In everyday political discourse, we often make judgements that seem to involve holding nations responsible for their actions, or for the consequences that follow from those actions. We say that Russians are responsible for the civil war in Chechnya, Israelis for the fate of Palestinian refugees, and Americans for their excessive contribution to global warming. We also make judgements about events that have occurred in the national past: we hold Britons responsible for the deaths of one million Irish people in the potato famine, Turks for the Armenian genocide, and Germans for the Holocaust. But against who or what are these judgements directed? In particular, are they directed against nations or against states? Is it the British people or the British state that we hold responsible for the Irish deaths?

In this chapter, I want to show that judgements of national responsibility are not only defensible (under appropriate conditions), but are also more basic than judgements of state responsibility. Often, when states are held responsible for the outcomes they produce, they are being judged as agents of the people they are supposed to serve. State responsibility might seem easier to establish, since where states are involved we can point to specific institutions—governments, legislatures, armies, and so forth—as the bearers of responsibility, and we can also point to particular acts—passing legislation, signing treaties, or declaring war—for whose consequences states can be held responsible. But to limit responsibility to states...

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considered as formally constituted bodies would have several disadvantages. One of these is that if we divorce state responsibility from national responsibility, it then becomes difficult to show how individual people can share in the responsibility to compensate those whom the state they belong to has harmed, whereas if we treat states as acting on behalf of nations, such collective responsibility will be easier to establish. Another is that we may want to hold nations responsible for actions performed by states that no longer exist, as in the case of the continuing responsibility of the German people for acts carried out by the Nazi state that was destroyed and replaced in 1945. A third is that, although nations may act through states, in which case national responsibility and state responsibility may coincide, in other cases this may not happen. Think, for example, of a stateless nation whose quest for self-determination leads it to carry out a terror campaign against the people holding it in subjection. For these reasons, it is important to show that our practice of holding nations responsible, for both the 'self-regarding' and 'other-regarding' effects of their actions, is philosophically defensible.

The sense of responsibility that is immediately at stake here is outcome responsibility. As we saw in Chapter 4, judgements of outcome responsibility can in some circumstances ground judgements of remedial responsibility: if A is outcome responsible for P's deprivation, A may have a remedial responsibility to help P. But this does not always follow, since remedial responsibilities can be distributed on other grounds as well. Perhaps some resistance to the idea of national responsibility arises because it is thought automatically to entail remedial responsibility, especially in the case of poverty-stricken peoples: if nation A is responsible for its own dire economic condition, as a result of civil war or disastrous public policy, then no one else has a remedial responsibility to go to its aid. But this does not in fact follow, for reasons that were laid out in the second half of Chapter 4. Moreover, outcome responsibility will in most cases be shared between nations in an interdependent world. So we should not foreclose the discussion of national responsibility on the grounds that it is bound to produce repugnant conclusions about global justice, with poor nations abandoned to their fate. How far national responsibility extends is a large issue that the present chapter will not try to resolve decisively. Its aim is more modest: to show that national responsibility, as a species of collective responsibility, makes (ethical) sense, and therefore that the people who make up a nation may sometimes properly be held liable for what their nation has done.

This chapter's scope is limited in one further way: it is concerned with national responsibility in the present, that is with the outcome responsibility of those who currently belong to the nation for what the nation does now. Responsibility for the national past is a separate matter, to be dealt with in Chapter 6. Clearly, many judgements made in practice about national responsibility presuppose that the present generation of compatriots can be held responsible (in some sense) for what their predecessors did; at the very least they may be remedially responsible for harms caused by earlier generations, through colonial expansion, warfare, slavery, etc. Such judgements raise difficult questions about the inheritance of responsibility that cannot be answered using the apparatus I shall deploy below. We might therefore see the complete argument for national responsibility as involving three separate steps. First, we need to explain and justify the idea of collective responsibility in general. We must show that it makes sense to hold collective groups—teams, crowds, corporations, and so forth—responsible for the effects of what they do in such a way that the individual members of those collectives can properly be held liable for the ensuing costs. Second, we must extend the argument to nations, understood at this point as contemporaneous groups of people; we must show that nations have features such that the general analysis of collective responsibility applies also to them. Third, we need to develop a further argument

2 Some authors consider it important to distinguish between groups that have a formal structure—with a defined membership, a fixed procedure for making decisions, and so forth—and those whose members are more loosely associated. This affects assignments of collective responsibility—for instance, Cane ascribes 'group responsibility' to corporations and other such rule-governed bodies, but 'shared responsibility' to individuals acting in concert. He argues that in the former case but not the latter, responsibility and the ensuing liability to pay costs remains with the group and does not descend to individual members. See P. Cane, Responsibility in Law and Morality (Oxford: Hart, 2002), ch. 5. Others have challenged this view: see, for instance, L. May, The Morality of Groups: Collective Responsibility, Group-Based Harm and Corporate Rights (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987). I prefer to use the idea of collective responsibility to cover all these cases, leaving it an open question for the moment what difference the presence or absence of a formal structure makes when responsibility is assigned. In the case of nations, I address this question in Section III of this chapter.
that can apply to nations considered now as extended in historical time—we need to show, in other words, that it makes sense to hold present-day nations responsible for the actions of their forebears in such a way that their current members can be held liable to bear the (self-regarding or other-regarding) costs of those actions. Each step is of course challengeable and needs careful argument. In this chapter, I try to justify steps one and two, and in the one that follows, step three.

II

To help our thinking about collective responsibility generally I want to elaborate two models, which I shall call the like-minded group model and the cooperative practice model. These are to be thought of as ideal types to which real groups may approximate to different degrees, and that may in practice overlap—a real group, that is to say, may have some features that belong to the like-minded group model and some that belong to the cooperative practice model. I do not want to claim that it is a necessary condition for ascribing collective responsibility to a set of individuals that they should display like-minded group or cooperative practice features. It has been argued with some plausibility that there are circumstances in which we are justified in holding even randomly assembled collections of individuals responsible for the outcomes of their actions. But I think that these are the models that are most relevant in thinking about national responsibility; I shall argue later that we are justified in holding nations responsible in so far as they display like-minded group and/or cooperative practice features. So let me begin with the idea of a like-minded group.

It is easiest to introduce this by means of an example. Consider a mob rampaging through a neighbourhood, terrifying the residents, destroying property, and looting shops. Different participants in the mob act in different ways. Some actively attack persons or property; others shout abuse or issue threats; yet others play a more passive role, running alongside the activists, urging them on and contributing generally to the atmosphere of excitement and fear. If the event we had to apportion individual moral or legal responsibility for what has happened, we should need to identify the precise causal role that each had played in creating the damage. But it is also the case, I want to argue, that the whole mob bears collective responsibility for the effects of the riot, and together they can be held liable for the cost of repairing the damage to persons and property. The specific intentions of each participant at the beginning of the riot may have been different: some may have started out meaning to inflict physical damage; others may have wanted to make a political point; and so forth. What matters is that each person took part with the same general attitude—“teaching them a lesson”, “showing them that we mean business”, etc.—and each made some causal contribution to the final outcome, whether this involved engaging directly in destructive acts, or merely in supporting and encouraging those who did. Indeed, we may not be able to disentangle individual contributions. Consider several members of the mob throwing bricks at a plate-glass window at roughly the same moment: we cannot say that any particular brick thrower was (causally) responsible for smashing the window, but we can say that the group as a whole is outcome responsible for the damage they brought about. What justifies us in saying not only that the mob as a collective is responsible for the damage that it has caused but also that its individual members share in the collective responsibility? Recall that our interest in outcome responsibility derives at least in part from our


2 See Michael Zimmerman's argument that where more people than were necessary to bring about O all acted in a way designed to bring about O, no participant can escape responsibility by claiming that his or her actions were indispensable to O's occurring. (M. Zimmerman, 'Sharing Responsibility', *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 22 (1985), 115-22.)

3 For a thoughtful discussion of the circumstances in which the collective responsibility of groups either does or does not descend to their individual members, see J. Feinberg, 'Collective Responsibility', in J. Feinberg (ed.), *Doing and Deserving: Essays in the Theory of Responsibility* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970). Feinberg takes as an example of group responsibility without individual responsibility the case of a car full of railway passengers who fail to prevent an armed bandit robbing the train. Acting together the passengers could have overcome the robber, but this would have been heroic, since one or two would probably have been shot in the course of doing so. It seems to me, however, that the group of passengers is only responsible for not preventing the robbery in a causal sense. There is no collective outcome responsibility, in the sense used here, since as we saw imputations of outcome responsibility depend on judgements about what it is reasonable to expect of normal people. It was not reasonable to expect the
interest in remedial responsibility. We want to know whose responsibility it is to clean up the vandalized neighbourhood. Attributing responsibility to the mob as a collective will not help unless responsibility also descends to the individual members, because these are the people who will actually have to bear the clean-up costs (we might imagine them contributing their labour or their money to the clean-up operation). But we also have to show that attributing responsibility to individual rioters is justified, and this we can do by recognizing that they contributed to a collective activity that was certain to inflict damage on other people, whether they specifically intended the overall outcome that actually occurred. Recall that outcome responsibility does not in general require intention: we hold people responsible for the consequences of their actions that a reasonable person would have foreseen, whether these consequences were intended and whether they were actually foreseen by the person in question. This condition was surely met in the case of the riot; anyone participating should have foreseen what a hostile crowd entering a vulnerable neighbourhood was likely to do.

Given that the responsibility of the collective descends to its individual members, why not dispense with the notion of collective responsibility altogether, and instead focus entirely on the outcome responsibility of each individual? As I indicated earlier, it may be impossible to assign specific shares of responsibility for what has happened to individual members of the mob. We may not know what causal contribution each made to the final outcome, and even if we did, it might still be controversial how responsibility should be divided (if there are recognized community leaders among the group conducting the rampage, should they be assigned a greater share of responsibility simply by virtue of that fact?). So our starting point must be that the group is collectively responsible, that other things being equal they are remedially responsible for restoring the damage they have caused, and that every participant bears an equal share of that responsibility. It may then be possible for the participants themselves to make finer-grained allocations of responsibility, depending on what is known about the activities of each member.

whether some can be identified as ringleaders, and so forth. This, however, is irrelevant from the point of view of achieving a fair distribution of costs and benefits between the rioters and their victims. From this perspective, all that matters is that the rioters as a group can be held collectively responsible for the damage they have caused, and are therefore liable to bear the costs of repairing that damage. Similarly, when nations behave in ways that are harmful either to themselves or to others, our primary concern will be to establish collective outcome responsibility for what has happened, in so far as this bears on the allocation of costs between nations. Within each nation, particular individuals or particular subgroups may then be identified as bearing a special responsibility, depending on the circumstances. I shall not attempt to investigate principles for distributing responsibility within nations.

Returning now to the like-minded group model, this applies to groups who share aims and outlooks in common, and who recognize their like-mindedness, so that when individual members act they do so in the light of the support they are receiving from other members of the group. This is particularly clear in the case of the mob. As students of crowd behaviour have long recognized, people in crowds behave differently precisely because of the contagion of those around them. Groups that exemplify this model are not then just collections of individuals who happen to have aims in common; they are groups whose members interact in such a way that even those who play no direct role in producing the outcome that concerns us may nonetheless properly be brought within the scope of collective responsibility. And this allows us to widen the model to take in cases that are less obvious than that of the rioting mob, but that bring us closer to the idea of national responsibility.

6 C.f. here Larry May’s argument that when groups are responsible for harm, the share of responsibility that descends to each member should depend on the causal role played by that person in bringing about, or failing to prevent, the harm. See L. May, Sharing Responsibility (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), chs. 2 and 6.
7 See the analysis in May, The Morality of Groups, chs. 2 and 4.
8 The rioting mob example illustrates how individuals can share in collective responsibility for outcomes that they did not specifically intend, which is one important aspect of national responsibility, but in other ways it works less well as a model of national responsibility. It involves a specific event, limited in time, and it also allows for a relatively clear demarcation between those who share in the responsibility and those who do not: to escape responsibility, in normal
A good example is provided by Feinberg’s discussion of racism in the post-bellum American South. Acts of violence against blacks, Feinberg suggests, were carried out in a context in which Southern whites generally passively sympathized with such acts, even if they were not actively involved in perpetrating them, as a result of a widely shared culture of racial inequality. In these circumstances, it makes sense to hold all Southern whites collectively responsible for keeping blacks in a state of subjugation. Feinberg argues that this includes whites who did not approve of the beatings and lynchings on the grounds of their solidarity with the majority who did. This distinguishes the example from the case of the rioting mob, where I claimed that relatively passive rioters who shared in the general aim of the riot but took no physical part in inflicting damage on persons and property nonetheless were collectively responsible for that damage. The argument in the case of the post-bellum American South is that where a community of people shares a set of cultural values, one of whose effects is to encourage behaviour that results in outcome O, then everyone who belongs to the community shares in the responsibility for O, even if they disapprove of it. By participating in the community they help to sustain the climate of opinion in which the actions in question take place, even if they voice their opposition to the actions themselves.

This of course raises the question of what individuals have to do in order to escape from collective responsibility for the results of the actions of groups to which they belong. I shall postpone discussion of this important question in order to introduce my second model of group responsibility, the cooperative practice model. Again, an example may help to bring out its main features.

Consider an employee-controlled firm whose manufacturing process has unwanted environmental effects—it involves depositing chemical substances in a river, for instance. Members are divided on whether this practice should continue, or whether a different, more expensive, technology should be used, but when the matter is discussed the majority favours staying with the existing process. The employees, I want to claim, are collectively responsible for the environmental damage they are causing, and if they are required to pay the costs of cleaning up the river, these costs should be borne collectively by all the members. Why does collective responsibility extend to the dissenting minority? They are the beneficiaries of a common practice in which participants are treated fairly—they get the income and other benefits that go with the job, and they have a fair chance to influence the firm’s decisions—and so they must also be prepared to carry their share of the costs, in this case the costs that stem from the external impact of the practice. Here again we see the difference between holding people morally responsible for the results of their actions and holding them outcome responsible. It would not in general be right to blame (or punish) members of the minority for what their firm has done to the river—they could quite properly defend themselves by saying that they spoke out against the manufacturing process that caused the pollution. But it is right to hold them, along with others, liable for the damage they have caused.

The cooperative practice model goes further than the like-minded group model in one direction, because there is no requirement here that the group in question should share a common identity or have aims in common; participating in the practice and sharing in the benefits may be sufficient to create responsibility. In another way, however, it is more restrictive, because it imposes fairness requirements that the like-minded group model need not impose. Change our example in such a way that the decisions about which technology to use are taken by a small clique who keep the rest of the workforce in the dark about the whole issue, or skew the distribution of rewards in such a way that one section of the workforce could reasonably claim to be working on exploitative terms, and collective responsibility no longer extends to all members, but at most to the decision-makers or the leading beneficiaries of the practice. The like-minded
group model does not depend in this way on substantive fairness. So long as the group in question is genuinely like-minded, its collective responsibility does not depend on how it allocates power, status, or other benefits among its members. We can therefore see these models as indicating two complementary sources of collective responsibility which may, as I have indicated already, overlap in particular cases. You can share in collective responsibility for an outcome because you form part of a like-minded group that brings the outcome about, or because you are a participant in a cooperative practice that produces the outcome, or for both reasons at once.

My analysis of the sources of collective responsibility may however set liberal alarm bells ringing. For it implies that in certain circumstances membership in a group may be sufficient to establish responsibility for acts performed by other members of that community even when one is opposed to those acts, and this goes against an intuition that it is only what a person does herself that can make her responsible for harmful outcomes. If membership is sufficient for responsibility, then it seems that no one can escape responsibility except by physically removing himself from the group in question, a course of action that may be very difficult if not impossible for the person to take. So we need to take a closer look at the conditions under which a member can legitimately claim that he has acted in such a way that he bears no personal responsibility for the harmful consequences of the policies and practices of his group.

As already suggested, mere inactivity will not, in general, relieve members of their group-based responsibility. A member who stands by and does nothing still provides passive support to other members of his group (in the like-minded group case) or still receives his share of the benefits (in the cooperative practice case). Nor is it sufficient order for the cooperative practice model of responsibility to apply, but I shall restrict my analysis to the simple cases.

13 This intuition is not universally shared. Indeed, paradoxically, it may occur more often to liberal observers looking in from the outside than to those on the ground who find themselves included in collective responsibility. For a robust statement of the opposite view—that mere membership may be enough to implicate someone in collective responsibility no matter what she does—see H. Arendt, ‘Collective Responsibility’, in J. W. Bernauer (ed.), *Amor Mundus: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt* (Boston, MA: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987). Arendt, does, however distinguish collective responsibility in this sense—she calls it ‘political responsibility’—from moral and legal responsibility, in much the same way as Karl Jaspers (see n. 21 below).

Simply to voice your opposition to the activities that are imposing the costs. Speaking up is better than doing nothing, of course, but as our discussion of Southern white racism revealed, even someone who voices opposition to certain of her community’s actions may still, by virtue of her membership, contribute to the climate of opinion in which those actions take place, because she subscribes to the community’s values in general, reinforces them in her daily activities, and perhaps supports the community in material terms. Nor, if the group has a formal procedure for reaching decisions, will voting against the action or policy in question necessarily exempt you from responsibility. Democratic procedures work on the basis that people who find themselves on the losing side of a vote must regard themselves as bound by the result, unless that result is so morally offensive, or so far outside the competence of the decision-making body, that some form of civil disobedience (or its equivalent) is justified. Just as a member of the minority must, except in these special circumstances, comply with the majority’s decision even though she strongly dislikes it, so she must bear her share of the costs if the decision turns out to have costly consequences. After all, were she in the majority, she would expect the losing minority to pay its share.

So what must a dissenting member do to escape from collective outcome responsibility? Unfortunately, it is difficult to say anything more precise than that he or she must take all reasonable steps to prevent the outcome occurring. What is reasonable in a particular case will depend on how seriously harmful the prospective outcome is, and what costs different courses of action will impose on the dissenter. Consider the case of the post-bellum American South. Anyone who joined the NAACP or one of its predecessor organizations, who took part in public demonstrations against white racism, and so forth, and who by virtue of these activities faced hostility from his neighbours in the white community would surely have met the condition. Equally someone who embarked on these activities but was then deterred by serious threats from racist groups to the safety of her home and family should also be exempted from responsibility—this is not a cost that we can reasonably expect an average person to bear in the course of trying to stop racist attacks on blacks (some people may turn out to be willing to bear the costs, but in doing so they reveal themselves to be heroic: our imputations of
responsibility must be based on [admittedly imprecise] judgements about what can reasonably be expected of people in general, not on what exceptional individuals are able to achieve.

But what is the most effective way to combat the outcomes that you oppose is to work inside the relevant group or practice, rather than adopting a stance of outright opposition? In the racism case, for instance, a person opposed to violence towards blacks might believe, with justification, that he would have greater influence by staying within the white community and gently shaming it into adopting more liberal attitudes, whereas by actively opposing the community he would simply be written off as a ‘nigger-lover’ whose opinions could henceforth be ignored. Or again, where a group governs itself through democratic procedures, the most effective way to change its policies may be to stay within democratic parameters — accepting rather than contesting decisions when you find yourself in a minority — since this will increase your influence in the long term. In cases like this, it may be ethically better to accept a share of collective responsibility for a bad outcome than to seek to avoid responsibility by distancing yourself from the group or the practice that produces the outcome. This is not a paradox, provided we keep it in mind that we are talking about outcome responsibility rather than moral responsibility of the blame-incurring kind. The person who with good reason decides that he should use his position as an insider to try to change the way that the collective behaves does the right thing and is not morally blameworthy for the ensuing harm (when his efforts fail or only partly succeed), but he does render himself liable to pay his share of the costs.

Is it an objection to the view of collective responsibility advanced here that it makes people responsible for outcomes simply by virtue of their membership of certain groups, or their participation in certain practices, even though they may not have chosen to be in that position? A liberal Southern white may bitterly regret that he finds himself in a community that supports violence against blacks, with the result that he has to choose between radical opposition that relieves him of collective responsibility, and working within the community to change attitudes while continuing to share in responsibility for the violence. Bear in mind, however, that in other, less controversial, cases people can become responsible for outcomes as a result of chance factors over which they have no control. Virginia Held gives the example of three pedestrians who happen on the scene of an accident. In order to save the victim they must act in concert. It is only chance that brings them together in that place, and yet, confronted by the accident and being the only people able to rescue the victim, they become collectively responsible for the harm he suffers if they fail to form a team and act. This may be unlucky for them: they may have to miss appointments or dirty their clothes to get the victim to safety, but this is luck of an unavoidable kind. We would not be impressed if one of the pedestrians asked ‘why me?’, not just as an expression of frustration at having to miss the concert he was hurrying to attend, but as an attempt to dodge responsibility for the situation that now confronted him. In a similar way, I may see it as regrettable bad luck that I belong to a political community many of whose members are willing to support policies with terrible outcomes, making it incumbent on me to get my hands dirty and help to create a majority for some less objectionable (but still objectionable) alternative. My responsibilities are thrust on me by my circumstances, but they do not cease to be my responsibilities because of that.

The claim that people who belong to like-minded groups or who participate in cooperative practices are collectively responsible for the results of their behaviour does not, then, depend on the assumption that entry into such groups or practices was voluntary or consented to. This is going to be important when we turn our attention to nations in the following section, because, exceptional cases apart, people do not choose to belong to national communities: they are simply born into them. What I have tried to do in this part of this chapter is to sketch two models of collective responsibility, two cases in which people can justifiably be held liable for the costs incurred by

13 Held, ‘Can a Random Collection of Individuals be Morally Responsible?’, 479.

14 A more elaborately described example in support of the conclusion that individuals can be held responsible for the results of practices that they oppose can be found in J. Raikka, ‘On Disassociating Oneself from Collective Responsibility’, Social Theory and Practice, 23 (1997), 93–108. Raikka, however, attempts to argue that the individuals involved in such cases may be morally blameworthy even though they are acting rightly, all things considered. I believe that blame is inappropriate here, and that a different sense of responsibility is at stake, as argued in the text.
groups of which they are members. The next step is to see whether the conclusions we have reached can be applied to nations. Granted that nations are communities of some kind, do they display the features that would justify ascribing collective responsibility to their members?

III

What, then, is a nation, to repeat Renan's famous question? It is first of all a group with a common identity: belonging to the nation is partially constitutive of the identity of each member (partially constitutive because national membership does not exclude belonging to other communities of identity, such as religious or ethnic groups). In other words, nations are not merely collections of individuals who happen to be juxtaposed in physical space, in the way that the three pedestrians were in Held's example referred to above. They are groups of people who feel that they belong together because of what they have in common. Second, among the things they have in common is a public culture, a set of understandings about how their collective life should be led, including principles that set the terms of their political association (a principle of political equality, for instance), and guide, in broad terms the making of political decisions (a principle of individual rights, for instance). This shared public culture does not exclude significant cultural differences among subgroups within the nation, nor does it mean—this is important to stress—that there is no political disagreement among the members. On the contrary, people who share a public culture can disagree quite radically about what the principles embedded in that culture entail in relation to particular issues. Third, nations are groups whose members recognize special obligations to one another, so that in that respect they are not like groups formed on a contractual basis to realize the predetermined aims and objectives of the members, where the reason for becoming and remaining a member is entirely instrumental. Fourth, the continued existence of the nation is regarded by the members as a valuable good, so that even if we could imagine the instrumental benefits of membership, such as personal security, being provided in some other way, they would regard with horror and dismay any suggestion that the nation should be disbanded and its individual members assimilated to other national groups, or that the whole nation should simply be absorbed into a larger unit without its distinct identity being preserved.

If these four features are necessary for a group of people to constitute a nation, one might wonder whether any nations do, in fact, exist. Nationality should not be confused with common citizenship: the citizens of a given state may bear two or more national identities. But even when that possible source of confusion is removed, we still need to ask whether every co-national does in fact share the set of beliefs and attitudes I have listed in characterizing nationality. Must every French person believe that he or she has special obligations to co-nationals, or that the continued existence of France is intrinsically valuable, if there is to be a French nation? If so, it seems very unlikely that this or any other nation actually exists.

But the condition just proposed is too stringent. What is necessary to the existence of a nation is that the beliefs and attitudes in question should be generally held (and believed by those who hold them to be correct), not that they be held by every single member. This is true of communities of all kinds. For a religious community to exist, for example, its members must hold certain beliefs in common, and behave in certain ways towards each other, but it can survive the presence of a few dissenting members whose beliefs are heterodox or whose behaviour violates principles of reciprocity. One cannot say precisely how much dissidence can occur before the community ceases to exist as such, and similarly with nations there must come a point where indifference towards the national identity, or unwillingness to acknowledge national obligations, would mean

16 F. Renan, "What is a Nation?", in A. Zimmern (ed.), Modern Political Doctrines (London: Oxford University Press, 1939). My concern in the paragraph that follows is to highlight features of nationhood that are relevant to the question of collective responsibility rather than to distinguish national communities from other social groups. For the latter, see my discussion in On Nationality (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), ch. 2.

17 Could not one sidestep the problem by defining as French only those people who hold the beliefs and attitudes in question? The problem here is that the full-fledged French will want to include the deviants as part of the French nation, partly on the grounds of cultural commonalities, and partly because they think that these others should recognize special obligations and so forth. They regard the deviants as reprobes rather than as outsiders, in other words. So one cannot simply adopt a narrower criterion for being French.
that the nation in question had become something else—a group of people who just happened to share a language or some other cultural traits, perhaps. So when speaking of nations I am making a broad empirical assumption that there exists, among many peoples, a sufficient degree of convergence in attitudes and beliefs that the four conditions are met for the great majority of members.

Belonging to a nation also involves a fifth feature: the aspiration to be politically self-determining. But in the real world this aspiration is met to very different degrees. There is a spectrum of possibilities here, of which three in particular are worth singling out. A nation may lack self-determination entirely, as when it is subject to imperial rule from outside. Next, it may possess its own state, but have a despotic or authoritarian form of government, where the ruler or ruling elite is drawn from the people and claims to be acting in their name, but there is no mechanism that subjects them to popular control. Finally, the nation may be governed democratically with major decision-takers answerable to the citizen body as a whole at periodic elections. We need to distinguish these cases in order to decide how far nations can be regarded as collective agents who might be held responsible for the consequences of what they do. Nations can be said to act collectively in two different senses. First, because their members share an identity and a public culture, both the practices that they follow and the behaviour of individual members can be seen as expressions of that common identity and culture. We say, for instance, that Germans are hard-working, meaning that the way individual German workers behave reflects a shared norm of industriousness that forms part of the public culture of Germany. Or we find that the pattern of family relations in a particular country, and the number of children who are on average produced, corresponds to the religious or other cultural values of the nation in question. Here there is no deliberate decision to behave in a particular way or to adopt a particular practice, but nevertheless what happens reflects the national culture in a fairly direct sense. Second, where a suitable political structure is in place, the political decisions that are taken will embody to a greater or lesser extent the articulated beliefs and attitudes of the nation in question. The closer we come to the democratic end of the spectrum, the truer this will be. So we have two forms of collective national action: action that is deliberately concerted through political channels, and action that is undertaken by individuals, or groups of individuals, but that reflects some element in the national culture.18

How closely do nations conform to either of the two models of collective responsibility outlined in Section II? Does it make sense, first of all, to regard them as like-minded groups liable to bear the consequences of their actions? Since members share both a common identity and a public culture—the first two features noted above—there is prima facie reason to regard them as meeting this condition. But it is clearly crucial to establish that their collective actions are a genuine embodiment of the shared beliefs and values that go to make up the national culture. Here the distinction just drawn between different levels of self-determination becomes significant. Where nations are subject to outside rule, any ascription of national responsibility becomes problematic. The nation is governed in a certain way, but it does not act politically at all. And even where we witness forms of collective behaviour that significantly affect the well-being of members or impose burdens on outsiders, it will be difficult to say which of these are authentic expressions of national culture, and which are merely the work of individuals who claim that what they are doing reflects that culture. In the absence of a political forum in which national aims and values can be articulated and debated, it will be difficult to establish how far the population as a whole is implicated in support for the activities in question.19

18 Is the second case a genuine case of collective action, sufficient to ground collective responsibility? Clearly, the fact that a number of individuals follow the same norm in their private or economic lives does not by itself allow us to say that they are engaging in collective action. But where the prevalence of the norm is common knowledge, and it is regarded as a component feature of national identity, then the fact that the behaviour in question is not formally coordinated does not mean that it cannot be regarded as a form of collective action. Compare here the cases of the rioting mob and white culture in the post-bellum American South discussed in the previous section.

19 This is not to say that we can never attribute responsibility to nations that lack political self-determination. The clearest cases may be those that resemble the racism of Southern whites discussed earlier. Suppose two peoples, A and B, locked together under the same system of imperial rule, feel mutual hatred and contempt for each other, and this results in genocidal acts perpetrated by certain As against the Bs. Under these circumstances, it would not be wrong to hold members of nation A collectively responsible for these savage acts, on the basis that almost everyone belonging to A contributed to a climate of opinion in which such acts were regarded not as morally reprehensible but as permissible, if not justified. Of course, before making this judgement we would need evidence that the attitudes in question were
At the other end of the spectrum, we have nations that are democratically self-governing. Here the policies pursued by the state can reasonably be seen as policies for whose effects the citizen body as a whole is collectively responsible, given that they have authorized the government to act on their behalf in a free election (I shall return later to the question whether political dissidents can also be held responsible).\(^{20}\) And even where the consequences flow from patterns of behaviour that are not the direct result of political decision, these patterns of behaviour are open to democratic control. Suppose, for example, that the dominant religion encourages large families, and that as a result the population is increasing at a rate that causes social problems of various kinds. It is open to the government to adopt a population policy that gives incentives for parents to limit the size of their families. If after democratic debate such a policy is rejected, then we can legitimately say that the nation in question is collectively responsible for the consequences of population growth: its culture is such that it prefers large families to, let us say, less crowded roads and cities.

What now of the case where the nation in question is governed autocratically by an individual or a small elite drawn from within? It is certainly harder in these circumstances to lay responsibility at the feet of the ordinary subjects. Yet two considerations must be taken into account even here. One is that the rulers may hold beliefs and values that correspond more or less closely to those of their subjects even though they are not formally accountable to them. To the degree to which their authority depends on that fact, we can say that they are supported by the people, and that when they act, or fail to act, the consequences flow from beliefs and values that are common national property. Suppose for instance that the state is a theocracy, and that its rulers issue a decree that results in the death of some person deemed to be an apostate. If the issuing of the decree stems from religious beliefs and practices that are generally adhered to throughout the population, then some share of responsibility falls on the nation as a whole, even if we want to say that it rests primarily with members of the ruling group.

The second consideration is that subjects of the autocracy may have a duty to resist it in the event that it begins to act in ways that are manifestly wrong, whether the wrongness takes the form of injustice to outsiders or simply of policies that are seriously damaging to the common interests of the nation itself. Mere passivity is then not sufficient to escape responsibility for the policies in question. Everything will turn on whether resistance is feasible, what the costs of resistance are, and whether sufficient numbers of people can act together to make their resistance effective. Unfortunately, correct judgement on these matters may be difficult to achieve, particularly for outsiders who have no experience of living under a repressive regime. How far, for instance, should we hold the Serbian people as a whole responsible for ethnic cleansing in Kosovo, given that they had no avenues of direct control over Milošević and the army that he directed? Should they have been expected to make greater efforts to coordinate their opposition to his regime (we know that it was divisions among the opposition parties that helped him to stay in power for as long as did)? Or were the costs of effective opposition greater than the average Serbian could be expected to bear? The difficulty in answering these questions should make us hesitate before we jump to the conclusion that responsibility spreads beyond the ruling elite to the nation as a whole.\(^{21}\)

\(^{20}\) I leave aside here the difficult question of how far (if at all) democratic elections can be seen as authorizing the governing party to carry out the policies contained in its manifesto. Clearly, if the government acts in ways that were not announced beforehand, and that could not reasonably be foreseen by the voters, responsibility for these policies does not automatically extend to the citizens generally, though my comments below about responsibility under autocratic regimes apply here too.

\(^{21}\) Writing in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, Karl Jaspers took a harder line in *The Question of German Guilt* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978). Jaspers distinguishes between legal, political, moral, and metaphysical guilt, where political guilt implies 'having to bear the consequences of the deeds of the state whose power governs me and under whose order I live' (31). In Jaspers's view all citizens share in this political guilt, irrespective of the nature of the regime that governs them, and so it seemed clear to him that all Germans should be expected to pay reparations after the war. 'We are politically responsible for our regime, for the acts of the regime, for the start of the war in this world-historical situation, and for the kind of leaders we allowed to rise among us. For that we answer to the victors, with our labor and with our working faculties, and must make such amends as are exacted from the vanquished.' (78) This included those who had opposed the regime, and those who stood wholly aloof from politics. 'The sense of
Another reason for hesitation is the possibility that the ordinary subjects of the autocracy were effectively brainwashed into holding views that support the policies in question. Attributions of national responsibility depend on the idea that the activities that nations engage in express beliefs and values that are genuinely shared by their members. This does not require that each member should have thought it all out for herself, so to speak; it does not exclude normal processes of socialization whereby individuals are exposed to certain values and practices as they grow up, and come to adopt and identify with those values and practices. But where current political attitudes can be directly traced to sustained propaganda efforts by an autocratic regime that allows no dissenting voices to be heard—attitudes of extreme hostility, say, towards a neighboring community—it is much less plausible to hold ordinary people responsible for the consequences that follow. Just as we cannot expect people to make superhuman efforts to oppose a regime, so we cannot expect them to stand firm against the propaganda barrage that descends on them (a few individuals will, just as a few individuals may be willing to bear extreme costs to fight the regime, but our judgments about responsibility should be based on what we can reasonably expect of the average person).

What this shows is that the more open and democratic a political community is, the more justified we are in holding its members responsible for the decisions they make and the policies they follow. National values will still to a large extent be inherited in practice, but they will be discussed and debated, alternative views will be expressed, and so forth. There seems little objection in these circumstances to requiring the members to bear the costs of what they decide to do. But what of those who find themselves in a dissenting minority? Here we need to turn to the second of our two models of collective responsibility, the cooperative practice model. For as we see in the previous section, those who are engaged in cooperative practices from which they benefit can be held responsible for the outcomes of those practices despite their opposition to the policies which produced those outcomes. So how far can we justifiably represent nations as cooperative practices writ large?

In practice, protective and welfare services are normally provided to all citizens of the state in question, regardless of national identity. But their justification—in particular the justification of their redistributive elements—rests on the idea that they are a way of discharging obligations that fellow-nationals owe to one another. In multinational states there is a marked tendency for welfare services especially to be devoted to national subunits, in so far as it is feasible to do so.

"...political liability lets no man dodge." (62) Jaspers thought, rightly, that ascriptions of legal and moral guilt must be more discriminating.

The case for so regarding them rests on two claims. First, as indicated earlier, nations are communities whose members see themselves as having obligations of mutual aid that are more extensive than the aid they owe to human beings generally. (I do not address here the question how far these circumscribed practices of mutual aid are justified; I am simply indicating that this is how fellow-nationals stand to understand their relationships to one another.) These obligations are typically discharged by creating and supporting institutions that provide protective and welfare services on which each member can call as the need arises. To the extent that there is fairness in the way that these services are funded and provided, we can say that each member belongs to and benefits from a cooperative practice.

Second, nations provide their members with a number of public goods, foremost among which is protection of the national culture itself. I am assuming here that, as indicated in my sketch of nationality at the beginning of the section, people value their national membership and want it to continue. They must also value, therefore, those cultural features that lend their nation its distinct character—the national language, for instance, the physical appearance of cities or landscape, cultural traditions that mark them off from other nations, and so forth. These features are often subject to erosion by outside forces, and so members have to invest resources and accept restrictions on their own behaviour to preserve their cultural heritage. Again, we see that nations exhibit the features of a large-scale cooperative practice: each member makes certain sacrifices in order to support a national culture from whose continued existence each is presumed to benefit.
So now let us return to the question whether responsibility for the outcomes of political decisions and policies can be extended to those who dissent from, oppose, the decisions and policies at stake. Even if they cannot be said to play any causal role in the genesis of those policies (as the like-minded group model requires), are they nonetheless involved in a cooperative practice that implicates them in collective responsibility? There are two issues to consider. The first is whether the nation in question does indeed distribute the benefits and burdens of membership fairly, including the opportunity to participate in political decision-making. Where a minority group is exploited, or is excluded from a significant range of benefits that members of other groups continually enjoy, it will be hard to justify the claim that their membership alone makes them responsible for the consequences of national decisions. Whereas a group that loses on a particular issue in a democratic forum can be included in responsibility for the result on the ground that it will win on other occasions, and therefore benefits from an ongoing practice that allows collective decisions to be taken, no such argument applies to a group that is excluded from decision-making altogether or that forms a permanent and oppressed minority. Thus the position I am defending does not lead to absurd conclusions such as that German Jews share in responsibility for the effects of the Nazi regime or that Iraqi Kurds share in responsibility for the actions of Saddam Hussein. State membership itself does not entail collective responsibility if the conditions for a cooperative practice are not met.

The second issue is the extent to which the dissident group shares with the majority the beliefs and values that constitute the national culture. The analysis I am offering here is an analysis of national responsibility, and it therefore does not apply in any direct way to states that house one or more conflicting national groups whose public cultures scarcely overlap. In these circumstances, protection of the culture of either group ceases to be a genuine public good for both communities. But even if we leave aside radically divided states, it remains an open question how much cultural overlap there is between majority and minority. One important issue here is whether the national culture of the majority includes elements that collide with the ethnic or religious cultures of particular groups, as, for instance, German national identity during the Nazi period embodying notions of racial superiority that made it repugnant to Jews and other ethnic minorities. So we need to draw a distinction between dissenters who oppose the majority view on a particular issue—say a pacifist minority vehemently opposed to a war that the majority supports—while continuing to subscribe to other aspects of national culture, and dissidents who reject that culture in its across-the-board way, and therefore see no value in policies designed to promote it. In the latter case, the idea of the nation as a cooperative practice fails, at least so far as this involves contributing to public goods from which every participant subsequently benefits. It is difficult to judge how often this case occurs in reality: to the extent that national identities are liberalized, in the sense that they are purged of ethnically or religiously exclusive elements, and are constituted instead by political and cultural values that are accessible to all, outright alienation from national culture will be rare.24

I have been concerned in this part of this chapter both to defend the idea of national responsibility and to identify its limits. To take the limits first: where nations are subject to external or to autocratic rule, it is usually difficult to identify acts undertaken by individual members or by the state as genuinely national acts, and so it becomes inappropriate to spread responsibility for those acts throughout the population in question. Furthermore, where cultural divisions run deep, we may decide that talk of a single nation (in the sense outlined at the beginning of the section) is out of place. These cases aside, I have argued that where nations act in ways that impose burdens on themselves or on others, responsibility for such burdens falls on every member, even on those who opposed the decisions or policies in question. The argument turns on the sharing of beliefs and attitudes that characterizes national communities, and on the benefits that membership brings with it. So I conclude that we

24 Are there any cases in which a nation has fractured along purely political lines, meaning not just that people disagree sharply over concrete issues, but they find that they also lack any common principles in terms of which they can seek a resolution of their differences? Even where the disagreement is deep and long lasting, as in the case of slavery in the USA, the two sides can still subscribe to many common values. But if, hypothetically, we can imagine such a fractured community, then we would not have a nation in the sense I am presupposing. Instead, we would have a variant of the multinational case: a political association formed between two distinct peoples, in this instance two peoples divided by their basic political principles. In such a case, it would be wrong to hold the whole association responsible for what one of its constituent communities had decided to do.
are not wrong, in general, to hold contemporary fellow-nationals responsible for actions performed in their name. But the hearing this has on questions of global justice is not yet clear. For one thing, nations can be held responsible not only for the benefits and burdens they create for their own members, but also for the impact that their actions have on outsiders. For another, we have seen that outcome responsibility, the focus of this chapter, has to be understood alongside remedial responsibility, the responsibility we may have, as individuals and as members of collective bodies, to respond to human deprivation, including global poverty. So by accepting the idea of national responsibility, we have not foreclosed the question what global justice demands of us. The next step, however, is to establish whether national responsibility can be extended to cover responsibility for the national past—especially responsibility to make good the injustices that earlier generations of compatriots have perpetrated. This is the task of Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

Inheriting Responsibilities

I

The idea that people today can be held responsible for what their forebears did has gained a significant foothold in contemporary politics. Various groups who claim that they are the victims of historical injustice have made legal or political demands for redress against the bodies taken to be responsible for the injustice—governments, corporations, banks, and so forth. These claims have been quite diverse in character, whether in terms of the nature of the groups involved, the basis for their claims, or the kind of redress that is being sought, so it may be helpful to begin by citing some examples of demands of this kind—some that have met with success and some that have not. Their common feature is that the present generation, or their representatives, are being asked to make good injustices that occurred before most of them at least were born. Consider, then, the following cases:

1. The payments that have been made by the German government to Jews as reparation for the Nazi Holocaust, mainly in the form of transfers to Israel, and estimated to be in the order of 80 billion Deutschmarks.
2. The demands made by members of the Australian Aboriginal community for compensation and for a national Day of Apology for the so-called ‘stolen generation’ of Aboriginal children