

# The Justification of National Partiality

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[From *The Morality of Nationalism*, edited by Robert McKim and Jeff McMahan.]

The moral issues about nationalism arise from the character of nationalism as a form of partiality. Nationalists care more about their own nation and its members than about other nations and their members; in that way nationalists are partial to their own national group. The question, then, is whether this national partiality is morally justified or, on the contrary, whether everyone ought to care impartially about all members of all nations. As Jeff McMahan emphasizes in [another chapter of the book in which this essay appears], a philosophical examination of this question must consider the specific features of nationalism as one form of partiality among others. Some partiality--for example, toward one's spouse and children--seems morally acceptable and even a duty. According to commonsense moral thinking, one not only may but also should care more about one's family members than about strangers. But other instances of partiality, most notably racial partiality, are in most circumstances widely condemned. Is national partiality more like familial partiality or more like racial partiality? To answer this question, we must know what in general justifies attitudes of partiality. Caring more about certain people is appropriate when one stands in certain special relations to those people. But what are these relations, and to what degree do they hold among members of the same nation? Assuming they are present within families and not within races, to what degree are they present within nations?

In addressing these questions, I will consider only "universalist" nationalism, the view that all people ought to be partial to their own nation and conationals. This is a more interesting and plausible position than the "particularist"--one could equally well say "chauvinist"-view that only one's own nation, say, only Canada, deserves special loyalty. And I will consider only intrinsic justifications of nationalism. There are various instrumental arguments for national partiality, ones claiming that, starting from impartial moral principles, we can show how people's being partial to their conationals will have good effects impartially considered. I do not find these instrumental arguments very persuasive. In any case, the more interesting philosophical question is whether national partiality can be justified noninstrumentally, or at the foundational level of morality. Many people believe that familial partiality is justified not just as a means to benefits for all but intrinsically or in itself. My question will be whether national partiality can be justified in the same foundational way.

My discussion will cover three separate topics. First, I will challenge one widely accepted view about the moral foundations of nationalism. Second, I will suggest that a full discussion of nationalism must recognize that it has two components, which raise distinct moral issues. Finally, I will sketch a moral defense of one of these aspects of nationalism. This defense will concede that along one important dimension the relations among conationals have less of the character that justifies partiality than do the relations among family members, but it will argue that along another dimension they have roughly as much. The result is not that we should be as partial to our conationals as we are to our children--that would be absurd--but that we may properly be partial to some degree.

## **Nationalism and "Embedded Selves"**

I have said that the moral issues about nationalism turn on whether certain relations hold within national groups. But many writers connect these issues to more abstract debates about the nature of morality and of moral agents. They say the impartialist view that we ought to care equally about all humans goes with the "Enlightenment" conception of morality as universal and impartial, whereas the defense of nationalism goes with a different "particularist" or "communitarian" conception of morality. According to this latter conception, moralities necessarily arise within the life of particular communities and therefore inevitably distinguish centrally between members and outsiders, requiring a certain priority to the interests of the former. David Miller expresses this kind of view. He says that moral impartialism sees the subject "as an abstract individual, possessed of the general powers and capacities of human beings--especially the power of reason;" whereas a nationalist ethic sees the subject as "partly defined by its relationships, and

the various rights, obligations, and so forth that go along with these, so these commitments themselves form a basic element of personality.”<sup>1</sup> But although nationalism is often said to rest on these communitarian ideas about morality--let me summarize them in the slogan that "moral selves are embedded"--I do not see any connection between the two. Despite their prominence in the recent literature on nationalism, claims about the "embedded self" are not relevant to the intrinsic justification of national partiality. I can detect two arguments in defense of nationalism that may be suggested by the talk of embedded selves, which I will call the *cultural perfectionist* argument and the *metaethical particularist* argument. The cultural perfectionist argument does not go far enough to justify a universalist ethic of nationalism; the metaethical particularist argument goes too far. Let me start with the cultural perfectionist argument.

Perfectionism as a general normative view holds that the good for human beings consists in developing their "nature" or "identity."<sup>2</sup> More specifically, it holds that certain properties make an individual what he or she is and thereby constitute that person's nature or identity, and that his or her good consists in developing these properties to a high degree. In many classical versions of perfectionism--for example, those of Aristotle, Marx, and Nietzsche--the relevant nature is generic human nature, one shared by all human beings. But those who talk of "embedded selves" sometimes suggest a different perfectionist view. According to this view, human beings have natures or identities based on their membership in particular cultures, and their good consists at least partly in developing these narrower cultural identities. According to this "cultural" perfectionism, I as a Canadian have a specifically Canadian identity, a German has a German identity, and in each case our good consists at least partly in developing this cultural identity. One argument suggested by the talk of "embedded selves" is that this cultural perfectionism provides the justification for national partiality. If human beings had just an abstract or common human nature, this argument runs, a purely impartialist or cosmopolitan morality would be reasonable. But if, instead, their identities depend on their belonging to particular cultures, morality demands that they be specially loyal to those cultures.<sup>3</sup>

Though this is a less central point, I do not believe that cultural perfectionism is a very plausible version of perfectionism. In the most attractive versions of this general normative view, the properties that it is good for a human to develop constitute his or her identity in a strict or metaphysical sense. They are essential to the person in the strong sense that he or she could not exist as numerically the same individual without having these properties. This condition is satisfied by the classical perfectionisms of Aristotle, Marx, and Nietzsche; since I am essentially a human, no being that did not have the properties that make humans human could be identical to me. But the condition is not satisfied by cultural perfectionism. I was born in Canada and raised in Canadian culture. But we can easily imagine a different course of events, one in which, a few months after my birth, my parents return to their native Czechoslovakia and raise me there. And what we imagine in this course of events is that *I*, the very same individual, am raised in Czech culture. My being a Canadian, therefore, is not metaphysically essential to me and constitutes my identity in only a weaker, nonmetaphysical sense. And nonmetaphysical identities, it seems to me, cannot generate a plausible version of perfectionism.

As I said, however, this is a less central point. What is more important is that even if we accept cultural perfectionism, it does nothing to justify national partiality. Let us grant that humans have different goods based on their membership in different cultures. How does it follow that I should care more about the achievement by my conationals of their specific cultural good than about the achievement by people in other cultures of their specific good? What rules out the view that I should care impartially about all people's realizing their different cultural identities--that is, what rules out an impartialist cultural perfectionism? Such a perfectionism would recognize that the good of Canadians is different from the good of Germans but direct both Canadians and Germans to care equally about both. How does accepting cultural perfectionism as a general position rule this specific view out?<sup>4</sup> I am not suggesting that the writers who embrace cultural perfectionism do so in an impartialist way. Most, it seems to me, endorse national partiality. But the partiality they affirm does not follow from their cultural perfectionism, which is equally consistent with an impartialist approach. Their position therefore combines cultural perfectionism with claims about partiality that are independent of any ideas about cultural identities and cannot be justified by them.

Cultural perfectionists may object that I have ignored a crucial feature of their argument. This argument does not claim only that people in different cultures have different identities; it claims, beyond that, that those identities involve, as

one component, a demand for partiality toward the culture's members. Thus my identity as a Canadian demands partiality toward Canadians, a German's identity demands partiality toward Germans, and neither of us can fully achieve his or her good by following an impartial morality.

If it takes this form, the cultural perfectionist argument requires a strong additional assumption. To show that national partiality is justified in every culture, it must assume that every culture involves as one component a demand for partiality, so there could never be a culture of pure impartialists. I find this assumption dubious, but let us grant it and ask what follows. If my identity involves as one component a demand for national partiality, I cannot fully achieve my good if I do what is right by impartialist standards. But this is no embarrassment or difficulty for an impartialist cultural perfectionism. It is merely one instance of the familiar fact that to do what is right, or has the best consequences impartially considered, agents must sometimes sacrifice some of their own good. Doing what is right often involves omitting what is best for oneself; here it involves omitting that part of one's good that consists in being partial. This familiar fact does not tell against impartial cultural perfectionism, and there is still no justification for national partiality.<sup>5</sup>

The difficulty with the cultural perfectionist argument is that it operates at the wrong level to justify national partiality. The affirmation of partiality concerns the form of an ethically appropriate concern. It says that whatever people's good consists in, we should care more about our conationals' good than about other people's. But cultural perfectionism makes claims about the content of our ethical concern, or about what people's good consists in. And no claims about what people's good consists in can justify the idea that we ought to care more about some people's good than about others'.

The second argument suggested by the talk of "embedded selves;" which I called the metaethical particularist argument, does address issues about form. It claims that an impartialist morality, one requiring all humans to care equally about all others, is inconsistent with the true nature of moral codes and principles. These codes and principles, the argument says, always arise within particular cultures; they are addressed to the members of a culture as having the particular cultural identities they have and as occupying particular roles within that culture. Morality is always *our* morality, in these circumstances here. This means that the standpoint presupposed by impartial morality--outside all cultures and making judgments about them all--is not available. Morality must be partial because the impartialist alternative is conceptually incoherent.

The problem here is that the particularist argument excludes not only impartialist morality but also a universalist ethic of nationalism. For universalists, too, make claims about what is right in all cultures, namely, partiality toward them; their judgments, too, do not arise from their particular culture but apply equally to all cultures. Consider Alasdair MacIntyre's lecture, "Is Patriotism a Virtue?" As its title indicates, this lecture asks a question about the value of patriotism in all cultures everywhere. And MacIntyre ties an affirmative answer to this question to what looks like a particularist metaethical view. On the view that underwrites patriotism, he writes, we never learn "morality as such, but always the highly specific morality of some highly specific social order." Later he claims that impartialist morality requires something that cannot be justified, namely, that we "assume an abstract and artificial--perhaps even an impossible--stance, that of a rational being as such, responding to the requirements of morality not qua peasant or farmer or quarterback, but qua rational agent who has abstracted him or herself from all social particularity."<sup>6</sup> But someone who really accepted this metaethical particularism could not ask the universalized question of MacIntyre's title. Such a person could only write a lecture titled "Is Canadian Patriotism a Virtue in Canada?" (if he or she was Canadian) or "Is German Patriotism a Virtue in Germany?" (if he or she was German). This person would not make any claims but would deny the intelligibility of claims about the value of patriotism in cultures other than his or her own. Any such universalist claims, no less than those of impartialist morality, issue from a standpoint that the particularist says is not available-- namely, one abstracted from any particular social identity and addressed to all humans or all members of cultures as such. As I have said, the interesting affirmation of national partiality is the universalist one; it is also the one that all writers on this subject discuss. But this universalist affirmation cannot be supported by metaethical particularism; on the contrary, it is excluded by it.

Let me summarize my discussion of the "embedded self" by introducing some technical terminology. The interesting nationalist doctrine is both universalist and agent-relative. It is universalist because it claims that partiality toward one's nation and conationals is appropriate for all humans in all cultures. It is agent-relative because it says that what different humans should be partial to is different--namely, their own conationals. The cultural perfectionist argument does not go far enough to justify this doctrine, because it does not rule out an impartialist view according to which we ought to care equally about the realization of their different cultural identities by people in all the cultures in the world. The metaethical particularist argument goes too far to justify the doctrine, because it rules out not only impartialist but also all universal moral claims. Neither of the two arguments that I can see suggested by the talk of "embedded selves" does anything to justify national partiality. The real issues about the ethics of nationalism do not concern the nature of morality or of the self but are those I introduced at the start of this chapter. Assuming that special relations sometimes justify partiality, are the relations among conationals of the kind that do justify partiality, like those among family members, or of the kind that do not, like those among members of a race?

### **Nationalism and Impersonal Goods**

My second topic is the content of national partiality, or exactly what nationalists are partial to. Many writers speak simply of being partial to one's nation without explaining further what that means. Some speak, more specifically, of being partial toward one's conationals--that is, of giving more weight to the interests of individuals in one's nation than to those of other individuals. This is certainly one aspect of nationalism, but I believe there is often another aspect.

In a number of writings Charles Taylor has emphasized the importance of cultural survival as a good and value for minority groups. In *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition,"* for example, he writes: "It is axiomatic for Quebec governments that the survival and flourishing of French culture in Quebec is a good."<sup>7</sup> Noting the importance of this insight, McMahan says it shows how for participants in a culture its survival has "impersonal value."<sup>8</sup> I agree that in one important sense the survival of a culture is an "impersonal" value or good, but in another sense, which seems to be the one McMahan has in mind, it is not, or is not most importantly, impersonal.

The survival of a culture is an impersonal good in the sense that is not reducible to the goods of individual persons, or to goods located in individual persons' lives. Consider francophone Quebecers who care deeply that there be a French culture in Quebec three generations from now. Do they believe that the survival of French culture is a good because better human lives will be lived if French culture survives than if it does not? Do they believe, more specifically, that their great-grandchildren will lead better lives if they are born and raised in a French culture than if, that culture having disappeared, those great-grandchildren are born and raised as full members of an English culture? I do not believe these Quebecers need or even should, if they wish to avoid chauvinism, believe this. They should grant that after enough time the disappearance of French culture would not be worse for persons in the sense of making the lives lived by persons worse. If, despite this, they continue to view the survival of their culture as a good, they must view it as an impersonal good in the following sense: it would be better if French culture survived even if this would not make the lives persons live more valuable.<sup>9</sup>

Valuing cultural survival in this way does not require the metaphysical view that cultures or nations exist separately from, or over and above, their individual members. It is fully compatible with the reductionist view that facts about nations consist entirely in facts about individuals and the relations between them. According to this reductionist view, for French culture to survive in Quebec is only and entirely for individuals in Quebec to live and interact in certain ways. But while holding that the existence of a culture is reducible to facts about individuals, a nationalist can deny that the good of the culture's existing is reducible to the goods of individuals. The fact that people interact in certain ways can have a value that is separate from the values present in their individual lives.<sup>10</sup>

Cultural survival, then, is an impersonal good in the sense that it does not consist in the goods of individual persons. But the word "impersonal" is often used in another sense, one equivalent to "impartial." In this sense, an impersonal good is one it is appropriate for all agents to desire and pursue and to weigh impartially against other similar goods. This seems to be the sense McMahan has in mind when he calls cultural survival an "impersonal value." He introduces the topic of survival while discussing the instrumental arguments that can be given, from an impartialist

standpoint, for endorsing some degree of national partiality, and he considers it alongside a value that cannot but be impersonal in this second sense--namely, that of the overall cultural diversity of the world. But it seems to me that cultural survival is valued by nationalists, and is thought by them appropriately valued, in a highly partial way. Who is it who cares about the survival of French culture in Quebec? It is surely, above all, francophone Quebecers. And they do not care about their culture's survival only in an impartial way, or merely as contributing to a universal good such as overall cultural diversity. If they did, they would gladly accept the disappearance of French culture in Quebec if that somehow allowed the survival of two other cultures elsewhere in the world. This is not their attitude; they care specially about the survival of their own culture. In the same way, it seems to me, people outside a culture do not have nearly as much reason to care about its survival as a good. McMahan writes that people outside a culture "are capable of appreciating its intrinsic value" and of "perceiving in a particular alien culture a variety of merits that may not be replicated in any other culture." But these remarks, though true, do not suffice to establish the appropriateness of impartial concern for another culture. I can appreciate that the well-being of someone else's children is a good while believing that I ought to care much more about my own children's wellbeing. And in my view commonsense nationalism does not give people outside a culture much moral duty to care directly about the culture's survival. This is obscured in many actual situations by the fact that the members of the culture do desire its survival. Thus if francophone Quebecers care deeply about their culture's survival, this gives other people, and especially anglophone Canadians, a reason of a more familiar kind to support measures that will ensure the culture's survival--namely, that Quebecers desire it. But what if a majority of Quebecers ceased to care about their culture's survival and instead preferred assimilating into English culture? In this situation I believe Quebecers in the minority would still feel a strong duty to fight for their culture and to try to persuade the majority to change their minds. But non-Quebecers would surely not feel any such strong duty, nor would they be failing in not feeling it. They might appropriately feel some mild regret about the loss of a distinctive culture and the loss of some overall diversity in the world, but they would not feel strongly bound to prevent the assimilation, for example, by offering subsidies to Quebecers who retain their French culture. When it is considered in itself and apart from the desires it gives rise to in members, the survival of a culture does not seem to be something that, according to commonsense nationalism, nonmembers have a strong reason to care about or pursue.

I have suggested that cultural survival, though an impersonal good in the sense that it is not reducible to the goods of individuals, is the object of highly partial attitudes. The same can be true of other impersonal goals associated with a culture. For example, nationalists can care that their cultures not only survive but also achieve the full flowering or self-expression that comes through sovereignty and independent statehood. In this case the importance of the impersonal good may be harder to see because there can also be personal goods at stake in sovereignty. Thus nationalists may believe that the individuals in their culture will engage in more valuable political activity or live under more culturally sensitive institutions if their government is entirely their own. But if it is possible to value the survival of one's culture apart from any benefits to individuals, it is surely possible to value sovereignty and statehood in the same way, and I think those active in independence movements do commonly have this impersonal desire. They value their nation's sovereignty, as they value their culture's survival, as something good partly in itself. Thus a central force in the Quebec sovereignty movement has been the desire that francophone Quebecers affirm their status as *un peuple* by establishing their own nation-state. In fact, nationalists can have many impersonal goals that they value in a partial way: that their culture flourish in the arts and sciences, that it be economically vigorous, that it produce athletes who win medals at the Olympics. Beyond this, nationalists can have impersonal political goals that they value partially: that their nation occupy a large territory, that it be militarily powerful, that it dominate its neighbors and even dictate to the world.

In this list of impersonal goals, there is a large moral difference between the innocuous first goal, cultural survival, and the politically threatening ones that come later, such as military power and world domination. But this is nothing new in the study of nationalism, which is often described as Janus-faced, attractive in some forms and terrifying in others. And our responses to the list may be guided by the view, which many writers on this subject endorse, that any acceptable form of national partiality must be constrained by respect for the basic rights of all individuals, no less in other countries than in one's own. One may pursue one's own nation's good and do so in preference to other nations' good but only in ways that respect fundamental rights.<sup>11</sup> As it happens, the more acceptable impersonal goals, such

as cultural survival, can usually be pursued successfully without violating anyone's rights, whereas it is hard to see territorial expansion or world domination achieved without violating rights. The different impersonal goals may differ morally not so much in themselves, therefore, as in the means likely to be necessary for their achievement.

I do not claim that every form of nationalism involves concern for impersonal goods; some nationalists may favor only the interests of their individual conationals. But it seems to me that the two forms of partiality often go together, and I will therefore define full-blooded nationalism as combining a greater concern for the impersonal goods of one's own culture, such as its survival and flourishing, with a greater concern for the interests of one's conationals. In a phrase I have used above, full-blooded nationalism involves partiality both toward one's nation, seen as having certain impersonal goods, and toward one's conationals. If this characterization is correct, it has an important implication for the morality of nationalism.

If full-blooded nationalism involves two components, a successful moral justification of it must address both. It must show the appropriateness of partiality toward one's conationals and also toward one's nation's impersonal good. Here the difficulties facing the two justifications seem interestingly different.

Consider, first, partiality toward one's conationals. There is no doubt that one ought morally to care about one's conationals; they are people, and one ought in general to care about people. The difficulty is to show why one should care more about these people than about others who are not members of one's nation, or why partiality toward this particular group is appropriate. In the situation where partiality seems most clearly justified, that of the family, it rests on a special relationship between people that is both rich and intense. The members of a family care deeply about each other, have lived together for many years, and have to a significant degree shaped each other's characters. Their interactions have been as close as people's typically ever are. But the relations among conationals are nothing like this. I have never met the vast majority of my fellow Canadians and do not know who they are; the causal links between our lives are tenuous at best. Especially worrisome is the fact that these links do not seem closer than my links with many non-Canadians—for example, with Americans living just across the Alberta-Montana border. In fact, with respect to closeness, the relations among conationals seem comparable to those among members of a race, who likewise mostly have not met. If the relations between conationals hold only to a limited degree, and not much more than between non-nationals, how can they justify any substantial degree of partiality?

The justification of the second form of partiality, toward one's nation's impersonal good, faces the opposite difficulty. Here there does not seem to be a large problem about justifying the attitude's partiality. Only one culture or nation in the world is mine; all the others are not mine. This is not just a small difference in degree but a large difference, perhaps a difference in kind. So if the justification of strong partiality requires a large difference in linkage or connectedness, we have that here. The problem, rather, is to show that impersonal goods are morally appropriate objects of any concern in the first place. What can be called "individualist" theories of the good deny this. Individualist theories hold that the only goods there are, and thus the only objects of rational concern, are personal goods, or the goods of individuals.<sup>12</sup> According to individualism, nationalists who value the survival or flourishing of their culture apart from any effects on individuals are being irrational and fetishistic. Their attitude is objectionable not because of its partiality but because of its object, which is not a genuine good because it is not a feature of individuals' lives. Nor is it only individualism in the strict sense that counts against the second form of partiality. A more moderate view allows that there can be impersonal goods and rational concern for them but insists that these goods are always relatively minor and the concern they call for always of less weight than the concern required for individuals. According to this moderate view, a partial attitude toward one's nation's impersonal good is allowed but not in a strength that often allows promoting that good at the expense of benefits to individuals.

To summarize: If there are two forms of national partiality, they need two justifications, and the difficulties facing these justifications are different. That one should care somehow about one's conationals is not in doubt; the question is whether it is right to care more about them than about non-nationals. As for a nation's impersonal good, if some concern for it is appropriate, it seems plausible that this is a highly partial concern. The difficult question here is

whether that initial concern is appropriate: whether impersonal goods are worth caring about or whether the only, or only important, goods are those of individuals.

### **Partiality and History**

Having suggested the importance to nationalism of impersonal goods, I will now set them aside and consider the more commonly recognized aspect of nationalism: partiality toward one's conationals. This partiality has many more specific manifestations. Nationalists typically care much more about relieving economic hardship within the nation than outside it; compare what nations spend on domestic welfare programs with what they spend on foreign aid. Nationalists also want immigration policy decided primarily by considering the effects on people already within the nation rather than on those who want to join. These various positions may receive some support from concern for impersonal goals like the nation's flourishing as a collective, but they are primarily directed at individuals. Setting aside the impersonal component of nationalism, therefore, I will consider the moral justification of partiality toward one's individual conationals. When partiality toward certain individuals is justified, it is because certain special relations hold between oneself and them. To what degree do these relations hold between members of a nation?

Because the arena in which partiality seems most clearly justified is the family, defenders of nationalism often try to assimilate the relations among conationals to those among family members. As we have seen, however, this assimilation is problematic; especially in the degree of interaction they involve, nations are not like large families. To many writers, therefore, it has seemed that the degree of national partiality that is justified is even in the most favorable circumstances much less than most nationalists desire.

In this section I will sketch a reply to this widespread skepticism about national partiality. This reply concedes that along one important dimension the relations between conationals have much less of the character that justifies partiality than do familial relations, but it claims that along another dimension, which most writers ignore, they have roughly as much.

First, however, I must state a presupposition of my argument: that the basis of partiality among conationals must be an objective rather than a subjective relation and, in particular, cannot be just the fact that conationals care more about each other than about non-nationals. It may be, as is sometimes argued, that certain subjective facts--that is, certain attitudes on the part of individuals--are necessary for a nation to exist. For example, it may be that individuals must view membership in a group as an important part of their identity before the group constitutes a nation. But questions about when a nation exists are different from questions about when its members should be partial toward each other, and the latter questions cannot turn on mere facts about caring. There are two decisive arguments for this conclusion.<sup>13</sup> One is that a purely subjective basis could not rule out the racial partiality that most of us find morally offensive. The fact that racists care more about people with their own skin color would by itself make it right for them to do so. The second argument is that a subjective basis cannot justify what nationalists typically affirm--namely, a duty to favor one's conationals that is binding even on those who do not now care about their conationals. I will assume, then, that the basis of national partiality must be some objective relation -- that is, some relation that holds independently of people's attitudes. To determine which relation this is, we must look more closely at the objective side of personal or familial relations.

Consider my relation to my wife. If I love her specially, it is partly for certain qualities that she has. Some of these qualities I am attracted to without judging them to be intrinsically good, such as her appearance and the sound of her voice. Others I do judge to be good, such as her trustworthiness, her intelligence, and her concern for other people. Especially with these latter qualities it is important that my beliefs about them be true, that she, in fact, have the qualities, and that they truly be good. But even if all my relevant beliefs are true, my wife's having these qualities does not explain all my emotional attachment to her. If it did, I would abandon my wife the moment someone else came along with the same properties to a higher degree. Or if, just before dying, my wife had a clone of herself made to stay with me, I would think myself no worse off for the exchange. But of course I would not trade in my wife in this way. Though I love her partly for her qualities, I do not do so in a way that would accept substitution. I also love her, in the common phrase, "as an individual," or for herself.

What does it mean to love a person "as an individual"? In my view, it does not mean loving a person apart from any qualities at all but rather loving the person for qualities that no one else can share. More specifically, it involves loving the person for certain historical qualities, ones deriving from his or her participation with one in a shared history. Thus I love my wife not only as trustworthy, intelligent, and so on but also as the person who nursed me through that illness, with whom I spent that wonderful first summer, and with whom I discovered that hotel on Kootenay Lake. These historical qualities focus my love on my wife as an individual, since no substitute, not even a clone, can be the very person who did those things with me. A highly romantic view of love and friendship holds that once these historical qualities are established they entirely determine the relationship, which should therefore never end and always imposes duties of partiality. This is the view expressed in Shakespeare's line: "Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds." But I think most of us believe that historical qualities, though part of the basis for love and friendship, are, again, not the entire basis. If my wife changes radically, losing the general or shareable qualities I admire and taking on ones I find despicable, I will no longer feel attached to her or bound by duties of partial concern. My love, in other words, has a dual basis. My wife's role in a shared history with me explains why I love her more than other people with similar general qualities, but her general qualities matter, too. If those qualities changed enough, our history would not be a sufficient basis to maintain my love or to continue to demand partiality toward her.

We can see the same dual basis in nationalists' attachment to their nation and conationals. Nationalists are, first, attracted to their culture and the activities that define it, thinking them to a considerable degree good. They need not believe that their culture is superior in the sense of being the single best in the world. That chauvinist belief would not be credible and, in any case, would justify not universalist nationalism but the belief that everyone in the world should promote the one best culture. Instead, nationalists need only believe that their culture is one of perhaps many in the world that are good. What attaches them specially to this culture and its members are historical facts: that this is the culture they grew up in, that their conationals share with them a history of being shaped by, participating in, and sustaining this culture. The favorable evaluation of their conationals' cultural activities is a necessary basis for this nationalist attachment, but it is not sufficient. There is also, and distinguishing their conationals from other people whose culture is equally good, the crucial fact of a shared cultural history.

This dual basis can lead to conflicts about national attachment. As Yael Tamir writes, "Citizens of a state involved in an unjust war may be torn between the feeling that they have an associative obligation to serve in the army together with their enlisted fellows, and their commitment to a moral code dictating they should refuse."<sup>14</sup> In the situation Tamir describes, the citizens' state is not now good; it has at least some general qualities that are evil. But the citizens are still historically connected to this state as the one they grew up under. How they resolve this conflict depends on which of the two bases of national attachment they find more important, which in many particular cases will depend on how evil their state currently is. If it is not irredeemably evil, the citizens may continue to feel special duties toward it and work harder to reform it than to reform other equally evil states elsewhere. But if their state degenerates too far, their historical connection to it may be outweighed and their feelings of national attachment, like love for an individual whose character has changed utterly, may end.

If national attachment rests partly on the belief that one's culture is good, it is important that that belief be true, which requires the culture to be, in fact, good. This is one point where evaluative considerations bear on the justification of national partiality, but there is another point as well. Considerations about good and evil also help determine when a shared history is of the right kind to justify partial concern and, when it is, what degree of partiality is justified.

Consider again a personal relationship like that between spouses. Here the shared history is predominantly one of mutual benefit or beneficence; two people have helped each other through difficult times and also shared good times, giving and taking pleasure in each other's company. And I think a history of reciprocal benefit or, alternatively, one where people have jointly benefited others, such as the students in a school where these people taught, can be a legitimate basis of partiality. The same is true of a history of shared suffering; people who lived in the same barracks in a Nazi labor camp and suffered the same evils there can appropriately feel on the basis of their shared history some greater concern for each other's well-being. But I do not think a shared history justifies partiality when it is a history of

doing evil, as for former members of an SS unit that ran and terrorized a labor camp. Many of us find something obscene in the idea of nostalgic reunions, even at this late date, of former SS colleagues, and there is a similar obscenity in the idea of partiality toward former SS colleagues. If an SS veteran receives a letter from one of his former colleagues claiming financial hardship and requesting a loan of \$1,000, should he feel a special duty to honor the request or to help his former colleague before helping others who are equally in need? It seems to me that he should not, even if his former colleague is now morally reformed. If anything, given the evil of the history they share, he should feel a duty not to associate with his former colleague and should contribute first to others who did not participate in that aspect of his past. Whereas a shared history of doing good or suffering evil can justify duties of partiality, a shared history of doing evil cannot.

These points suggest a general account of the basis of duties of partiality. Some activities and states of people, most notably their doing good or suffering evil, call for a positive, caring, or associative response. Others, such as their doing evil, call for a negative or dissociative response. Partiality between people is appropriate when they have shared in the past in the first kind of activity or state. For example, if two people have a shared history of doing good, either reciprocally or to others, partiality between them in the present is a way of honoring that good fact about their past. (This is why partiality among former SS colleagues is troubling; it seems to honor a past that properly calls for dishonor.) One should, in general, care more about people who have shared with one in activities and states that call for a caring response. This account does not claim to justify partiality of concern as a general moral phenomenon; on the contrary, it assumes it. It assumes that one has a special duty to honor past doings of good or sufferings of evil that involved oneself. But it does give particular duties of partiality a more abstract basis. In the many realms where partiality is appropriate--the family, private clubs, perhaps the nation--it is an appropriate response to a history that joins oneself and other people in activities or states that are good or that call for association.

This general account can explain our attitudes to racial partiality. As McMahan notes,<sup>15</sup> while we condemn racial discrimination by members of a dominant racial group, we often think it appropriate for minority races to celebrate their distinctness and even to implement discriminatory policies that benefit their members at the expense of others. In current conditions, black and aboriginal solidarity movements have a different moral status than white supremacy movements. The explanation, I would argue, is that minority racial groups have a shared history of the kind that makes partiality morally appropriate--namely, a shared history of suffering evil because of one's racial membership. But the history of dominant racial groups, which is largely one of oppressing the minority, is not of the kind that justifies partiality. Among members of the minority, there is a shared history that morally warrants partiality toward other members; among members of the majority, there is one that positively precludes it,

More important, the account suggests a defense of national partiality against the skeptical argument mentioned above. If certain people have a shared history of doing good, what determines the degree of partiality that is justified between them? Two factors suggest themselves: the degree to which the people's history is shared or involves interaction between them, and the amount of good their interaction produced. Other things being equal, people whose history involves closer relations or more intimate contact have stronger duties of partiality. Also, other things being equal, people whose interactions produced more good, for themselves or for others, have stronger duties of partiality.

The history of family members scores extremely high on the first of these dimensions--namely, closeness of contact. Family members interact intimately on a daily basis, with large effects on each other's lives. Family history also scores high on the dimension of good done, given the large benefits given by parents to their children, spouses to each other, and even children to their parents. Surely family members benefit each other as much as they do any individuals.

A nation's history, by contrast, scores very low on the first dimension. As I have said, I have not met the majority of my fellow Canadians and do not know who they are. But a nation's history does much better on the second dimension. Consider another example from my history. In the 1960s Canadians created a national health care system that continues to provide high-quality medical care to all citizens regardless of their ability to pay. The benefit this medicare system provides any one citizen is probably less than that provided by his or her family, but it is still substantial, and it is one Canadians have provided together. Canadians derive equally substantial benefits from many other aspects of

their political activity. When these benefits are added together, they constitute a significant counterweight to the weakness of national relations on the first dimension, that of closeness of contact. The critique of national partiality considers only this first dimension, of closeness. But if we believe that a necessary basis for justified partiality is a shared history, that this history must be good rather than evil, and that the degree of partiality a history justifies depends partly on the quantity of goodness it produces or embodies, we have some response to the critique. On the one dimension, a national history does indeed have much less of the character that justifies partiality than a family history. But on another dimension, the national history has roughly as much.

This account of the basis of national partiality fits most obviously those many nationalisms that point to glorious deeds in the nation's past, such as saving Europe for Christendom or inventing representative democracy. But the account should not be too closely tied to these nationalisms, for two reasons. First, if the basis of national partiality is objective rather than subjective, it must depend on the nation's actual history rather than on beliefs about that history that are all too often false. A national mythology with no basis in fact cannot justify nationalist policies today.<sup>16</sup> Second, the benefits produced in a nation's history need not be specially grand; on the contrary, they can be perfectly ordinary. Consider again familial partiality. The benefits my wife and I have given each other, such as companionship and love, are also given to each other by countless other couples. What ties my wife and me specially together is not that we have produced unique goods but that we have produced familiar goods jointly, in interactions with each other. The goods in a nation's history can likewise be familiar. Before enacting medicare, Canadians together maintained political institutions and through them the rule of law in Canada, which ensured liberty and security for all Canadian citizens. The same liberty and security were produced in other nations, but only my fellow Canadians produced them with me, and it is that historical fact that is decisive. According to the account I am proposing, it is important that a nation's history have produced significant benefits, but these benefits need not be the grand ones of national mythologies or even at all different from those produced in other nations' histories.

Nations as defined by political institutions<sup>17</sup> are not the only large groups that can have this kind of history. Consider a linguistic and cultural group. Its members have together sustained a language and through it the possibility of beneficial communication for all its speakers. Other groups have also sustained languages, but this group has done it here. They have also, as writers and readers, sustained a literature and an artistic tradition that provide further benefits. When political and cultural groups coincide, these two grounds of partiality reinforce each other. The nation's members have two separate reasons for being partial to the same individuals. But when political and cultural boundaries do not coincide, there can be conflicts about partiality. Consider francophone Quebecers. They share a political history with all Canadians and a cultural history with a smaller number of francophone Canadians. Which group they feel more partial to will depend on how good they think the groups' present qualities are and how beneficial they think the groups' histories have been. Those who think of Canada as a successful country with an admirable political history will be strongly attached to the larger group; those who see present failure and a past of suppressing minorities will not.

Whether a nation is defined politically or culturally, its history differs from a family's in involving many more people, both as recipients of its benefits and as participants in producing them. If only the first of these differences, in the number of beneficiaries, mattered morally, the nation's history would score much higher on the dimension of good done than the family's, since its benefits are much more widely dispersed. The total good resulting from Canadian medicare, for example, is vastly greater than any produced in a family. But it is more plausible to count both differences about numbers, so that what matters for this dimension is not the total benefit produced in a history but something closer to the average benefit per participant, which in the national case roughly equals the average benefit per recipient.<sup>18</sup> Even when we take this view, however, the good produced in a national history is comparable to that in a family history. If we consider the benefits each Canadian receives from living under the rule of law and with social programs such as medicare, they are surely of similar size to those that person receives from his or her family. If this is so, a national history scores roughly as well on the dimension of good done as a family history. Since the national history scores less well on the dimension of interaction, the result on balance is that less partiality is justified toward one's conationals than toward one's family members. This is an intuitively plausible result. Not even the most ardent nationalist claims that one should care as much about one's conationals, as conationals, as about one's spouse or

child. And the degree of concern that is justified toward conationals is considerably greater than toward non-nationals, since one's history with the latter scores very poorly on both dimensions. One not only has had no close interactions with nonnationals but also has produced no significant goods with them. The political and cultural institutions of a nation enable its members to cooperate, however indirectly, in producing significant benefits. But there are no comparable institutions joining non-nationals, even ones living just across a national border, and therefore no comparable goods they can be said jointly to have produced.

I wish I could say more precisely what degree of national partiality this historical account justifies. Unfortunately, that would require weighing against each other more precisely the two dimensions of closeness of contact and good done in a history, which I cannot now do. Nor do I see that more precise weightings of these dimensions follow from the general ideas I have advanced. So I will content myself with two more modest conclusions. The first is that, whatever degree of national partiality is intrinsically justified, it is more than the limited degree that the comparison with families initially suggested. Though a national history scores less well on one dimension than a family history, it scores comparably well on another and therefore justifies at least a moderate degree of partiality. It may be that any morally acceptable national partiality must be constrained by respect for the basic rights of all persons, both within one's nation and outside it. But familial partiality is likewise constrained by respect for rights, and it still has considerable room to express itself. The second conclusion is that it is no surprise that nations and cultures are prime objects of partial attitudes. According to the historical account, partiality is justified when the members of a group have worked together in the past to produce significant benefits. But nations and cultures embody just the institutions that make such beneficial interactions possible. My nation is an appropriate object of partial attitudes because it more than other similarly sized groups has allowed me to act with others to produce significant human goods.

## NOTES

An earlier version of this essay was presented as a commentary on Jeff McMahan's "The Limits of National Partiality" at the Conference on the Ethics of Nationalism, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, April 1994. Many of its ideas were stimulated by McMahan's fine essay; I am also grateful to him and to Robert McKim for helpful comments.

1. David Miller, "The Ethical Significance of Nationality," *Ethics* 98 (1988): 649-50. The same view is defended in his *On Nationality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).
2. See my *Perfectionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).
3. This argument is suggested in Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," *Political Theory* 12 (1984): 81-96; and Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), chap. 1.
4. As an analogy, consider a different version of perfectionism defended by Rousseau, Humboldt, and Mill. They hold that the nature whose realization constitutes a person's good is not one shared with all other humans or even one shared with all members of one's culture but rather a nature distinctive of that person as an individual. Each person has a unique individual identity, by realizing which the person achieves "individuality." But do these writers say that each person ought to care only or even more about his or her own achievement of individuality than about other people's? They do not. They say that each person ought to care impartially about the achievement of individuality by all and to support those institutions, especially liberal institutions, that will permit individuality for all. But if this individualist perfectionism is compatible with full impartiality, surely cultural perfectionism is as well.
5. Could the cultural perfectionist claim that the demand for partiality is not just one component of every cultural identity but an essential component, so that if I do not care more about my conationals I do not realize my cultural identity to any degree at all? This claim surely is, as a claim about identities, utterly implausible. And even if it is accepted, it still does not show why, at a foundational level, I should care more about the realization to some rather than no degree of my nation's identity than of others'.

6. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Is Patriotism a Virtue?*. Lindley Lecture (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 1984), pp, 9, 12, A weaker version of metaethical particularism is defended by Michael Walzer in *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), chaps, 1-2, and *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).
7. Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition,"* ed, Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p, 58.
8. See chapter 8.
9. The importance of goods that are impersonal in this sense for the morality of war is brought out in Jeff McMahan and Robert McKim, "The Just War and the Gulf War," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 23 (1993): 522, Note that what Derek Parfit calls an "impersonal" as against a "person-affecting" principle of beneficence does not involve reference to impersonal goods in my sense (see his *Reasons and Persons* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1984], pp, 386-87), Parfit's "impersonal" view holds that the best outcome is the one in which the best lives are lived, even though the people living those lives may be numerically different from the people in alternative outcomes. (Numerical nonidentity is especially likely when the outcomes involve large-scale and long-lasting changes, as the survival and disappearance of a culture do.) But Parfit's "impersonal" view still holds, with other versions of beneficence, that the relevant goods in the different outcomes are all states of individual persons. It is this latter claim that the affirmation of what I call impersonal goods denies. This affirmation rejects not only person-affecting beneficence but also the individualism about value still present in Parfit's "impersonal" view.
10. If the impersonal view accepts metaphysical reductionism, it embodies G. E. Moore's principle of "organic unities;" according to which the value of a whole need not equal the sum of the values its parts would have if they existed alone. See Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), chap. 6.
11. See, for example, chapter 8.
12. Individualism is affirmed in Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, "National Self-Determination;" *Journal of Philosophy* 87 (1990): 439-61; and Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, pp. 83-84. Interestingly, Margalit and Raz allow that the interest of a group is not reducible to the interests of its members (p. 450) but insist that only individual interests are relevant to the justification of national rights.
13. See chapter 8.
14. Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 102.
15. See chapter 8.
16. It is also relevant that these beliefs usually concern the distant past, which in my view counts less in justifying partiality than does the recent past. Immediately after World War II, national partiality on the part of Germans would have been morally unthinkable because of the evil their nation had just done. It is much less so today, after fifty years of the *Federal Republic*.
17. Those of us who live in multicultural states, especially ones like Canada where two cultures are geographically separated, are much more likely than others to define "nation" in political rather than in ethnic or cultural terms. If we did not, we would be barred by language from any pan-Canadian "nationalism." The Canadian understanding of "nation" is nicely illustrated by an incident from the 1968 federal election campaign. The Progressive Conservatives, seeking to reverse decades of electoral failure in Quebec, announced a *deux nations* policy, according to which Canada was composed of French-speaking and English-speaking nations. Pierre Trudeau, recently elected leader of the Liberal party, said he rejected this "two nations" policy. He did not favor the separation of Quebec but wanted Canada to remain one nation. Though Trudeau's reply benefited him electorally in English Canada, it was widely

regarded as linguistically mischievous. The English word "nation;" it was said, is not equivalent to the French *nation*. While the French word has a primarily cultural significance, the English word is political. The correct translation of *deux nations* is therefore "two [founding] peoples," which does not carry, as "two nations" does, any implication of separate political institutions.

18. I owe this point to Jeff McMahan. Note that treating both differences as significant plausibly implies that members of small nations have just as strong duties of partiality as members of large nations. If only the number of recipients were significant, citizens of the United States would have a duty of partiality ten times as strong as that of Canadians because their history has benefited ten times as many people.