For Don Fowler
whose warmth and friendship I shall miss so much
and also for Peta

Citizenship and National Identity

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In Defence of Nationality

My story begins on the river bank of Kenneth Grahame's imagination.

"And beyond the Wild Wood again?" [asked the Mole]: "Where it's all blue and dim, and one sees what may be hills or perhaps they mayn't, and something like the smoke of towns, or is it only cloud drift?"

"Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wide World," [said the Rat]. "And that's something that doesn't matter, either to you or me. I've never been there, and I'm never going, nor you either, if you've got any sense at all. Don't ever refer to it again, please."

The Rat, so very sound in his opinions about most things, bores especially, seems in this moment to reveal exactly what so many people find distasteful about national loyalties and identities. He displays no overt hostility to foreign lands and their ways. But the combination of wilful ignorance about places beyond the Wild Wood, and complete indifference to what is going on there, seems particularly provoking. Aggressive nationalism of the 'my country right or wrong' variety is something we might at least argue with. But the narrowing of horizons, the contraction of the universe of experience to the river bank itself, seems to amount to the triumph of sentiment over reasoned argument.

Nationality under attack

Philosophers, especially, will have great difficulty in coming to grips with the kind of national attachments for which I am using the Rat's river-bankism as an emblem. Philosophers are committed to forms of reasoning, to concepts and arguments, that are universal in form. 'What's so special about this river bank?' a philosophical Mole might have asked in reply. 'Why is this river bank a better place than other river banks beyond the Wood?' To which the Rat could only have said, 'This is my place; I like it here; I have no need to ask such questions.'

The Rat, clearly, is no philosopher. Yet in contemplating his frame of mind we might be led to recall the words of one who was:

there are in England, in particular, many honest gentlemen, who being always employ'd in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations, have carried their thoughts little beyond those objects, which are every day expos'd to their senses. And indeed, of such as these I pretend not to make philosophers.... They do well to keep themselves in their present situation; and instead of refining them into philosophers, I wish we cou'd communicate to our founders of systems, a share of this gross earthly mixture, as an ingredient, which they commonly stand much in need of, and which would serve to temper those fiery particles, of which they are composed."

Plainly the Rat is well supplied with gross earthly mixture, literally and metaphorically, and the question is whether any philosophical system can make use of what he has to offer. The sort that can is the Humanist sort. By this I mean a philosophy which, rather than dismissing ordinary beliefs and sentiments out of hand unless they can be shown to have a rational foundation, leaves them in place until strong arguments are produced for rejecting them. The Rat's beliefs cannot be deduced from some universally accepted premise; but that is no reason for rejecting them unless the arguments for doing so seem better founded than the beliefs themselves. In moral and political philosophy, in particular, we build upon existing sentiments and judgements, correcting them only when they are inconsistent or plainly flawed in some other way. We don't aspire to some universal and rational foundation such as Kant tried to provide with the categorical imperative.

It is from this sort of stance (which I shall not try to justify) that it makes sense to mount a philosophical defence of nationality. There can be no question of trying to give rationally compelling reasons for people to have national attachments and allegiances. What we can do is to start from the premise that people generally do exhibit such attachments and allegiances, and then try to build a political philosophy which incorporates them. In particular we can do two things: we can examine the critical arguments directed against nationality - arguments trying to undermine the validity of national loyalties - and show that they are flawed; and we can try to assuage the tension between the ethical
particularism implied by such commitments and ethical universalism, by showing why it may be advantageous, from a universal point of view, that people have national loyalties.

Philosophers may protest that it is a caricature of their position to suggest that the only reasons for belief or action that they will permit to count are those that derive from an entirely impersonal and universal standpoint. It is common now to distinguish between agent-neutral and agent-relative reasons and to give each some weight in practical reasoning. But what motivates this concession is mainly a concern for individuals' private goals and for their integrity: people must be given the moral space, as it were, to pursue their own projects, to honour their commitments, to live up to their personal ideals. National allegiances, and the obligations that spring from them, are harder to fit into this picture, because they appear to represent, not a different segment of moral life, but a competing way of understanding the concepts and principles that make up the impartial or agent-neutral standpoint (consider, for example, the different conceptions of distributive justice that emerge depending on whether you begin from a national or a universal starting-point). That is why such loyalties appear to pose a head-on challenge to a view of morality that is dominant in our culture, as Alasdair MacIntyre has argued.

It is a curious paradox of our time that while nationalism is politically on the advance, its would-be defenders (in the West at least) find themselves on the defensive. I have just given one reason for this: the view that national allegiances cannot withstand critical scrutiny, so a rational person cannot be a nationalist. There is also a more mundane reason: nationality is widely felt to be a backward-looking, reactionary notion; it is felt to stand in the way of progress. In the European context, for instance, we are invited to look forward to a 'Europe of the regions' in which Catalonia, Brittany, Bavaria, Scotland and the rest co-exist harmoniously under a common administrative umbrella, free from the national rivalries which have plunged us into two world wars. Progress means the overcoming of nationality. In the Oxford branch of the Body Shop (and doubtless in the branches in Paris, Tokyo and elsewhere) you can buy a lapel badge that quotes H.G. Wells: 'Our true nationality is mankind.' H.G. Wells and the Body Shop in tandem epitomize the modern idea of progress, whose disciples were described by George Orwell in such a wonderfully acid way: 'all that dreary tribe of high-minded women and sandal-wearers and bearded fruit-juice drinkers who come flocking towards the smell of "progress" like bluebottles to a dead cat.' If you are one of these bluebottles, and most of us are to some degree, then you will think that ordinary national loyalties amount to reactionary nostalgia and queue up tosport the H.G. Wells slogan.

What is a nation?

So the would-be nationalist has two challenges to meet: the philosophical challenge and the progressive challenge. And now it is time to spell out more precisely the notion of nationality that I want to defend. Nationality as I shall understand it comprises three interconnected propositions. The first concerns personal identity, and claims that it may properly be part of someone's identity that they belong to this or that national grouping: in other words that if a person is invited to specify those elements that are essential to his identity, that make him the person that he is, it is in order to refer to nationality. A person who in answer to the question 'Who are you?' says 'I am Swedish' or 'I am Italian' (and doubtless much more besides) is not saying something that is irrelevant or bizarre in the same way as, say, someone who claims without good evidence that he is the illegitimate grandchild of Tsar Nicholas II. Note that the claim is a permissive one: national identity may, but need not, be a constitutive part of personal identity.

The second proposition is ethical, and claims that nations are ethical communities. They are contour lines in the ethical landscape. The duties we owe to our fellow-nationals are different from, and more extensive than, the duties we owe to human beings as such. This is not to say that we owe no duties to humans as such; nor is it to deny that there may be other, perhaps smaller and more intense, communities to which members owe duties that are more stringent still than those we owe to Britons, Swedes, etc. at large. But it is to claim that a proper account of ethics should give weight to national boundaries, and that in particular there is no objection in principle to institutional schemes that are designed to deliver benefits exclusively to those who fall within the same boundaries as ourselves.

The third proposition is political, and states that people who form a national community in a particular territory have a good claim to political self-determination; there ought to be put in place an institutional structure that enables them to decide collectively matters that concern primarily their own community. Notice that I have phrased this cautiously, and have not asserted that the institution must be that of a sovereign state. Historically the sovereign state has been the main vehicle through which claims to national self-determination have been realized, and this is not just an accident. Nevertheless national self-determination can be realized in other ways, and as we shall see there are cases where it must be realized other than through a sovereign state, precisely to meet the equally good claims of other nationalities.

I want to stress that the three propositions I have outlined - about personal identity, about bounded duties and about political
self-determination – are linked together in such a way that it is difficult to feel the force of any one of them without acknowledging the others. It is not hard to see how a common identity can support both the idea of the nation as an ethical community and the claim to self-determination, but what is more subtle – and I shall try to bring this out as I go along – is the way in which the political claim can reinforce both the claim about identity and the ethical claim. The fact that the community in question is either actually or potentially self-determining strengthens its claims on us both as a source of identity and as a source of obligation. This interlinking of propositions may at times seem circular; and the fact that the nationalist case cannot be spelt out in neat linear form may confirm philosophical suspicions about it. But I believe that if we are to understand the power of nationality as an idea in the modern world – the appeal of national identity to the modern self – we must try to understand its inner logic.

So let me now begin to look more closely at national identities themselves, and in particular ask what differentiates them from other identities – individual or communal – that people may have. What does it mean to think of oneself as belonging to a national community?

The first point to note, and it has been noted by most of those who have thought seriously about the subject, is that national identities are constituted by belief: a nationality exists when its members believe that it does. It is not a question of a group of people sharing some common attribute such as race or language. These features do not of themselves make nations, and only become important insofar as a particular nationality takes as one of its defining features that its members speak French or have black skins. This becomes clear as soon as one looks at the candidates that have been put forward as objective criteria of nationalhood, as Ernst Renan did in his famous lecture on the subjects to every criterion that has been proposed there are clear empirical counter-examples. The conclusion one quickly reaches is that a nation is in Renan’s memorable phrase ‘a daily plebiscite’; its existence depends on a shared belief that its members belong together, and a shared wish to continue their life in common. So in asserting a national identity, I assume that my beliefs and commitments are mirrored by those whom I take to share that identity, and of course I might be wrong about this. In itself this does not distinguish nationality from other kinds of human relationship that depend on reciprocal belief.

The second feature of nationality is that it is an identity that embodies historical continuity. Nations stretch backwards into the past, and indeed in most cases their origins are conveniently lost in the mists of time. In the course of this history various significant events have occurred, and we can identify with the actual people who acted at those moments, reappropriating their deeds as our own. Often these events involve military victories and defeats: we imagine ourselves filling the breach at Harfleur or reading the signal hoisted at Trafalgar. Renan thinks that historical tragedies matter more than historical glories. I am inclined to see in this an understandable French bias, but the point he connects it to is a good one: ‘sorrows have greater value than victories; for they impose duties and demand common effort’. The historic national community is a community of obligation. Because our forebears have toiled and bled their blood to build and defend the nation, we who are born into it inherit an obligation to continue their work, which we discharge partly towards our contemporaries and partly towards our descendants. The historical community stretches forward into the future too. This then means that when we speak of the nation as an ethical community, we have in mind not merely the kind of community that exists between a group of contemporaries who practise mutual aid among themselves and which would dissolve at the point at which that practice ceased; but a community which, because it stretches back and forward across the generations, is not one that the present generation can renounce. Here we begin to see something of the depth of national communities which may not be shared by other more immediate forms of association.

The third distinguishing aspect of national identity is that it is an active identity. Nations are communities that do things together, take decisions, achieve results and so forth. Of course this cannot be literally so: we rely on proxies who are seen as embodying the national will: statesmen, soldiers, sportsmen, etc. But this means that the link between past and future that I noted a moment ago is not merely a causal link. The nation becomes what it does by the decisions that it takes – some of which we may now regard as thoroughly bad, a cause of national shame. Whether this active identity is a valuable aspect of nationality, or whether as some critics would allege merely a damaging fantasy, it clearly does mark out nations from other kinds of grouping, for instance churches or religious sects whose identity is essentially a passive one in so far as the church is seen as responding to the promptings of God. The group’s purpose is not to do or decide things, but to interpret as best it can the messages and commands of an external source.

The fourth aspect of a national identity is that it connects a group of people to a particular geographical place, and here again there is a clear contrast with most other group identities that people affirm, such as ethnic or religious identities. These often have sacred sites or places of origin, but it is not an essential part of having the identity that you should permanently occupy that place. If you are a good Muslim you should make a pilgrimage to Mecca at least once, but you need not set up house there. A nation, in contrast, must have a homeland. This may of course be a source of great difficulties, a point I shall return to when
considering objections to the idea of nationality, but it also helps to explain why a national community must be (in aspiration if not yet in fact) a political community. We have seen already that nations are groups that act; we see now that their actions must include that of controlling a chunk of the earth's surface. It is this territorial element that makes nations uniquely suited to serve as the basis of states, since a state by definition must exercise its authority over a geographical area.

Finally it is essential to national identity that the people who compose the nation are believed to share certain traits that mark them off from other peoples. It is incompatible with nationality to think of the members of the nation as people who merely happen to have been thrown together in one place and forced to share a common fate, in the way that the occupants of a lifeboat, say, have been accidentally thrown together. National divisions must be natural ones; they must correspond to real differences between peoples. This need not, fortunately, imply racism or the idea that the group is constituted by biological descent. The common traits can be cultural in character: they can consist in shared values, shared tastes or sensibilities. So immigration need not pose problems, provided only that the immigrants take on the essential elements of national character. Indeed it has proved possible in some instances to regard immigration as itself a formative experience, calling forth qualities of resourcefulness and mutual aid that then define the national character - I am thinking of the settler cultures of the New World such as the American and the Australian. As everyone knows, there is nothing more illustrous for an Australian today than to have an ancestor who was carried over in chains by the First Fleet.

When I say that national differences must be natural ones, I mean that the people who compose a nation must believe that there is something distinctive about themselves that marks them off from other nations, over and above the fact of sharing common institutions. This need not be one specific trait or quality, but can be a range of characteristics which are generally shared by the members of nation A and serve to differentiate them from outsiders. In popular belief these differences may be exaggerated. Hume remarked that the vulgar think that everyone who belongs to a nation displays its distinctive traits, whereas 'men of sense' allow for exceptions; nevertheless aggregate differences undoubtedly exist. This is surely correct. It is also worth noting that people may be hard pressed to say explicitly what the national character of their people consists in, and yet have an intuitive sense when confronted with foreigners of where the differences lie. National identities can remain unarticulated, and yet still exercise a pervasive influence on people's behaviour.

These five elements together - a community constituted by mutual belief, extended in history, active in character, connected to a particular territory, and thought to be marked off from other communities by its members' distinct traits - serve to distinguish nationality from other collective sources of personal identity. I shall come in a moment to some reasons why such identities may be thought to be particularly valuable, worth protecting and fostering, but first I should emphasize what has so far merely been implicit, namely the mythical aspects of national identity. Nations almost unavoidably depend on beliefs about themselves that do not stand up well to impartial scrutiny. Renan once again hit the nail on the head when he said that 'to forget and - I will venire to say - to get one's history wrong, are essential factors in the making of a nation'. One main reason for this is that the contingencies of power politics have always played a large part in the formation of national units. States have been created by force, and, over time, their subject peoples have come to think of themselves as co-nationals. But no one wants to think of himself as roped together to a set of people merely because the territorial ambitions of some dynastic lord in the thirteenth century ran thus far and no further. Not indeed is this the right way to think about the matter, because the effect of the ruler's conquests may have been, over time, to have produced a people with real cultural unity. But because of the historical dimension of the nation, together with the idea that each nation has its own distinct character, it is uncomfortable to be reminded of the forced nature of one's national genesis. Hence various stories have been concocted about the primeval tribe from which the modern nation sprang. The problem is, of course, particularly acute in the case of states created relatively recently as a result of colonial withdrawal, where it is only too obviously the case that the boundaries that have been drawn reflect the vagaries of imperial competition. It is easy for academic critics to mock the attempts made by the leaders of these states to instill a sense of common nationhood in their people. I myself recall, when teaching in Nigeria in the mid-1970s, reading with some amusement earnest newspaper articles on the question whether the country did or did not need a national ideology - it seeming obvious that a national ideology was not something you could just decide to adopt.

**Nationality defended**

The real question, however, is not whether national identities embody elements of myth, but whether they perform such valuable functions that our attitude, as philosophers, should be one of acquiescence if not positive endorsement. And here I want to argue that nationality answers one of the most pressing needs of the modern world, namely how to maintain solidarity among the populations of states that are large and anonymous.
such that their citizens cannot possibly enjoy the kind of community that relies on kinship or face-to-face interaction. That we need such solidarity is something that I intend to take for granted here. I assume that in societies in which economic markets play a central role, there is a strong tendency towards social atomization, where each person looks out for her interests and her immediate social network. As a result it is potentially difficult to mobilize people to provide collective goods, it is difficult to get them to agree to practices of redistribution from which they are not likely personally to benefit, and so forth. These problems can be avoided only where there exists large-scale solidarity, such that people feel themselves to be members of an overarching community, and to have social duties to act for the common good of that community, to help out other members when they are in need, etc.

Nationality is de facto the main source of such solidarity. In view of the broadly Humanist approach that I am adopting, where our moral and political philosophy bends to accommodate pre-existing sentiments, this in itself would be enough to commend it. But I should like to say something more positive about nationality before coming to the difficulties. It is precisely because of the mythical or imaginary elements in national identity that it can be reshaped to meet new challenges and new needs. We have seen that the story a nation tells itself about its past is a selective one. Depending on the character of contemporary politics, the story may gradually alter, and with it our understanding of the substance of national identity. This need not take the crude form of the rewriting of history as practised in the late Soviet Union and elsewhere (airbrushing pictures of Trotsky out of the Bolshevik central committee and so on). It may instead be a matter of looking at established facts in a new way. Consider, as just one example, the very different interpretation of British imperialism now current to that which prevailed at the time of my father's birth in Edwardian Britain. The tone has changed from one of triumphalism to one of equivocation or even mild apology. And this goes naturally along with a new interpretation of British identity in which it is no longer part of that identity to shoulder the white man's burden and carry enlightenment to the heathen.

From a political standpoint, this imaginary aspect of nationality may be a source of strength. It allows people of different political persuasions to share a political loyalty, defining themselves against a common background whose outlines are not precise, and which therefore lends itself to competing interpretations. It also shows us why nationality is not a conservative idea. A moment's glance at the historical record shows that nationalist ideas have as often been associated with liberal and socialist programmes as with programmes of the right. In their first appearance, they were often associated with liberal demands for representative gov-

ernment put forward in opposition to established ruling elites. Linda Colley's studies of the emergence of British nationalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries show that nationalist ideas were developed by middle-class and popular movements seeking to win a place in the public realm, and resisted by the state and the landowning class that supported it. This picture was repeated in its essentials throughout Europe. It is easy to see why a conservative may resist nationalism. Nationality invokes the activist idea of a people collectively determining its own destiny, and this is anathema to the conservative view of politics as a limited activity best left in the hands of an elite who have been educated to rule. Two of the most sweeping recent attacks on nationalism have come from acolytes of Michael Oakeshott, Elie Kedourie and Kenneth Minogue. Minogue regards nationalism as essentially a revolutionary theory and 'therefore a direct enemy of conservative politics'. He offers a reductive psychological explanation of its appeal: 'Nationalist theories may thus be understood as distortions of reality which allow men to cope with situations which they might otherwise find unbearable.'

Nationality, then, is associated with no particular social programme: the flexible content of national identity allows parties of different colours to present their programmes as the true continuation of the national tradition and the true reflection of national character. At the same time it binds these parties together and makes space for the idea of loyal opposition, an individual or faction who resist prevailing policy but who can legitimately claim to speak for the same community as the government of the day. But its activist idea of politics as the expression of national will does set it against conservatism of the Oakeshott-Kedourie-Minogue variety.

The liberal objection

I have referred to the liberal origins of the idea of nationality, but the first objection that I want to consider amounts essentially to a liberal critique of nationality. This holds that nationality is detrimental to the cultural pluralism that liberals hold dear; it is incompatible with the idea of a society in which different cultural traditions are accorded equal respect, and whose vitality springs from competition and exchange between these traditions. The classic statement of this critique can be found in Lord Acton's essay on 'Nationality' in which he argues in favour of a multinational state in which no one nation holds a dominant place. Such a state, he claims, provides the best guarantee of liberties, 'the fullest security for the preservation of local customs' and the best incentive to intellectual progress.
This argument derives from the assumption that national identities are exclusive in their nature; that where a state embodies a single nationality, the culture that makes up that nationality must drive out everything else. There is no reason to hold this assumption. Nationality is not of its nature an all-embracing identity. It need not extend to all the cultural attributes that a person might display. One can have a national identity and also have attachments to several more specific cultural groups: to ethnic groups, religious groups, work-based associations and so forth. A line can be drawn between the beliefs and qualities that make up nationality, and those that fall outside its scope. The place where the line is drawn will be specific to a particular nationality at a particular time, and it will be a subject for debate whether its present position is appropriate or not. For instance one may argue in a liberal direction that a person's religion, say, should be irrelevant to their membership of this nation, or argue in a nationalist direction that language is not irrelevant, that each member should at least be fluent in the national tongue. The Acton argument supposes that no such line can be drawn. It supposes, contrary to all evidence, that one cannot have a pluralist society in which many ethnic, religious etc. groups co-exist but with an overarching national identity in common.

Indeed one can turn Acton’s argument around, as J.S. Mill did by anticipation in his chapter on ‘Nationality’ in Representative Government. Unless the several groups that compose a society have the mutual sympathy and trust that stems from a common nationality, it will be virtually impossible to have free institutions. There will, for instance, be no common interest in stemming the excesses of government; politics becomes a zero-sum game in which each group can hope to gain by the exploitation of the others.

This was Mill’s argument, and there is plenty of subsequent evidence to back it up. But I want now to consider a more subtle variation on the theme that nationality and liberalism are at odds. This conceives that national identity and group identity can be kept separate, but points to the fact that national identities are always in practice biased in favour of the dominant cultural group, the group that historically has dominated the politics of the state. The state may be liberal in the sense that it does not suppress minority groups, but it does not accord equal respect and equal treatment to cultural minorities. Practical examples of this would include what is prescribed in the curricula in state-run schools, the content of what is broadcast through the national media, and so forth. The national identity includes elements drawn from the dominant culture, this is reproduced politically through the state, and minority groups are put at a disadvantage both in various practical respects and in the less tangible sense that their cultures are devalued by public neglect.

Concrete versions of this critique will be familiar to most readers. I want to reply to it first by conceding that it is descriptively true in many historical cases – national identities have very often been formed by taking over elements from the group culture that happens to be dominant in a particular state but then adding that it is not integral to national identities that they should be loaded in this way. I have stressed the malleability of nationality already, and one thing we may be doing in the course of redefining what it means to be British, French, etc. is to purge these identities of elements that necessarily entail the exclusion of minority groups. Here there is one particular aspect of nationality that needs underlining. Although in standard cases a national identity is something one is born into – and I have argued that this factor of historical continuity is a source of strength – there is no reason why others should not acquire it by adoption. In respect it contrasts with ethnic identities which generally speaking can only be acquired by birth. Although a priori a nation might define itself tightly by descent, in practice nations extend membership more or less freely to those who are resident and show willingness to exhibit those traits that make up national character. So although this does impose certain constraints on them, minority groups, particularly those moving to the society in question, have the option of acquiring a new identity alongside their existing ones. Nationality, precisely because it aims to be an inclusive identity, can incorporate sub-groups in this way without demanding that they forsake everything they already hold dear.

Indeed one can take this further and say that what best meets the needs of minority groups is a clear and distinct national identity which stands over and above the specific cultural traits of all the groups in the society in question. The argument here has been well put by Tariq Modood, who has particularly in mind the position of Muslims in British society. He writes:

As a matter of fact the greatest psychological and political need for clarity about a common framework and national symbols comes from the minorities. For clarity about what makes us willingly bound into a single country relieves the pressure on minorities, especially new minorities whose presence within the country is not fully accepted, to have to conform in all areas of social life, or in arbitrarily chosen areas, in order to retain the charge of disloyalty. It is the absence of comprehensive and respected national symbols in Britain, comparable to the constitution and the flag in America, that allows politicians unsympathetic to minorities to demand that they demonstrate loyalty by doing X or Y or Z, like supporting the national cricket team in Norman Tebbit's famous example. 22

To make my position clear here, I do not suppose that the superimposition of national identity on group identity that I am arguing for can be
wholly painless on either side. While national identities are thinned down to make them more acceptable to minority groups, these groups themselves must abandon values and ways of behaving that are in stark conflict with those of the community as a whole. National identity cannot be wholly symbolic; it must embody substantive norms. This will be readily apparent if a formal constitution occupies a central place in such an identity, as I believe it should. Forms of belief and behaviour inconsistent with those laid down in the constitution will be ruled out. So, as I have argued elsewhere, one cannot aspire to unlimited tolerance in this area. But the view I am defending does appear consistent with the kind of politically sensitive liberalism exhibited by J.S. Mill.

The Balkan objection

This, I hope, sufficiently addresses the liberal objection to nationality. Now I want to come to a second objection which might be termed the Balkan objection. This claims that the principle of nationality cannot in practice be realized, but meanwhile the belief that it can lead to endless political instability and bloodshed. This is because would-be nationalities are so entangled with one another that there is no way of drawing state boundaries that can possibly satisfy all claims. Minority group B secedes from state A in search of national self-determination, but this only provokes group C within B to attempt secession in its turn and so on ad infinitum. I call this the Balkan objection because of a view one frequently hears expressed nowadays that so long as the peoples of that region were governed from afar by the Austro-Hungarian and Turkish empires different ethnic groups lived and worked happily side-by-side, but once those empires were weakened and the idea of national self-determination was let loose, impossible conflicts were generated. Recent events in Yugoslavia seem to confirm the view, and any view now I expect to hear President Tito's reputation being salvaged on the same terms as that of Emperor Franz Josef.

The principle of nationality as formulated earlier holds that people who form a national community in a particular territory have a good claim to political self-determination. This principle should not be confused with a certain liberal view of the state—which makes individual consent a necessary and sufficient condition of a state's authority. If each person must consent to the existence of the state, it follows that the borders of states should be drawn wherever people want them to be drawn. The practical implication is that any sub-community in any state has the right to secede from that state provided that it is in turn willing to allow any sub-sub-community the equivalent right and so on indefi-
minorities whose own identity is radically incompatible with the new majority's, so that rather than creating a genuine nation-state, the secession would simply reproduce a multi-national arrangement on a smaller scale. Third, some consideration must be given to small groups who may be left behind in the rump state; it may be that the effect of secession is to destroy a political balance and leave these groups in a very weak position. It is, for instance, a strong argument against the secession of Quebec from the Canadian federation that it would effectively destroy the double-sided identity that Canada has laboured to achieve, and leave French-speaking communities in other provinces isolated and politically helpless.

What I am trying to stress is that the principle of nationality does not generate an unlimited right of secession. What it says is that national self-determination is a good thing, and that states and their constitutions should be arranged so that each nation is as far as possible able to secure its common future. Since homogeneous nation-states are not everywhere feasible, often this will require second-best solutions, where each nationality gets partial self-determination, not full rights of sovereignty. Equally, there may be cases where communities are intertwined in such a way that no form of national self-determination is realistically possible, and the best that can be hoped for is a modus vivendi between the communities, perhaps with a constitutional settlement guaranteed by external powers.

Justice and sentiment

That, somewhat elliptically, is my answer to the Balkan objection. The final objection I want to consider arises from the second aspect of the idea of nationality, the claim that nations are ethical communities. It runs as follows. You say that nations are ethically significant, that the duties we owe to fellow-members are greater in scope than those we owe to outsiders. Yet you base this on a shared sense of identity which is based not upon concrete practices but upon sentimental ties, on historical understandings which you concede to be imaginary in part. But how can duties of justice, especially, depend in this way on our feelings about others? Does this not make justice an entirely subjective idea, and abandon its role as a critical notion which serves to correct both our beliefs and our behaviour?

Observe to begin with that our sense of national identity serves to mark out the universe of persons to whom special duties are owed; it may do this without at the same time determining the content of those duties. In particular my recognition of X as a co-national to whom I have obligations may depend upon a sense of nationality with sentimental content, but it does not follow that my duties to X depend on my feelings about X as a person. An analogy with the family makes this clear. A family does not exist as such unless its members have certain feelings towards one another, yet obligations within the family are not governed by sentiment. I may feel more sympathy for one child than another, yet in allocating the family's resources I ought to consider their needs impartially.

It appears nonetheless that obligations in this account are being derived from the existence of a certain kind of community, while in the national case the community is sentiment-based. It would follow that if nation A embodies a strong sense of fellow-feeling whereas nation B embodies a relatively weak sense, then obligations within A are more extensive than those within B, and this seems paradoxical. What this overlooks, however, is the role played by political culture within national identity. It is not merely that I feel bound to a group of people defined in national terms; I feel bound to them as sharing in a certain way of life, expressed in the public culture. The content of my obligations stems immediately from that culture. Various interpretations of the public culture are possible, but some of these will be closer to getting it right than others, and this also shows to what extent debates about social justice are resolvable. It follows that what social justice consists in will vary from place to place, but not directly in line with sentiments or feelings. A Swede will acknowledge more extensive obligations to provide welfare for fellow-Swedes than an American will for fellow-Americans; but this is because the public culture of Sweden, defining in part what it means to be Swedish, is solidaristic, whereas the public culture of the US is individualistic. It is not part of the story that Swedes must have more sympathetic feelings for other individual Swedes than Americans do for other Americans.

This may still sound an uncomfortably relativistic view to some. What I have argued is that nationalists are not committed to the kind of crude subjectivism which says that your communal obligations are whatever you feel them to be. Membership of a national community involves identifying with a public culture that is external to each of us taken individually; and although we may argue with one another about how the culture should be understood, and what practical obligations stem from it, this is still a question to which better or worse answers can be given.

Conclusion

Philosophers may find it restricting that they have to conduct their arguments about justice with reference to national identities at all. My claim is that unless they do they will lose contact entirely with the beliefs of the people they seek to address; they must try to incorporate some of Hume's
gross earthy mixture, the unreflective beliefs of everyday life. Nonetheless there is a tension here. We should return to Kenneth Grahame's Rat who on his first appearance seems to stand for unlimited acquiescence in the everyday world of the river bank. As the story draws towards its conclusion, however, a more troubled Rat emerges. Disturbed first by the departure of the swallows to Southern climes, he then encounters a seafaring rat who regales him with tales of the colourful and vibrant world beyond the river bank. The Rat is mesmerized. His eyes, normally 'clear and dark and brown', turn to 'a streaked and shifting grey'. He is about to set out for the South with stick and satchel in hand, and has to be physically restrained by the Mole, who gradually leads his thoughts back to the everyday world, and finally leaves him writing poetry as a kind of sublimation of his wandering instincts.

The Rat's earlier refusal to contemplate the Wide World, it emerges, was a wilful repression of a part of himself that it was dangerous to acknowledge. Something of the same dilemma confronts the philosophical nationalist. He feels the pull of national loyalties, and he senses that without these loyalties we would be cast adrift in a region of great moral uncertainty. Yet he is also alive to the limitations and absurdities of his and other national identities. He recognizes that we owe something to other human beings merely as such, and so he strains towards a more rationally defensible foundation for ethics and politics. There is no solution here but to strive for some kind of equilibrium between the everyday and the philosophical, between common belief and rational belief, between the river bank and the Wide World. But, as the cases both of the Rat and of David Hume in their different ways demonstrate, this is far easier said than done.

Citizenship and Pluralism

The problem of citizenship and pluralism is easy to state but very difficult to solve. Its premise is the cultural fragmentation of modern states. Members of these states are in the process of adopting an ever more disparate set of personal identities, as evidenced by their ethnic affiliations, their religious allegiances, their views of personal morality, their ideas about what is valuable in life, their tastes in art, music and so forth. In all these areas there is less convergence or agreement than there once was. Yet at the same time the individuals and groups having these fragmented identities need to live together politically, and this means finding some common basis or reference point from which their claims on the state can be judged. Citizenship is supposed to provide this reference point. Our personal lives and commitments may be very different, but we are all equally citizens, and it is as citizens that we advance claims in the public realm and assess the claims made by others. Yet if fragmentation is as far-reaching as the premise implies, how is it possible for us to share a common identity as citizens? We may share a common legal status, a formally-defined set of rights and obligations, but how can we agree about what it means to be a citizen, what rights and obligations ought to be included in the legal status, and beyond that how we ought to behave when occupying the role of citizen? The very state of affairs that makes common citizenship so important to us seems at the same time to expose it as a pipe-dream.

This view of citizenship as a unifying force in a divided world has appealed recently to political thinkers both of the centre-right and of the centre-left, although the underlying motivation has been somewhat different in the two cases. The new-found enthusiasm of conservatives for