

**THE OLD LIE:
TAMIR AND MACINTYRE ON NATIONALISM AND
DYING FOR THE LIBERAL STATE**

By
Rastislav Dinic

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Political Science

In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisor: Professor Janos Kis

Budapest, Hungary
2007

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank professor Janos Kis, for being prepared to go out of his way and accept to supervise me on this thesis, professor Zoltan Miklosi for all the useful comments he gave me, and last but not the least, Orsi, my friend and colleague, for lending me her laptop, but even more for giving me support and encouragement when I needed them the most. Needless to say, the author is solely to blame for any faults in the outcome.

ABSTRACT

The thesis investigates whether the liberal state is should be allowed to use nationalist imagery and rhetoric in order to provide its citizens with a reason to risk their lives for it. Two different answers to this questions are confronted, an affirmative one by Yael Tamir and a negative one, by Alasdair Macintyre. The two conceptions are compared in the light of Bernard Williams' internalist theory of reasons for action, and it is concluded that Tamir's concept suffers from insurmountable difficulties, for it conflicts with liberal morality and also fails to provide valid reasons for citizens to sacrifice their lives for the state.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 1: PRO PATRIA MORI.....	3
1.1 Yael Tamir on the Nationalist Ground Project.....	3
1.2 Alasdair MacIntyre: Is Patriotism a Virtue?.....	7
CHAPTER 2: ON INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL REASONS.....	13
2.1 Williams on Internal and External Reasons	14
2.2 Reasons, Practices and Traditions: MacIntyre's Critique of Williams.....	19
2.3 MacIntyreian Interpretation of Owen Wingrave	22
CHAPTER 3: THE NATIONALIST GROUND PROJECT, THE CONCEPT AND THE PROBLEMS..	30
3.1 The Nationalist Ground Project and Liberal Morality	33
3.2 The Nationalist Ground Project between False Belief and Irrationality	35
3.2.1 <i>On Truth and Falsity of Images</i>	39
3.2.2 <i>On Humean Irrationality</i>	47
CONCLUSION.....	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY	52

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the famous Hobbes's exclamation that a man fighting for his state is only "protecting his protection", the obligation of citizens to sacrifice their lives for the state, especially in connection to the military obligation, has presented a recurring problem for liberal theorists. However, it was a problem they were rather trying and mostly succeeding to avoid, than to face head on. April Carter notes that when liberal theory rarely dealt with the military obligation, and where it did, it dealt primarily with the ways of avoiding it¹.

This gap in liberal theory presented left it open for numerous attacks from different anti-liberals thinkers, from Hegel, through Carls Schmitt, to Alasdair Macintyre. The arguments changed, but the objection stayed the same: liberalism is not able to obligate its citizens to sacrifice their lives for the state, and that is why it is in the long-run, indefensible.

On the other hand, the factual resilience of the liberal states and their capability to mobilize citizenry whenever it was necessary, obviously spoke otherwise. During the last century, liberal states fought and frequently won several bloody and exhausting wars, while relying primarily on conscript armies. How could this discrepancy be explained?

April Carter explains this with the fact that in the times of war, liberalism steps down before nationalist and populist ideologies, and it is the latter that succeed in mobilizing the citizens. This reliance on illiberal ideologies, even if only in times of strife, is seen by Carter as problematic, and she considers it a strong reason for developing a strong liberal conception of citizenship with clearly defined duties.

However, there are different opinions on the subject, and one of them will be discussed in this paper – Yael Tamir defends nationalist ideology as a way to provide citizens of the liberal state with a reason to risk their lives for the state. Tamir sees nationalism as

¹ April Carter, 'Liberalism and the Obligation to Military Service', *Political Studies*, 46 (1998), 68

indeed inconsistent with “the contractarian ethos”, but she holds that it is primarily a conflict between two political cultures, and argues for nationalism as a legitimate way of persuasion, as long as the choice whether to accept its reasons is left to the citizen herself. On the other hand, Alasdair MacIntyre claims that incompatibility of nationalist and liberal ideology is much deeper, and that these two ideologies represent two completely irreconcilable moralities. Therefore, he argues, for a liberal state to cultivate a nationalist (or as MacIntyre calls it – patriotic) ethos, would be both immoral and deceitful.

In this paper I will argue that both MacIntyre’s objections (of immorality and of deceitfulness) are correct, and will show that even Tamir’s conception must succumb to them. In the first chapter I will summarise the argument that Yale Tamir makes in her text “Pro Patria Mori”, and then the one made by MacIntyre in his Lindley Lecture, “Is Patriotism a Virtue?”. In the second chapter I will propose that the authors’ differences should be looked for in their different stands on Bernard Williams’ conception of a ground project and internal and external reasons for action, give a short summary of Williams’ internalist argument and MacIntyre’s criticism of it argument.

In the third chapter I will show that the way that persuading citizens to adopt the nationalist ground project, the way Tamir defines it, is bound to conflict with liberal morality. Also, I argue that if the adoption of this ground project is based on nationalist imagery, which seems to be Tamir’s main thesis, then it is either based on false beliefs, or must be treated as irrational. In either case, such a ground project fails to provide a reason for the citizen to sacrifice her life for the state.

Finally, I conclude that due both to its incompatibility with the liberal morality and its failure to provide valid reason for a citizen to sacrifice her life for the state, Tamir’s account fails in justifying nationalism as a legitimate means for a liberal state to attain the legitimate end of self-defense.

CHAPTER 1: PRO PATRIA MORI

1.1 Yael TAMIR ON THE NATIONALIST GROUND PROJECT

There is a common argument in political theory that nations need states to survive. In her text “Pro Patria Mori! *Death and the State*”², Tamir turns this argument on its head, claiming that the opposite is also true – nations are necessary for the states to survive. When the state is asking of its citizens to risk or even sacrifice their lives for it, it must offer something in return. But what could be a valid reimbursement for a loss of life? Something bigger than life, or at least bigger than individual life, and that is the life of a nation as a whole.

According to Tamir, it is exactly the states which “foster a contractual ethos”³, that is – liberal democracies, which most often have to resort to nationalist discourse in situations which require personal sacrifice on behalf of their citizens. Says Tamir:

“Nationalism should therefore be seen not as the pathology infecting modern liberal states but as an answer to their legitimate needs of self-defense or, to put it in even more dramatic terms, as a remedy to their malaise – namely, the atomism, neurosis, and alienation that inflict liberal states and may leave them defenseless.”⁴

But how can nationalism help “remedy the liberal malaise”? Or, more precisely, how can nationalism motivate the atomistic liberal citizens to willingly risk their lives for the state? First, nationalism is able to provide a *reason* for citizens to sacrifice their lives for the state, by making the state seem worthy of this sacrifice. It helps the citizens see their state not just as a voluntary association, but also as a “community of fate”⁵, a protector of cultural heritage

² Yael Tamir, “Pro Patria Mori! *Death and the State*”, in *Morality of Nationalism*, Robert McKim & Jeff McMahan eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.)

³ Ibidem, 232.

⁴ Ibidem, 292

⁵ Ibidem, 232.

and historical memory. Such a state claims to guarantee its members not only safety, like the Hobbsian state, but also a meaningful, contextualized existence, embedded in the history of the nation, with all its successes and failures. An individual who sees herself as a part of this supra-individual national project, can, without any inconsistency be prepared to sacrifice her life for this project, and the state as its integral part. Here, Tamir refers to Williams' concept of "the ground project"⁶ which she defines as "an endeavor on which the successful pursuit of all other projects is dependent"⁷. Williams claims and Tamir concurs, that it is perfectly sensible that people are prepared to risk and even sacrifice their lives for their ground projects, since a life without these would be meaningless. Of course, there can be, and indeed there are, different kinds of ground projects. An artist can consider her life to be meaningless unless she is able to finish the master-piece she is working on, and a mother can consider her life meaningless unless she is able to provide good life for her children, and that is why the former would be prepared to sacrifice her health in order to finish her life-work, and the latter would be prepared to risk her own well-being for the sake of her off-spring. What nationalism is supposed to do is convince people that the well-being of the state is a valid ground project, and that they should treat it as such. And the fact that the national project is meant to guarantee a historical continuity between the past and the future, thus transcending the lives of individual citizens, makes it sensible to treat it as such.

However, that is not all. Tamir points out that even if a large number of citizens accepted the nation-state as this kind of ground project, most of them would certainly still prefer to continue participating in this project, than to lay down their lives for it. For that reason, they would be tempted to *freeride*, or to enjoy the benefits of living in the community, without paying the costs that it entails. Also, fear of death is a factor whose strength cannot be underestimated and it is reasonable to believe that even the most patriotic citizen would rather

⁶ Ibidem

⁷ Ibidem, 233.

live for their state, than die for it, especially if someone else is prepared to die for it instead of him.

That is where the second role of nationalism comes in. It does not offer only the reason why the state is worth dying for, but also appropriate incentives that should help individuals conquer their fear of death. Here, Tamir refers to the famous Epicure's argument that, since we can not know death, there is no reason to be afraid of it. Even if we accept Epicure's argument, and reject death itself as a reason for fear, there are, Tamir asserts, still four different implications of death which may incite fear in human beings. First, we may fear the process of dying (which is different from death). If this process is painful, or terrifying, there is good reason to fear it, even if we do not fear its outcome. Second, we may have an existential anxiety caused by the very temporariness of human existence, and its "incidental and nonessential nature"⁸. Third, and as Tamir claims, closely related to the second, we may be afraid that of the implications of death on the meaning of our existence, that death will somehow render our existence meaningless. And fourth, we may be concerned about the fate of our loved ones, and the fact that we would no longer be there to protect them.

Tamir shows that it is exactly in tackling these issues that the usefulness of nationalist ideology comes to full light. First, she shows that nationalist and patriotic literature pictures death on the battlefield as peaceful and dignified, thus releasing future soldiers from fear of painful and brutal process of dying. "Moreover", Tamir adds, "nationalist literature ties death with hope and promise for a better future, rather than to despair and destitution."⁹ The deaths portrayed in nationalist propaganda are "but a beginning"¹⁰, a beginning of a better and brighter future for the nation, but also of the new and eternal life in national history, for the fallen soldiers.

⁸ Ibidem, 234.

⁹ Ibidem, 235.

¹⁰ Ibidem, 236.

This brings us straight to the second point Tamir makes, that nationalism “shifts finite humane experience from the sphere of the mundane and contingent to the realm of the eternal”.¹¹ She claims that nationalist rituals, literature and imagery create a collective memory which ensures a sort of secular belief in personal immortality for the soldiers fallen in battle. That way, nationalism is able to appease the fear of mortality itself, of the fact that the world will go on without us. If we layed our life down for our country, it actually would not go on without us, because we would have continued living in the collective memory.

Third, Tamir claims that nationalism is able to assure individuals that dying in battle may make their lives more meaningful then they would have been otherwise, even if they were longer. The reasoning behind this claim can be summarized in the following way: if what we fear when we fear death is actually that our existence will lose its meaning, than the cure for this fear is not to make our life longer, but to make it more meaningful. And although the longevity and the meaningfulness of one’s life may coincide, they may also diverge and even conflict. My life may actually be more meaningful if I sacrifice it for a worthy cause, than if I prolong it and then spend the rest of it in petty and self-indulging amusement. A life of a fire-fighter who dies at 30 while saving children from a burning building can be considered more meaningful than the one she could have led if she lived to be 80 and spend all her years eating chips and watching TV. One of the points of nationalist rhetoric is to convince individuals that military service, with all the danger that it entails, is one of these “meaning generating” acts, so that there is no reason to fear it. On the contrary, one should pursue it if she wants her life to be meaningful. “Combat soldiers are thus seen not only as best citizens, but also as finest people”, says Tamir. “The meaning and worthiness of their lives are defined by their readiness to face death.”¹²

¹¹ Ibidem

¹² Ibidem, 238.

Finally, Tamir notes that in order to alleviate the worries that soldiers have about what might happen to their loved ones after they are gone, the state offers generous material rewards and benefits to those who act courageously in its defense. Moreover, the military service presents a way to acquire a stable and respected position in society and access to important social networks. On the other hand, refusing military service, even when it is not punishable by law, is still frowned upon and stigmatized by the society. All this taken into account, one may ensure a much better future for his family if he joins the army, than if he refuses to do so.

To conclude, Tamir's opinion is that liberal democracies must depend on some form of nationalism in order to justify the obligation to military service. Like she says in her book "Liberal Nationalism", "there is a long-standing, though much denied alliance between liberal and national ideas that might explain the inconsistencies pervading modern liberal theory."¹³ There is an associative account of political obligations, which goes beyond the purely contractual one in that it explains these obligations not only on the formal fact of belonging to a state, but also on the feeling of belonging to it. And it is this feeling of belonging that the obligation to die for the state may be based upon. One is so obliged if she feels herself so obliged, and this would mean that she accepts, at least to a certain extent, the nationalist view of the state.

1.2 ALASDAIR MACINTYRE: IS PATRIOTISM A VIRTUE?

MacIntyre's opinion on this subject is in many ways similar to Tamir's. He too believes that liberalism is incapable to provide justification for the obligation to die for the state, and he too believes that the modern liberal state relies on nationalism (that is, patriotism), to justify this obligation. However, where MacIntyre would disagree with Tamir is in assessing whether this "alliance" between liberalism and nationalism can be upheld.

¹³ Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.), 117

According to MacIntyre liberal morality which is based on neutral and universal principles, and patriotism, which is based on loyalty to a particular community are mutually incompatible. What is a vice for one is a virtue for another. A patriot cannot be a liberal, and vice versa, without falling into inconsistency. And since the modern state expects its soldiers to be patriotic, so they would be prepared to sacrifice their lives for it, then, MacIntyre concludes, “good soldiers may not be liberals”.¹⁴ However, for MacIntyre, this does not mean just that nationalism may be “useful” for the liberal state, but also reveals a deep and irresolvable contradiction in the existence of such a state.

But let us start from the beginning. Why can there be no compromise between liberal morality and patriotism? MacIntyre claims that the liberal account of morality presupposes an impersonal standpoint in moral judgment. According to this account, if we want to judge and act morally, we have to abstract ourselves from all particular ties and loyalties. In other words liberal morality requires impartiality. On the other hand, patriotism is based on the particular loyalty that binds us to our nation. This means that patriotism requires partiality. From this MacIntyre concludes that the two are necessarily incompatible.

Although there where attempts to reconcile these two positions in the form of “moderate patriotism”¹⁵, MacIntyre claims that such attempts are doomed to fail. In his opinion, there are two key reasons why this is so. First, when conflicts between nations over scarce natural resources arise, the requirements of impersonal liberal morality must collide with the requirements of patriotism; the former will require that the resources in question be distributed among the individuals regardless of their communal belonging, while the latter will give primacy to one of the communities in conflict.

Second, MacIntyre asserts, communities may enter into conflict over their respective understandings of good life. In this case too, impersonal morality on one side, and patriotism

¹⁴ MacIntyre, Alasdair, “Is Patriotism a Virtue?”, *Theorizing Citizenship*, Ronald Beiner ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 226.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 212

on the other, suggest radically different ways of resolving these conflicts. Once again, liberal morality strives for a solution which is neutral, although this time between competing beliefs, while patriotism requires loyalty to a particular community's conception of a good life.

So, MacIntyre concludes, "moderate patriotism" seen as particularistic loyalty under the constraints of liberal morality, can be sustained only in the relatively peaceful periods of international relations. Whenever a more serious conflict arises, a moderate patriot will be forced too choose between impersonal morality and patriotic loyalty.

However, MacIntyre points out that there is a different moral tradition, the one originating in Aristotle's political philosophy, which does not consider patriotism to be at odds with morality, but indeed holds that patriotism a prerequisite for it. What makes this moral tradition different from liberal morality is that it is not impersonal. In MacIntyre's own words:

"According to liberal morality, the questions *where* and *from whom* I learn the principles or precepts of morality are and must be irrelevant both to the question of what the content of morality is and to that of the nature of my commitment to it [...] By contrast, on the alternative account of morality which I am going to sketch, the question of *where* and *from whom* I learn my morality turn out to be crucial for both the content and the nature of moral commitment."¹⁶

MacIntyre's hypothesis claims that moral rules have to be acquired within some specific community. And since the morality of a community is always historical, and shaped not only by certain canonical texts (which may be shared by a larger number of different communities), but also by the "way in which members of the particular community responded to some earlier situation or series of situations", it must be particular in its character and differ greatly from the universal and a-historical rules of liberal morality. This is even more obvious

¹⁶ Ibidem, 213

when we take into account that the way moral rules are interpreted and apprehended depends on particular institutional arrangements practiced in the given community.

MacIntyre admits that this line of reasoning may be criticized from the liberal standpoint. It is true, the liberal critic might say, that moral rules are first acquired this way, but they can only be considered as moral rules because they represent an applied version of the universal moral rules, and the process of moral reasoning for individuals presupposes a process of abstracting these rules from social particularities and contingencies.

However, MacIntyre raises two objections to this line of criticism. First, he says, it is not just that we first acquire moral principles in a particular community, but that these principles must be justified with reference to a particular, socially specific good, which is inseparable from a particular kind of social life. “Goods are never encountered except as thus particularized”, claims MacIntyre, and concludes: “It follows that *I* find *my* justification for allegiance to these rules of morality in *my* particular community, *I* would no reason to be moral”¹⁷.

Second, he adds that the weakness of will and susceptibility to temptation make it difficult for an average individual to persist in obeying the moral rules if she is left to her own devices. That is why individuals need a moral community to support them in the moral choices they make, and it is only in such a community that an average individual is capable of continuous and sustainable moral agency. Also, the communities which treat their members with certain moral expectations show them a kind of respect which is necessary for the long-term development of the person’s moral capacities. For all these reasons, morality is seen in this conception, as inseparable from the particular community in which it is practiced. Taking all this into account, MacIntyre comes to the following conclusion:

¹⁷ Ibidem, 217

“*If* first of all it is the case that I can only apprehend the rules of morality in the version in which they are incarnated in some specific community; and *if* second it is the case that the justification of morality must be in terms of particular goods enjoyed within the life of particular communities; and *if* third it is the case that I am characteristically brought into being and maintained as a moral agent only through the particular kind of moral sustenance afforded by my community, *then* it is clear that deprived of this community, I am unlikely to flourish as a moral agent. Hence, my allegiance to the community and what it requires of me – even to the point of requiring me to die to sustain its life – could not meaningfully be counterposed to what morality required of me.”¹⁸

And this is why, in MacIntyre’s alternative account of morality, patriotism is a not only virtue, but a central virtue. If community is necessary for me to be a moral agent, than patriotism as a loyalty to this community is also necessary for my personal morality. In this case, even dying for the community is in the interest of morality, and not as in the liberal account, contrary to it, or inexplicable by it.

However, MacIntyre further claims, the main premise of this morality of patriotism is that an individual can only make sense of her moral obligations and capacities if she understands her own life as a part of historical narrative of her own community. And that, he adds, means that patriotism can sensibly be regarded a virtue only in the communities based on the “bonds deriving from history”¹⁹. In communities in which these historical bonds have been substituted with bonds of reciprocal self-interest, as is the case in the modern liberal states, patriotism would have to be an irrational attitude.

This, of course, does not mean that feelings of patriotism cannot exist even in the modern liberal states. They can and do exist. Moreover, they are purposefully incited by the state in the situations when personal sacrifices on behalf of the citizens have to be made,

¹⁸ Ibidem, 218

¹⁹ Ibidem, 225

armed conflict being the most notable of such situations. But, in MacIntyre's opinion, since in such communities there is no possibility for genuine morality of patriotism, than "what paraded itself as patriotism would be an unjustifiable simulacrum". Hence, the feelings incited by this simulacrum can be nothing more than a deception, or more simply put – a lie. The fact that this lie may be useful, or even necessary for the survival of the state, does not make it any less of a lie.

CHAPTER 2: ON INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL REASONS

Tamir' whole conception is based on the concept borrowed from Bernard Williams – that of the ground project. In his text “Persons, characters, morality”, Williams indeed does claim that: “There is no contradiction in the idea of a man's dying for a ground project – quite the reverse, since if death really is necessary for the project, then to live would be to live with it unsatisfied, something which, if it really is his ground project, he has no reason to do.”²⁰

However, for what Williams means by “having a reason to do something” we will have to look more closely at his conception of internal and external reasons. As far as Macintyre's account is concerned, the reason why he is able to openly pose the question that Tamir avoids, that of rightness of dying for the state, and indeed considers it to be of central importance, lies in the fact that he take a very different view of the concept of the ground project than Williams does. But in order to present this view, I will have to turn to Macintyre's critique of Williams' internalism.

Since both strands seem to be pointing in the same direction, I will proceed with my argument by reviewing Williams' account of internal and external reasons, and Macintyre's critique of this account. Conveniently, Williams illustrates his argument with an example which seems to be tailor-made for our discussion, that of Owen Wingrave, the hero of Henry James' story of the same name. I will retain the example, and also use give a hypothetical Macintyrian account of it. Afterwards I will reflect on the significance and consequences that these two accounts for the problem of dying for the liberal state.

In his text on internal and external reasons, Bernard Williams suggests a provisional distinction between the two, only to conclude that external reasons as such cannot really exist – either they are “disguised” internal reasons, or they are no reasons at all. To illustrate his

²⁰ Bernard Williams, “Persons, characters, morality”, in *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 13.

point, Williams uses a literary example – Henry James’ story “Owen Wingrave”, about a young man who declines to pursue a military career despite his family’s military tradition.

Alasdair Macintyre criticizes Williams’ conclusion on several counts, and suggests the distinction between internal and external reasons should be redrawn in such a way that both types of reasons should still be meaningful, while the transition of the latter into the former should be made clearer. Macintyre especially insists on the role of social mediation in this transition from purely external to internal reasons.

I will begin with a short summary of James’ story; then I will proceed with an exposition of Williams’ arguments, and the way that he uses the Wingrave example to illustrate it; then I will pass on to Macintyre’s critique of Williams, and in the end I will offer a Macintyrian account of the Owen Wingrave example and offer arguments for its advantage over Williams’ model.

2.1 WILLIAMS ON INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL REASONS

Owen Wingrave, the hero of James’ story of the same title, is a young man who comes from a family with a long and distinguished military tradition. All of his male predecessors have dedicated their lives (and many have lost them, too) to the military profession. It is expected that he will follow in their footsteps and become an officer himself. However, he declines to do that. At the very beginning of the story he announces to his family and friends that he has no intention to pursue a military career, and moreover that he considers the military trade as such to be immoral and even “criminal”. The plot of the story revolves around the attempts of Owen’s family to dissuade him of his intentions and bring him back to the traditional path. However, all the attempts fail, and the family gives up on Owen, labeling him a coward. The story comes to its tragic finale when Owen, in an attempt to prove that he is not a coward, decides to spend a night in a locked room which is supposedly haunted by a

ghost of his dead grand-grandfather., and is found dead the following morning, lying on the floor “like a young soldier on a battle field”.

Williams’ argumentation unfolds in the following way. There are, he claims, two ways in which we speak about reasons for action. One is when we claim that person *A* has a reason to *f*, if and only if she has a motive which would be “served or furthered” by her *f*-ing²¹. The other is when we claim that no such motive is necessary for the person *A* to have a reason to *f*. Provisionally, Williams names the first manner of speaking about reasons “internal”, and the other “external”, and even identifies two corresponding types of reasons – internal and external reasons. The distinction is provisional since his whole article is aimed at proving, and indeed in the end claims to have proven, that there is no such thing as external reasons. How is that supposed to be the case?

First, Williams claims, there is a certain set of motivations (*S*) that a person *A* has. This set is not static, and it is also not reducible to a set of desires in the simple (or animal, although Williams does not use this exact expression) sense of the word, but can contain “dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties and various projects”²². If *A* has an *internal* reason to *f*, than there has to be an element (*D*) in this set that *f*-ing is related to as means to an end, or is, alternatively, itself an achievement of an end desired by *D*. Person *A* can deliberate on the ends that she is pursuing in the sense that she can compare and weigh the ends she is pursuing (in the case they are conflicting or have to be ordered), reconsider some of the ends in the light of their causal connections to other ends, and discover new ends to be pursued, again primarily regarding their relationship to already existing ones (but also, through imagination, become aware of some completely new ones). That is why the set of motivations is not static, but can grow or diminish.

²¹ Bernard Williams, “Internal and External Reasons”, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.), 101.

²² Ibidem, 105

Second, Williams argues that needs do not necessarily implicate motivations. *A* may *need* something (a medicine) in order to stay alive, but still not have any *motivation* to stay alive whatsoever. Consequently, she would have no motivation to take the medicine, although she may in some sense *need* it²³.

Finally, Williams concludes, if even after thorough deliberation, *A* can has no element in her *S* to *f*, then she has no *internal* reason to *f*. And if, even after that being established, it is claimed that there are reasons for *A* to *f*, than that can only be claimed in an external sense. And that is where the Owen Wingrave example comes into play. Writes Williams:

“Owen’s family urge on him the necessity and importance of his joining the army, since all his male ancestors were soldiers, and family pride requires him to do the same. Owen Wingrave has no motivation to join the army at all, and all his desires lead in another direction: he hates military life and what it means. His family might have expressed themselves by saying that *there was a reason for Owen to join the army*. Knowing that there was nothing in Owen’s *S* which would lead, through deliberative reasoning, to his doing this would not make them withdraw the claim or admit that they made it under a misapprehension. They mean it in an external sense.”²⁴

However, Williams asserts, it is unclear what external reason statements so described might actually mean. They cannot serve as an explanation of a person’s (in this case Owen’s) acting in a certain way, since for that to be the case, they would also have to motivate him in some way, which they, by definition, cannot do. “[N]o external reason statement could *by itself* offer an explanation of anyone’s action. Even if it were true (whatever that might turn out to mean) that there was a reason for Owen to join the army, that fact by itself would never explain anything that Owen did, not even his joining the army, For if it was true at all, it was

²³ At least she will have no motivation arising from the need. She may have a motivation to take the medicine for instance, because she would not want to make her relatives worried. But that is a motivation arising from her worry for her relatives and their feelings and not from her need for the medicine in order to stay alive.

²⁴ Williams, 106

true when Owen was not motivated to join the army. The whole point of external reason statements is that they can be true independently of the agent's motivations.”²⁵

To cut the long story short, Williams comes to a conclusion that, even when we introduce a psychological link between the truth of the external reason claim and the individual's action, that is, *belief*, the case for external reasons does not look any better, and here is why. If this belief (that one has reason to do what is reasonable) can itself be considered a motive, then the external reason indeed collapses into an internal one. If this is not the case however, we are back at the beginning, and we cannot see how the external reason can be meaningful.

Williams elaborates on this line of argumentation, but I will only skim through its main points. Namely, he argues that if we understand the external reason statement as a claim that if the person deliberates on her motives, she will end up accepting the external reason as a reason for action, then we are actually already presupposing that the person has a motivation to act in accordance with the external reason, but that she just has not made that clear to herself. However, that would mean that what we are making is indeed not an external reason statement at all, but a disguised internal reason statement. On the other hand, if we claim that having external reasons require new motives, which cannot be inferred from the set of existing ones simply through deliberation, then it is very unclear how the external reason can provide a person with such a motive. It is important to note that Williams does not deny the possibility that persons can acquire new motives through “inspiration and conversion”, or that the person can be persuaded to accept an external reason claim, he only claims that in this process of persuasion we cannot call upon rationality, or accuse the person of *irrationality*. So even if the external reasons are accepted in the end as reasons for action, it is not due to their being *reasons* that they are so accepted. Finally, Williams concludes:

²⁵ Ibidem, 107

“[E]xternal reason statements, when definitely isolated as such, are false, or incoherent, or really something else misleadingly expressed. (...) Those who use these words often seem, rather, to be entertaining an optimistic internal reason claim, but sometimes the statement is indeed offered as standing definitely outside the agent’s *S* and what he might derive from it in rational deliberation, and then there is, I suggest, a great unclarity about what is meant. Sometimes it is a little more than that things would be better if the agents so acted. But the formulation in terms of reasons does have an effect, particularly in its suggestion that the agent is being irrational, and this suggestion, once the basis of an internal reasons claim has been clearly laid aside, is bluff. If this is so, the only real claims about reasons for action will be internal claims.”²⁶

The consequences of such a conclusion for the Owen Wingrave example are obvious, and indeed Williams himself explicitly draws some of them in the text. They may be summed up in the following way: Owen has, at the moment, no motivation to join the army whatsoever. His family’s appeals to family honour and tradition as reasons for him to join the army are either “optimistic internal reason claims”, or simply a bluff – an appeal to reasons where there actually are none. With Owen’s present set of motivations, external reasons offered by his family are for him no reasons at all. His motivations may change in the future, and he may suddenly start to believe that family honour and tradition are valid reasons for him to become a military professional, but in that case we would not be speaking about external reasons anymore, but about internal ones. However, what the Wingraves seem to be claiming, or at least what Williams understands them to be claiming: that although he has no motivation to join the army, there is still in a certain sense a reason for Owen to do so, is simply meaningless.

²⁶ Ibidem, 111

I believe that Williams' account fails to provide explanation of the Owen Wingrave example on at least three important points. First, it does not seem to be the case that Owen's family claims that there would be reason *for any rational agent* in Owen's position to join the army (which is what Williams seems to imply), but only that there is reason *for Owen* to do so. Second, once that the Wingraves give up on Owen, accepting that he indeed has no motivation to join the army, they do not accuse him of *irrationality*, but of *cowardice*²⁷. And finally, Williams' account fails to acknowledge, much less explain the importance that Owen himself attributes to being falsely labeled as a coward, and his attempt to prove his family wrong. I intend to come back to these points later, after I have provided an overview of Macintyre's criticism.

2.2 REASONS, PRACTICES AND TRADITIONS: MACINTYRE'S CRITIQUE OF WILLIAMS

There is one important point on which Macintyre agrees with Williams, the concept of external reasons understood as what a purely impersonal rational agent would consider a reason for action, indeed does not make much sense. Says Macintyre: "The transformation of *me* with purely personal motivations that are distinctively *mine* into a moral agent of pure impersonality who is *anyone* legislating for *everyone* seems a project for moral alchemists rather than philosophers."²⁸

However, where Macintyre does not agree with Williams is on the very distinction between "*me* with purely personal motivations" on one hand, and the "moral agent of pure impersonality" on the other, as the only way of framing the question about internal and external reasons. According to Macintyre, Williams' account ignores any kind of "social mediation", and is thus unable to acknowledge the existence of position of limited

²⁷ Here is how James describes the accusation that the Wingraves raise against Owen: "He was the only one who had ever backed out – he was the first in three hundred years. Every one had known he was going to go up, and now every one would know he was a young hypocrite who suddenly pretended to have scruples. They talked of his scruples as you wouldn't talk of a cannibal's god. His grandfather had called him outrageous names.", Henry James, "Owen Wingrave", *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, Leon Edel ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1964)

²⁸ Alasdair Macintyre, "The Magic in the Pronoun 'My'", *Ethics*, 94:1 (October 1983), 117

impersonality that arises in different social practices. What is this position, and how does it come about?

Macintyre explains this by drawing an analogy with the scientific practice and reasons for belief, as viewed by contemporary philosophy of science. An agent who enters into a particular scientific practice must learn to accept the standards *of that practice*, by which reasons for belief are to be considered good reasons, and not judge them to be such based on her own personal beliefs. Similarly, Macintyre claims, a person who is initiated into a social practice of any kind, must learn to accept what is considered as good reasons for action by the standards of that particular practice. Furthermore, this kind of initiation can lead to a genuine transformation of motivation, “and it is such irrational transformations which enable me to deliberate from a relatively, if not absolutely impersonal standpoint of anyone whose values are those of the relevant practice”²⁹.

It is on grounds of this conception that Macintyre offers what he considers to be a “defensible distinction”³⁰ between internal and external reasons for action. He distinguishes between a good reason for *anyone* who shares the goals and goods or a certain practice, on one side, and a reason that has force for a particular agent, on the other. The former is independent of the desires and motives of a particular agent, and can thus be considered external, but regardless of that can be applied to the agent if he participates in this practice. There is a way in which this kind of external reasons can become internal as the agents’ motivations are transformed according to the role that the agent plays in the given practice. Indeed, this kind of transformation, and transcending of the limitations of her former limitation set is, according to Macintyre necessary for moral development of a person since childhood onwards.³¹

²⁹ Ibidem, 119

³⁰ Ibidem, 118

³¹ Macintyre claims this in a different reference to Williams’ text, in the book *Dependant Rational Animals* (Chicago, Illinois: Open Court, 1999.), 87: “Williams’ account certainly allows for moral development of some

According to Macintyre, in order to achieve this passage from wanting to achieve *X* simply because we desire it, towards desiring *X* qua good, we need to develop certain qualities. These qualities are intellectual and moral virtues.³² In his “After Virtue”, Macintyre gives a following provisional definition of virtues in their relation to the practices:

“A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.”³³

Although there are a potentially unlimited variety of practices which we can be a part of, there is a set of key virtues without which the goods internal to these practices will be “barred” to us.³⁴ These key virtues are Macintyre claims, *justice*, *courage* and *honesty*. I am not going to go into detailed accounts Macintyre gives of why each of these is to be considered a key virtue. The one that I am particularly interested in this paper for reasons which should up till now be fairly obvious to the reader is – *courage*. In Macintyre’s own words: We hold courage to be a virtue because the care and concern for individuals, communities and causes which is so crucial to so much in practices requires the existence of such a virtue. If someone says that he cares for some individual, community or cause, but is unwilling to risk harm and danger on his, her or its own behalf, he puts in question the genuineness of his care and concern. Courage, the capacity to risk harm or danger to oneself, has its role in human life because of this connection to care and concern. This is not to say that a man cannot genuinely care and also be a coward. It is in part to say that a man who

kinds, but it obscures from view the way in which agents have to learn at various stages how to transcend what have been up till this or that point the limitations of their motivational set and will fail badly in their moral development if they remain within those sets”

³² Ibidem, 87.

³³ Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1981.), 191.

³⁴ Ibidem, 191.

genuinely cares and has not the capacity for risking harm or danger has to define himself, both to himself and to others, as a coward.³⁵

Finally, one more important element of Macintyre's account of practices and its relation to virtues must be noted, before I turn to its application to the Owen Wingrave example. Practices are significantly determined by their history. That is why, when we are initiated into a practice we have to accept the authority of its tradition. This does not mean that we cannot, once we have been initiated into it, question some of its traditionally established standards. On the contrary, a tradition cannot thrive without such questioning. "When a tradition is in good order", Macintyre says, "it is always partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose."³⁶

Moreover, according to Macintyre, every person inherits a set of debts and obligations that come together with the roles she inhabits as a member of a family, clan or a nation.³⁷ We cannot simply detach ourselves from that inheritance, but must treat it as "our moral starting point".³⁸ In other words, translated into concepts which this paper is concerned with, there is a set of good reasons for action which we inherit simply by being born into a certain role. Questioning these reasons is possible and even desirable, but it has to start from a position of the place one has in a traditionally determined practice, and has to be formulated on terms of this practice.

2.3 MACINTYREIAN INTERPRETATION OF OWEN WINGRAVE

There are two important traditions that the plot of the story is weaved around. One is a practice of family life, the other – military practice, both with their respective traditions. In the

³⁵ Ibidem, 192.

³⁶ Ibidem, 222

³⁷ "The possession of an historical identity, and the possession of a social identity coincide. Notice that rebellion against my identity is always one possible mode of expressing it", Ibid, 221.

³⁸ Ibidem, 220.

Wingrave family, these two traditions significantly intermingle. The tradition of the Wingraves is in its important part a tradition of the military trade.³⁹ Being a Wingrave, or more precisely, occupying the role of male member of the Wingrave family in itself means that there is a reason for joining the army – and indeed *that* is the claim that the Wingraves are making when they say that there is a reason for Owen to join the army. And this reason is no less valid if Owen himself has no motivation to act in accordance with it. However, if Owen is a Wingrave, which is a fact, and he still does not want to do what he has (in a Macintyreian sense – external) reason to do, than something must be wrong with him, his motivation is not transformed in accordance with his role. Since this transformation is enabled by the possessions of virtues and disabled by their absence, then he must lack in virtue. And since the action he should be motivated to conduct is a self-endangering one then he must lack a virtue which enables one transform his self-preserving motivation into ones which allow self-endangering actions his role in a practice requires of him – and that is – *courage*. If Owen lacks courage, than he is a coward, that is, he has a certain character deficiency which bars him from taking his part in pursuing the good of the Wingrave family practice even if he indeed does care for these goods and the practice itself.

That would, in short, be the Macintyreian interpretation of the argument that the Wingraves are making against Owen, and I believe that it is much more accurate than the one made by Williams. First, because it fits better with the explicit claims that they are making, and second because it is able to explain their accusation of cowardice that they are raising against Owen.

On one point, however, Williams is obviously right: the Wingrave family argument, indeed, misses that point, but, as I am going to show, for completely different reasons than the

³⁹ Consider for instance this passage from James' story, in which Spencer Coyle, Owen's military instructor describes Owen's aunt: "She's formidable, if you mean that, and it's right that she should be; because somehow in her very person very person, good maiden lady as she is, she represents the might, she represents the tradition and the exploits of the British army.", Henry James, *Owen Wingrave*

ones that Williams offers. For one, what Wingraves claim is wrong in a very obvious way – Owen is not a coward, as he will prove by risking his life in the end of the story. So, there has to be a different reason for his declining to join the army. What is that reason?

The obvious answer is the one Owen himself offers for his behavior: he believes that war is a terrible thing, and that causing and participating in it is morally wrong. What is the nature of this claim? James implies in one place that Owen puts this claim as a claim of personal belief and nothing else (“He [Owen] evidently didn’t pretend that his wisdom is superior; he only presented it as his own”), however, if it is also obvious that it is a very strong claim about the military practice as such, and the goals and goods that it is pursuing. And if, according to Macintyre, a tradition of practice, and the institution bearing it, are largely constituted by “continuous conflict” about the very goods and goals of the practice and what they ought to be, then Owen’s objection would have to be treated as a claim in this conflict. But, it is not so treated, and indeed can not be so treated. Why is that?

First of all, it is unclear on the level of which tradition, or its accompanying institution could Owen’s claim be discussed. And this lack of clarity, I argue, is a result of a lack of clarity on a more basic issue, and that is the issue of the exact relationship between the tradition of the practice of the family life on one side, and the tradition of military practice in the other, in the case of the Wingrave family. In the beginning of this chapter I have already established that these two traditions are closely intermingled, but they are still two essentially different traditions whose goods and goals may coincide, but may also conflict. This can be easily established if we would compare this family with a military tradition, with Macintyre’s favorite example of the family farm. In the latter initiation into the practice of family life will at the same time be an initiation into the practice of farming. Moreover, the goods and goals of both practices will be discussed on the same level and among the same participants – the members of the family farm. However in the former example, we see that there is no such

coextension. The goods and goals of the military practice are not, and for obvious reasons *can not* be deliberated upon on the level of an individual family⁴⁰. Where, then, *are* they supposed to be deliberated upon? Certainly not on the level of the army as an institution, and especially not in its XIX-century-England form. Then where? The obvious answer would have to be, on the level of the political community. But, again, XIX century England certainly did not present the kind of community in which such a matter could be a subject of deliberation, and indeed, as Macintyre would argue, no modern state could be such a community, for the modern state is not a bearer of a tradition of practice. It might at times pretend to be such a community, but indeed is not, the point that I will later discuss in more detail.

Second, Owen's claim is not put in a way which would allow it to be discussed in the terms of a practice. However, I am inclined to argue that this is due to the fact that the very tradition of the practices he belongs to do not provide him with any resources to do so. The Wingrave family is unable to discuss the goods and goals of its own family practice since it is based on an essential confusion – and that is that its own tradition is the tradition of the army, and hence that no separation between the two can be made.⁴¹ To be a male member of the Wingrave family, according to them, means to have good reason to join the army. But to be a Wingrave means also other things, which they are not ready to consider and compare with the former. For instance, to be a male member of the Wingrave family, may indeed mean that there is a good reason to be a good father to one's children, and to be a good father means to

⁴⁰ In his story, James describes an attempt of such a discussion, which quickly ends in failure, between Owen Wingrave and his trainer Spencer Coyle:

““But what *do* you propose instead of it?”

‘Instead of what?’

‘Instead the stupid solution of war. If you take that away you should suggest at least a substitute.’

‘That’s for the people in charge, for governments and cabinets,’ said Owen Wingrave. ‘They’ll arrive soon enough at a substitute, in the particular case, if they’re made to understand that they’ll be hung if they don’t find one. Make it a capital crime – that’ll quicken the wits of the ministers!’ His eyes brightened as he spoke, and he looked assured and exalted. Mr Coyle gave a sigh of perplexed resignation – it was a monomania.”, Henry James, *Owen Wingrave*

⁴¹ Consider just this exchange between Owen's colleague Lechmer and Spencer Coyle are discussing Owen's decline to join the army:

““But it has been the proffession of all his family!”

‘Their profession? It has been their religion!’”, Henry James, “Owen Wingrave”

be father who is their for his children and who is able to help them in their initiation into a practice of virtues⁴². So there is also a good reason for a male member of a Wingrave family to stay close to his children and to try to stay alive at least long enough until they are brought up – something that he is certainly not going to be able to do if he dies on distant battlefield, as happened to Owen’s father who had “received his death-cut, in close quarters, from an Afghan saber” before Owen himself was even born. This is not to say that reason for joining the army cannot take precedence over the reasons for staying with one’s children, even from the point of view of the practice of family life, for instance in the situation the attack of the enemy forces would represent an immediate threat to one’s family. But this is certainly not the case in XIX century English army which fought practically all of its wars for imperial gain⁴³. And more importantly, ordering these conflicting good reasons for action (which would imply the ordering of goods pursued by the two practices involved) is not even considered to be an option for the current members of the Wingrave family.

And that is why, I believe, the reasons, that the Wingraves claim Owen has for joining the army, are actually not valid reasons. Not because they are *external* reasons, as Williams would claim, but because they are *not good* external reasons for action. And they are not good reasons because they are based on an unresolved tension between conflicting reasons which are considered good by different practices. Moreover, these tensions are not only unresolved, but also *unresolvable* in the terms of the Wingrave family tradition, which is unable to resolve internal conflict. Indeed it embodies the kind of a tradition which is, according to Macintyre, typical for England of that day and age. It is a tradition which has already become “Burkean” in the sense that Macintyre uses the term in that it contrasts tradition and reason, stability and

⁴² See Macintyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*.

⁴³ See Jock Haswell, *The British Army: A Concise History* (London: Book Club Associates, 1975.), chapter 5.

conflict. “And when a tradition becomes Burekan, it is already dying or dead.”⁴⁴ Indeed, the fact that the Wingraves consider it to be equally reasonable to join the army fighting the Norman invaders, and the army fighting the Zulu tribes in order to take their land, shows that their family tradition of military honour is unable to deliberate on the goods being pursued by one joining the army. The tradition has become a matter of habit, and not of deliberation.⁴⁵

It is no wonder then, that Owen frames his dissent not in the terms of the tradition, but in the terms of pacifist rhetoric he has found in the literature. And of course, framing it this way makes the question impossible to settle within the tradition his family belongs to.⁴⁶

To once again revert to the terminology of philosophy of science, I am not offering any “crucial experiment” for choosing between Williams’ and Macintyre’s accounts of internal/external reasons distinction, but I am inclined to argue that Macintyre’s account has larger “explanatory power”, at least when the Owen Wingrave example is concerned. The point in which this can be clearly seen is the way it is able to explain the accusation for cowardice that Owen’s family raises against him, and also his need to prove that the accusation is false. Williams’ account is unable to notice this as important, since according to it, cowardice and scruples would be equally internal reasons for action. On Macintyre’s account, however, there is a significant difference between the two: cowardice would show Owen’s lack of virtue, and his incapability to transform his motivation from “purely personal” (i.e. self-interested), to the role that fits his role in the relevant practice. The reasons his family is offering could still be good reasons, they just would not have force for him, due to his own character deficiency. His scruples, however, show something entirely different: that he no longer considers the reasons of his family to be *good reasons*, regardless of whether they

⁴⁴ *After Virtue*, 221-222. Jeffrey Stout claims that Macintyre is seriously misconstruing Burke’s concept of a tradition in *Tradition and Democracy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004). Whether that is true or not, however, is a question I do not intend to deal with here.

⁴⁵ Owen’s grandfather makes a claim that Wingrave military tradition stretches for three hundred years. For the role of the army in different periods of British history, see Jock Haswell, *The British Army: A Concise History* (London: Book Club Associates, 1975.)

⁴⁶ On the three main traditions of evaluating wars in modern discourse, and their mutual incommensurability, see the opening pages of *After Virtue*.

would have force for him or not. And he is prepared to risk his life to prove this. James' finishing remark in which he compares Owen's dead body to that of a dead soldier, only corroborates that there was nothing wrong with Owen's character, or with his motivational set. Not only did Owen possess the virtue of courage, but he also possessed a sort of character that his role required him to develop – a soldierly character⁴⁷. The conclusion, then, makes itself clear, if there was nothing wrong with his courage, there was something wrong with a reason for action offered by his family and hence with the tradition in which it is considered to be a good reason.

One more interesting, and important consequence follows from Macintyreian reading of the story, and this is the following: even if Owen would, hypothetically, be convinced by his family's appeals to tradition, if he would suddenly, through an act of "imagination or conversion", become motivated to join the army, this still would, according to the reading I proposed, not mean that he had a good reason to do so.

On the other hand, for Williams, it is exactly this kind of conversion that would give Owen reason to join the army. Once he includes the respect for the family honour into his motivational set, the reasons for joining the army will more or less logically follow.

Since it is obvious that the ground projects belong (together with other projects, "dispositions of evaluation", "patterns of emotional reaction" and "personal loyalties") into what Williams calls the subjective motivational set, and since it is also obvious that tradition of the Wingrave family military honour must be Owen's ground project (because, one is expected to sacrifice his life for it, if needed) if it is to be considered a reason for Owen to join the army, then, we could say that the hypothetical example of Owen getting a reason for joining the army through acquiring this ground project fairly resembles the way that Tamir's

⁴⁷ Spencer Coyle, Owen's trainer, makes this point several times: "To my sense he *is*, in a high sense, a fighting man", he retorts to Owen's fiancé when she expresses her doubts on about Owens courage. On a separate occasion he notices that Owen's preparedness to face the attacks and accusations of the Wingraves, shows that "he was after all not a Wingrave for nothing, and had a steadiness under fire". And when Owen asks him for advice, Coyle answers: "Oh, you *are* a soldier; you must fight it out!", Henry James, "Owen Wingrave".

hypothetical citizen is to be considered as having a reason to die for her country. Macintyrian objection would then again be the same as in the previous case: the fact that there is such a reason, and that it has force for the citizen in question, does not necessarily make it a good reason.

CHAPTER 3: NATIONALIST GROUND PROJECT, THE CONCEPT AND THE PROBLEMS

Macintyre claims that there are two ways that the self may be related to its ground projects. The first way is that a certain project matters to me exactly because it is mine. In Macintyre's words: "The self to which they are related to is one that exists independently of and antecedently to, and which identifies itself as continuing to exist independently of and antecedently to, the project that it is involved"⁴⁸. The second way would be such that projects matter to me because of its very character – I appreciate it because "I understand myself in terms of my role in the project, and not vice versa."⁴⁹ In this case, "the self is transformed by its roles within projects and practices so that its motivations become those required from the impersonal standpoint of the role."⁵⁰

There are, Macintyre further claims, two different types of ground projects: the ones we can relate to in both possible ways, and the ones we can relate to only in the second way, and these are the ones which require "the kind of transcending of self that relegates to a position of unimportance the fact that this project happens to be mine."⁵¹

If the state is a bearer of a certain tradition of practice, and the citizen understands herself in terms of the role in this practice, then being prepared to die for one's country could be seen as a logical consequence of the second type of relationship to one's of ground project. That would, according to Macintyre, be a case with Socrates in *Crito*. The state is, in the famous words of Socrates, also a parent, that is – it takes care that the children will grow up into virtuous adults. So, although the state itself is not a practice, but an institution, it is the institution that enables the long-term survival and development of the tradition of practice.

⁴⁸ Macintyre, "Magic in the Pronoun My", 121

⁴⁹ Ibid, 121

⁵⁰ Ibid, 121

⁵¹ Ibid, 121

But, Macintyre is quick to add that: “It does not of course follow from an acceptance of the Socratic view of political community and political authority that we ought to assign to the modern state the moral function that Socrates assigned to the city and its laws. Indeed the power of the liberal individualist standpoint partly derives from the evident fact that the modern state is indeed unfitted to act as moral educator of any community”⁵².

It is because of this unfittedness of the modern state to act as an educator that liberal morality must posit itself as neutral among different conceptions of good life.⁵³ Says Macintyre: “For liberal individualism, a community is simply an arena in which individuals pursue their own self-chosen conception of the good life, and political institutions exist to provide that degree of order which makes such self-determined activity.”⁵⁴

It must be, then, that the only way that a citizen of the modern state can relate to the nation as her ground project is in the first way that Macintyre describes, and that would be to value it exactly because it is hers, and this is exactly what Tamir proposes. Since this ground project would be self-chosen, there seems to be no obvious inconsistency with liberal morality. Indeed, Bernard Williams proposes a similar solution for the problem of free-riding: if people are motivated by a sense of fairness or altruism then they have reason to contribute to the public good. There is nothing irrational in them having this kind of motivation, or in the state encouraging them to have this kind of motivation.

Tamir’s suggestion is on the surface very much like Williams’, but, as I will show, also differs from it in some very important respects which make it much more problematic if not downright unfeasible. First, as I will show, it is far from clear that it is not irrational for a citizen of a liberal state to adopt a nationalistic ground project, and actually there are strong

⁵² After Virtue, 195

⁵³ And unlike many other communitarian philosophers, Macintyre claims that liberal neutrality is the best principle for running a state of this type. “Where liberals have characteristically insisted that government should give expression to some shared vision of the common good, contemporary communitarians have urged that such government should give expression to some shared vision of the human good (...) [F]rom my own point of view communitarians have attacked liberals on one issue on which liberals have been consistently in the right.” (A partial response, 302.)

⁵⁴ After Virtue, 195

arguments to claim that the contrary is true – that it is irrational for him to have such a ground project. Second, it is equally unclear that it is not irrational to encourage people to acquire such a ground project. Furthermore, it might be immoral to encourage them to do so (a question that does not even arise in Williams’ proposed solution of the free-riders problem).

But before I am able to assess the objections which can be put to Tamir’ conception, I will have to make clear what exactly is this conception, although it may not be such a simple task, for there are some unresolved ambiguities even at the very basic level of Tamir’s account.

I will start with the central concept of her account – the concept of the nationalist ground project. What is this project exactly? From Williams’ claim that there is no contradiction in one sacrificing his life for his ground project, Tamir draws the following conclusion:

“If a person’s ground project is to live a meaningful life and if membership in a particular national-cultural community is a necessary, though by no means sufficient, condition to living such a life, a person may have a reason to risk his or her life in order to ensure the continuity and growth of her nation.”⁵⁵

Based on this passage it seems that the real ground project in question is living a meaningful life, and that membership in a national-cultural community, ensuring the growth and continuity of the nation are only the means to attaining this end. However, in other places, Tamir puts it differently. For instance, just a few lines later she says the following:

“Ground projects need not be collective or, if they are, need not have the state, or the nation, as their object. States, however, are obviously interested in their citizens adopting ground projects in which the state plays the central role and will therefore devote considerable effort to cultivating a preference for such projects.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Tamir, 233

⁵⁶ Tamir, 233

From this it follows that the ground project she is concerned with has a state, or a nation for its object. This is a quite different claim than the previous one. Here, the state, or the nation (again she is unclear which one exactly, as if the two were synonymous, which they obviously are not), or their “continuation and growth” are taken as ends, not just as means of the ground project.

In both cases, however, the objections are more or less the same so I am not going to insist on making a clear distinction but simply refer to this kind of ground project as to the “nationalist ground project”, as Tamir herself refers to it⁵⁷, and consider the possible implications of different interpretations only where these would make significant difference for the argument.

3.1 THE NATIONALIST GROUND PROJECT AND LIBERAL MORALITY

Let us start with the second objection, the one about the rationality and morality of encouraging citizens into acquiring national ground-projects. Williams also contends that ground projects, even the unselfish and altruistic ones, may often conflict with impersonal morality of either utilitarian or Kantian kind. In that case, Williams argues, impartial morality requires primacy, but it is not always reasonable to believe that it will actually get it. Says Williams:

“There can come a point at which it is quite unreasonable for a man to give up, in the name of impartial ordering of the world of moral agents, something which is a condition of his having any interest in being around in that world at all.”⁵⁸

The implications of this claim for Tamir’s position are obvious. If 1) ground projects may come in conflict with impartial morality, and those which are based on partial loyalties are obviously more likely to come into this conflict than others, and if 2) impersonal morality

⁵⁷ Tamir, “Pro Patria Mori”, 233

⁵⁸ Williams, “Persons, Characters, Morality”, 14

is often likely to come out of this conflict as the loser, and finally if 3) nationalism is seen as this kind of ground project, with a particularly partial “bend”, then it directly follows that to purposefully persuade people to accept nationalism as their ground project is in conflict with liberal morality as impartial morality. So if the state is doing this kind of persuading, it is behaving irrationally and even immorally in the light of the same liberal morality that it is allegedly founded upon.

Of course, to this line of argumentation it may be answered that nationalism does not necessarily have to come in conflict with liberal morality, and that even when such a conflict arises, liberal morality may often come out as a winner. However, it is exactly the point of Williams’ claim that once the ground project is acquired, there is no reasonable guarantee that impersonal morality will prevail over it, or in which cases it will prevail. More precisely, once that a soldier has accepted nationalism as his ground project, it can no longer be reasonably requested of him not to show nationalist bias in such situations as diminishing civilian casualties, or treating prisoners of war in a civil and moral way. Although it is more likely that a soldier with a nationalist ground project will be prepared to sacrifice his life for the state, than the one without such a project, it is also more likely that he will break norms of impersonal morality if he believes that would be in the interest of his nation. That is why accepting nationalism as a ground project increases the risk that the rules of liberal morality will be broken. Consequently, the liberal state is endangering liberal morality when it is persuading its citizens/soldiers to accept the nationalistic ground project.

This threat sounds particularly sinister if we take into account the following remark Tamir makes in an attempt of resolving a paradox of dying in order to lead a meaningful life:

One way to confront this issue is to proclaim a close link between readiness to die for a cause and the belief that one’s life is meaningful. According to Williams, the readiness to die for specific projects reaffirms the self-image of the person not as someone to whom all

projects are equally eternal or contingent but as someone who has some constitutive commitments that makes his or her life meaningful. (...) By expressing readiness to risk their lives in the pursuit of some of their projects, liberal agents draw a distinction between contingent and constitutive projects, between projects that are theirs and projects that define their identity⁵⁹

This proclaimed connection not just between the national project as such and having a meaningful life, but also between readiness to die for this project and making your life meaningful, leads to the conclusion that it would be reasonable for a liberal agent to get into situations (or even create them) in which he could display this readiness, so that he could “reaffirm his self-image” of somebody to whom this project is constitutive, and thus render his life meaningful. The way such “reasonable” behaviour would be fared by liberal morality is obvious.

3.2 THE NATIONALIST GROUND PROJECT BETWEEN FALSE BELIEF AND IRRATIONALITY

Leaving the moral inconsistencies aside, would a nationalistic ground project really provide a citizen of the liberal state with a reason to sacrifice her life for the state? At first sight it may seem as if Tamir builds a solid internalist case in favour of such a claim. However, Macintyre’s objection that nationalist ground project can not provide this reason, since it is based on the deception of the citizens about the nature of the state they live in, must not be rejected until we consult what Williams has to say about the motives which are based on false beliefs. And he says the following:

⁵⁹ Tamir, “Pro Patria Mori”, 233

“A of *S* [motivational set], *D* will not give *A* a reason for *f*-ing, if either the existence of *D* is dependent on false belief, or *A*’s belief to the relevance of *f*-ing to the satisfaction of *D* is false.”⁶⁰

The example Williams gives, is that of a man who believes that the liquid before him is gin and wants (has a motive) to make a gin and tonic. However, the liquid is actually not gin at all, but gasoline. It is obvious that he does not have a reason to use the liquid for making the cocktail, although he may think that he has (and that is why we can use this for an explanation of his behaviour).

The question then is, whether it could be said that the nationalist ground project, in the way Tamir defines it, is based on false belief or not, for if it is then a person with this ground project in her motivational set would have no more reason to sacrifice her life for her country, than the man from Williams’ example would have reason to mix gasoline with tonic and drink it.

First, if the nationalist ground project is actually the ground project of having a meaningful life, which is then believed to be in some crucial way connected with the national project, which is in turn seen to be essentially dependent on the state, than there are at least two links in this chain which could be turn out to be false. It may be false that leading a meaningful life must be connected to the national project, and it may be false that the national project is inseparable from the state. Although there is no accepted opinion on the matter, there are strong arguments in favour of national-cultural identity being very important for the meaningful life of persons, and so this identity, or the possibility of this identity, might be rightly viewed as worthy of personal sacrifices.

However, the belief that the modern liberal state is, or even can be, a bearer of this project may very well turn out to be false. The liberal state, if it is indeed liberal, must be

⁶⁰ Williams, “Internal and External Reasons”, 103

neutral among different teleological concepts its citizens might have, and it must not partial to the goals of any specific national or cultural community. That is why it is unfit to be the bearer of the national project. To deem it such would mean to hold a false belief that dying for it is important for our having a meaningful life. Therefore, our ground project of having a meaningful life will not give us reason to die for the state, even if we see this meaningful life as essentially bound up with national-cultural project (indeed, it could even be argued that the opposite is true – having such a ground project could explicitly give us reason not to die for the state, since dying for the state will prevent us from investing our lives into actions and institutions which actually can be dedicated to furthering the national-cultural project – local communities, NGO-s, heritage associations and the similar).

On the other interpretation it is the very existence and well-being of the state itself that is at the core of the nationalist ground project, and nationalist ideology only enables one to see the state as worthy to be acquired as such a ground project. In this we could say that the well-being of the state as ground project is itself based on false belief about the state, and for that reason can not provide a reason for one to sacrifice her life for the country. So, it turns out that on both interpretations of the nationalist ground project it fails to provide this reason, either because the very existence of this ground project is based on false belief, or because the relevance that dying for the state has this project is based on false belief.

To this objection, Tamir could answer in the following way: what nationalist imagery is offering is a certain way of seeing, or imagining the state, not a set of factual statements which could be true or false. Imagination plays an important part in how we look at all relationships that matter to us, those with our spouses, lovers, relatives, and friends. One could see her marriage as a union of souls, or as a business venture, as founded on romantic connection or on common interest. Neither of these can be either true or false in any definitely

decidable sense, although the institution of marriage is clearly and unambiguously defined by the law.

The images of a nation as a family, community, or a historical contract “between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born”⁶¹ are obviously not meant to be taken literally and cannot be accused of falsity any more than love poetry or television commercials. No one really thinks that love is based on a “match made in heaven”, or that there is a fairy-kingdom in every Coca-Cola machine, but still these images can give us a motive to, respectively, put in extra-effort into our love-relationships, or simply have a can of Coca-Cola. These images are inviting one to accept a certain way of viewing the world, not convincing her of any factual claim. Thus, they can not be true or false, only persuasive or not, believable or not.

Just like most people would not loose their motive to drink Coca-Cola just because you would point out to them that there is no fairy-kingdom in the Coca-Cola machine, or even if you opened up the machine and showed them what is inside, most people with nationalistic ground projects would not give up on these even if they were presented with all the necessary facts about the nature of the state they live in, its constitutional and legal order. This should be the sign that these projects are not based on some factual false belief about the state, but on the way individuals see its worth.

It might very well be the case that someone who has acquired the state as her ground-project due to the fact that she started imagining it in the way suggested by nationalist imagery, as “an assailed inheritance derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity”⁶², holds no specific beliefs about this state that would be in conflict with its real, or self-professed nature. Such a person may not hold any expectations that should be

⁶¹ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 194-195

⁶² Citation belongs to Burke, but is quoted by Tamir, “Pro Patri Mori”, 233

fulfilled if the state is to prove itself worthy of personal sacrifice. In other words, her beliefs about the state would not be falsifiable.

The difference from Williams' example with gin and gasoline is obvious. The moment the man from Williams' example takes a sip of his gasoline&tonic cocktail he will understand that he actually had no reason to drink it, or even make it, simply because it does not satisfy his desire for gin&tonic. But the person who buys Coca-Cola from a machine after seeing the TV commercial, will not be dissatisfied with what she gets, because she had no falsifiable belief about the quality or taste of the drink which came from the machine, but was only under the impression of a certain metaphorical image which made her value the drink (or deem it worthy of drinking) in a way she probably would not if she had not seen this image. The same goes for a person who is, under the impression of nationalist imagery, led to acquire her state's well-being as her ground project – for this motive is not based on any falsifiable, and therefore any false, beliefs. What it is based on are images, and images can not be false. Or can they? I dedicate the next chapter to the answer that Macintyre offers in his essay "Poetry and Political Philosophy: Notes on Burke and Yeats".

3.2.1 ON TRUTH AND FALSITY OF IMAGES

"Images are true or false", says Macintyre, "but not in the same way statements are. Statements say or fail to say how things are; images show or fail to show how things are. Images are true as long as they are revelatory, false insofar as they obscure, disguise, or distort. But the reality that an image represents more or less adequately is not the one to which we have access independently of any exercise of imagination. Our perceptions are partly

organized in and through images, and a more adequate imagination is one that enables us to see or envisage what we could not otherwise see or envisage”⁶³

According to Macintyre, the communities we belong to, be they monasteries, cafés or nations, are too partly constituted by imagination, or more precisely by the shared images their members participate in. Living the role of a community-member is a “form of imaginative acting out”. “[T]o be English or Irish, I must be able to imagine myself as Irish or as English, something achievable in part by participating in the shared poetic utterance of the nation.”⁶⁴.

This poetic utterance, however, can be rendered false or incomprehensible with the transformation of the communities that it is supposed to describe. If the shared imagination of the members of a certain nation can no longer be coherent, that might, Macintyre claims, be the sign that this nation is no longer a community in the proper sense of the word. These incoherencies in the way communities see themselves are best revealed in poetry, which itself deals with images and poetic utterances. In Macintyre’s words:

“The poet, and only the poet, may be able to represent absolutely the incoherence or the sterility or both of the substitute images, the *ersatz* images, by which such a deprived form of political society may try to conceal from itself its condition. The poet may achieve a disclosure of this failed political imagination by putting the relevant images to the test, by using them in a poem and showing that when they are used with integrity what they disclose is imaginative incoherence or sterility or both.”⁶⁵

Macintyre’s example for these *ersatz* images are the images used by Edmund Burke in describing the British state of his time. The poetry which he says is putting Burke’s images to

⁶³ Alasdair Macintyre, “Poetry as Political Philosophy: Notes on Burke and Yeats”, *Ethics and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 160

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 161

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 161

the test is the poetry of William Butler Yeats. According to Macintyre, Burke's primary contribution to political philosophy was primarily in the role of an image-maker. Making no clear distinction between the state, society and the constitutional order, Burke was able to create the images which "provide a much-needed mask to be worn by the modern state"⁶⁶, images of the state as a bearer of traditional societal values. One of the most impressionable of these images, that of the state as an oak will later find its way into Yeats' poetry, but as Macintyre notes, this time "what there is at the top of tree is emptiness"⁶⁷. Yeats indeed admits that "great nations blossom above", but notes "What tears down a tree that has nothing within it"⁶⁸. According to Macintyre, the reason for this variation of the Burkean theme lies in the following:

"Yeats, having committed himself to the use of Burke's political image, has been compelled by his perception of Irish political reality to invert its use, so that the state is now to be imagined only as what has failed to flourish as a tree."

But, Macintyre also notes, that "those features of the Irish state that allow Yeats to find only a negative and condemnatory use belong to it not as Irish, but as state. They are features of the modern state as such. And hence derives my thesis that Yeats reveals to us in the images of his mature poetry the imaginative poverty not of a particular regime, but of the structure of every modern state."⁶⁹

What allows Macintyre to make such a claim is that he believes that there are, or at least there were, political communities which would be correctly described by the images of historical continuity and tradition – "the best types of Greek *polis* or of medieval community – membership in which provided their citizens with a meaningful identity, so that caring for

⁶⁶ Ibid, 163

⁶⁷ Ibid, 170

⁶⁸ Ibid, 171

⁶⁹ Ibid, 171

the common good, even to the point of being willing to die for it, was no other than caring what was good about oneself.”⁷⁰

The fact these images actually do correspond to a certain institutional reality implies that they can be can also be used improperly, to describe an institutional reality they do not correspond to, and in that case they are used “to disguise or distort”. Since the modern state does not embody the institutional reality these images correspond to, it can only be using them as a disguise. On the other hand, Macintyre points out, it is a necessary disguise, because without it, being asked to die for the modern state would be “like being asked to die for the telephone company”⁷¹.

To sum up Macintyre’s position, the incoherence in Burkean imagination lies in the fact that the modern state asks its citizens to intellectually assess its arrangements as self-interested calculators, while at the same time asking them to foster an imaginative devotion to it, as to a community based on the common good. And the only way that Burke is able to compromise between these two incompatible positions is that he suspended the use of sceptical reason in the area of imaginative allegiance.⁷²

When Tamir speaks about “[t]he importance of endowing the state with a national task that creates a link between the present generation, its ancestors, and future generation, its ancestors, and future generations”, which “helps individuals conquer their fear of death by promising them an opportunity to enter the sphere of the eternal”⁷³, not only is she using Burken images *par excellence* (while only occasionally paying tribute to the original author), but she is using them with the same purpose and in the same way that Burke did. This means that she considers them to be on the one hand necessary, and on the other – beyond rational criticism. However, if we accept Macintyre’s position that images can also be true and false,

⁷⁰ Ibid, 163

⁷¹ Ibid, 163

⁷² Ibid, 162

⁷³ Tamir, “Pro Patria Mori”, 233

inasmuch as they reveal or disguise the true nature of a community they purport to describe, then this exclusion from rational criticism can hardly be defended. If images can be true or false, than the truth of the nationalist imagery must be tested, and if we follow Maintyre's advice, this is best done in poetry.

One such test is given in Wilfred Owen's famous poem "Dulce et Decorum Est". The poem' which describes a death of a soldier dying of gas-poisoning in the WWI battle field, concludes with the following lines:

"If in some smothering dreams, you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin,
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs
Bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, --
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori."⁷⁴

Although Owen also states his main claim properly and very out-rightly, he supports it not with arguments, but, quite in accordance with Macintyre's dictum – with poetic images. We are to believe that dying for the state is not sweet and becoming because of the images that the poem shows us. And these can be clearly distinguished in two sets. First, there are the images of a soldier's death on the battlefield, and the later transportation of his corpse,

⁷⁴ Wilfred Owen, "Dulce Et Decorum Est"

described in all the horrible details. Second, in the end of the poem there is an image of a distant and unnamed “friend”⁷⁵, who is quite obviously seated somewhere safe, far from the battle-lines, and who is actually the one reciting the Horace’s words to the young, inexperienced and enthusiastic listeners. By setting these two sets of images side by side, Owen puts these the latter to the test, to use Macintyre’s terminology, and shows its falsity. One of the reasons why images differ from statements, Macintyre asserts is that “a true statement remains true when conjoined with other statements”, while, “an image conjoined with others may thereby acquire new revelatory power, or lose what it previously had.”⁷⁶ So in Owen’s poem, Horace’s proverb proves to be false when conjoined with the image of a soldier dying of gas-poisoning, and since the latter is as real as can be, the former must be false, it must be a lie. What could be a reason for this “imaginative incoherence”?

We could look for this reason in the obvious contrast between the “sweet and right” death that Horace promised in the famous verse, on the one hand, and the painful and horrible one described by Owen, on the other. However, although there are certainly many important things to be said about the inhuman methods of modern, especially chemical warfare, the act of dying in war has never, not even in Horace’s time, been “sweet”, measured by any sensible standards. Therefore, I am inclined to think that the reason we are looking for lies not in a, relatively contingent facts about the war technology, but in a deeper incoherence in the way that the modern nation-state is imagined by its citizens.

If we follow Macintyre’s lead, then the the real incoherence that Owen’s poem reveals is caused not by the contrast between two descriptions of dying for the state, but between the image of the state as something worth dying for, and the reality of this dying which is bereft of the meaning ascribed to it by the image. As if the realistic description of dying in the

⁷⁵ There is every reason to suppose that this friend was actually Jessi Pope (the first version of the poem was dedicated to her), the author of pro-war propaganda poems full of naive images and trivial comparisons. One such example is *Play the Game*, in which she compares war with football: “Football’s a sport/ And a rare sport too,/ Don’t make it a source of shame./ Today there are worthier things to be done./ Englishmen, play the game!”

⁷⁶ Macintyre, “Poetry as Political Philosophy”, 160

battlefield makes us realise that death is *real*, the real ending (almost a whole verse that Owen dedicates to describing the corpse and its fate is there to remind us of this finality), which is somehow suppressed or disguised in the image of the *patria* which it is “sweet and right” to die for. It is therefore, not the reality of the act of dying, however painful and horrible it might be, that is primarily obscured by this image, but the reality, and the finality, of death itself. The modern state is something that requires self-sacrifice, but is not actually worthy of sacrifice. That is why to claim that it is “sweet and right” to sacrifice one’s life for the country is a lie. A lie which may not be seen as such by everyone, a lie which we may be persuaded into believing, especially if we are young and “ardent for some desperate glory”, but still, a lie nevertheless.

It is interesting, and indicative, to note that in her text “Pro Patria Mori: Death and the State”, Yael Tamir refers to the poetry of Wilfred Owen, but *not* to “Dulce et Decorum Est” which would seem to be the obvious choice, but to a lesser known Owen’s poem “Asleep”:

“Under his helmet, up against his pack,
After the many days of work and waking,
Sleep took him by the brow and laid him back.
And in the happy no-time of his sleeping,
Death took him by the heart.”⁷⁷

Tamir cites this poem as an example of how “nationalist discourse attempts to portray the moment of death as instantaneous, gracious, and painless rather than as brutal and painful.”⁷⁸ Leaving aside the obvious blunder of classifying Owen’s poetry as “nationalistic discourse” (it would be difficult to find an author or an oeuvre less deserving to be put into this category), and also Tamir’s clear misunderstanding of Owen’s verses (for what they offer is not just another version of the worn-out metaphor of “death as eternal sleep”, but quite the

⁷⁷ Wilfred Owen, *Asleep*

⁷⁸ Tamir, “Pro Patria Mori”, 235

contrary of death as something that breaks into the “happy no-time” of sleeping and grabs the sleeper “by the heart”; an image much more unsettling than Tamir would have it), it is important to take into consideration Tamir’s claim about the portrayal of death in war in the nationalist discourse. Calling upon the findings of George Mosse⁷⁹, she claims that the shift from portraying death in war as a grim reaper to portraying it as eternal sleep, took place in the eighteenth century, which would set it exactly in the period in which, according to Macintyre major disruptions of the communal order have been taking place which Burke was trying to hide with the images of continuity⁸⁰. In other words it is exactly the period in which the state has been transforming itself into a kind of institution not worth dying for, and therefore a kind of institution in need of masks.

Image of death as eternal sleep is a necessary part of nationalist imagery because without hiding the very fact of dying as the final end it would hardly be able to persuade anyone of taking that risk. This and similar images, such the image of “sweet and righthous” dying deccribed in Horacio’s verses, are revealed in all their falsity when they are used “with integrity”, which would mean against realistic descriptions of dying in war. And that is what Owen’s poem so vividly illustrates.

In conclusion of this lengthy discussion on truth in poetry, it could be said that nationalist images used to persuade citizens to adopt the nationalist ground project are not of undecided truth value. They purport to reveal something about what they represent, but instead they distort it, so they could be reasonably considered as false and giving raise to false beliefs. This would then mean that the motives based on these beliefs could not provide a person having those motives in her motivational set with valid reasons for action.

⁷⁹ Tamir, “Pro Patria Mori”, 239

⁸⁰ Macintyre, “Poetry as Political Philosophy”, 162

3.2.2 ON HUMEAN IRRATIONALITY

But there is one more alternative which has considered. A person could be influenced by the nationalist imagery to adopt a nationalist ground project and still claim to hold no specific false belief about the state. For instance, the famous British WWI recruitment poster showing a British soldier pointing to an idyllic picture of the English countryside and saying to the spectator: “Wouldn’t you fight for this?” could have inspired a person to enlist into the army, without making him hold any rational beliefs that the early XX British state was really made all made up of idyllic country houses, or that the state policy has been in any way friendly to the tradition of English countryside⁸¹. He may even be aware that the modern British state of that time can in way is actually contributing to disappearance of the very way of life which is praised in the poster image, and still retain the motive influenced by this picture. If asked, he would probably say that he still feels the British state is in some indescribable way still the embodiment of the “green and pleasant land” presented in the picture, or simply that the picture made him see his state as worthy of sacrifice, or simply that the image made him feel more passionately about his country. This would be, it seems, the conception that Burke himself held. Macintyre notes that in *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Sublime and Beautiful*, “Burke argued that it is not intellectual content of language, but the psychological use of words that produce responses in action”⁸². Indeed, there, Burke says:

“The truth is all verbal description, merely as naked description, though never so exact. Conveys so poor and insufficient an idea of the thing described, that it could scarcely have the smallest effect, that mark a strong and lively feeling in himself. Then by the contagion of our passions, we catch a fire already kindled in another, which probably might never have been struck out by the object described. (...) If the affection be well conveyed, it

⁸¹ Roger Scruton gives an account of the state’s systematic destruction of the country life and also points to further reading on the subject in *England: An Elegy* (London: Chatto&Windus, 2000)

⁸² Poetry, 164

will work its effect without any clear idea; often without any idea at all of the thing which has originally given rise to it”⁸³

In this case, we could not say that the motive is based on false beliefs, for indeed it is not on any rational belief at all, but on passion.

However, what could be said is that in this case the man motivated to join the army by seeing the poster is behaving irrationally. As Christine M. Korsgaard notes in her critique of Bernard Williams, “[r]ationality is a condition that human beings are capable of, but it is not a condition that we are always in.”⁸⁴ Even when we rationally understand that something is not an appropriate means to an end we are pursuing – for instance that the modern liberal state in no way furthers the national-cultural cause, and that therefore cannot help us attain a meaningful life – we may still be motivated to pursue these “false” means for non rational reasons. We may be rational, but we are not perfectly rational, and as Korsgaard rightly notes, even when we are aware of a causal relationship (or lack thereof) between a means and our desired end we may fail to be motivated by it to pursue (or not pursue) this means. Korsgaard further notes that even a very narrow version of internalism, such as Hume’s, that confines all rationality to means/end reasoning, would have to admit the existence of this kind of irrationality, and Williams’ somewhat broader conception would certainly have to do so. Not taking the means to our self-proffered ends, if we are aware of the causal relationship between the two, can be nothing else but irrational.

Images can be suggestive, and motivate us on an emotional level, but in this case such motivation could hardly be considered as providing us with a valid reason to act. Picture of England as a green and pleasant land of small villages and farms can move someone on a very deep archetypal level and cause him to value the modern British state enough to make it his ground project, even though he is rationally aware that the former is a false representation of

⁸³ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 160

⁸⁴ Christine M. Korsgaard, “Scepticism about Practical Reason”, *The Journal of Philosophy* 83:1 (Jan., 1986), 18

the latter, but this is, according to Korsgaard still a form of irrationality – a failure to be motivated by our rational considerations or being “wilfully’ blind to them”. This irrationality may, in the words of the same autor, result from “self-deception, rationalization and the various forms of weakness of will”⁸⁵.

So to make a final conclusion – the nationalist imagery which Tamir claims can persuade citizens to adopt the the state as a ground project, is either inspiring some factual beliefs about the nature of the modern liberal state as a bearer of a tradition of a common good, or it is not raising any such beliefs but is doing its perssuasion on a purely irrational level. In the first case, the beliefs that it is inspiring are false and therefore the motive acquired on the bases of these false beliefs cannot provide the reason for one to sacrifice her life for it. In the second case, however, the ground project is again unable to provide one with this reason since it is acquired on irrational bases.

⁸⁵ Christine Korsgaard, 14

CONCLUSION

Liberal order differs from the illiberal ones in that it allows citizens to freely choose their ends. These ends can be considered by others to be absurd, worthless, or even irrational, but as long as the person holding them does not infringe on other persons' freedom, she has an unalienable right to pursue them. She can, to use the famous Rawlsian example, consider counting blades of grass to be a worthy goal, and it is not up to the state to dispute her opinion. There is no reason why it would be any different with a person holding the welfare of the state as her end, even if she holds it so because she has certain false beliefs about its character. Such a person would have every right to pursue her end even if she considers that it includes sacrificing her life for it. There would be nothing inconsistent to liberal morality if the army would allow such a person to sign up for service, even though her reasons for signing up may not be the same as the reasons that the state has to allow her to do it. Also, there seems to be no inconsistency in the liberal state persuading its citizens to voluntarily take part in the projects which further the public interest, such as volunteer work, or blood donating.

Yael Tamir's suggestion, however, goes one step further – she claims that the state has a right to use nationalist imagery in persuading people to choose the state as their end. This is, as I have shown, an illegitimate step in two connected but still separate senses. First, I have shown that persons who adopt what Tamir calls the nationalist ground project, can be a very serious threat to liberal morality, because according to Bernard Williams, there is nothing unreasonable in a person overstepping the bounds of impartial liberal morality when it comes into conflict with the rules of this morality, and nationalist ground project almost by definition in conflict with them. Since Tamir builds her whole account on Williams' concept of ground project, she is bound to accept this consequence too.

Second, I have shown that the nationalist ground project which is adopted on the bases of nationalist imagery is either based on false beliefs about the nature of the liberal state, which are implicit in these images, or it is based on an irrational motivation which prevents the person from acting on the base of the perceived causal relationship (or a lack thereof) between the end of this ground project, and the means of attaining it. I have also shown that nationalist imagery is not of an indeterminate truth value. It denotes a community of a certain kind, and the liberal state is not that kind of community, and therein lies its falsity. In other words, to answer the question from the WWI poster, “this” may very well be worth fighting for, but “this” is not the state.

All this leads to the conclusion that liberal states may not use nationalist imagery as a legitimate way to deal with their otherwise legitimate need for self-defense. This conclusion is not revolutionary, and it certainly does not represent a significant step forward in search for a sustainable liberal model of defense. However, it does tell us where not to look for this model, and that, I believe, may still be a certain, modest contribution to finding a solution.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Burke, Edmund, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)
- Burke, Edmund, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Penguin Books, 2004)
- Carter, April, "Liberalism and the Obligation to Military Service", *Political Studies*, XLVI (1998), 68-81.
- Haswell, Jock, *The British Army: A Concise History* (London: Book Club Associates, 1975.)
- James, Henry, "Owen Wingrave", *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, Leon Edel ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1964)
- Korsgaard, Christine M., "Scepticism about Practical Reason", *The Journal of Philosophy* 83:1 (Jan., 1986), 5-25
- Macintyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1981.)
- Macintyre, Alasdair, *Dependant Rational Animals* (Chicago, Illinois: Open Court, 1999.)
- MacIntyre, Alasdair, "Is Patriotism a Virtue?", *Theorizing Citizenship*, Ronald Beiner ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 209-229.
- MacIntyre, Alasdair, "The Magic in the Pronoun 'My'", *Ethics*, 94:1 (Oct., 1983), 113-125
- Scruton, Roger, *England: An Elegy* (London: Chatto&Windus, 2000)
- Stout, Jeffrey, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004.)
- Tamir, Yael, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.)
- Tamir, Yael, "Pro Patria Mori! *Death and the State*", in *Morality of Nationalism*, Robert McKim & Jeff McMahan eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.)

Williams, Bernard, “Internal and External Reasons”, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.), 101-113.

Williams, Bernard, “Persons, Characters, Morality”, *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.), 1-19.