

## **Liberalism and Nationalism: The Theoretical Foundations of Liberal Community**

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### *Abstract*

*Liberalism instinctively distrusts the idea of non-voluntary communities with rights not reducible to individual rights. Yet an exception has historically been made with respect to the national communities within which liberal governments function. Does liberalism's apparently expedient connection with nationalism, a discredited ideology, reveal a flaw in liberal theory? This essay re-examines Thomas Hobbes and the problem of defence of the state to investigate this question. It finds that Hobbes needs a doctrine of love of polity capable of transcending self-preservation to secure the commonwealth, one that can indeed be logically adumbrated from his own views in Leviathan. This, however, founds a version of modern nationalism that must be contrasted to traditional patriotism.*

Introducing this topic in an exchange between Islamic and Western scholars in Indonesia, I must admit to having felt some uncertainty about the likely relevance of a paper that centred on the thought of Thomas Hobbes. Fortunately, Islamic scholars in attendance enlightened my ignorance on the history of Islamic political philosophy, which, I discovered, had a distinctly Hobbesian cast. A powerful government capable of awing subjects or citizens into peaceful coexistence seemed as logically needful to Islamic thinkers as it had to the great seventeenth century British philosopher. Moreover, the problem of properly securing people's allegiance to the earthly Leviathan – which, I argue here, was a latent problem for Hobbes that pointed the way to some form of nationalism – seemed not irrelevant to the present condition of Indonesia with its huge diversity of peoples and languages and its need to accommodate so disparate an array within the confines of modern nation state. I was encouraged to hope, therefore, that the following reflections on a conundrum at the heart of Western liberal democracy might have some interest and resonance in the Indonesian context.

It has been argued that it was merely fortuitous that liberalism and nationalism arose together in Europe to form a union enabling wealth creation within cohesive national boundaries (Meyer 1998, 63). But the alliance, however practical, presents theoretical problems. The principles of nationalism are not the founding principles of liberalism. Liberalism gives priority to individuals over community. The protection of individual rights, not collective utility or popular will, is its paramount concern. The core liberal idea is that the sole legitimacy of the political state resides in its function as an instrument for the protection of individual rights to life and property. Liberals have therefore been highly suspicious of, and resistant to, all 'collectivist' or 'communitarian' arguments.

It seems anomalous, then, that liberals should have privileged a particular form of community, namely the national one. Liberal states are *nation*-states, 'nation' implying something higher than the mere political organisation of power for security purposes. A nation is a community (even if only an 'imagined' one – Anderson 1989)

that has traditionally demanded something more from its members than obligatory obedience to order-securing rules. Liberal nation-states have demanded – and received – love that transcends individualism and encourages sacrifice.

Liberals have, for the most part, accepted nationalism without worrying much whether it contradicts their own most basic, individualistic assumptions. Even today many accept that liberalism is dependent on the existence of some kind of nationalist sentiment, arguing that the latter ensures the social and cultural integration presumed necessary for the smooth functioning of liberal democracy. Aware that traditional nationalism based on blood and descent has lost the intellectual and moral respectability it once had, modern nationalist liberals seek some benign ‘civic’ form strong enough to promote a sense of commonality and belonging, but not so strong as to encourage xenophobia (Miller 1995, 1998; Barry 1999).

One of the arguments put by David Miller on the need for a nationalist sentiment concerns the sacrifices he believes are required for meeting the demands of social justice. He claims that there is unlikely to be democratic support for the redistribution of resources unless citizens regard themselves as bound to the beneficiaries by strong ties of community, and by a sense of common identity (Miller 1989, 59, 236).<sup>1</sup> In this essay I want to look at the larger sacrifice required by the need for defence at times of threat, which reveals most starkly the tensions liberalism suffers through its *de facto* association with the national community.

I will begin with a brief account of liberal individualism and the challenge presented to it by various critiques, particularly those of ‘communitarians’ in the context multicultural policy. I will discuss the instinctive liberal distrust of group or community rights that cannot be reduced to individual rights, and note the significant exception made, explicitly or tacitly, for the case of national communities. I will then look at the loss of intellectual and moral respectability suffered by theories of nationalism in recent times, despite the continuing force of nationalism in the world, and ask what it implies for the cogency of liberal theory that it has tied its fortunes to such a questionable phenomenon. Finally I will attempt to address this question through a return to liberal foundations in the work of Thomas Hobbes, and particularly to his failure to provide theoretically for the effective defence of the commonwealth. I will argue that this defect is correctible by appeal to Hobbes’ own account of love and gratitude, which bind individuals to their commonwealth and to each other in a way that pure self-concern cannot. This then may indicate theoretical foundations for a form of nationalism on which (a perhaps modified) liberal individualism can be argued to depend.

## **Liberalism and its critics**

What is an individual? What is a community? What is a nation? None of these questions, however one may take them, admits of a simple or singular answer.

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the arguments put forward by civic nationalists are more concerned with democratic functioning than with liberal values as such (see, for example, Taylor 1996). I am more concerned here with the liberal element in liberal democracy than with its democratic aspects, though of course the conjunction of liberalism with democracy is no less problematic theoretically than that with nationalism.

Perhaps they do not even make much sense formulated in this manner. The 'is' suggests an existent 'thing' that can be isolated, examined and accurately described. But what is most often at issue for individual, community and nation is the very *mode of existence* to be imputed in each case. It often seems easier to address causal questions about how individuals, communities or nations emerge and act upon the world than to answer questions about what, existentially, they *are*.

Further, it is hard to give a definite answer to any of these questions without apparently pre-determining answers to the others. This is not just because in characterising individuals we must define the nature of their relationship to communities, or because in defining the 'super-community', nation, we are obliged to describe its relationship to the various communities and individuals it enfolds. It is because any description we offer will have ideological import in the sense of expressing a priority of one category over another. That human beings are social creatures is undeniable, but does it follow that human individuals are reducible, to the social collectives in and from which they emerge? One might as easily say (as some do) that societies, since they contain nothing but individual human beings, are therefore reducible to the latter. Many of the most fundamental arguments about politics revolve around this question of which category is to be regarded as – logically, ontologically, causally, or morally – prior.

In modern political theory, liberalism argued the priority of the individual over communities or collectives. Individuals lived in communities, of course, but liberals took these to be mere voluntary associations that people might enter or leave at will. Any stronger notion implied an unwarranted collective check on that liberty to which individuals had a 'natural' right simply by virtue of being individuals. Since liberty without existence was meaningless, natural rights were held to extend also to an individual's possession of life and the means of subsistence – in other words, to *property*. The essence of liberal political theory, therefore, was that pre-existent individuals voluntarily formed societies for their mutual advantage and established governments over those societies to defend their natural rights to liberty and property. The sole justification of government lay in its performance of this latter function. Government was therefore conceived to be a purely instrumental means to individual ends with no particular value in itself – indeed it was often regarded as a necessary evil, and a potential danger to the very liberty it was instituted to protect.

Left-wing opponents of liberalism insisted instead on the essentially collective nature of human reality. Marxists argued that 'bourgeois individualism' mistook (intentionally even if not consciously) the egoistic individuals of civil society for representatives of a universal class displaying the real nature of humankind. In reality, according to the Marxist view, they formed but a moment in the historical evolution of class relations, necessary for developing the capitalist mode of production but destined to be superseded by, or reunited in, a genuine community during the higher stages of communism.<sup>2</sup> Bourgeois individuals were an historical fact, but liberal individualism was merely a self-justifying, ideological fiction. A similar perspective could be detected in the work of various 'post-modern' writers, some of whom viewed the 'self-choosing' liberal individual as the creation of a totalising political system that purposefully individuated subjects (that is, determined them *as*

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<sup>2</sup> Has argued, however, that (Barry etc???)

individuals) (Foucault 1983; Connolly 1988). Others argued the virtual dissolution of the individual self within a fabric of determinative social relations – the necessarily social individual was reduced to a ‘subject position’ within various ‘language games’, ‘narratives’ or ‘discourses’. “A *self*,” said Lyotard, “does not amount to much” (1997, 15).

Liberals of course vehemently rejected Marxist views (which they saw as ultimately tyrannical over individuals) and were ambivalent about those of the post-moderns (the political implications of whose theories were often unclear – but see Corlett 1989, Young 189, 1990). They were more agitated, however, by ‘communitarian’ criticism that arose within their own ranks and that deployed similar critiques. So-called communitarians were usually less intent on destroying liberal values than in applying a corrective by pointing out that ‘the social fabric sustains, nourishes, and enables individuality rather than diminishes it’ (Etzioni 1996; see also Bellah 1996; Barber 1984). They argued that people were inevitably and beneficially dependent upon one another, unable to achieve or even conceive of individual goods outside of the communities and traditions that both form them and provide the context of their meaningful action (MacIntyre 1984; Walzer 1983). Communities were ‘constitutive’ of people’s very selves (Sandel 1982) and therefore prior to individuality and to individual liberty (Taylor 1977, 1992). Communitarians diagnosed a sense of loss, even of pathology, in societies that promoted the liberal ideal of individual autonomy. They noted a loss of psychic connection to others, a loss of mutuality, and of a type of relationship that transcends the liberal’s contractarian notion of mutual exchange for benefit. Such relationships were held to constitute part of one’s individual identity, and to make up an essential part of any coherent notion of the good life (Phillips 1993).

The force of the communitarian challenge was felt most strongly by liberals over the issue of ‘multiculturalism’ (Kane 2002, 98-101). In an era concerned to lay old ghosts of racialism, liberals in multicultural states felt impelled to confront the problem of ethno-cultural groups that, on the one hand, were the objects of unjust discrimination and, on the other, sometimes resisted assimilation to liberal-individual values. The liberal commitment to equality was tested by the first condition, the liberal value of toleration by the second.

The communitarians argued that toleration should be extended from individuals to the particular communities to which they belong and which support them in their being (Raz 1994; Kymlicka 1995). Cultures or communities should be held to have protective rights deserving of respect. Charles Taylor went so far as to recommend “that we recognize the equal value of different cultures; that we not only let them survive, but acknowledge their worth” (Taylor 1992, 64). But this ‘politics of recognition’, as it was labelled, seemed to imply that liberal individual rights did not apply universally, a contention that other liberals rejected. Natural rights were so firmly attached to individuals in liberal theory that it was difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of them as attaching to groups of any kind, since group rights might, on occasion, be held legitimately to trump those of individuals. Whatever moral significance might attach to the preservation of cultural identity, it could not give rise to a collective right analogous to the rights that safeguarded an individual’s liberty and autonomy (Narveson 1991; Stier 1998). Even Will Kymlicka, one of the principal advocates of multicultural group rights, stressed that these should not permit groups to

restrict the autonomy of their members – individual liberty was to remain an inviolable principle.

More interesting from the perspective of this essay, however, was the intended purpose of the group rights that Kymlicka originally proposed. These were meant to gain some measure of cultural protection for national minorities (for example, indigenous ‘first nations’ or Quebecois French) from the assimilative pressures of the dominant cultures within a state (Kymlicka 1995). Group rights could therefore be claimed only by sub-*national* groups and not by ethnic immigrant groups within a multi-cultural polity. This was a highly significant restriction in the context of liberal theory. It represented a tacit recognition of a long-standing exception to the liberal denial of rights for groups or communities.

That exception was precisely the *nation* to which liberal individuals belonged.

### **Liberalism and nationalism**

Liberals have typically pursued their individual goals within national political cultures. In accord with liberal theory, the legal and political authority of the state provided a stable environment in which individuals, accorded the status of equal citizenship, could comfortably pursue their private ends (in particular, their economic ends). Yet the liberal state quickly became something more than an institutional device for the protection of natural rights to life and property. It turned into something larger than the collection of individuals who comprised it, something to which those individuals were presumed to *belong* in a particular way, and to which they owed a special allegiance and special duties, even love. The nation was a community that itself had rights – for example, rights to national self-determination, or non-interference by other nations – rights that could not be reduced to individual rights. It was also a community that could and did demand sacrifices from its members in the confidence that it had a right to do so.

Liberal theory thus privileged one particular form of community. Whenever the connection was explicitly noted, as it was by John Stuart Mill, the essential national principle was simply presumed to prevail. “Where the sentiment of nationality exists in any force [and however it might have arisen], there is a *prima facie* case for uniting all members of the nationality under the same government, and a government to themselves apart” (Mill 1972, 392).<sup>3</sup> But this was hardly a liberal justification for government, since nationalism in Mill’s time presumed a prior and supra-individual identity of which individuals partook. Nineteenth century thinkers, influenced by writers like Johann Herder (1968), understood nations as distinct cultural-linguistic entities united by blood and by attachment to place. Nations were the products of organic historical growth and therefore ‘natural’ (the two English words share the same Latin root, *nasci*, to be born). It seemed to an age marked by both the ascendancy of the sovereign state and the romantic elevation of nature, that natural justice required that every true nation be self-determining within its own state.

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<sup>3</sup> This is also Ernest Gellner’s (1983, 1) definition: “Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent.”

Yet the liberation of peoples and cultures suffering the oppressive yoke of foreign domination, however laudable, rested on a presumption different from the individualistic premises of liberalism. Indeed, there has never been any principled reason why national states should not be anti-liberal. Worse, from the perspective of classical theory, it was argued even liberal governments were dependent on a prior national principle. Free institutions, Mill said, were almost impossible in a state containing mixed nationalities that precluded 'fellow-feeling' and sense of common identity (Mill 1972, 392).

This conjunction of liberalism and nationalism should perhaps have become even more embarrassing once the theory of nationalism turned into an intellectual scandal. It had always been a scandal for Marxist thinkers, of course, because the nation proved to be a more powerful cohesive force than international proletarian solidarity. Even avowedly Marxist regimes could not, ultimately, dispense with nationalist sentiment. Stalin mobilised the Soviet masses to defeat the Nazi invasion not by pleading communist ideology or by urging loyalty to the party, but by a frank appeal to love of Mother Russia. Nor did ideology long sustain fraternal solidarity once communism had spread to other parts of the world. The Soviet Union, China, Vietnam and Cambodia all pitted their enmity against each other as much, if not more than, against the nations of the decadent West. Communism proved to be quite as amenable to, and perhaps as dependent upon, the formation of national varieties as had capitalism before it. Neither bourgeoisie nor workers showed any profound inclination to think or act as a 'world class'.<sup>4</sup>

But in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, nationalism became a scandal for liberally minded people as well, people of the kind that had once been fervent supporters of 19<sup>th</sup> century 'liberal nationalism'. Jingoistic imperialism, fascist outrage, attempted genocide, ethnic cleansing, all seemed to reveal the darkly xenophobic potentiality of the ethno-cultural nation. Nationalism's moral stock fell among liberal intellectuals, who began to look toward trans-national forms of governance that might relegate the sovereign nation-state to a more subsidiary role. Yet the force of nationalism in the world appeared undiminished even at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Though some argued that increasing cultural and economic integration signalled the eventual decline of the nation-state, politicians continued to play the nationalist card at crucial moments, confident that people would respond with feelings of love, loyalty and sacrifice. Nations continued to engage in bitter struggles to free themselves from domination or fragmentation, or to gain hold of disputed territory, in order to constitute themselves as true nation-states (Lind 2000).

It was just this continuing strength of nationalism that was the greatest scandal so far as scholars were concerned, even greater than the loss of moral respectability. For all its undeniable effectuality, nationalism no longer seemed to have any intellectual or theoretical credibility. Political power was allegedly accompanied by 'philosophical poverty' (Anderson 1983, 5). The principal problem was the allegedly 'fictive' nature of the nation, which could always be shown to be a political creation rather than a primordial existent. Though nations were new things in history, they must appear to "loom out of an immemorial past" (Anderson 1983, 11). The creation of nations

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<sup>4</sup> Benedict Anderson's well-known book, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), declared its aim to be to offer a more satisfactory interpretation of this 'anomaly' than it had hitherto received (4).

involved the creation of myths (or downright falsehoods) about the nation's origins – thus the ironic definition of a nation as “a society united by a common error about its origin and a common aversion to its neighbours” (Ginsberg 1963, 2). If traditions were required to prove antiquity, then traditions would be invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). It was for this reason that Hobsbawm claimed that no serious historian of nations and nationalism can also be a committed political nationalist: “Nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so” (1990, 12).

But if nationalism is no more, in the end, than a form of irrationalism, it can hardly provide a basis for serious political theory any more than for serious history. At best it may be the object of political analysis, amenable, like racism perhaps, to socio-psychological explanation. It surely cannot be deployed as a philosophical category with respectably normative force. As in Marx's view of religion, it can perhaps be explained only by being explained away.<sup>5</sup> Bad enough that liberalism should have made itself dependent on any form of community at all, worse to have hitched its fortunes to an imagined community<sup>6</sup> lacking either theoretical or historical justification.

It may be thought that the case would be better for ‘civic nations’ whose identities are allegedly founded more on loyalty to rational political principles and perhaps a particular political history rather than on pre-existing ethno-cultural commonalities or the heritage of blood. This is certainly the hope of contemporary liberals who argue the compatibility of liberal values with ‘thin’ conceptions of national identity (Barry 1999). There is reason, however, to doubt the soundness of this hope given that even civic nations feel the need to invent their own sustaining myths and (as Mill virtually admitted) are themselves generally underpinned by explicit or implicit ‘ethnic’ criteria (such as ‘race’ or religion) (Wiebe 1975, Smith 1999, Kane 1997). I take the essence of nationalism to be not rational assent but love, love of something transcending oneself that is yet an important source of one's self-identity – of a country identified as one's own, or of a people who are one's own. Such love easily transforms into hatred of those who would threaten or hurt one's own, and provides the motive for the lover to be prepared to sacrifice him- or herself for the beloved when necessary. It is exactly the political mobilisation of such love and hatred for the purposes of warfare that has characterised nationalism in modern times, and given it the appearance, to the eyes of cool liberals, of an irrational and detestable primitivism.

It would be unfortunate, then, if liberalism's historical success were in fact dependent on the preservation of ‘primitive’ communal passions that had no place within its own theoretical assumptions. If it were so, would this reveal a fatal flaw in theoretical liberalism itself?

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<sup>5</sup> Religion's real power over people's minds was, according to Marx, the result of the fantastical solace it afforded for present suffering, a solace bought at the price of obscuring the real forces preventing happiness here on earth. Nationalism could be regarded as a political illusion that is the secular extension of the religious illusion Marx sought to dispel, useful for binding people to political structures that, on deeper analysis, are inimical to their true happiness (Cocks 2002, 26-30).

<sup>6</sup> Anderson's formulation implies a contrast to ‘real’ communities in which people deal with each other face to face. This is to suppose that face-to-face human communities are transparently existent and not themselves crucially the products of ‘imagination’. The same goes for ‘individuals’, as the beginning of this essay indicates.

I want to suggest that liberal individualism in its purest form is indeed flawed, but that its dependence on some form of nationalism may be more than simply expedient. To make this argument I want to return to liberal foundations. The seeds of the problem were, I will claim, already there in the work of the most profound of the theorists who ushered in the modern era, Thomas Hobbes. They can be discerned in his arguments concerning the obligation of subjects to defend their ‘commonwealth’ against external enemies.

Hobbes was not, of course, a modern liberal (the word was not coined until the 19<sup>th</sup> century); and certainly not a liberal democrat concerned with constitutionalising the power that human beings had created through their covenanting (that honour went to Locke).<sup>7</sup> But no author pursued so determinedly and with such apparent logical force a path from the motives of solitary, fearful, self-interested individuals to the foundation of a sovereign power to which all were morally obligated. For Hobbes, the limits of an individual’s obligation were logically set by the singular motive that impelled them to inaugurate the sovereign power, self-preservation. But this, I claim, was a potentially fatal flaw in his theory that threatened the very existence of his sovereign state. Moreover, I will argue that the answer to Hobbes’ dilemma can be found in Hobbes himself, and that it lay in an appeal to another motive – love – that (just as in nationalism) transcended the self while simultaneously confirming it. My intuition is that if Hobbes’ trenchant individualism can be shown to be dependent on according priority to some larger collective entity, then all extreme individualisms may prove similarly dependent.

### **The Hobbesian dilemma**

Hobbes famously argued that commonwealths were inaugurated by the agreement of free and equal individuals wishing to escape from a competitive ‘state of nature’ that he characterised as ‘the war of all against all’. Unable to ensure their individual security in a world where every person, however strong, was equally vulnerable to the might or cunning of others, individuals covenanted together to establish a Leviathan state with the overawing power necessary to provide protection and justice for all. In exchange for this protection, individuals contracted away the natural right they had possessed in the state of nature to pursue their own interests to the maximum extent and by whatever means possible. This transfer of right was, said Hobbes, a voluntary act, “and of the voluntary acts of every man, the object is some *good to himself*” (*Leviathan* 1, 14, 66; 1996, 88, emphasis in original). In other words, the sole basis for the allegiance that each owed the state was, for Hobbes, nothing more than the individual benefit it bestowed upon him or her.

The commonwealth thus established may be more or less large, but it could not conceivably be universal. Hobbes therefore presumed the existence of a multitude of commonwealths that would remain, in the absence of an overarching power, in the original state of nature with respect to one another. Each commonwealth must therefore be prepared to defend its members from the aggression of others, which meant in practice mobilising citizens for defence. The question then arose whether individuals could be obligated to risk or sacrifice their lives given that obligation was

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<sup>7</sup> Hobbes famously argued that there was no distinction between the sovereign power and tyranny (*Leviathan* ?????).

founded solely on the sovereign's capacity to ensure individual self-preservation. This was an especially pressing question for Hobbes since he had argued, consistent with his initial premises, that self-preservation was a natural right that could not be covenanted away. He was adamant that "no man can transfer, or lay down his right to save himself from death, wounds, and imprisonment, (the avoiding whereof is the only end of laying down any right)" (*Leviathan* 1, 14, 29; 1996, 93). Even a justly condemned criminal did not forfeit – *could* not forfeit – his right to resist death, injury or imprisonment at the hands of established authority. Hobbes insisted that, in such individual cases, men by nature chose the lesser evil (danger of death in resisting) rather than the greater one (certain death in not resisting), and that they had always the right to do so.

It may be thought that this reasoning would also establish the collective case for resisting destruction of the commonwealth. At the most, however, it established a *right* to collective defence and not an obligation for individual citizens to assist in that defence. Indeed it is not clear that Hobbes' individualistic premises supported such a move, though it was one he seemed to make when he explored "the true liberty of a subject; that is to say, what are the things, which though commanded by the sovereign, he may nevertheless, without injustice, refuse to do" (*Leviathan* 2, 21, 10; 1996, 144). Hobbes argued that these things were revealed by a logical test. According to him, the sovereign's commands are in effect our own, since we have authorised the sovereign to make them on our collective behalf. We cannot justly disobey the sovereign's commands if doing so would frustrate the end for which sovereignty was ordained, namely our own security and survival. By the same token, however, we are not obligated to obey any command that requires us to harm ourselves (for example, an order to confess to crimes even if we have indeed committed them), for this *would* frustrate the end of sovereignty (*Leviathan* 2, 21, 12-15; 1996, 144-45).

Despite this, Hobbes argues that we are sometimes obliged to obey when the sovereign commands us to do some dangerous thing, such as fight an enemy. He admits that refusal is not always unjust, even if the sovereign may have the right to punish such refusal by death. Avoiding a battle may be cowardice, he says, but is not injustice. Yet he goes on to argue:

But he that enrolleth himself as a soldier... taketh away the excuse of a timorous nature; and is obliged, not only to go into battle, but also not to run from it, without his captain's leave. And when the defence of the commonwealth, requireth at once the help of all that are able to bear arms, every one is obliged; because otherwise the institution of the commonwealth, which they have not the purpose, or courage to preserve, was in vain (*Leviathan* 2, 21, 16; Hobbes 1996, 145).

Whatever the case with the enlisted soldier, the latter argument obliging collective exertion in defence of the commonwealth is one, not of logical, but of *practical* necessity: no common defence, no commonwealth. The *logical* contradiction is surely to be willing to die for an institution whose only purpose is to ensure one's preservation. It is of course possible to mount a moral argument that people who share the benefits of mutual association are obligated also to share the risks, including the risks of defence. Hobbes no doubt depends implicitly on this argument here though it does not follow from his original premises. But even if we allow it, we must ask from what particular motive Hobbes expects a fearful individual to act in fulfilment of such

a duty. The traditional reply, and the one many would still give today, would be *honour* – the honour of defending and perhaps sacrificing for one’s community, or the fear of being thought dishonourable for failing to do so. But this reply is hardly available to Hobbes, in whose system honour was a degraded commodity.

Honour is said by Hobbes to be no more than the appearance of power, and the reputation that power confers among one’s fellows.<sup>8</sup> He writes that it does not alter the case of honour “whether an action (so it be great and difficult, and consequently a sign of much power,) be just or unjust: for honour consisteth only in the opinion of power” (*Leviathan* 1, 10, 48; 1996, 62). The Hobbesian irony is that this opinion of differential power is largely illusory in the state of nature, where “the weakest has strength enough to kill the strongest” and where men are inclined to view their own gifts and ambitions as equal to everyone else’s (*Leviathan* 1, 13, 1-2; 1996, 82). Moreover, the desire for honour is portrayed by Hobbes as merely a petty form of human pride, which in the guise of glory or reputation is identified as one of the three main causes of destructive quarrel.<sup>9</sup> In the absence of a common power able to overawe all, he says, “every man looketh that his companion should value him, at the same rate he sets upon himself.” So it happens that men do violence “for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue” (*Leviathan* 1, 13, 5-7; 1996, 83-4). One function of the common power set up to keep all in awe is to repress such impulses of honour. Indeed, since honour is identified with power, the unparalleled power of the sovereign virtually extinguishes all honour among individual subjects by humbling them to the same level of comparative powerlessness (*Leviathan* 2, 18, 19; 1996, 121-2).

Hobbes’ political theory is intended to be strictly ‘realistic’ about the human condition and therefore disillusioning about human pride and honour. He believes he can reveal the logical necessity for government – and thus the true foundations of political obedience and obligation – by assuming nothing more than self-interested, always-vulnerable individuals whose desire to live well inevitably pits them against every other (and commits them to “a perpetual and restless desire for power after power, that ceaseth only in death”). The sovereign state that these individuals agree to create for their own protection therefore appears wholly instrumental, a mere prudential means to securing private ends. Hobbes claims that the establishment of a sovereign power introduces law and justice into the world, since he holds that until there exists a power capable of enforcing law and justice these cannot exist. But sovereign power does not seem to create a political community capable of commanding the true loyalty and devotion of its members. Hobbes seems fatally unable to transcend his own individualistic premises through either logic or an appeal to a sense of honour he has intentionally devalued. In the matter of defence of the commonwealth, such a failure may be disastrous.

There is, however, a possible line of argument to be found in *Leviathan* that might deal with the problem. It derives from Hobbes’ account of the emotions evoked in

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<sup>8</sup> Hobbes takes evidence of superiority in anything – speech, judgment, ability to hurt or help – as signs of power which cause people to honour those that display them and to dishonour those that lack them.

<sup>9</sup> The other two are competition (for mastery of resources and people) and ‘diffidence’ (or fear of one another that forces men to use violence to defend their own).

giving and receiving benefits, in particular his analysis of those circumstances that call forth a response of love.

Hobbes argued that, when a person we consider our equal confers upon us greater benefit than we can possibly return, we may pretend to love them but in fact will secretly hate them.

For benefits oblige; and obligation is thralldom; and unrequitable obligation, perpetual thralldom; which is to one's equal, hateful. But to have received benefits from one, whom we acknowledge for superior, inclines to love; because the obligation is no new depression: and cheerful acceptance, (which men call *gratitude*,) is such an honour done to the obliger, as is generally taken for retribution (*Leviathan* 1, 11, 7; 1996, 67).

In other words, great benefits received from a superior do not put us any more deeply in that superior's debt than we were beforehand. Generosity is not therefore cause for resentment but for gratitude, and gratitude is the only recompense that the superior needs or requires.

Looking at this in the larger context of Hobbes' political theory, it is clear that the greatest benefits that a member of a commonwealth ever receives come from the sovereign power. That power provides the security and internal peace that are the necessary conditions for science, industry, arts, letters and society (*Leviathan* 1, 13, 9; 1996, 84) – for everything, in other words, that makes life worthwhile, and even for life itself. If gratitude to a superior for benefits received inclines to love, then the sovereign, who is infinitely superior to any individual in power and beneficence, would appear to be worthy of the greatest love imaginable.

Honour finds its proper role here, too. If honour is recognition of superior power then honour must be due to the sovereign above all else. Significantly, Hobbes connects honour to both love and to fear. "To show any sign of love, or fear of another is to honour; for both to love, and to fear, is to value." The subject must surely fear the sovereign's power, value the sovereign's exercise of that power, and love the sovereign for the indispensable benefits that this exercise bestows. Elsewhere, Hobbes connects honour and love to *goodness*. He writes: "Honour consisteth in the inward thought and opinion of the power and goodness of another." The passion that arises from the "internal honour" of power is fear; the passion that arises from the internal honour of goodness is love (*Leviathan* 2, 31, 8-9; 1996, 238-9). Though Hobbes takes a relativistic view of good and evil, he argues that all men agree at least that peace is good, and therefore also the means to it (*Leviathan* 1, 15, 40; 1996, 105-6). Since the sovereign is the *only* means and guarantor of peace, the sovereign must also be the supreme source of all earthly goodness, therefore again deserving of supreme love. (It is significant that Hobbes called his Leviathan the 'earthly god', akin to the heavenly God whose presumed goodness and power commands our greatest love and fear.)

If the desire for self-preservation cannot guarantee the willingness of subjects to risk their lives for the commonwealth, the necessary impulse may nevertheless come from a love that is naturally evoked by gratitude. This is a love, moreover, that testifies to and helps sustain our bond of mutual dependence with all our fellows in the commonwealth. In Hobbes' theory, individuals do not covenant with the sovereign but with each other to create the sovereign, which remains therefore *from* them but *above* them all. Since the sovereign power is sustained by the continuing agreement of

all, its effectual existence is both a sign and a product of every person's enduring, vital connection to his or her fellows.

It may seem curious that the earthly god we love is our own creation, our individual selves writ large, an entity whose deeds and actions we claim as our own. Yet this identification merely gives our love greater motive force. Indeed it opens the way for a theoretical rather than merely contingent and fortuitous connection of liberalism and nationalism. For nationalism, I have said, is but love of one's nation. And what is that but the love of something identified as a source of great beneficence that is, in some special sense, *our own*? The nation allows us to transcend our banal individuality and to find an identity in something greater than ourselves which is nevertheless of ourselves. It clearly separates *mine* from *thine*, and in so doing binds us to our fellow nationals. It gives us a motive for love that may be demonstrated, when required, in service and in sacrifice.

## Conclusion

If Hobbesian love and gratitude, centred on effective government, do indeed provide a foundation for some form of nationalism, it is clearly not of the ethno-cultural variety. It is perhaps more like the civic nationalism alleged to underpin citizenship in liberal democratic countries. Modern liberal democrats, however, are shy about speaking plainly of 'love', which seems to raise the spectre of the irrational passion they suppose to infuse the more virulent strains of national feeling. Yet one of the central problems for political citizenship since ancient Greek times has been to loosen people's primary bonds to local community, tribe or clan and to re-attach them to a civic polity that offers more and different kinds of rewards. It has never been deemed sufficient to rely solely on the self-interest of the citizen to achieve this, though that was fundamental too. Love of the polity that provided larger life opportunities and experience was encouraged. In Renaissance Italy, civic *amor* was actually required for the granting of citizenship rights (Riesenberg 1992).

If my argument is correct, then liberal individualism's attachment to nationalism may not be so anomalous after all. In fact it may rest on a requirement that individuals must love something larger than themselves that is nevertheless of themselves and which thus attaches them to the thing loved and also, practically, to their fellow citizens. This something is the polity that provides the conditions and opportunities that make a liberal life possible. But if that is so then liberal political theory begins to resemble much older conceptions of political citizenship, though it cannot be identical to them, since ancient patriotism is not the same as modern nationalism, however much these may be confused and conflated.

This distinction raises a problem which, although there is not space to address it here, is worth mentioning in conclusion. George Orwell (1943) distinguished between ancient patriotism and modern nationalism by saying that the former implied devotion to place and a way of life while the latter was based on expanding the power of an entity in which one had sunk one's individuality. John Lukacs drew on Orwell's account in his analysis of Hitler, who vehemently declared himself a nationalist and definitely not an old-fashioned patriot. Lukacs wrote (1997, 127) that: "Nationalism is both self-centered and selfish, because human love is not the love of oneself, it is the

love of *another*.” Hobbes’ Leviathan is the independent self writ-large, a naturally selfish self collectivised and projected as an earthly god above all individual selves, deriving its power from each. Its logic is therefore nationalist, for to love the god that one has helped create, and to love one’s fellows who are collaborators in that creation, is in peculiarly transmuted fashion to love oneself. It is a love, moreover, grounded in individual fear and hope of reward, rather than the selfless love celebrated by St. Paul. The patriot’s love, in contrast, is more traditional and filial, being the love for those elements (land, polity, parents) that are indeed *one’s own* but definitely not of one’s own creation. They are rather the creators of oneself, unchosen and merely given, to whom one owes debts of gratitude, loyalty, obedience and sacrifice whether one likes it or not. The central difference lies in the contrast between Socrates’ decision, as portrayed in Plato’s *Crito*, to accept death, even unjustly, at the hands of the polity, and Hobbes’ insistence that even justly condemned citizens retain the right of self-preservation. At eternal issue is the question of the proper balance to be struck between the ever-importunate individual ego and the collective requirement for order and justice.

If I may return finally to the Indonesian context with which I began, the relevance of these problems seems clear. Like almost every country in the modern world, the borders of the state called Indonesia have been arbitrarily determined by history. They enclose a diverse set of peoples whose natural love and interest are attached to particular localities and to specific kith, kin or religion. If the arbitrary state is to be something more than a mere geographical entity, much more than force will be required to bind these diverse peoples together. They must find reasons to love the greater family that Indonesia aspires to be. The artificial forcing of love and identity by emphasising real or illusory external threats common to all, though a familiar feature of modern nationalism, has been shown to import serious dangers. The state seeking genuine security must embark on a more serious form of nation-building, one that attempts, through good government and an evident will to justice, to provide rewards and engagements that give positive reasons for general allegiance, that give each a part in the common enterprise and each a reason to call the new nation one’s own.

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