially sound – in what it rejects even more than what it proposes. But, as I shall try to show below, there is nothing in it that need offend a sensible liberal. At this level, the conflict between liberalism and nationalism frequently asserted by Miller simply does not get off the ground.

In contrast, the argument contained in the third chapter is obnoxious from a liberal – and, more broadly, from a human – point of view. There are two main ideas. One is that common national identity gives rise to some sort of natural or pre-institutional obligation on the co-nationals to do things for one another that they would not be required to do for others. It has to be conceded that David Miller's version of this nationalist doctrine is far too cautious to underwrite the uses of it made recently in, say, Bosnia and Rwanda. But diluted poison is still poison: even if the principle of homeopathy is valid in medicine, it has no place in political philosophy.

I do not, of course, wish for a moment to deny that life is full of contexts within which we have obligations to some people that we do not have to others. Miller makes things artificially easy for himself by suggesting that the only coherent alternative to his own view is one that denies the validity of such special obligations unless they can be shown to be conducive to some impersonal objective such as the maximisation of total utility. His strategy is to propel us into an acceptance of his nationalistic twist on particularism by encouraging us to believe that only by doing so can we escape a witless kind of universalism that runs counter to all common-sense moral ideas. But this forced choice is a bogus one.

Morality is, indeed, universal in its nature – Miller's fundamental error lies in denying this. But that universal morality consists largely in general

prescriptions that, in the actual circumstances of everyday life, generate specific obligations: to keep promises, to reciprocate benefits, and to play our part in the social practices of our society, such as those that prescribe the obligations of adults to care for children. (Any notion that there is something 'natural' and pre-social about the norm that devolves almost exclusive responsibility on the biological parents could not survive even the most casual survey of the wide variety of ways in which childcare responsibilities are distributed in non-Western societies.)

My contention is that there is nothing about common nationality *as such* that can make contact with any morally compelling basis for ascribing special obligations. It is simply the wrong sort of thing. This is not to say that we may not very well have obligations to co-nationals that we do not have to others. But we shall, I believe, always discover on further investigation that this obligation arises from some morally relevant relationship which is (more or less well) correlated with shared nationality.

One very important source of special obligations is common membership in a state. If I ask why I am obliged to contribute to the old age pension of somebody I have never met and have no particular interest in who lives in Rotherham, but not to the pension of somebody equally distant to me who lives in Rennes, the answer is that I belong to the same scheme of social insurance as the first but not the second. Now it is also true that I (probably) share a nationality with the first and not the second. Moreover, there is an obvious connection between this fact and the fact that I belong to the same system of social security as the first and not the second. But we should be careful not to elide these two separate facts and conclude that my special obligation to the pensioner in Rotherham derives from our common nationality.

Although I do not have the space at my disposal to demonstrate it here, I maintain that none of the apparently persuasive examples that Miller gives of special obligations arising from shared national identification supports his case. In every instance, I believe that we shall find that it is some other relationship that is carrying the moral strain. Most often it is common membership in a state that is doing the work, but the special obligations arising from this are treated as if the morally relevant feature underlying them were common nationality.

There is, of course, a common usage that rests on the identification of nation and state, as when we speak of national sovereignty or international relations. But, as Miller himself recognises in his second (definitional) chapter, any such identification would defeat his purposes, which require him to be able to talk about nations that do not have states and states that are multinational (pp. 18–19). Yet the application of Miller's other idea in chapter 3 turns on treating all states as if they had the attributes that he ascribes to nations. This second idea consists in a principle of national autonomy and a related principle of national responsibility for outcomes arising from national decisions.

It may help to locate this idea to observe that Miller has in recent years

fallen heavily under the influence of Michael Walzer, who harks back in turn to German romantic nationalists such as Herder. Liberals, in virtue of their view that value resides ultimately in individual human beings and not in collectivities, are inevitably suspicious of this kind of romantic nationalism. But it seems to me that the theory would not be objectionable in principle to the extent that its preconditions were actually met. What is objectionable is the way in which its adherents (including Miller) behave as if it had widespread application in the real world when in fact it has scarcely any.

Thus, suppose we pack into the idea of a nation the requirement that everyone regards fellow nationals as equally valuable, so that there are no groups that are stigmatised or discriminated against. And suppose we also stipulate that there must on all important matters of public policy (peace and war, income distribution, and so on) be a consensus among the members of the nation – a General Will in which all participate. Then, if this nation inhabits a state, there is surely some plausibility in saying that (at any rate within certain broad limits) its collective autonomy is valuable, because it can be seen as a contribution to the flourishing of its individual members. Similarly, under these very stringent conditions, the normally problematic concept of collective responsibility may quite plausibly be regarded as having some application.

I do not know if there are any nation-states in the world, if we understand the existence of a nation as requiring these conditions. (Perhaps Iceland is a candidate?) What is at any rate clear to me is that very few states are nations in the relevant sense, and the theory has less application the further they depart from its presuppositions. In the light of this, it seems to me quite grotesque that Miller should deploy it to explain (pp. 65–79) why wealthy Western countries should not intervene in the internal affairs of states in sub-Saharan Africa (because this would be a violation of national autonomy or ‘self-determination’) and why they have no obligation to provide economic aid (because this would be a violation of the collective responsibility).

Many of these countries do not make contact at any point with the requirements necessary to trigger the values of national autonomy and national responsibility. These include Angola and Rwanda, which Miller cites specifically as suitable applications of the principle of national autonomy (p. 78, n. 31), and Somalia, which is cited as an illustration of the way in which this principle of national responsibility relieves rich countries of an obligation to aid poor ones (pp. 63–4).

Manifestly, the romantic nationalist idea has here been transformed into the doctrine of state autonomy and state responsibility, which is assumed still to apply even if the state is riven by internecine conflict between opposing groups and the government is in essence a gang of looters intent on squeezing what it can out of the population at whatever cost to the future of the country. Contrary to what Miller so confidently claims, only

practical considerations (which may sometimes be powerful) weigh against intervention and economic aid where states are so radically defective in providing their citizens with the minimum of physical and economic security. Miller regards it as a decisive objection to universalism that it results in this conclusion; I would rather urge it as a decisive objection to Millerian particularism that it denies it.

Despite my fundamental dissent from the ‘ethics of nationality’ put forward in chapter 3, I am (as I have already said) broadly sympathetic to Miller’s practical proposals in chapters 5 and 6. If we were to define ‘nationalism’ as subscription to these, I would be willing to sign up with only minor qualifications. The obvious implication must be that the ‘ethics of nationality’ and Miller’s self-styled nationalist programme are virtually independent logically.

How can this be? I do not think that the answer is very mysterious. What Miller is really discussing in chapters 5 and 6 is the social and intellectual conditions under which a liberal democratic polity can maintain itself without having to resort to coercion of minorities. In contrast to the (official) argument in chapter 3, these chapters are entirely state-orientated. That is to say, they take as given a state whose boundaries include members of different ethnic, religious or cultural groups and ask how matters might be arranged so as to maximise the prospects of rational and civilised public discourse leading to policy outcomes that are equitable and directed at the pursuit of the public interest. Summarising Miller’s analysis, we might say that this requires – as a precondition of a common society-wide self-understanding and a common arena of political discussion – that the overwhelming majority of the inhabitants must speak the same language, though not necessarily as their first language. Beyond that it requires widespread adherence to certain rules of the game and to the principles underlying them. It also requires a general willingness to transform the ‘We want this’ of naked group self-interest into demands of the form ‘We believe that we have a legitimate claim to this, on the basis of broadly shared societal values.’ As I understand him, Miller also believes that the citizens’ ability to appeal a shared conception of the public interest requires as an underpinning some sort of common view of a distinctive collective enterprise.

Of all these conditions, it seems to me that only the last can with any historical legitimacy be assimilated to anything like a sense of common national identity. For, as Miller himself admits (with unnecessary concern, in my view) none of the rest has any essential reference to characteristics that differentiate one country from others (e.g. the United Kingdom from most other members of the European Union). Indeed, since he believes that Britons cannot satisfactorily unite around their constitution unless it is codified and modernised, it may be said that he is himself advocating a step that would remove one of the most important differences between the United Kingdom and its neighbours. After this reform had been carried

through, it is hard to see how the content of the 'civic education' that Miller advocates for the schools of Britain would be very different from that to be found in other European liberal democracies.

In the last chapter ('Conclusion') Miller writes: 'I have defended a civic education that presents to students the principles on which their society operates, and traces the historical process whereby those principles have come into play' (p. 194). He goes on to say immediately: 'Liberals and nationalists will find themselves somewhat at odds over issues such as these.' But if this kind of thing is to count as 'nationalism', I simply cannot see why it should be regarded as being in principled conflict with liberalism. Liberals are presumably, first and foremost, people who want to see liberal institutions thrive. If, as seems plausible enough, Miller has correctly identified the conditions for their thriving, it would have to be a perverse liberal who would object to measures necessary for the fostering of those conditions. Indeed, it is notable that the American political theorist Amy Gutmann, in her work on what she calls 'democratic education', advocates a form of civic education that incorporates everything proposed by Miller and, if anything, goes beyond it (Gutmann 1987, 1995). This no doubt reflects the American belief (which goes back well over a century) that the primary mission of the public school system is to turn a country of immigrants from a diversity of political cultures into a body of citizens capable of making liberal democratic institutions work.

The only ingredient in Millerian 'nationalism' that a liberal might be inclined to gag at is, as I have earlier suggested, the idea that the virtues necessary to the maintenance of a liberal democratic polity have to be supported by some common view of a shared collective purpose or perhaps even destiny. There is no question that this can (and usually does) take forms that are profoundly incompatible with liberal principles. Liberal democratic institutions cannot work well, if at all, in a divided society such as Northern Ireland which is proclaimed by its first prime minister to be 'a Protestant state for a Protestant people' or in a Croatia whose government makes it clear from the start that those who are not ethnic Croats can never hope for anything but (at best) second-class citizenship. But Miller would clearly repudiate this kind of exclusivity just as vehemently as any liberal who claimed to reject nationalism in any form.

We get the best idea of what Miller has in mind in his extended discussion in chapter 6 of the contested concept of British nationality. What is most important here are the alternatives that Miller rejects. He is explicit that a country containing English, Welsh and Scots (he ducks Northern Ireland), with a sizeable minority of immigrants or their descendants from the Caribbean and Indian subcontinent, cannot be defined in any terms that include nationality (in the sense that the English and the others are nationalities), race or ethnicity, religion or culture. The British Empire might be thought to have provided a world historical project between 1880 and (at the outside) 1960, but it has had no successor. Margaret Thatcher's

vision of Britain p.l.c., in which liberty of association and democratic accountability were to be sacrificed to the Moloch of economic growth, clearly failed to inspire anyone outside the small group who grew rich quick from her efforts to implement it. Is some more promising alternative waiting in the wings?

Miller is, I am bound to say, not a great deal of help here. Apart from hoping that we might rally round the (yet-to-be-written) constitution, he seems to suggest that the common project at the moment is to search for a common project. My own view is that there are a number of things that British people can legitimately take pride in, first among which is the country's remarkable contribution to the arts, the physical and biological sciences, and the social sciences – out of all proportion to its size and obscure location. If it is asked why somebody whose parents hail from Trinidad should feel any connection with these achievements, I would reply that they have as much reason as I have. As far as I can tell my ancestors were agricultural labourers in Devon and artisans in east London. I very much doubt if any of them had any personal connection with great events (except, according to one speculation, being on the receiving end of the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes). Other candidates are our role (in which the Commonwealth shared) in the defeat of Hitler, our record of preserving the countryside, and the qualities of decency and diffuse kindness celebrated by Orwell and still, perhaps surprisingly, surviving. (For example, I do not believe that there is any country in which passers-by will come as quickly to the aid of somebody who falls down in the street or is involved in a car accident.)

Although such things might form the basis of a national identity unique to Britain, I would be the first to concede they are scarcely the stuff out of which an all-embracing National Purpose is going to be forged. But do we need one? Do we want one? For my own part, I regard the lack of one as among the most attractive features of contemporary Britain.

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Miller's silence on bureaucracy

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David Miller is a nationalist. Accordingly, he presents an argument that 'political communities should as far as possible be organised in such a way that their members share a common national identity, which binds them together in the face of their many diverse private and group identities' (Miller 1995: 188). However, 'no one is simply a nationalist and nothing else: she may be a liberal nationalist, a socialist nationalist, a conservative nationalist' (188). Of these alternatives, Miller is primarily a socialist nationalist. He wishes to bind people together because he thinks that only insofar as people feel themselves to be so bound can 'political communities' enjoy sufficient legitimacy to redistribute resources between their members. This hypothesis is empirically supportable. It may be used to explain the unusual success of social democratic redistributive policies in some northern and central European nation-states, including that of the post-war Labour government in Britain. Miller might, then, be seen as drawing an empirical lesson from history to inform a proposal as to how socialist politics might be revived.

Miller must be congratulated on his prescience, given that political theorists more often follow political change than anticipate it. His, in contrast, is a timely argument, published when influential voices in the British Labour Party have begun publicly to debate how socialists can engage with national identity (e.g. Thompson 1995) and its leader, seeking to recreate the solidaristic spirit of 1945, has declared 'We are patriots. This is the patriotic party' (Blair 1995: 17).

That there is a problem in combining socialism and nationalism may, of course, also be learnt from history. Their combination by, for example, Barrès, Corradini and the Strasser brothers may be seen as the intellectual origin of fascism (Sternhell 1994) and national socialism. Thereafter, celebration of wartime solidarity made socialist politicians susceptible to fascism's appeal (White 1992). Miller's way around this problem is to stress that his synthesis of nationalism and socialism is effected within 'the core political principles of liberalism ... toleration and free speech, the rule of law, government by consent of the governed, and so forth' (Miller 1995: 193). His is the liberal socialism of Jaurès, Bauer or Orwell rather than the illiberal socialism of Sorel, Mussolini or Mosley.

Accordingly, Miller presents nationalism in the eminently liberal form of a 'principle of nationality' (pp. 2, 187-8) and describes it as a form of 'liberalism-on-communitarian-foundations', as opposed to 'liberalism-on-individualist-foundations' (p. 193). For example, rather than claiming that state power is legitimated by individual consent (even though 'government by consent of the governed' is a 'core political principle of liberalism'),

'political institutions are legitimate when they serve to express the will of the national community, which requires that the interests and beliefs of each member should be represented, but not that there should be individual consent to institutions or policies' (p. 194). 'The principle of nationality' legitimates not only policies such as redistribution between members of a national community, that may be implemented through a state, but also, the state itself as an institution.

Miller, in characteristic style, presents a rich array of arguments, giving reasons why he considers some rationally (or, at times, intuitively) superior to others. In *On Nationality* those other arguments are ones advanced by conservative nationalists, multiculturalists, and individualist or universalist liberals. As Miller has argued before, individualist 'liberalism is blind to the social origins of individuality itself. A person comes by his identity through participating in social practices and through his affiliation to collectivities like family and nation' (Miller 1989a: 51). This is the same communitarian critique of individualist liberalism advanced by conservatives. What distinguishes Miller's socialist nationalism from conservative nationalism is the relation he draws between this 'empirical' argument for community and a normative argument for citizenship:

Nationality is the identity we have in common, an identity in large measure inherited from the past, and not fully open to rational scrutiny. Citizenship is a political status which allows each of us to participate in reshaping that identity. For instance, we scrutinize our institutions and practices to see whether the meanings they convey ... are meanings we still want to endorse. (Miller 1989a: 70)

This combination of claims is coherent and compelling, but perhaps a problem may still be found with this liberal and republican form of socialist nationalism. For Miller, practices and collective institutions alike constitute personal identity. This apparently factual claim, in good Humean style, establishes the proper parameters of normative debate and political action. His position is, indeed, rationally superior to that of universalists and multiculturalists who avoid acknowledging the necessary bases of liberal politics in the institution of the 'nation-state' by talking instead of "'society" or "the political community"' (Miller 1995: 185). It would be carping to itemise the places in Miller's argument where he also lapses into use of such imprecise substitutes for 'state'. Nevertheless, the frequency of such lapses suggests that something remains undiscussed in his own position.

An indication of where this residual problem may lie is given by Alasdair MacIntyre, in noting that Miller fails to distinguish 'between a practice and the way in which it is institutionalized' (MacIntyre 1994: 184). For MacIntyre, community arises from participation in conventional practices and their particular forms of reasoning, not from organisational institutions. Institutions are necessary to sustain practices, but necessarily involve money and power which constantly threaten to corrupt those practices the sustaining of which justifies their existence (p. 194). A state, from this

perspective, is an unjustifiable 'hierarchy of bureaucratic managers' (p. 85). Far from being a political community in which individuals can meaningfully participate as citizens, 'it tends to destroy such communal ties as still exist: bureaucratic procedures create individuals who are abstracted from any social identity', as Miller has put it, summarising MacIntyre (Miller 1989a: 61).

This exposes the weakest part of Miller's argument for nationalism. He takes great pains, in *On Nationality* as elsewhere, not to confuse nation with state. "'Nation" must refer to a community of people with an *aspiration* to be politically self-determining, and "state" must refer to the set of political institutions that they may aspire to possess for themselves' (Miller 1995: 19; Miller's emphasis).

Of course, he qualifies and elaborates this definition of nation. Nevertheless, two implications of it are notable because they are evident throughout *On Nationality*. First, this definition makes 'nation' conceptually inseparable from 'state' (although not *vice versa*). Second, it involves ideas of collective consciousness and of nations as political actors. Miller invokes 'the belief that nations could be regarded as active political agents' and 'the idea that institutions and policies could be seen as expressing a popular or national will' in criticising the 'premodern ideas' of conservatives (Miller 1995: 31). These 'modern' ideas enable him, within the context of states, to link nationalism to citizenship and democracy. However, in the above definition and when writing about 'national self-determination', he clearly implies that a 'national will' may exist prior to the creation of a national state (although the will to create such a state, may, under certain conditions, be reasonably appeased with some lesser form of institutional expression, such as federation) and, therefore, that such a will may exist apart from any institutional means for its putative formulation and expression through electoral procedures.

It is hard to know where to begin taking issue with this idea of a collective will when no arguments are advanced in its support. What can be said is that it appears not only theoretically insupportable but also politically dangerous, as demonstrated by much of modern politics from the Jacobins onwards. The danger appears all the more obvious when it is claimed that 'if a nation is to be self-determining, its members should aim as far as possible to achieve consensus' (Miller 1995: 150). This claim is made in support of 'deliberative democracy', but of the many forms of 'democracy' proposed as institutionalisable within states it is liberal democracy, involving competition rather than consensus, that has proven the least malign.

Against Miller's position, I suggest that a state cannot be identified with the will of a 'nation' or of any other collection of 'citizens'. It is a bureaucratic apparatus of rule, to which liberal democracy may be well suited as a source of legitimation, leadership and policy. Miller's communitarian claims (in part aimed at Habermas) that liberal democracy cannot

provide any strong sense of 'personal identity' and that people require such a sense are both plausible. Miller is, therefore, right to suggest that nationalism is useful as another means of legitimating both states and collectivist policies. It does not follow, however, that nationalism is a satisfactory source of personal identity. People's sense of identity is, indeed, largely constituted by their socialisation into 'collectivities' and by 'participating in social practices', but this does not entail that it is constituted by any such entity as a nation.

Also plausible is Miller's communitarian claim that multiculturalism, in combination with the global market, undermines people's sense of social identity and solidarity (Miller 1995: 187). However, other things may have a similarly atomising effect. Miller repeats, but does not answer, MacIntyre's charge that 'bureaucratic procedures' tend 'to destroy ... communal ties' and abstract 'individuals from any social identity'. Take the Jacobins, for example. They did not champion, first, popular sovereignty and, then, nationalism (Hont 1994) in order to rectify a lack of a sense of identity. On the contrary, in order to promote these as sources of personal identity they had to outlaw and attempt to destroy myriad other collective sources of personal identity. Elsewhere this process may have been less dramatic, as states have expanded their power to assume social functions previously performed in other, often more cooperative, ways, but everywhere enhanced nationalist legitimation of states is likely to have the effect of further undermining cooperative practices and concrete communities.

Can this charge be dealt with from the politically idealistic, socially realist and philosophically sceptical stance that Miller has now been elaborating for many years? In his first book, Miller attempted 'to relate interpretation of justice to view of society in such a way that the vindicating role of the social model becomes apparent', so that each of various perspectives upon society 'was shown to support a separate principle of social justice' (Miller 1976: 153, 339). 'Our object in political theory' is 'to explicate the ideas and principles found in [our] culture', according to that culture's 'shared criteria of logic and empirical evidence.' Given the 'characteristic phenomenon of contemporary society' that 'people appear to hold irreducibly different value priorities', 'the political theorist could not ... argue conclusively in favour of one principle of justice at the expense of others' but only defend a social and normative 'perspective if he thought that the evidence was strongly in its favour' (Miller 1976: 343). Miller's favoured perspective has remained clear: 'an egalitarian conception of justice will be preserved in a community in so far as it manages to maintain close, solidaristic relationships among its members' (334). It is from this stance that he was able, later, baldly to pronounce that 'even those [socialists] who regard community as having no independent political value must rely on it in practice to underpin their distributive concerns' (Miller 1989a: 60). Conversely, he rejected arguments that political community should be based on anything other than the

nation-state as contrary to the ideas and principles of our contemporary culture (e.g. Miller 1984: 179–81).

Miller's previous book remains the central statement of his remarkably consistent political position (Miller 1989b). In *On Nationality* he has gone a long way to elaborate that part of the argument which attracted most critical attention, his defence of nationality against the normative abstractions of liberal universalism. However, given his earlier acknowledgement that 'bureaucratic hierarchy' is 'the predominant form of organization in modern society' (Miller 1984: 183), he should surely now turn his attention to what he has so far 'left undiscussed – the problem of bureaucracy' (Miller 1989b: 227). Not before he has dealt with that problem, in a way which is consistent with his extant claims about political community, will it be apparent that those claims fully cohere.

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A very British Scot

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Pollsters and political scientists ask, 'How do you think of yourself in terms of nationality?' (System Three Scotland, and Scottish Election Study 1992), and 'Do you see yourself in the near future as (Nationality) + European; European + (Nationality); European only; (Nationality) only?' (*Eurobarometer 40*, December 1993). Philosophers such as David Miller are not much interested in such questions, and even less in the answers, if his book *On Nationality* is anything to go by (see p. 18, where such 'empiricism' is rejected; there are only two references to such surveys, one on Catalonia and one on Scotland).

Philosophers deal not so much in empirical research as in concepts and ethics. Nothing wrong with that, but there ought to be a link between the two approaches in the study of nationality, especially as Miller largely subscribes to the 'imagined communities' school of thought about nations, which is based on people's perceptions of the nation and their own nationality. So when those in Scotland overwhelmingly answer that they think of themselves as Scottish in terms of nationality, even if most also think of themselves as British, is it in order for Miller to assert that the term 'nation' is misleading to describe Scotland? (p. 174). Would anyone take him seriously, especially as he has nothing to put in its place except 'national minority' firmly ensconced within the British 'nation'?

His idea seems to be that a sense of dual (national?) identity such as Scottish and British (to which a majority in Scotland do subscribe, although 30–40 per cent say they have 'Scottish, not British' national identity) makes the Scottish identity only one 'legitimate way of "being British"'. In this view, Britain emerges as the only true 'nation' (Scotland being ruled out) – or is it England, since 'British' nationality is linked to the Church of England (p. 179)? This preference for 'Britain' over Scotland as a nation is not surprising in the context of Miller's book, since much of the discussion on nationality and sovereignty is actually about states (misleadingly called 'nation-states' at p. 101), although he is aware of this conceptual error at p. 19. Later on, 'nationality' seems to mean citizenship, and the latter is held to carry with it an 'obligation' to hand on a national identity (i.e. pertaining to the state) to the children of cultural minorities (pp. 145–6). So in this terminology conflicts between nations/cultural minorities and states, which occur widely, get obscured, and anti-state nationalists are usually dismissed in terms that make them appear illegitimate. In contrast, states such as Britain, France and Canada are seen as true nations whose statehood is unquestioned by the principle of nationality. Anti-state nationalisms in these states are essentially out of order, and even basely motivated. For example, Scottish nationalism,

'it has frequently been remarked' is based on a desire to 'hog' all the oil in the North Sea at England's expense (p. 115, including note). Actually, oil is a minor factor in contemporary SNP campaigning, which is much more based on the right of national self-determination. Corsican, Breton and Basque nationalism do not rate a mention in the context of France's nationality (pp. 143–4). Quebec separatism is no good (pp. 114, 117) and is incompatible with the overarching and more legitimate 'Canadian national identity' (p. 142). Irish unity cannot be preferred on grounds of nationality alone (p. 115n.). Catalan and Basque nationalists in Spain are all right as long as they wish to stay within Spain (pp. 116–18).

If all these nationalisms gets short shrift, curiously the Czech Republic and Slovakia had 'good reason' to separate politically, because the state housed 'two communities whose national identities are clearly distinct' (p. 188). But is that not true of Britain (which has at least four distinct substate national identities, and one state national identity)? And were there no 'Czechoslovak' identifiers, as there are British identifiers? How many exclusive national identifiers are needed to constitute a nation, which can then legitimately form a nation-state?

While appearing to accept the nationalist case in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (where no referendums on separation were held), it is clear that Miller does not accept it in many other places. Some nations, he says, 'will have to settle for less than full self-government' if they are 'geographically intermingled with other groups' (p. 81). In fact, such a condition applies to most aspiring and actual states to some degree, and Miller's condition might even encourage a bout of 'ethnic cleansing' to get on the right side of national homogeneity. In any case, why should the present 185 states in the UN be supported in their 'sovereignty'? It seems that states have the edge in legitimacy over nations for some philosophers, as well as for state governments.

Miller finally emerges as something of a British nationalist, which he prefers to Scottish, Welsh and Irish nationalism. His 'project' of reviving nation-building in Britain through civic education (p. 182) sounds like the contemporary Conservative Party New Right. 'Scottish children should learn British history, but should focus particularly on developments in Scotland' (p. 182). Of course they do that already, but such historical education does not necessarily lead to the desired result of a stronger British nation-state if a Scottish nationalist perspective is adopted. The focus on Scottish developments might endanger the British state, and it is interesting that such a focus was introduced in Scottish schools in the period of revived Scottish nationalism in the 1960s. Linda Colley's book *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (Yale University Press, 1992) is quoted with approval, but her conclusion is not followed through. She states that 'the factors that provided for the forging of a British nation in the past have largely ceased to operate' (p. 374). The result is that separate Welsh, Scottish and English states or, 'more likely', a federal Britain, are seen as appropriate (p. 375). Miller's answer to the weakening of British national identity is not to give

the nations within Britain any self-government (devolution and federalism are not mentioned) but to integrate these nations further within the British 'nation-state'. The only concession to Scottish and Welsh nationalism is a written British Constitution with a Bill of Rights. Such an arrangement is also praised for Canada (at p. 180), but Miller misses the point that it was precisely the 1982 Constitution with its shift to equal status for all provinces and the Canadian Charter of Rights that raised the hackles of French Quebecers, who saw themselves as a 'distinct society' with a claim to nationhood and sovereignty over what they saw as national civil rights.

In short, it may be impossible to indulge in latter-day British or Canadian nation-building. Certainly, Colley does not give any grounds for optimism in the British case, and the voters in Quebec in the referendum of October 1995 were more separatist than before, despite (or because of) the 1982 constitutional changes.

The ambiguities of John Stuart Mill's treatment of nationality haunt this work. Mill too defended nationality as an essential principle of 'representative government', but it was British, not Scottish, nationality that he recognised, even if he was an 'ethnic Scot'. For him, as for Miller, Scotland was not a 'nationality' (nation), and Britain represented civilisation and progress. That was fine in the golden age of Mill's Britain, described by Colley, but is it relevant today when the conditions are not present?

There is little support for many actual nationalists in Miller's ambiguously pro-nationalist book. And there is not much material for political scientists to get their teeth into, whatever there might be for philosophers. For the former, patterns of state-nation domination and discrimination, actual or anticipated, largely explain political nationalism, and responses to surveys on national identity, not to mention actual voting in elections and referendums, aid in its measurement. All these are crucial to the determination of actual outcomes. So too is nationalist direct action (the 'armalite' as well as the 'ballot-box' in IRA terminology). There is hardly anything about political power and political behaviour in Miller's book, nor is there much offered about what to do positively about nationalist claims in specific cases. Sometimes (as with Scotland and Quebec) a bias towards states takes over. We can benefit from much of Miller's text, especially its unusually open-minded philosophical approach to nationalism in general, but at times it is difficult to trust his political judgement.