Zionism, Nationalism, and Morality

Nationalism - Herder

“. . . he regarded the state as something artificial and accidental, nationality as something natural and essential.”

“Each nationality was to him a living organism, a manifestation of the Divine, and therefore something sacred which should not be destroyed but cultivated. Every man, so he taught, could fulfill his human destiny only within and through his nationality. This was true of all nationalities: all were equally sacred, the seemingly advanced ones and those called ‘primitive,’ through them all, in different ways, the destiny of mankind fulfilled itself. A nationality lived about all in its civilization; its main instrument was its language, not an artificial instrument, but a gift of God, the guardian of the national community and the matrix of its civilization.”

Herder (continued)

Humanity remained for Herder the highest, though a somewhat vague, goal and criterion. His love for nationality embraced all nationalities and their national life. "No love for our nation shall hinder us in recognizing everywhere the good which can be effected progressively only in the great course of times and peoples." For the nations are diversified and unique in order supplement one another.”

“Nothing seemed more ridiculous to Herder than national pride. What, he asked, would be the yardstick for comparisons among nations? “In each nation the feeling of sympathy for all other nations must be cultivated so much that each one may imagine itself in the place of the other.”

Zionism: 2 claims

• Jews have a right to a state somewhere in the world
• Jews have a right to a state somewhere in Palestine
Three Criticisms of Zionism

- Zionism is immoral because all forms of cultural nationalism is immoral
- Zionism is immoral because Jewish nationalism has particular qualities that make it an unacceptable form of cultural nationalism
- Zionism is immoral because of its violation of Palestinian rights

Is Cultural Nationalism Acceptable?

- An issue of partiality: what forms partiality of are morally acceptable?
- Is nationalistic partiality okay?
  - Administrative nationalism: just a means to advance impartial end of human welfare
  - Cultural nationalism: state promotes the right of national self-expression (Khalidi), a distinctive way of life (Walzer)

Response to 3 Criticisms

- Cultural nationalism not like racist partiality
- It has some positive values
  - Responds to a basic human need (perhaps)
  - Value of diverse ways of life as forms of human consciousness
  - Appropriate to apply realistic, not idealistic morality

Jewish Nationalism

- Are Jews a “people” or “nation”?
  (Larger question: what groups are “appropriate” candidates for national self-determination?)
  - No objective criteria
  - Subjective, experiential standard appropriate
- Jewish nationalism as inclusive/exclusive as other cultural nationalisms
- No reason people must be indigenous to land to have a claim. Issue is whether other people’s rights are violated.