
Herder: On the Ethics of Nationalism

Richard White

Creighton University

*Nationalism
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force.*

It would be hard to deny the resurgence of nationalism in the modern world: not only in Serbia and Bosnia and the newly independent republics of the former Soviet Union, but also in Palestine, Scotland, and Quebec as well as in established countries like India and Pakistan. It is a great irony that Marx consigned nationalism to the dustbin of history, along with religion and every other form of "false consciousness."¹ At this time nationalism seems to be a much stronger force than Marxism itself, and, while multiculturalism and economic globalization are significant features of the contemporary scene, it is by no means obvious that they must eventually displace nationalist projects and aspirations. Interestingly, philosophers seem to share Marx's distrust of nationalism, and other than J. G. Herder (1744–1803) there are not many philosophers who have made nationalism a significant theme in their own work or offered a philosophical justification of it. Kant is typical in this regard: his emphasis is on the universal and necessary features of human experience, and he has very little to say about the issue of nationality and particular nations.² Kant embraces cosmopolitanism and affirms the necessity of a universal narrative of history that would include the whole of humankind. By contrast,

RICHARD WHITE is Professor of Philosophy at Creighton University.

¹ For an overview of Marx's reflections on nationalism see Roman Szporluk, *Communism and Nationalism: Karl Marx Versus Friedrich List* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

² See Kant's brief comments on the character of nations in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. Mary Gregor (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 174–182.

the work of his contemporary, Herder, is remarkable for its attempt to provide a justification for the particular perspective of the nation. Herder regarded the nation as the basic unit of humanity. According to him, the identity of the individual is largely dependent upon his or her culture, and he strongly affirmed the right of each people to determine its own path in the world.

Herder may be regarded as the first philosophical spokesman for nationalism. But, just as significantly, he is also viewed as one of the avatars of contemporary multiculturalism.³ The nations of the world today are increasingly multicultural and multiracial in character, and this in spite of the resurgence of nationalist sentiment with its most extreme aspect of “ethnic cleansing.” The question now is how we are to understand the relationship between nationalism and multiculturalism as two of the most significant forces in the modern world. As a preliminary inquiry into this issue, this article examines the moral significance of nationalism in light of Herder’s original arguments. First, I consider three significant objections to nationalism. Then I outline some themes in Herder that would allow us to review these problems in a different light. Finally, I consider some possible problems with Herder’s account, focusing on the difficult relationships among nationalism, globalization, and diversity: My goal is to determine the extent to which Herder’s work may still illuminate these issues.

Herder is regarded as a champion both of nationalism and multiculturalism.

i. Philosophers tend to be suspicious of or even hostile to nationalism. There are some exceptions, and in some cases, like that of Heidegger, one may want to argue that there is a conflict between the philosopher’s own personal views (which include sympathy for national socialism) and the actual implications of his thought. But there is an inherent philosophical tendency towards cosmopolitanism and universalism, and it is this which calls the limited perspective of nationalism into question. The first argument against nationalism follows from this general point. Because nationalists always celebrate a particular point-of-view—which is that of their given nation—their perspective remains one-sided, and they cannot grasp the value of whatever is different or “other.” One of the received ideas of traditional philosophy is the

³ See Charles Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition,” in Charles Taylor et al., *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 30-32.

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claim that human beings possess reason and that this faculty allows them to determine how they should live their lives. But from this it follows that whatever conclusions philosophers reach must be valid for all rational beings in the same circumstances, regardless of from where they come. Thus at a certain point, nationalism and national differences should be considered irrelevant. But this is precisely what the nationalist refuses to accept. On the other hand, many philosophers would argue that nationality and national differences are not really differences that should have any significance, for they are accidental determinations of who we are, like blood-type, race or even religion.

This line of thought leads to a related argument that focuses more particularly on the moral dangers of nationalism. True nationalists will tend to celebrate everything about their country, including its literature, scenery, cooking, people or sport, as the best of its kind in the world. But their moral judgement can also be distorted by their nationalist sympathies, and the latter can make them oblivious of the worst excesses of their nation. As George Orwell comments: "There is no crime that cannot be condoned when our side commits it."⁴ Because of nationalism we tend to divide the world into an "us" and "them"; terms like "freedom fighter" and "terrorist" become secondary to our own national sympathies; and a form of moral relativism prevails. To avoid this conclusion, we might want to argue for a distinction between "patriotism" and "nationalism." According to Orwell, for example, patriotism involves "devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force upon other people," while the goal of the nationalist is to "secure more power and prestige, *not* for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his individuality."⁵ This distinction does help us to understand how patriotism can be a virtue when it inspires loyalty, courage, and a willingness to sacrifice private desires for something that is greater than oneself. But it cannot be denied that patriotic devotion may also involve a willingness to impose one's own way of life on others and a willingness to sacrifice their lives as well as one's own. In practice it is quite difficult to distinguish between

⁴ See George Orwell, "Notes on Nationalism," in *Such, Such Were the Joys* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953), 96.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

(good) patriotism and (bad) nationalism, and historically the one has often developed into the other: British patriotic fervor at the end of the eighteenth century grew in response to the threat of Napoleon; but it also created a strong sense of national self-righteousness that justified the legitimacy of British imperial rule. Likewise, a sense of national humiliation after the Napoleonic conquest inspired German patriotism and national feeling; but it also sowed the first seeds of Aryanism and exalted national pride.⁶

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Finally, as Marx and others have pointed out, there is also a sense in which nationalism relies upon religious feelings to fabricate an imaginary ideal of the nation that cannot be rationally supported.⁷ The devout nationalist thinks of Mother Russia, la Patrie, or the Fatherland, as quasi-divine beings for whom every sacrifice may be called for and justified. But all of this derives from a basic metaphysical mistake: As Ernest Renan comments in his famous lecture "What is a Nation?": "Nations are not something eternal. They have begun, they will end. They will be replaced, in all probability, by a European federation. But such is not the law of the century in which we live."⁸ The nation state, the obvious focus of nationalist yearning, is a relatively recent phenomenon in the history of the world. Nations came into being at a certain point in time, they have not always existed, and, as Renan reminds us, they will probably have a limited life. It is therefore a mistake to substantialize the nation as if it were a singular being that is both transcendent and eternal. Indeed, nationalist claims about the "soul" of the people provide an excuse for ignoring the reality of internal diversity and conflict. Hence, in the end, nationalism is irrational and self-serving, and it promotes ignorance and self-deception on a massive scale.

We have now sketched three related criticisms of nationalism from a philosophical point of view. These are certainly not the only arguments against nationalism that could be made, but they are quite typical. Using Herder's perspective, however, it can be shown that all of these arguments are themselves dependent upon

⁶ See Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993).

⁷ For a recent discussion of this point from a psychoanalytical perspective, see Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 200-237.

⁸ See Ernest Renan, "What is a Nation?" in Omar Dahbour et al., eds., *The Nationalism Reader* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1995), 154.

a very particular view of what philosophy is—one that is epitomized by the Enlightenment ideal of progress towards universal ideals. A different approach, like Herder's, would question whether universality and necessity really are the privileged regions of truth; and it would emphasize that nationalism is not an aberration, but a valid expression of community and a sense of collective belonging.

ii. J. G. Herder was a leading thinker in what Isaiah Berlin has described as the "Counter-Enlightenment."⁹ Herder was not opposed to the scientific and political progress celebrated by Enlightenment thinkers like Hume, Voltaire and Kant. But he was committed to the absolute value and integrity of all the different peoples of the world, and instead of proclaiming a universal model of progress and civilization, he insisted on the need to understand each culture on its own terms and as an organic unity: "Each nation has its centre of happiness within itself, just as every sphere has its own centre of gravity."¹⁰ And, he explains, "human nature is not the vessel of an absolute, unchanging and independent happiness, as defined by the philosopher; everywhere it attracts the measure of which it is capable: it is a pliant clay which assumes a different shape under different needs and circumstances."¹¹ In his many writings, particularly the *Ideas for A Philosophy of the History of Mankind*, his early essay ironically entitled *Yet Another Philosophy of History*, and other works on language and government, Herder elaborates this position, which is probably the first in the history of western philosophy to affirm the fact of national and cultural diversity.¹² Herder believes that the nation is the natural basis of the state, and so he supported the right of any given people to self-determination.

⁹ See Isaiah Berlin, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 168-242. For an extended overview of Herder's position, see Michael Forster's entry on "Herder" in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/herder/>).

¹⁰ See J. G. Herder on *Social and Political Culture*, ed. F. M. Barnard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 186; hereinafter referred to in the footnotes as *Herder*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹² Selections from all of these works are included in *Herder*. A more recent collection is *Herder's Philosophical Writings*, ed. Michael Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

Herder affirms the ontological priority of the different peoples or nations of the world: "It is nature which educates families: the most natural state is, therefore, *one* nation, an extended family with one national character."¹³ He argues that each nation is the embodiment of a unique culture and a particular way of life, and in this way each culture may be viewed as a unique expression of *humanität* (or the human essence). He also claims that it is the nation (or *Volk*) that provides the most basic and original horizon for understanding and interpreting the world, and it is only insofar as we belong to a particular people that we can begin to make sense out of life. Thus, to be exiled or alienated from one's *Volk* can be spiritually disastrous, for the individual is nothing without the community that has nurtured and supported her and from which she takes all her bearings. Indeed, "Some sensitive people feel so intimately close to their native country, and so much attached to its soil, that they can scarcely live if separated from it."¹⁴ Hence the evil of forcing Africans to leave their homeland to work as slaves in America; hence the danger, also cited frequently by Herder, of rootless cosmopolitanism and spiritual abandonment. On the other hand, to be truly in attunement or at one with the spirit of one's people is the necessary condition for the highest creative achievement; the work of the individual artist, he argues, is just an expression of the national "genius."

For Herder, each culture is a unique expression of humanität.

In specifying what it is that constitutes the essence of a nation, Herder admits the influence of climate, like Montesquieu and others before him, but he argues that a nation is really made one by common traditions, an enduring way of life and a collective memory that is ultimately grounded in a particular language. And the latter is the natural power that integrates people within a particular community and provides the ultimate horizon of all meaning and understanding for them. "For every distinct community is a *nation*," he writes, "having its own national culture as it has its own language. The climate, it is true may imprint on each its peculiar stamp, or it may spread over it a slight veil, without destroying, however, its original national character."¹⁵ Hence, as Isaiah Berlin points out, Herder's conception of nationalism is emphatically cultural rather than political in character, and Herder

A nation is constituted by common language, traditions, and collective memory.

¹³ Herder, 324.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 285.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 284.

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has nothing but scorn for Romans, imperialists and other nationalists who would impose their indigenous customs and ways of life on others—for whatever justification may be offered, the artificial imposition of an alien form or set of values always violates the organic unity of the original culture:

Nothing, therefore, is more manifestly contrary to the purpose of political government than the unnatural enlargement of states, the wild mixing of various races and nationalities under one sceptre. A human sceptre is far too weak and slender for such incongruous parts to be engrafted upon it. Such states are but patched-up contraptions, fragile machines, appropriately called state-machines, for they are wholly devoid of inner life, and their component parts are connected through mechanical contrivances instead of bonds of sentiment.¹⁶

Thus Herder discloses an authentic possibility of nationalism before the triumph of its aggressive forms in the twentieth century made it much harder to view nationalism as an innocent ideal. The basic strengths of his account can be briefly stated: First, Herder emphasizes the importance of cultural belonging in a very convincing way. He does not try to articulate an abstract account of human nature or formulate an ethics that would apply to all people at all times. Instead, he realizes that human beings are shaped by a particular cultural horizon, they belong to a particular place and time, and it is this that allows them to make sense out of the world. Likewise, Herder's discussion of the nation offers us another way of thinking about the legitimacy of the state. For the most part, before Herder, modern philosophers sought to justify the state through the fiction of a social contract conceived in terms of individual self-interest. According to Hobbes, Locke and Kant, this meant that the state was a necessary evil but not a positive good. For Herder, on the other hand, the nation is the ground of the state, every different nation or people should have its own state, and without a common national identity the state must be a "cold monster" that imposes its rule from without. Once again, Herder grasped the necessity of a shared community which involves more than just the equality of rights and procedures, for the latter can never create a common sense of loyalty and belonging. For Herder, it is the nation that provides us with a positive sense of association, and it is a natural, not an artificial, unit of

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 324.

humanity. The final point is Herder's emphasis on cultural diversity as the natural and best state of affairs. Each people has its own specific genius and provides a uniquely valuable expression of *humanität*. There is no universal culture of humankind, and the so-called "underdeveloped" or "primitive" cultures should in no way be regarded as irrelevant or having been superseded by the European enlightenment ideal. Of course, there are also problems with Herder's account—as we shall see in what follows—and recent work on nationalism and diversity is much more sophisticated than Herder's original analysis of these themes.¹⁷ But there is also much that is still to be learned from Herder's perspicuous discussion.

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Following Herder, in fact, we can reply to the first argument against nationalism. The "universal" point of view, celebrated by the Enlightenment, if not by philosophers in general, is actually quite empty and has no relevance for real human beings. What Herder understood, and what the Enlightenment thinkers did not, is the importance of a sense of belonging. And the latter exists only insofar as we live within a particular culture in a particular place and at a particular time in history. Every people and every culture, we should say, draws its own horizon around itself; and in the context of this particular framework of myths, customs, traditions and language, they continually re-create themselves and the culture to which they belong. Thus Enlightenment philosophers, like Kant, may pride themselves on their universal concepts of human nature, but these are really nothing more than their own particular ideals; they are an expression of modern European culture, which the supporters of the Enlightenment wanted to foist upon all other peoples. Not only are these ideals parochial; they also are dangerous insofar as they express the complete triumph of "cold" mechanical reason over living organic form. As Herder comments:

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After dozens of attempts, I find myself unable to comprehend how reason can be presented so universally as the single summit and purpose of all human culture, all happiness, all good. Is the whole

¹⁷ At this point the literature on nationalism is huge. See, for example, Ronald Beiner, ed., *Theorizing Nationalism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1999). Beiner's volume offers an excellent collection of the best contemporary theoretical work on nationalism, including essays by Yael Tamir, Charles Taylor, Brian Barry, Bhikhu Parekh, Will Kymlicka, Michael Walzer and others.

body just one big eye? Would it not suffer if every part, the hand and the foot had to serve as the eye and the brain? Reason, too carelessly, too uselessly diffused, may well weaken desires, instincts and vital activity—in fact, has already done so.¹⁸

For Herder, then, we must continually guard against the prejudice of (abstract) Enlightenment reason and its reduction of the human spirit to a single uniform standard. Cultural and national diversity are the original givens; they are not problems that need to be corrected.

Responsibilities toward others learned only within a particular moral community.

The second concern about nationalism is that it leads to moral relativism and an inability to make independent moral judgments given the primary allegiance to one's own people that nationalism entails. In response, it must be allowed that we have a duty of allegiance to those who are closest to us, our children, friends and neighbors, as opposed to those whom we will never know. And it is only within this particular moral community that we can ever learn about our responsibilities to other people, including those who are strangers. Likewise, the love of one's own friends and family is much deeper and more real than the universal love of humanity, for although the latter may eventually proceed from the former, it is only in the personal and particular context of love that we learn what love is. As Herder puts it:

The savage who loves himself, his wife and child, with quiet joy, and in his modest way works for the good of his tribe, as for his own life, is, in my opinion, a truer being than that shadow of a man, the refined citizen of the world, who, enraptured with the love of all his fellow-shadows, loves but a chimera. The savage in his poor hut has room for every stranger; he receives him as his brother without even inquiring where he comes from. His hospitality is unostentatious, yet warm and sincere. The inundated heart of the idle cosmopolite, on the other hand, offers shelter to nobody.¹⁹

Morality is learned through attention to personal character and virtue, not through reflection on the universal moral law, and this means that the particular is the original ground of moral life. But this does not mean that Herder espouses the complete relativism of different cultures: he argues that different cultures achieve different versions of the good and emphasize different aspects, such as freedom, family, tradition, or social harmony; but no single cul-

¹⁸ Herder, 199.

¹⁹ Ibid, 309.

ture, including the culture of the Enlightenment, has a privileged access to goodness. This means that every particular culture is incomplete, and there is probably something to be learned about the nature of goodness from every different culture. Such a position promotes moral growth and is explicitly at odds with moral relativism as such. This aspect of Herder's work has been especially noted by contemporary multiculturalists, and it continues to be relevant.

All cultures can learn something about goodness from others.

Finally, there is the claim that nationalism is often accompanied by a bogus religious sentiment that makes individual nationalists into "true believers," and capable of the worst excesses for the sake of their own national idol. From Herder's perspective, this criticism would seem to rely upon a very questionable disjunction between reason and the passions. In fact, Herder argues that this fracturing of human beings, and the attempt to separate different faculties, is part of the problem of modern Enlightenment culture. Herder insists that every aspect of our culture—religion, morality, custom, tradition, law—is closely related to every other aspect and congruent with it. Hence it can be argued that nationalism is entirely natural since it represents the affirmative response of those who are nurtured and developed by a particular way of life. We affirm the community to which we belong even at the same time that we criticize it, though rarely would we want to leave it. This is not merely an intellectual activity on our part, but a response of our whole being, and it is accordingly "religious" or enthusiastic in nature. And if it is objected that nationalism cannot be a natural response, since the nation state is by most accounts a comparatively recent development, it may be allowed that, while political nationalism has been slow to emerge, the "cultural nationalism" on which it depends has existed for much longer, and perhaps for as long as human society itself. Of course, anything can be abused—nationalism, religion, even liberal attempts at fairness—but this does not show that any of these things is inherently flawed.

Both affirming and criticizing one's own community wholly compatible.

Herder's philosophical work forces us to reexamine the objections made against nationalism from a philosophical point of view. Before we reach a final verdict on his philosophy, however, we must first examine some difficulties with his particular account of nationalism, especially in light of the steady emergence of multicultural and multiracial societies in the world today, and the

development of a “global” economy, all of which appear to challenge the priority of the traditional nation state.

Herder failed to appreciate sufficiently the internal diversity of nations.

iii. It is no accident, and it is certainly quite intriguing, that Herder has found support from both the defenders of nationalism and the adherents of multiculturalism. This suggests an overarching vision that may actually be attuned to what is best in both perspectives. Nevertheless, and at the risk of some oversimplification, three basic and interrelated problems with Herder’s account of nationalism can briefly be described. Herder may not have been able to anticipate these problems since nationalism really flourished in the years after his death, but they obviously have some bearing on the relevance of his account. First, even though Herder does emphasize the diversity of different cultures and their radical incommensurability with each other, he frequently writes as if each particular culture is largely homogeneous and embodies a single way of life. Thus Herder fails to emphasize—even if sometimes he does explicitly recognize—the reality of internal diversity, or the fact that within any given nation there will be rich and poor living separate lives, there will be regional variations and religious rivalries, perhaps a polarity between town and country, and a significant difference in the opportunities available to women as opposed to men. In this respect, for example, it can be urged that it makes no sense to talk about “the English way of life” as if this were something that was uniformly available to all English people. What would “the English way of life” consist of—support for the monarchy, cricket on the green, a love of Shakespeare and the Romantic poets, a fierce sense of independence and kindness to animals? A critic would say that these are all self-serving cultural icons. Like most other countries England is now a multicultural and multiracial society with a large non-Christian population. It contains great extremes of wealth and significant regional variations, and any attempt to describe English national culture should be able to capture this diversity.

The second problem is what may be called Herder’s “cultural determinism.” Perhaps Herder is right to give nationalism a cultural (rather than an ethnic or a political) basis, but he also seems to believe that culture is everything. Economic and political currents do not seem to have any place in Herder’s discussion of how the different nations are ordered and developed. His emphasis is

actually on language as the core of our *humanität*. But surely, it may be argued, transnational capitalism is now significantly shaping human realities, and the sovereignty of different nations is seriously challenged by it. The movement towards a united Europe is an obvious case in point.

Herder offers an account of peoples and their cultures, and he uses this to argue that nations are the natural units of humankind that exist by analogy with the family. The problem is that Herder's work was written at the end of the eighteenth century, and the reality of distinctly different peoples—the English, the German, the French, etc.—with their own particular national characteristics is no longer as obvious as it had once appeared to be. Multicultural and multiracial societies have become a feature of modern life, and the continual mixing of populations will presumably continue as refugees and migrant workers follow the global flows of capitalism. In this regard, Herder's account of nationalism seems rather outdated, and, as we have seen, he appears to resist current developments when he reviles “[t]he wild mixing of various races and nationalities under one sceptre,” even though he is the champion of cultural diversity.

The third criticism would simply be that Herder overstates the priority of nationalism and nationalist sentiment. The importance of a sense of belonging and membership within a given community can hardly be denied. It is not so much a choice but a destiny, and we will always be shaped by it. But it is also the case that we belong to, and identify ourselves with, multiple communities. If I am poor, then there are contexts in which I will identify with all of those who are dispossessed; and if I am a victim of racial prejudice, then I will probably come to identify more strongly with my own racial or ethnic community. I may also have strong religious loyalties; and sometimes being a teacher or being an immigrant will be the context that provides an identity for me. And yet, if I am poor, or the victim of prejudice and not given equal treatment under the law, then I may not feel any strong sense of national belonging. All of which suggests that nationalism is not a natural given but a social construction that can ebb and flow depending on individual and historical circumstances.

We can briefly summarize these objections: (1) Herder's account lacks a sense of the nation's internal diversity; (2) Herder's account supports cultural determinism and largely ignores eco-

conomic factors; and (3) Herder overestimates the importance of the nation and nationalist sentiment. I am somewhat sympathetic to these criticisms, but at the same time I think that much more needs to be said, and in reviewing these points I shall move towards a final evaluation of Herder's work as a relevant philosophy for our time. First of all, this essay began with an observation concerning the resurgence of nationalism in the modern world, everywhere from Scotland to Quebec. Nationalist feeling is by no means a spent force, and one important consideration here is that our identification with any particular nation is typically beyond our control, and it is not something that has to be voluntarily affirmed. Most dramatically, for example, during a war or after a significant terrorist attack, the people of a particular country will usually experience a common sense of identity and belonging insofar as they sense that they all share a common fate. In his essays on nationalism, mentioned above, George Orwell points out that during the London Blitz the shared risk and suffering that people endured created a very strong sense of solidarity and pride in spite of the huge differences in class and station that existed in England at that time. This could be considered an exceptional circumstance, but I think it only brings out what is more usually the case, that quite apart from all of their differences, people also share a group identity insofar as they all abide by a common set of laws, use the same system of public education, and are affected by the same ongoing issues and struggles that shape the history of their community. In this respect, individuals participate in the traditions of their society while they also help to develop and transform them.

Personal belonging constituted through the intertwining of narratives.

More can be said about the nature of tradition and our involvement with it, since this really is the basis of Herder's "cultural determinism." In his defense of patriotism, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that the idea of a community and our own sense of personal belonging are constituted through the intertwining of different narratives that enfold and connect with each other. It is an important point that is worth repeating:

Each one of us to some degree or other understands his or her life as an enacted narrative; and because of our relationships with others we have to understand ourselves as characters in the enacted narratives of other people's lives. Moreover the story of each of our lives is characteristically embedded in the story of one or more larger units. I understand the story of my life in such a way that it is part of the history of my family or of this farm or of this

university or of this countryside; and I understand the story of the lives of the other individuals around me as embedded in the same larger stories, so that I and they share a common stake in the outcome of the story and in what sort of story it both is and is to be: tragic, heroic, comic.²⁰

But now someone might ask, what is the narrative or the story that I should be telling about my life, and the nature of the community of which I am a member? There is an aspect of destiny here—after all, I cannot choose my parents or decide for myself where I was born. I cannot choose to be male or female or black or white and whether I will suffer discrimination because of my race or sex. And yet at a certain point I can decide to affirm or else to reconstrue the shape of the cultural horizon that surrounds and supports me. Presumably, in the latter case, this is what it would mean to change one's self-understanding, and to think of oneself as a citizen of a modern multiracial society, and not as a member of the (white) English race; or to think of oneself as a European, as opposed to a German; or to think of oneself as an American as opposed to an immigrant in exile. MacIntyre is right about the importance of tradition in shaping personal identity. But this is also a reciprocal process in which the traditions can be redescribed by the subjects who are formed by those traditions. And this means that there is both a subjective and an objective aspect to personal narrative identity and the sense of a community.

This point helps us to appreciate the significance of the so-called "Campus wars" and heated discussions about the school curriculum and how subjects like literature and history should be taught. This is not just a matter of "political correctness," but an attempt to answer important questions such as, What does it mean to be British (or French or American etc.)? What is the nature of the community to which we belong? And once we recognize that we *do* belong to a given community with a rich diversity of traditions, how are we to educate children to become full members of that community so that they all experience a deep sense of belonging? As Herder saw, each particular culture has its own collective memory, its own festivals, and a common tradition that grounds the community and opens up the future for those who belong to it. But to what extent should we now insist upon a common, "mo-

²⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Is Patriotism a Virtue?* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1984).

nocultural” perspective, and to what extent should we encourage the preservation of specific cultural differences among immigrant populations who now reside in this country? Is it possible to affirm a multicultural tradition or is there more to be said for the ideal of the “melting pot” and accepting the priority of the establishment culture? These discussions will be difficult, but it is only on this intellectual and specifically *cultural* level that people will ever acquire a positive sense of their own particular community. Tradition is not mechanical but dynamic, and it requires an active engagement on the part of anyone who desires to belong to it fully.

Likewise, it is important to emphasize that particular identifications, like being an American or being a European, will have to be confirmed and supported by economic, legal, educational and political realities if they are ever to inspire enduring human communities. Hence the need to consider anti-discriminatory laws, a curriculum that addresses all students and gives them a sense of belonging, and a political system that allows equal access to all groups; for these are among the objective correlates and supports for a positive sense of group identity.

So far we have discussed the unavoidability of national identity (at least for the foreseeable future) and its undeniable power, which may be either manifest or latent. Herder’s neglect of internal diversity is perhaps not as crucial as we might first think, because it is quite possible for very different people to share a common collective narrative. We have also suggested a way of thinking about “cultural determinism” that makes more sense, given that our understanding of national identity involves the reflection of a tradition, and this is subject to reflection, enactment and change. But finally, what about the claim that Herder’s account does not allow for the reality of globalization but relies instead upon problematic ideas like “national characters” and their distinctive traditions? Admittedly, Herder’s philosophy of nationalism is now anachronistic in certain respects, and the modern world is very different from the world that Herder knew at the end of the eighteenth century. All the same, it should be pointed out that the reality of economic and cultural globalization is not something that is totally fixed and determined. It is largely dependent upon particular nations and the different ways in which they choose to affirm it, ignore it, reject it or transform it. It is important to note that nationalists and patriots *and* the supporters of

Economic and cultural globalization not necessarily inevitable.

multiculturalism all affirm the priority of a particular sense of belonging over the relentless drive towards commodification and development—or homogenization—through global economic exchange. They realize that only by defending cultural particularity can specific identities be preserved, which are essential to human flourishing; and this cultural vitality, as Herder was himself the first to see, is the measure of our deepest well-being.

The philosophy of Herder is historically important insofar as it offers the first sustained discussion of national and cultural diversity. In opposition to Enlightenment universalism, Herder emphasizes the absolute importance of a sense of belonging and allegiance to a particular community, and he provides a new justification of the state in terms of the nation it is meant to serve. There is much of value in Herder's discussion. One of the main points of this article has been to emphasize his continued relevance as a social philosopher. I have sought to provide an initial evaluation of his position, including problems with his account of nationalism. My hope is that these observations will inspire a continued conversation on highly significant and timely ideas in Herder's philosophy.