

UNIVERSALISM, MORAL THEORY, AND ETHNOANARCHISM: A CHALLENGE TO CONTEMPORARY NATIONALISM

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One of the more cutting criticisms of nationalism as a social and ethical movement is that it engenders an inequality of moral claims; that is, one's nationalism necessarily comes at the expense of another's, and it inherently demands the limitation of other or "opposing" nationalist claims. Hans Morgenthau's famous "ABC paradox" is a manifestation of this difficulty. His 1957 article, "Paradoxes of Nationalism," asks the question of moral consistency: Nation A invokes the principles of nationalism against nation B, while denying it to C, one of its own minorities. All societies have minorities. However, almost all societies have invoked nationalist principles against outsiders. Therefore, the anti-nationalist would conclude, nationalism is not a consistent theory of politics at all, but a convenient tool to use against outside opponents.

Nationalist theory, in the ethnic and cultural sense, rejects the existence of this paradox. Modern, liberal governments more often than not benefit from having a militant minority to use against nationalist parties, groups, and movements within the society who challenge the "multiethnic" state. Instead of considering the state as the locus of the nation, which is an error, the notion of the ethnos needs to be the central focus if Morgenthau's criticism is to be withstood. The ethnocommunity is the primary variable in politics as well as world history; rejecting the statist model of the nation, the ethnocommunity controls its destiny within whatever territory it finds itself. There is no such thing as the "multiethnic" state, then, and the ethnonation becomes the focus of authority in terms of social life wherever it has settled.

The fallacy of the so-called "paradox" is that Morgenthau is speaking of states rather than ethnonations, and his paradox assumes the centrality of the state. A state might invoke its "cultural patrimony" against outsiders, but, for the sake of its own formal power, might deny it at home. Keep in mind, however, that states do not have "cultural patrimonies": only nations do. On the other hand, Morgenthau's criticism fails as an ethical one in that the ethnonation, even in a diaspora's small numbers, should be the centerpiece of

social and political authority, administering the social life of a people who consider themselves members. Of course, such a view radically undercuts state authority, and can exist only when the state is replaced by a cultural idea of the ethnocommunity.

Morgenthau's argument is rather common, and recurs within the literature on nationalist thought and practice. However common and fashionable it may be, the argument is false. Nationalism, far from being essentially exclusivist in relation to other nationalisms, is inherently a *universalist* idea: nationalisms do not, and cannot, come at the expense of other nationalisms unless the others' claims are too expansive and hence illegitimate to begin with. In other words, the ethnos becomes the focus of social authority. Therefore, it is ethnic belonging, not a specific territory or a formalized administration, that assumes the ethical mantle of legitimacy. Members of the ethnos are ruled, then, by the historical experience of the nation as a whole through its traditional institutions—rather than by the formal institutions of the modern state as its “administrative” apparatus. This might be considered a type of ethnonational anarchism, in which the formal and territorially based institutions of the Leviathan are replaced, organically, by the traditional language, institutions, and experience of the ethnos. A citizen, then, belongs to the life of an ethnos, rather than the administration of a state, and is integrated into that ethnos through the guilds and system of internal distribution that the group has developed over the centuries.

In contemporary times, ethnic groups reach well over state lines through language clubs, churches (such as the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad), the institutions of a diaspora (such as relocation and housing services, etc.), and ethnic institutions of various types. Ethnonationalism, as an ethical foundation for civilization's reconstruction, might make use of this foundation to provide those institutions with actual governing power and control over the economies of their communities centering around ethnic membership, though a membership that is culturally based, rather than one based on blood.¹

Ethnonationalism centers itself on a cultural self-determination that takes its normative force in that the culture forms and nurtures the people under its care, making them truly individuals. Without culture and its institutionalization, individuals become mere embodied egos demanding satisfaction of their impulses; civilization becomes impossible and eventually unravels. Nationalism, then, takes the communal culture of a people (considered as making up the ethnos) as normative in the sense that it not only offers a coherent and civilized moral code (one necessary for properly social behavior within the community), but also contains the imperative (or moral motivation) of an institutionalized tradition; nationalism offers a particularly rich idea of moral psychology. When nationalism is connected to the concept of empire (that is, the subjugation of others for the benefit of the imperial power), it then becomes illegitimate, for it—by definition—interferes with the cultural aspirations of subject peoples.

Thus, within its proper bounds, nationalism, at least of a contemporary kind, demands a radical decentralization of world power and global politics. Politics becomes cultural; it becomes the expression of the ethnocommunity because it is only within the confines of a well-defined cultural community that ideas of “the good” or “rights” make any sense. Such words are culturally bounded. Liberalism, through its long and sordid history, has defined itself as precisely opposite this, claiming that justice is a purely procedural matter, rather than a substantial one, thus rendering culture unimportant and ornamental. This has led to the elimination of communal autonomy under the Leviathan, and, in turn, created the “abstract” notion of a consolidated public policy. Given that liberalism developed in the specifically cultural milieu of Western Europe, the idea is self-refuting as well as corrosive.

Liberalism must define itself in this way, for if the individual (ego) is supreme, culture is normative if and only if one so “chooses” it (itself self-refuting, in that the intellectual power to choose, and any interest in the moral results, derives from one’s surrounding moral environment and upbringing). Culture becomes a pleasant ornament, but ultimately not normative for a society (it is usually considered “repressive,” for it interferes with the economically profitable gratification of the passions and impulses); liberalism must demand that the individual ego rest upon itself, namely its drives.

Nationalism claims that politics and ethics exist only as part of a cultural patrimony, with its long-established ideas of the “right” and the “good,” that has created civilized individuals capable of studying moral philosophy or indeed caring about moral action. Otherwise, justice must begin and end with the demands of the individual ego, unconstrained, with justice never becoming an object to be realized, but resting on certain procedural norms which must be devoid of any cultural or moral foundation, lest justice be considered by liberalism heteronomous.

Far from ethnocommunitarianism being relativistic, it is part of a natural law tradition that posits man as he can in no other way be posited: as the product of a community. Thus, the development of the community, including all the goods it has brought into existence—cultural stability, education, language, material satisfaction, aesthetic experience, etc.—becomes the citizen’s by right. It is a Kantian deontology—but one removed from the abstract “individual” possessing, inexplicably, abstract rights somehow “adhering” to his personhood—that renders rights and duties far more stable by way by connecting them with a functioning and living community; a community of language and historical experience that makes political life and words like “right” and “good” intelligible. If the goods promised by the concept of community (rather than any specific community) are vitiated, then the community’s legitimacy can be questioned. Therefore, if one of the goods of a community is the protection of human life (a rather uncontroversial claim) and the community, somehow corrupted, begins to make legal the practice of

abortion, thereby destroying its own progeny for personal gain and convenience, that aspect of the community needs to be fought, for it contradicts its own claim to existence. If a community, existing, minimally, to protect life, begins to extinguish itself on the Baalian altar of convenience, then it contradicts itself and is thus rendered immoral.²

Immanuel Kant's error was to believe that ethics can be reducible to the most common element in humanity, that is, the concept of willing a law in general, which is the basis of the so-called "categorical imperative," or the moral idea that any act of willing, in order to be called "right," must be amenable to formulation as a "universal law." Such universalism contains nothing of ethical value (as Hegel was later to charge), since it is an ethical void that is soon replaced by the far more vivid and concrete ideas of sensual gratification and egoistic behavior. It rejects the communal parameters which make any kind of choosing even possible. The weakness of Kantianism lies in the fact that the moral infrastructure such that "universalism" might be acceptable and considered "good" is a creation of civilized society.

The preexistence of the cultural structure of the nation, that is, the national community at whatever level, is necessary for the abstractions of the "will," "intellect," or even "natural law" and "right" to make any sense whatsoever. The very utterance of such terms is saturated with historical experience, for without it, the terms would have never come into existence and would not have the moral force they do. In other words, there are no abstract rights. "Rights," as the term is used in modern political discourse (or what passes for it), are abbreviations of long-standing social practices and historical experience that have been reduced to slogans and propositions for the sake of easy communication, as well as less praiseworthy ends. To conclude from this that they are separable from historical experience is an inexcusable nonsequitur.

Thus Kantianism does not stand by itself, but is dependent upon the already existing social norms of eighteenth century Prussia, accepted solely due to the fact that the surrounding society has properly socialized the Prussians to demand some accounting of moral behavior. In other words, to care about right and wrong, and about proper and social behavior in general, is something that arises through the development of communal life and is inseparable from it. This is perennially the problem with moral theory based on abstract grounds. The "abstraction" – whether it be "rights" or "duty" (or some other such "imperative") – never actually exists except as an abbreviation of an already developed sense of moral life that is itself the product of centuries of human behavior, historical experience, and mutual suffering that provide such ideas with their genesis, formulation, institutionalization, and moral force.

It is the nation, the community united by language and historical experience, not the "categorical imperative," that socializes people to be civilized and moral. One can take Kant seriously only after reflecting on the fact that it is the civilized life that makes such questions even meaningful, never mind providing answers.

Before even caring about whether or not one's "will" can be formulated into a "universal law," that is, can be done by everyone without contradiction, one must be civilized already. Kant's ideas serve to place liberalism on a more German and idealistic metaphysical foundation, and find a less "philosophical" formulation in John Stuart Mill, several decades later, in the so-called "harm principle" found in *On Liberty*.³ For Kant, the notion of "universality" means that the moral worth of an action is dependent upon it being "universalized" without contradiction, defined as severe social dislocation. Therefore, a Kantian can say that lying is immoral for, if one was to universalize lying, i.e. imagine everyone lying all the time, then social life would quickly cease, for no one could ever believe what anyone said about anything. Therefore, lying is evil because it is socially self-contradictory.

Without the cultural community, Kant's ethics becomes merely an eccentric hobby, a hobby that is incapable of giving us reasons for taking the idea of the "universal law of willing" seriously; in other words, there is nothing inherent in this ethical universalism and formalism that makes anyone interested in following it in the short term. Nietzsche did it terrible damage precisely for this reason. Once one rejects the moral imperative of cultural community, then there is really no reason why even "social contradiction" is any barrier to one's behaving immorally. All that a neo-Nietzschean needs to say is that, taking a cue from Hegel, the will, the ego comes first, and the life of society is thus its product. From this proposition, logically untenable, it is impossible to avoid its consequent, that all cultural attachments are arbitrary and thus ultimately trivial and ornamental. Its force is then heteronomous and therefore unethical. Putting this differently, one would only listen to Kant or Hegel because there is already an inborn sense of community and emotional attachments to it and its welfare: "inborn" because any moral question, in order to make sense, must be formulated in such a way that it is salient to community life, and can only be salient if it is formulated in the language and basic conceptual apparatus of the ethnic community in question, taking into account their historical experience, sensitivities, weaknesses etc. Such a problem is the eternal difficulty of analytic methods in philosophy. To posit a "moral agent" is to posit an analytic abstraction, not a human being.

Kant's interest in universalism and moral equality derives from strands of thought found within the entire history of Western European moral philosophy. Kant merely took a sliver of thought from his own culture and provided it with its own origin, the naked, abstract will that comes, literally, from nowhere. One might be attracted to it only so far as one is already socialized within an already existing humane morality. Such invariably comes from one's cultural community or the nation. Only later does one theorize.

The development of a nationalist consciousness within a certain people requires only that the cultural norms of a society be normative for its politics within the confines of natural law. This is an alternative formulation of the idea of "self-determination," a normative requirement for any nationalism

whatever, and is the very substance of free action in the terms of international politics. The question remains, then, what does a nationalist do when nationalism rises within the borders of a historic enemy?

This question has long been vexing for nationalists. The answer is that nationalism is justified to the extent it is not inherently expansionist. To the extent a nationalist movement seeks to unite those under its cultural patrimony, it does not nor can it reject the claims of even its enemies to do the same. Furthermore, it is not in the nation's interest to absorb those likely to be hostile to it. Such policies often derive from a ruling class that is alienated from the cultural patrimony of its own people, viewing culture not as a means in itself, but to some further end, such as political power.

An ethnos most certainly is not merely any group of people that develops common interests; nor is it synonymous with the state, but a possible list of a few requirements for a group to qualify as a nation might be listed here as an aid to the present argument:

- A nation must be defined by a common culture, a culture that is normative for an entire way of life, politically and ethically, rather than something specific, such as a social organization structured for a limited purpose. Yankee fans and computer geeks, then, do not form nations, for the simple reason that the nation is necessary for these second-order attachments to make sense, or even to exist.

- A nation is united by a common language, though it is reasonable to claim that dialects and related languages might well coexist (such as Polish and Ukrainian; Spanish and Portuguese; Cantonese and Mandarin, etc.).

- A nation must be an entity of long standing. That is, a nation must have an objective ground in history; it must be the product of a long development. As the distinguished British political scientist Ernest Barker once pointed out, "The nation is a congeries of wills, acting through centuries."⁴ Developmentally, a nation is the visible manifestation of the *character* of its people—a natural, organic synthesis that emerges over centuries from common traditions, customs, and folkways.

- A nation must view itself as such, that is, be aware of itself as such; this is the subjective ground of nationalism.

To the extent that any nationalist movement seeks to expand itself beyond these confines, it becomes not a nationalist movement, but an imperial movement, and thus a movement against the core ideas of nationalist theory. When a movement becomes imperial, the nation's neighbors have every right to defend themselves. Beyond this, there is no moral ground for one nation to demand that another not become conscious of itself, or form its own institutions according to its own experience. Thus, nationalism can never of itself be synonymous with imperialism or wars of conquest. Warfare is legitimate only to defend the common cultural patrimony that is the nation, even if part of that patrimony happens to lie across a state border.

The solution to the endless problems of “minority rights,” “irredentism,” and other such irritants in world politics is the building of the autonomous ethnocommunity, absorbing social, religious, and economic life under its aegis. Self-determination is vitiated by the outworn and incorrigibly violent state apparatus, where bureaucracy inevitably takes interests to itself outside of the cultural patrimony which birthed it, thereby making itself odious to the ethnos. Therefore, the ethnic group expresses its rule through its own individuality, its own historical experience objectified in institutions such as craft guilds, ethnic churches (such as in eastern Orthodoxy), and local assemblies in tune with the tradition of the community in question. From these institutions does a properly representative system of rule come about, for representation is not about the shifting sands of individual self-interest or the demands of the libido, but rather the solid ground of the historical experience of a national history, the ethnos, the actual “individual” of history and politics. The institutions of rule, indigenous to a people, then take control over the aspects of social life impinging its members, objectifying historical experience and, therefore, the structure of maturity and intellect that creates citizens, rather than egos. The empowerment of the ethnos over and above the interests of the state is central to true freedom, identity, belonging, and peace among peoples. It is a true diversity in the Herderian, not the modern, sense.

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END NOTES

1. There is no question that a “blood” tie is a tenuous one for European ethnicities. Most European states presently are a mix of peoples, and over the centuries, the peoples themselves have mixed. Therefore, members of each family must decide for themselves which cultural patrimony they identify with. None of this entails a “rejection” of the others, but an understanding that cultural heritage is not an “ornamental” association, and that political allegiance cannot be separated from historical experience and the patterns of thought the ethnos engenders.

2. It needs to be made clear that abortion is evil because it kills babies. As seen from the perspective of national life, however, it is additionally an evil in that it destroys what the community was called into existence to protect, namely its own progeny, who will build upon the capital of historical experience and make additional contributions to their culture and, possibly, the world at large. In other words, the natural law, designed by God (as such objective laws certainly cannot seriously be described as random interaction, which is also a contradiction), implants in mankind the drive for community for its very survival. To then use the resources of that community to destroy that which it protects, namely life, is an absurdity and proves the immorality, decadence, and weakness of whatever community permits it.

3. Stated briefly, the "harm principle" goes like this: The moral agent can act as he wishes, and the authorities are only permitted to interfere with his self-will whenever there is a manifest harm committed. What "harm" means is anyone's guess, and has not satisfactorily been dealt with in the literature. Often, "harm" is reductively defined as "physical damage" to persons or property.

4. Ernest Barker, *National Character and the Factors in Its Formation* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927), 5.