

# The Proper Canadian Nationalism is Ethical<sup>1</sup>

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1. I develop a number of definitions and ideas associated with this sometimes-nasty word, *nationalism*.
2. But first I start with an assertion so that you know where I am heading.
3. The **assertion** has a background notion. This is that in dealing with the concept of nationalism, just as in dealing with all other social relationship questions, one must always strive to *take the high road*. Strive to do the *right and proper thing*.
4. And so the question is: Does nationalism have a right and proper definition?
5. I take it that the right and proper thing always makes for the better world. What makes for the better world always means doing the ethical rather than unethical, or immoral. And the ethical route is to be taken **in economics as well as political and other areas** of life. It means holding positions that will stand in the face of ethical scrutiny. Injustice is to be replaced by justice.
6. Specifically this ethical positioning is a base camp from which one can try to create a world in which *the conditions for the free and full development of each person are the conditions for the free and full development of all persons*. A practical aspect of this is that *as we pursue our individual goals we do so without doing injustice to others*. A moment's reflection and one realizes just how difficult that is to do.
7. Well that is the background and the base camp to the notion of a *proper nationalism*. Now what is the assertion?
8. The *assertion* is that there is a concept that can be called *ethical nationalism*.
9. I define ethical nationalism as having two components. The first component is what has come to be called **civic nationalism**. More on this in the Canadian context in a bit.

The second component of ethical nationalism is **the priority question of Justice in Capitalism**. I take it that this is the meaning of John Rawls words that: "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, ... laws and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I found the paper original of this note in 2009. The original contained the points I made at a SPUC meeting held on February 6, 2000. It is still seems relevant. I have only tried to improve the writing and add some recent updates to relevant readings. The argument remains and if anything is strengthened by new readings. See for example John Ralston Saul, *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada*, (Viking Canada, 2008)

<sup>2</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 3.

So, the term *priority question of justice in capitalism* implies the ethics and practices implemented in coming to grips with the question of economic injustice. That is with unjustifiable, system created differentials in economic opportunity and with other end results that differentially confront other wise equal Canadian citizens.<sup>3</sup> [If we are equal, as we are supposed to be, why are we not fully equal? Why are systemic unjustifiable differentials allowed to persist?]. The economic and social system by definition and in its operation systemically creates injustices and so it, the system, is unjust. We have a moral obligation to make the world just.

There is a corollary to the assertion. The corollary is that an *ethical domestic or at home nationalism* can only be complete if the ethical argument applies both nationally and internationally. That Canadians are citizens of the world, part of the human community, implies that we have a moral obligation to struggle to assure that injustices abroad are turned into justices there just as we take on similar struggles here at home.

10. To develop this assertion I want to distinguish between other types of nationalism.
11. The first two are: (1) ***Visceral nationalism*** and (2) ***community minded nationalism***.
12. ***Visceral nationalism*** is for example, the nationalism of Nazi Germany. It is a negative concept of racial superiority, of exclusion of some groups of people from full-life based on their ethnicity, color and or religious background. ***Visceral nationalism*** generates unjustifiable inequalities in the treatment of people independently of the economic system and it is clearly immoral. Think of Kosovo, Ireland, various countries in Africa. Current injustices in Syria created by the Assad regime.
13. One would hope that visceral nationalism is not a possibility in Canada. Our great diversity would seem to make it not possible.<sup>4</sup> In any event it is a concept inconsistent with our traditions and with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms found in section 34 of the Constitution Act of 1982. But we are still left with differentials in the treatment of people that cannot be justified.
14. ***Community minded nationalism***: Charles Taylor, Canadian Philosopher and political scientist at McGill defined it as “as sense of the significance of what a people is doing [or can do] together, of its collective achievements and its common goals.”<sup>5</sup> This could apply to Canada and to Quebec with or without the other. It could apply to Quebec outside of Canada as much as it is meant to apply to Canada, that is to say Canada including Quebec.

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<sup>3</sup> This may be seen as coming to grips with the social costs that spin off from the operation of the system. See: *Profit as the Root of all Evil: The Devil is in the Details*. (2006)

<sup>4</sup> See the recent warning in: Irvin Studin, Canada is too big to Fail: Canadians tired of the Quebec Question should be careful about what they wish for.” *Toronto Star* (Sunday, August 26, 2012), A13. The shooting outside a Part Quebecois victory rally Tuesday September 4, 2012, must surely raise some concerns.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Taylor, *Economic Independence for Canada*, (Montreal: McGill University Department of Political Science 1966).

15. Taylor also noted the features of community minded nationalism in Canada: (1) "... To develop the five great regions as full scale societies... the principal aim of uniting these diverse regions into one body politic can only be their combined development ... a goal which would mean a fuller and more prosperous life for the vast majority of Canadians." (2) "...To develop a mode of existence where different cultures can grow and be fully themselves without paying the price of isolation, while helping that is to, to enrich each other, ... a society in which diversity is welcomed as richness and not feared as the prelude to division. ..." (3) "... Once we exist as a country we cannot avoid our obligation to play a role in the international scene ... a strategic role in the attempt to preserve peace."<sup>6</sup>

It is possible to raise questions, perhaps quibbles, about what Taylor says. For example in his point (1) why not say a more prosperous life for "all Canadians" rather than the vast majority of Canadians. And in his (2) why not say "the full and free development of each person" — is that what his words *fully themselves* means? And again in point (2) the words are meant to apply to Canada, but it seems they ought also to apply to Quebec outside of Canada - but if Quebec is outside Canada has Canada and Quebec failed to achieve Taylor's second specification? And in point (3) his international role is peace. But in my ethical nationalism the international role is a broader more encompassing concept in that it includes economic justice. So I think it is possible to say that the words used or language with which Taylor chooses to express his ideas ignores the economic and in consequence seem to have a systemic equation of liberalism = capitalism and a disguised trickle down theory of income distribution about them.

16. But to be generous, the definition of community minded nationalism and Taylor's 3-point elaboration of it in the Canadian context is probably consistent with the civic and the international components of my assertion about ethical-nationalism; or at least can be made to be. But it seems not at all clear that Taylor even implicitly recognizes to priority question of justice within Capitalism, And so on my definitions it is incomplete, Taylor has not gone far enough.
17. This is not to say that Charles Taylor does not recognize the ethical question of justice and injustice in capitalism. But when I raised this question with him a few years ago, (1993) at his lectures at Wilfred Laurier University,<sup>7</sup> he retorted: "there are worse systems than capitalism." As I see it this response, in a sense missed the point about moral obligation even as it as it implicitly granted the point that capitalism is unjust, and this means, I take it, that Taylor has granted the validity of my criticism of his language.

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Taylor, "Nationalism and independence: An Economic Problem," in P.W. Fox ed., *Politics Canada*, (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Limited, 1982), 169-177.

<sup>7</sup> Wilfrid Laurier University October 26, 27 and 28, 1993. Lectures included in *Selected Readings to Accompany Canadian Studies 201—Canadian Community, Existence and Sustainability*. (Waterloo: University of Waterloo, 1994). "The Liberal Communitarian Debate," Transcribed Notes of The *Laurier Lectures*, (October 26, 1993); "Two Theories of Modernity," Transcribed Notes of The *Laurier Lectures*, (October 27, 1993); "The Malaises of Modernity," Transcribed Notes of The *Laurier Lectures*, (October 28, 1993).

18. But some further definition of the extra-economic side of the argument. The Fall 1999 issue of *Cité Libre*, contains an article by Max Nemni<sup>8</sup> of Laval University in Quebec City. Nemni distinguished between two nationalisms, both made in Canada, indeed both made in Quebec. The first he described as the ethnic nationalism of Quebec separatists. This has been a closed and exclusive nationalism, which seems required if one wants to secede, it involves Jacques Parizeau's statement that "Quebec is a chicken plucker" and "Canada is the chicken to be plucked." Parizeau later, I understand provided the caricature of Canada as a cow being milked by Quebec, I leave it to you to decide whether the ethnic nationalism of the BLOC and of the Parti Québécois can be labeled visceral.
19. The other nationalism that Nemni sees as originating in Quebec is the "civic Nationalism" which he ascribed to Pierre Trudeau. Civic nationalism implies an open and inclusive society based on equality rights of citizenship. In our context it also meant reinforcement of the French language in Canada. The story involved is of the struggle of Pierre Trudeau to repatriate the constitution and to embed it in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (in Section 34 of the Constitution Act).
20. Let me now say a bit about Economic Nationalism. By that term I mean the Economics and Ethics of Community Survival. When I started teaching I was an economic nationalist. The way I defined economic nationalism then and still define it today runs in terms of an alternative to what the powers that be were allowing to be pressed on Canada by outside forces. This makes my notion of economic nationalism sound something like Quebec nationalism in the sense of being economic "masters in our own house." But economic nationalism did not have and cannot have according to my definitions any ethnic component. Being economic masters meant we could at least have a democratic voice in determining the character and degree of our integration in the world economy. The alternative was capitalist imperialism or outside control. Outside control was and still is registered in foreign ownership of resources and other sectors, a branch plant structure and truncated manufacturing. Foreign ownership was seen as limiting the growth and development of Canada along lines that could have been defined by Canadians. In other words we were being put in the service of foreign corporations and our governments have assisted in this. Canadian governments have allowed capitalist development in the twentieth century to continue in the same fashion as the Hudson Bay company in a much earlier time, The sort of thing being objected to can be seen in the words Neil McElroy.

"Neil McElroy, chairman of Procter and Gamble explained, "It is customary in our development of overseas markets for us to use a minimum of U.S. Capital, a maximum of borrowing overseas, and reinvestment of earnings abroad." You didn't even have to bring in much to take over an industry in a place like Canada: you could borrow the money from a Canadian bank repay it with profits carved out to the Canadian price structure and waddle home with the

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<sup>8</sup> Nemni, Max, "Canada's Two Nationalisms, Made in Quebec," *Cité Libre*. (Fall 1999), 41-47.

rest, Indeed you could use the foreign subsidiary to buy from the American parent. McElroy could prove it too, ... the American corporation had sent \$11 million out and brought back \$290 million, \$47 million in profit and \$243 million in purchases.”<sup>9</sup>

21. I could not see that that sort of thing and generally foreign ownership implied the self-determination/sovereignty that is implied by the notion of the free and full development of the individual let alone of the nation and its regions, And neither could many others, most notably I suppose, George Grant who wrote a book titled *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*. Grant it can be said saw capitalism, capitalist individualism and technology as the root causes of our problems. They prevented us from pursuing the common good and, rather, they directed us to a more US style of life based on the private market and profit as the one value to be concerned about.
22. Subsequently, and consistent with market dominance, in the 1980’s the citizens of this country and others have been subjected to the abuses of neo-conservative political power and economic and social policy.<sup>10</sup> These have not been policies that looked to strengthen community. They have nothing at all of community minded nationalism in them. In fact like a cancerous disease<sup>11</sup> they have attacked the very programs and institutions that make for community strength, So, like globalization, corporatism and the anti-Government notions they illegitimately spawn, they can be said to be anti-nationalist and anti-community.
23. For this reason it seems to me that the neo-conservatives have unwittingly assisted in adding a new dimension to the practical struggle against neo-conservatism itself. The struggle against neo-conservatism itself seems to unite people of every social activist description at home and abroad. The Seattle demonstrations against the WTO seem proof positive. In those demonstrations the world saw the coming together of people from the four corners of the globe to demonstrate against the WTO and the planned imposition of “freedom for capital constitutions” of the sort built into NAFTA and that would have been built into MAI, the *Multilateral Agreement on Investment*. These economic constitutions provide rights to capital over people. The demonstrators in Seattle were expressing a people’s internationalism in opposition to capitalism and globalization that has an ethical base consistent with what they were also arguing should apply in their various home countries.
24. So I give it to you that implementation of the definition of ethical nationalism and economic justice involves nationalist policies for and of local community survival

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<sup>9</sup> Eric Kierans and Walter Stewart, *Wrong End of the Rainbow: The Collapse of Free Enterprise in Canada*, (Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1988). 72.

<sup>10</sup> See Dalton Camp, *Neo-Conservatism: How to Wreck a County without a Hammer*, March 23 200. Kerr-Saltzman Lecture at the University of Waterloo.

<sup>11</sup> See: McMurtry, John, *The Cancer Stage of Capitalism*, (London and Tokyo: Pluto Press and Springer-Verlag (1999); McMurtry, John, “The Social Immune System and the Cancer Stage of Capitalism,” *Social Justice: A Journal of Crime, Conflict and World Order*. XXII4(1995) 1-25. McMurtry John, *Fascism and Neo-Conservatism Is there a Difference.*” *Praxis International IV* (1984) 86-102.

and they are necessitated by the destructive influence of unregulated markets, globalization and neo-conservative economic and social policy, including and especially, free trade and international finance.

25. Note that this provides a link from the ethical base for community survival at the domestic level to an equal ethical base for strengthening international community. Practically this involves world governance of a sort we have not yet devised but that sits in embryo form in the United Nations and in the various charters of Human Rights to which Canada is a signatory. So, again the proper nationalism is internationalism with an ethical face.
26. I have tried to trace out a conceptual scheme or ordering of ideas that I think helps to understand current events and the notion of nationalism in Canada and where we ought to be heading to progressively extend human rights and freedoms.
27. In summary ethical nationalism means civic nationalism and it means coming to grips with the question of justice in capitalism so as to extend equal rights of economic and political citizenship to all the people of the earth. An idealistic struggle indeed!
28. One last thought is that there is another way of wording this argument. Tommy Douglas said on many occasions that in Canada we had a *political democracy* (procedural electoral rights for equal citizens) but we did not and do not have an *economic democracy*. My argument is consistent with that evaluation and goes beyond it in a way with which TC Douglas would agree:

***Full Democracy = Economic Democracy + Political Democracy***  
***Ethical Nationalism = Economic Justice + Civic Nationalism***

### **Some readings:**

Camp, Dalton, *Neo-Conservatism: How to Wreck a County without a Hammer*, March 23 200. Kerr-Saltzman Lecture at the University of Waterloo.

Frye, Northup, *Divisions on a Ground: Essays on Canadian Culture*, (Toronto: Anasi, 1982. Edited by James Polk)

G. Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*. (Toronto McClelland and Stewart.)

Kierans, Eric and Walter Stewart, *Wrong End of the Rainbow: The Collapse of Free Enterprise in Canada*, (Toronto: Collins Publishers, 1988). 72.

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Needham, W. Robert *Profit as the Root of all Evil: The Devil is in the Details.* (2006)

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Taylor Charles, Lectures at Wilfrid Laurier University October 26, 27 and 28, 1993. Lectures included in *Selected Readings to Accompany Canadian Studies 201—Canadian Community, Existence and Sustainability.* (Waterloo: University of Waterloo, 1994). “The Liberal Communitarian Debate,” (October 26, 1993); “Two Theories of Modernity,” (October 27, 1993); “The Malaises of Modernity,” (October 28, 1993).