

Nationalism: The Democratization of the Mystical
Experience

By
Paul Castronova

Departmental Honors Thesis
The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga
Political Science Department

Project Director: Fouad Moughrabi
Examination Date: November 15, 2004

Robert Swansbrough
Stephen Eskildsen
James Ward

Examining Committee Signatures:

Project Director

Department Examiner

Department Examiner

Liaison, Departmental Honors Committee

Chairperson, University Departmental Honors Committee

Abstract

This is a work of political philosophy. In the tradition of John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and Edmund Burke, I am exploring aspects of the human experience. In particular, I am exploring the aspects of the human experience we call “nationalism.” The purpose of this work is to achieve a greater understanding of the phenomenon nationalism by examining it as if it were a form of mysticism. I will evaluate the experience of nationalism in a fashion comparable to that which William James employs in his writings on mysticism. Thus, my paper will have a substantial reliance on psychology. Using psychology as a basis, I find that these phenomena, mysticism and nationalism, converge at the human desire for unity. Obtaining unity, and thereby satisfying psychological needs, demonstrates that these phenomena are fundamentally similar. This essay will expound further on their similarity.

So here was this Giant, this nameless, faceless system reaching for him, ready to devour him and digest him. It would use his energy to grow stronger and stronger throughout his life while he grew older and weaker until, when he was no longer of much use, it would excrete him and find another younger person full of energy to take his place and do the same thing all over again.

-Lila,
Robert Pirsig

Introduction

This is an introduction to a variety of elements in nationalism, the nationalist experience, and the cultivating of a nationalistic consciousness. My aims are to explore the inner dimensions and allure of nationalism. The specific elements discussed in the following pages are those comparable to the mystical experience. This inquiry takes into account arguments insisting that the institution of politics sprang from religion, those that contest that politics functions as an alternative to religion (such views assume religion fulfills specific psychological human needs), as well as those that find no reason to link the two institutions outside the realm of metaphor. I hold no prejudice against any of these perspectives. Deciding which interpretation has the most influence and impact is the prerogative (and to some degree, the responsibility) of the reader.

This essay will bear elements of a post-modern work. By this I mean, it will not be emphasizing the historical process, nor will it be adhering to ideas of progress. This work offers no claims of being exhaustive or definitive; instead, this essay is descriptive in nature. I will be entertaining a variety of perspectives on nationalism because of the intrigue they hold and the understanding reached through comparison. My purpose is to show that the phenomena, nationalism and mysticism, converge at the human desire for unification. For this end, the existential predicament of modern man, the curious notion that human existence is something to be solved, must be assumed. We are in an era of “diminishing horizons of meaning,” as Charles Taylor insists, and consequently, the individual is constantly battling against insignificance.

Nationalism offers the individual stability and security, only if he/she recognizes him/herself as a part of a greater whole.

As a consequence, ego-dissolving principles are gaining strength in this age marred by extreme individualism. This essay maintains that some understanding of nationalism (and its integrative function) is achieved by reviewing it as if it were a variant of the mystical experience. This description of nationalism will show how the unification experience thought to be reserved for the religious mystic has been broadened to include the most common of men. Thus, we are witnessing the democratization of the mystical experience.

We are entering an era threatened by what Alessandro Pizzorno has named “absolute politics.” He explains that the boundaries set around the practice of political commitment and the exercise of political will are fading in front of our eyes. All things once considered social are being placed within the hierarchy of politics and thus, they are interpreted and rendered transformable only through political channels (Maier 27). In his work, “Politics Unbound,” Pizzorno states that:

political action can be seen as the only type of action capable of transforming society and therefore the only one through which the life of humanity, or of a nation, can be improved to approximate a given ideal. Political vocation as well as participation in politics are predicated as the highest of possible individual choices. They dictate to a person aims which will prevail over those dictated by his or her own self-interest (27).

It follows that before the passing of any moral judgment, an issue must first be judged politically (28). The moral vacuum left by the declining religious authority embodied by the Church, has subsequently been filled by the State.

In awareness of this fact, J. P. Sironneau asserts that “the flow of the sacred runs through the duct of religious institutions, and when those are, for some reason, obstructed, part or the whole of that flow will find its way through another duct, specifically through the political one,” (Maier 29). Thus, the “hydraulic model” was born. This model relies on the premise that religious needs are a permanent aspect of human nature, or as Daniel Bell observes, religion is “a constitutive aspect of human

experience,” (Maier 111). Consequently, following religion’s decline in the modern era, there was transference of devotion towards that which is called political (111). Religiously dispossessed persons rediscovered security, satisfaction, tranquility, and purpose in their relationship with the State.

The perspective furthered by Georges Duby, a French historian specializing in the Middle Ages, does not view modern politics as a conduit equally adequate in directing the flow of the sacred. Rather, Duby finds politics to be a phenomenon “emerging from the fall, or weakening of some religious (theological) discourse,” (33).

Many theorists characterizing politics as the offspring of religion try a more progressive spin. Instead of painting politics as a degradation, they declare it a secularization of religion, a moral system cleansed of mythology. Secularization theories contend that the needs of the people can be met without any appeal to spiritual power. A sense of ultimacy, for these theorists, is often reached through the democratic process and within public opinion. However, Pizzorno argues that the modern practice of dissociating Church and State has not exactly been one of secularization. For Pizzorno, absolute politics evokes concerns over ultimate as well as immediate ends, thus bridging the spiritual and temporal realms of power. Modern politics has sought, and often won, control of “spiritual” resources. En route to social domination, politics incorporated techniques Claus Offe calls “broadening.”

In the essay, “New social movements,” Offe describes “broadening” as the aspect of post-industrial societies in which “established modes of economic and

political rationality are no longer concentrated and class-specific; they are dispersed in time, space, and kind so as to affect virtually every member of society in a variety of ways,” (85). Under absolute politics, the “sacred” is broadened. As Democracy takes the forefront, generalization¹ reaches its zenith. The sacredness of the monarch is dispersed among the people. The social power of knowledge is stripped from the Church with the establishment of state supported public education and widespread literacy. The Law, in all its sanctity, is forced to let the layman step into the jurors’ box, empowered as the “finder of fact².” Even the economics of the day, capitalism, advocates the universal acquisition of property by private citizens³. Thus, with the entrance of the modern era the masses obtain direct access to the sacred. Spiritual power is fragmented and uniformly distributed throughout mankind without discrimination.

Accordingly, if the attributes of religion are both preserved and generalized by institutional politics, then we should expect to see religious experience reappearing within the political context. Nationalism is such a phenomenon. However, nationalism is not the political manifestation of just any religious experience. Underlying nationalistic devotion is the individual’s desire for unification with his/her

¹ In relation to generalization, it is interesting to note some of the unfavorable implications of this tendency. While speaking of the work of Max Scheler, Albert Camus tells us that “humanitarian feelings are always accompanied by a hatred of the world. Humanity is loved in general in order to avoid having to love anybody in particular,” in *The Rebel, Revolution, and Its Limits*.

² Democracy finds truth among the people. For a contrasting opinion, we look towards Soren Kierkegaard’s work, *Concerning the Dedication to “The Individual.”* Here Kierkegaard declares that “the crowd is untruth,” (Spanos 238)

³ A brief comment on the social power with which ownership of property was once charged: Anderson remarks on the archaic belief that the redemption and civilization of the Indian included the acquisition of private property, along with impregnation with white, ‘civilized’ semen (14). Salvation consists of the sacredness of owning property.

community. Even at the expense of dissolving one's personal identity. Viewing this desire for unification as pivotal to the nationalist experience, we are likely to find a parallel experience within the religious spectrum. We find such a compliment in the mystical experience. Concisely put, mystical and nationalistic experiences are analogous since they both contain currents of unification.

In his work, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James proposes four marks which constitute a mystical experience: ineffability, noetic quality, transiency, and passivity. If our comparison is to be of any use, then the nationalistic experience must exhibit qualities similar to those listed above. It is the objective of this essay to examine the nationalistic experience as it relates to these points. Using the mystical experience as a metaphor, we will delve into the nationalistic experience in an attempt to evaluate its effect on the individual's consciousness. However, much like the dramatic alterations undergone by the forms of the "sacred" referred to earlier, the generalizing of elements from the mystical experience has rendered it virtually unrecognizable in its nationalistic counterpart. The experiences that we will be examining are far subtler than the fits of ecstasy familiar to James' study, because they belong to the common man, not to an elite class of mystics. For this reason, the nationalistic experience is assumed a natural feature of everyday reality. Yet, the mystical experience of unification, however slight it may appear, is the foundation of national consciousness.

As James partitions the religious field into the institutional and personal religion, I too would like to make the distinction between institutional nationalism and the personal effects nationalism has on the individual. Also true to the Jamesian tradition, I wish to minimize my dealings with the institutional branch and center my writings around the experience of the individual. Therefore, as James asks you to arbitrarily take religion to mean “the feelings, acts and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine,” I ask the reader to approach nationalism in a similar fashion (31). The reader is to regard nationalism in this context, but not to the degree that the terms, religion and nationalism, become synonymous. First, because it is not religion in its entirety, but mysticism, one aspect of religion, with which nationalism is being compared. Secondly, we are not pursuing a definition of nationalism. Rather, we are choosing a particular angle from which to observe this phenomenon.

We will also assume that for the nationalist it is only natural that the term “divine” implicates the nation, an equally ambiguous concept. This stance on the nation is based on the work of Paul Tillich. In his book, *The Dynamics of Faith*, Tillich teaches us that faith is the state of being ultimately concerned. Tillich states that, “everything which is a matter of unconditional concern is made into a god. If the nation is someone’s ultimate concern, the name of the nation becomes a sacred name and the nation receives divine qualities which far surpass the reality of being and functioning of the nation. The nation then stands for and symbolizes the true ultimate, but in an idolatrous way,” (44). Shortly we shall try to refute this accusation

of idolatry, but for now it serves us to acknowledge the nation's legitimate claim to divinity. In the end, churches and nations alike live second-hand upon tradition, but their founders owe "their power originally to the fact of their direct personal communion with the divine," (31).

However, unlike James who passes by the fainter and more tranquil manifestations of the religious experience, this essay considers all cases, regardless of intensity, when evaluating nationalism. A key supposition in this study is that nationalism not only unites all within its boundaries, but also instills a feeling of equality. Therefore, each individual within a nation assumes their experience is significant and universal, regardless of the specific degree of intensity in their nationalism. Thus, in contrast to the exclusiveness often characterizing mystics, nationalism is universal, a natural part of the human experience. I have revealed my intent and articulated my proposal to critically link the concepts of nationalism and mysticism. Onward.

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace...

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

-Imagine, John Lennon

James tells us that the mystical experience defies expression, “that no adequate report of its contents can be given in words. It follows from this, its quality must be directly experienced; it cannot be imparted or transferred to others,” (371). This is his basis for declaring the mystical experience ineffable. Similarly, nationalism resides on a poorly articulated philosophical foundation. Despite its standing, among most political philosophers, as an universal phenomenon, nationalism has yet to be unambiguously defined. For the most part, it has eluded verbal bondage, but not from a lack of trying. This lack of consensus is due to nationalism genesis in experience. Nationalism is based on the vital assumption that every individual naturally has a nation in which to belong. However, this sense of “naturalness” confounds the issue. It is “natural” in the sense that it contains something that is unchosen, much like gender, skin color, and parentage; however, the experience of nationalism is a social phenomenon that transcends physical characteristics and is ultimately contingent on an individual’s experience.

Thus, in order to separate the wheat from the chaff, it is important to discuss a few basic terms and their relation to each other. It seems that any evaluation of nationalism requires at least a brief discussion of the following key words: nation, patriotism, and state.

In the beginning, there was the nation. Well, not quite. Despite nationalists' attempts to glorify perceptions of "the nation" with imagery of the eternal, discriminating critics such as Benedict Anderson and E. J. Hobsbawm contend that the nation, as we know it, appears relatively recently in history⁴. In fact, Hobsbawm gives us a surprisingly specific birth date in his piece, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*. Though such distinct dating has its appeal, the nature of social phenomena hardly permits them spontaneous and complete births. However, Hobsbawm's date aids in setting our subject in modernity.

Hobsbawm brilliantly reveals the modernity of vocabulary surrounding the subject of national identification while digging deep into various editions of the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy and the like. Among other things, he discovers that:

Before 1884 the word *nación* simply meant 'the aggregate of the inhabitants of a province, a country or a kingdom' and also 'a foreigner.' But now it was given as 'a State or political body which recognizes a supreme centre of common government' and also 'the territory constituted by that state and its individual inhabitants,

⁴ The nationalistic sense of the "eternal" is important in its own right. However, that point is essentially different from the issue at hand and will be furthered later in the essay.

considered as a whole', and henceforth the element of a common and supreme state is central to such definitions, at least in the Iberian world (14).

In this snippet alone, we can see Hobsbawm lay the foundation for his vital equation: state = nation = people. Admittedly, etymologies are interesting; however, let us move on to a definition with more substance we can sink our teeth into, a functional definition.

This is a daunting task indeed. Walter Bagehot once captured the difficulty of pursuing the concept “nation” when he declared “we know what it is when you do not ask us, but we cannot very quickly explain or define it.” In spite of Bagehot’s skepticism, we will commit to a definition. The following is the definition Benedict Anderson proposes for the nation: “it is imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign,” (6). He continues to deconstruct the concept even further by stating, “It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion,” (6). He says that the nation imagines itself as limited, “because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lies other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind,” (7). However, issues of imperialism, including “cultural imperialism,” seem to challenge the idea that nations are inherently imagined as limited. They can often have grandiose visions that some element of their nationalism should be

“coterminous with mankind.” For example, the notion that democracy should be a universally acceptable, not to mention desired, form of government is a product of the Western mind. This overstretch hardly displays an incorporated sense of limitation in their nationalism. Especially when used as a justification for military intervention abroad.

Anderson concludes that nations are imagined as sovereign “because the concept was born in an age in which Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm,” (7).

Finally, he defends the most fundamental term in his definition, community. He states that, “it is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much kill, as willing to die for such limited imaginings⁵,” (7).

However, is the reality of the matter as straightforward as state = nation = people? Though that would simplify things greatly, I believe that further demarcation is necessary. The terms, nation and the state, are two terms that have subtle but principal differences. Max Weber, in his piece entitled *Politics as a Vocation*, tells us

⁵ This is reminiscent of Camus’ depiction of the rebel. The rebel who accepts death as a consequence of his act of rebellion, demonstrates that he is willing to sacrifice himself for the common good. Camus states, “It is for the sake of everyone in the world that the slave asserts himself when he comes to the conclusion that a command has infringed on something in him which does not belong to him alone, but which is common ground where all men—even the man who insults and oppresses him—have a natural community.” For Camus’ rebel suffering is a collective experience. He demands respect for himself and fights for the integrity of his being “only in so far as he identifies himself with a natural community.”

that to sociologically define the modern state, it is essential to recognize the use of physical force as the only means peculiar to it. He compels us to accept that “a state is a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory,” (2). Weber goes on further to stress that “territory” is a fundamental characteristic of the state. The idea of territory contained within the term “state” differs from the one that relates to the term “nation.” In a state, despite disputes and the frequent shifting of geopolitical borders, the limits of the territory are assumed to be relatively firm. On the other hand, the territorial claims of nations vary. It can be coterminous with that of the state, in both desirability and political fact, resulting in the ideal form, the nation-state. Otherwise, the boundaries of nations can be considerably amorphous and vague. If they are smaller than that of the official claims of the state, the boundaries of the nation can inspire regionalism and separatist movements. A nation can find itself spanning the borders of two or more states, or it can even find itself divided, with a portion lying outside the “motherland,” enveloped by the folds of a neighboring state. No matter what form it takes, the “nation” simply does not have the politically recognized, “legitimate,” claim to the territory to which it feels tethered. That privilege lies with the “state.” Later on, we will see how this discrepancy often culminates in the nation challenging the state’s monopoly on physical force.

I would like to conclude my lexicography with one final term, patriotism. In his “Notes on Nationalism,” George Orwell warns against the pitfalls of using the terms patriotism and nationalism interchangeably. He claims there are opposing ideas

at the heart of the two terms, and believes a distinction is not simply present, but necessary. Orwell states:

Both words are normally used in so vague a way that any definition is liable to be challenged, but one must draw a distinction between them, since two different and even opposing ideas are involved. By "patriotism" I mean devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality (1).

The details of such a distinction are highly arguable. Though we acknowledge Orwell's defensive and offensive facets contained within this sentiment, such a marked division is hazardous. I believe we would be hard pressed to find individuals, or even movements, that adhere strictly to either the patriotic or nationalistic; some may even find themselves constantly oscillating between the two. Our inability to depend on assumptions concerning the pure intent needed to uphold Orwell's delineation leads me to adopt a rather indiscriminate attitude towards the two terms⁶.

⁶ The scope of this paper does not allow me to linger long on the particulars of these two terms, nationalism and patriotism. Likewise, diverging terms within other works must be neglected. For

On the other hand, Orwell's assertion that nationalism is an "emotion" in which the nationalist "has chosen to sink his own individuality" is astonishingly near to the argument furthered in this paper.

With this pocketful of choice words, some perimeters for the nationalist's experience can be established. Thus, this evaluation can move forward and address the three remaining aspects William James attributes to the mystical experience. After pursuing an understanding of how these three particular elements affect the nationalist, the psychological appeal of nationalism will become more apparent. On this expedition, it is important to keep in mind that we are concerned with the experience of the individual nationalist and any attempt to map aggregate nationalism according to these specifications would be inappropriate and essentially fruitless.

example, Erich Fromm's discussion of "sick" vs. "sane" societies, or Paul Tillich's argument that a person's ultimate concern, which is typically spoken of in positive terms and associated with God, can be demonic).

Beneath the decline of sacred communities, languages and lineages, a fundamental change was taking place in modes of apprehending the world, which, more than anything else, made it possible to ‘think’ the nation (Anderson 22).

James includes “transiency” among the four essential qualities demarcating the mystical experience. Of the four, transiency is the most challenging characteristic to address. The influence of traversing contexts, from the religious to the political, is most remarkable in this specific attribute. James advises, “Mystical states cannot be sustained for long. Except in rare instances, half an hour, or at most an hour or two, seems to be the limit beyond which they fade into the light of common day,” (372). Though the impermanence of religious ecstasy is an acknowledged and accepted provision for the mystic, the layman demands consistency. The common man accepts a radical reduction in the intensity of the experience, but for his sacrifice, he receives the gift of longevity. Modernity turns transiency on its head. The modern man, and consequently the nationalist, spends the majority of his everyday life in a trance state, incessantly saturated in his thoughts and imaginings. Such a drastic alteration of a fundamental precondition would surely render the mystical experience unrecognizable, and thus, enable it to slip, unnoticed, into the general consciousness as something “natural.” As a result, the mystical state, unity with the divine, could begin a process of democratization. We will explore this position with greater depth, later on. For now, we will content ourselves with examining how temporal perspectives have changed with the founding of the modern era.

There is sufficient reason to believe that mankind, prior to modernity, understood time as no more than a string of pearls, where events succeed each other on a linear continuum. Accordingly, it would be reasonable to assume that genealogy would take on the utmost importance. In his work, *Time and Self*, Paul Brockelman tells us:

For if there were no *continuity* through time, we would not have time at all, but sheer *difference* and thus constant creation. On the other hand, if there were no *difference* in time (succession), there would be stasis and time willy-nilly would become eternity. As Samuel Alexander recognized, both succession (difference) and continuity (identity) seem to be essential characteristics of time (36).

Clearly, any variance in daily consciousness that culminates with an individual embracing one of these two elements, succession or continuity, over the other, would undoubtedly sculpt a new temporal perspective. Shortly, we will see how thought, prior to the modern-era, cultivated an atmosphere that minimized temporal *difference*, compounding past and future into simultaneous present, and consequently created a eternity-stasis that links vertically with the divine. On the opposite hand, modern man, with his increasing indifference to history and heritage, is eliminating *continuity*. Thus, modernity establishes now-centered individuals who search for significance not within the rearview mirror, but rather within a community of individuals distinguished by temporal coincidence.

Religious thought preceding modernity, in the words of Anderson, “concerns itself with the links between the dead and the yet unborn, the mystery of re-generation. Who experiences their child’s conception and birth without dimly apprehending a combined connectedness, fortuity, and fatality in a language of ‘continuity’?” (11). This style of thinking illustrates man’s desire to transform fatality into continuity, since an awareness of continuity detracts from the arbitrariness of one’s own mortality. John Berger gives unique insight into this perspective, “All nationalisms are at heart deeply concerned with names: with the most immaterial and original human invention. Those who dismiss names as a detail have never been displaced; but the people on the peripheries are always being displaced. That is why they insist upon their continuity—their links with their dead and the unborn.” Erich Auerbach, in *Mimesis*, precisely sketches the mediaeval Christian mind and the form of consciousness that promotes such an association with time:

If an occurrence like the sacrifice of Isaac is interpreted as prefiguring the sacrifice of Christ, so that in the former the latter is as it were announced and promised and the latter ‘fulfills’...the former, then a connection is established between two events which it is impossible to establish by reason in the horizontal dimension...It can be established only if both occurrences are vertically linked to Divine Providence, which alone is able to devise such a plan of history and supply the key to its understanding...the here and now is no longer a mere link in an

earthly chain of events, it is simultaneously something which has always been, and will be fulfilled in the future; and strictly, in the eyes of God, it is something eternal, something omnitemporal, something already consummated in the realm of fragmentary earthly event (64).

Ultimately, one is able to find meaning in life by maintaining the 'continuity' that links one with Divine Providence. So, one is bound, through his/her vertical associations, to eternity. The psychological pay-off of tapping into eternity in such a way is incalculable, especially in its fullest glory. Paul Fraisse, in *The Psychology of Time*, writes that mystic ecstasy is a "means to liberation from time," it introduces us "to the euphoria of eternity," (289).

Political thought is not without claims to psychological benefits for those linked to eternity. A philosopher, Johann Gottlieb Fichte exemplifies the nationalist who utilizes a vertical perspective of time. In his "Addresses to the German Nation," Fichte states:

He who does not first regard himself as eternal has in him no love of any kind, and, moreover, cannot love a fatherland, a thing which for him does not exist. He who regards his invisible life as eternal, but not his visible life as similarly eternal, may perhaps have a heaven and therein a fatherland, but here below he has no fatherland, for this, too, is regarded only in the image of eternity---eternity visible and made sensuous, and for this reason also he is unable to love his fatherland. If none has been handed down to such a man, he is to be pitied.

Fichte does not simply offer us a chance at euphoria, he questions our very ability to love without first cultivating a sense of eternity. Participation in eternity, for Fichte, starts with respecting one's internal boundaries, the boundaries of descent and language. Fichte anchors his nationalism in its linguistic and ethnic roots, in other words, the basic necessity of man is to realize one's place on the string of pearls. Each one assuming the responsibility to carry-on the name, the culture, the genes, and the language of the fatherland, preserve the vertical continuum through history that links us all with the eternal. Inherently hind-sighted, the most imperative type of association for those of this mind is the association we have with our ancestors, those that came before.

“But how shall we bury you?” said Crito. “Any way you like,” replied Socrates, “that is, if you can catch me and I don’t slip through your fingers”...”I can’t persuade Crito that I am this Socrates here who is talking to you now...; he thinks that I am the one whom he will see presently lying dead...[but] when I have drunk the poison I shall remain with you no longer.”
--Plato, *The Phaedo*, 114A-115D

Let us not forget that Auerbach suggests a horizontal as well as vertical connection through time. A connection powered not by history and heritage, but by reason. And reason, among other things, leads us to conclude, as David Kaplan did, that, “past individuals are also, in my view, nonexistent.” (qtd. in Yourgrau 147) In our mortality lies the limit of our existence, as far as living means existing. Palle Yourgrau, in *The Disappearance of Time*, tells us that:

Once we have extended our ontological horizons, however, to recognize dead as nonexistent objects, we are free to acknowledge other nonexistents: the unborn (i.e., future people), those who will alas, never be born (merely possible people), merely possible worlds, past and future times, and so on (147).

If we can no longer even share existence with past people, how can we find our ultimate significance in our relation to them? As Anderson puts it in *Imagined Communities*, “the impact of economic change, ‘discoveries’ (social and scientific), and the development of increasingly rapid communications, drove a harsh wedge

between cosmology and history⁷,” (36) What's more, unlike the mystic, whose primary occupation runs parallel to seeking liberation from time, modern man finds invaluable security contained within the constricting pressures of time. Paul Fraisse articulates this dissimilarity in *The Psychology of Time*:

The security of the normal human being does not lie in liberation from time. Temporal pressure is constricting, but it is also the framework within which our personality is organized. When it is absent we are disoriented. There is nothing to bind the sequence of our activities; we are alone. From this confusion there arises not only a feeling of emptiness but also a vague fear...Human equilibrium is too precious to do without fixed positions in space and time. (288-289)

Thus, it is no surprise that “a new way of linking fraternity, power and time meaningfully together” became a pressing obligation (Anderson 36).

Distinct from the medieval man, the modern man does not experience time as a simultaneity of “past and future in an instantaneous present,” but instead cultivates Walter Benjamin’s idea of ‘homogeneous, empty time,’ (Anderson 24). Benjamin finds it plausible to argue that every essential modern conception is based on a conception of ‘meanwhile,’ that time is not marked by fulfillment and progression, but by temporal coincidence. Modern man is inclined to seek associations within his own time. Increasingly rapid communications and physical mobility, while they

⁷ Anderson speaks powerfully concerning the ebbing of religious belief, saying, “Disintegration of paradise: nothing makes fatality more arbitrary. Absurdity of salvation: nothing makes another style of continuity more necessary,” (11).

upset the significance of past/present relations, laid the foundations for a fraternity among men inhabiting the same time. To understand exactly how this idea of ‘homogeneous, empty time’ works we must once again refer to *Imagined Communities*. Anderson asks us to, “take, for illustrative purposes, a segment of a simple novel-plot, in which a man (A) has a wife (B) and a mistress (C), who in turn has a lover (D).” He then asks us to imagine a sort of time-chart for this segment as follows:

Time:	I	II	III
Events:	A quarrels with B C and D make love	A telephones C B shops D plays pool	D gets drunk in a bar A dines at home with B C has an ominous dream

Anderson now turns our attention to the simple fact that during this sequence the characters A and D never actually meet. Following this, Anderson asks what actually links the two? His answer is two tiered:

“First, that they are embedded in ‘societies.’ These societies are sociological entities of such firm and stable reality that their members (A and D) can even be described as passing each other on the street, without ever becoming acquainted, and still be connected,” (25). This position is fortified by Berger and Luckman in *The Social Construction of Reality*. They assert that there exists “highly anonymous abstractions, which by their very nature can never be available in face-to-face interaction. Social structure is the sum total of these typifications and of the recurrent patterns of interaction established by means of them. As such, social structure is an essential element of the reality of everyday life,” (33).

Anderson continues, “A and D are embedded in the minds of the omniscient readers. Only they, like God, watch telephoning C, B shopping, and D playing pool all at once. That all these acts are performed at the same clocked calendrical time, but by actors who may be largely unaware of one another, shows the novelty of this imagined world conjured up by the author in his readers’ mind,” (25). With this new frame of reference, each individual gains the omniscience necessary to “imagine” communities larger than the face-to-face relationships of the primordial village. Since people gain significance simply by inhabiting a specific time, “the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion,” (6).

The title of Ernest Renan’s 1882 essay asks, “What is a Nation?” Renan then proceeds to provide an answer to this inquiry with a chain of religious metaphors. More importantly, Renan stresses the importance of the individual’s “will to belong.” Renan testifies that “a nation's existence is, if you will pardon the metaphor, a daily plebiscite, just as an individual's existence is a perpetual affirmation of life,” (Renan 52). In doing so, Renan advocates an idea of the living nation. Living being synonymous with existing, as we saw earlier, requires the nation to be a community in the eternal “now.” Mankind, no longer past-oriented, “is a slave neither of his race nor his language, nor of his religion, nor of the course of rivers nor of the direction taken by mountain chains,” (54). As the individual becomes more aware of the

significance, and supremacy, of his/her own time, horizontal associations move to the forefront. People begin to find themselves yoked together with others of their own time; yoked under their “will to belong.” Renan directly promotes the sharing of ideas and abstractions. Ideas and wills take the place of linguistic, genetic, and religious bonds.

Despite Renan’s radical notions, vertical associations never die off completely, instead they move to the background. They support the community by making it the intermediary between the individual and the eternal. It is the nation that moves through history. The nation holds the immortality the individual longs for. Thus, modern man seeks to dissolve his individuality into the nation. Nietzsche demonstrates this point by asserting that mankind now trusts “in the community as the *savior*, in short in the herd, in “themselves”—,” as a community linked by ideas and not heredity (306).

Anteater: I reject holism. I challenge you to tell me, for instance, how a holistic description of an ant colony sheds any more light on it than is shed by a description of the ants inside it, and their roles, and their interrelationships. Any holistic explanation of an ant colony will inevitably fall far short of explaining where the consciousness experienced by ant colony arises from (Hofstadter 312)

Let us look at the movement from vertical to horizontal associations from a fresh perspective, an evolutionary perspective. It is neither new nor difficult to ask one to apply theories of genetic evolution to social groups. In his work *The Lucifer Principle*, Howard Bloom, does that very thing. However, Bloom takes it one step further and presents a novel way to bridge the disconnect between forms of genetic survival and social survival. For this end Bloom borrows Richard Dawkins', author of *The Selfish Gene*, concept of the meme. A meme is a fundamental component of the social sphere. It is a concept Dawkins based in analogy with the gene. "As genes are to the organism, so memes are to the superorganism, pulling together millions of individual into a collective creature of awesome size," (Bloom 98). Dawkins defines the meme as simply a unit of intellectual or cultural information that survives long enough to be recognized as such, and which can pass from mind to mind. A meme is a melody that lodges in your head after passing a whistler on the street, the scientific concept that blossoms into new field with countless of adherents, the Golden Rule, or the verses recited by Mao's "sea of blue ants." Memes are "snatches of nothingness," as immaterial as can be; however, Dawkins promotes the startling

suggestion that memes should be regarded as living structures, not just metaphorically but technically.

“Memes stretch their tendrils through the fabric of each human brain, driving us to coagulate in the cooperative masses of family, tribe, and nation,” (98). More importantly, memes inherit the deed to mankind. This is more than a poetic turn of phrase, it is a decisive movement in the evolution of human culture. The seat of human motivation, the drive to survive, is moved from within to the external. We dedicate ourselves to the preservation of ideas as we once dedicated ourselves to the preservation of our genes. Bloom traces just how such a transition may have occurred. “How do you know who shares your genes?...inventive Homo sapiens used ideas, manners, morals, and peculiarities of clothing. The Children of Israel were typical of the tribal nations of the time. To belong, you had to have the right genetic stuff. How could an early Hebrew tell if you were entitled to insider treatment? Your god, your mannerisms, and your ideas were the outward labels of your genetic contents,” (103). Follow the laws of Hebrew culture and you were in. The Children of Israel held a critical tribal concept that is visible in primal peoples the world over; that only those who shared the same genes could share the same god. Why convert the heathens? The unbelievers weren’t family. Thousands of years ago the names of gods were mere labels for genetic stock.

However, as human groups grew larger and larger, as they expanded past familial bonds, the meme no longer retained its role as a genetic marker. Jesus of Nazareth’s followers were simple folk from the hills of Galilee. After his death,

however, a university educated city-dweller joined the ranks. The community of followers did not necessarily receive Paul's reinterpretation of Jesus' teachings with the highest of regard. Considering his anti-Christian past, it is easy to understand why they might have viewed him with suspicion despite his conversion on the road to Damascus. Bloom states that, "with his big city ways and complex ideas, he was anything but their rustic kind," (105). God said to him, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth," (Acts 13:47). Thus, the fledgling apostle turned to new fields to harvest followers. He started a vigorous campaign to win over the gentiles, those with views far more compatible with his own. Bloom calls him an "innovator" of transferable religion. Under Paul one was no longer required to share the same genes in order to share the same god. Beliefs became the focal point for movements, gathering peoples of all kinds together as never before seen. He severed the cord that bound divinity to genetic anchors and gave gods the power to supercede their positions as emblems of tribal heritage. Folks of various stocks would now find themselves yoked together by an intangible common thread, the meme. The gene had been usurped, by the meme, as the world's most powerful replicator. Richard Dawkins alleges that God exists as a pattern in brain structures replicated across the minds of billions of people throughout the world.

The irony is that there are times when the culture actually fosters trance and hypnosis to further its purposes...When you enter a movie theater you know that all you're going to see is 24 shadows per second flashed on a screen to give an illusion of moving people and objects...yet you enter the illusion and become a part of it and while the illusion is taking place you are not aware that it is an illusion. This is hypnosis. It is trance, (Pirsig 357)

In Arthur Deikman's world, and consequently in our modern world, the temporal proportions between waking life and the "trance" are inverted. Deikman states that the "predilection of people to be preoccupied with imaginings, to confine their attention to narrow segments of reality, is a tendency with which mystical science is much concerned but which psychotherapy deals with only indirectly," (119). In his work, *The Observing Self*, Deikman develops this trend; devoting a chapter to what he calls "the trance of ordinary life."

Deikman presents evidence that our everyday consciousness could qualify as a type of acute trance. He asserts, "trance seems to be a special state of consciousness. But, in fact, ordinary day-to-day preoccupations can produce brief periods of behavior that have somewhat similar qualities, though they are much less intense," (120). We find ourselves sacrificing intensity at the altar of longevity. We are constantly enveloped in a life of fantasy and thought punctuated only occasionally with the clarity of attentive perception, not the other way around. "Transiency," for Deikman, characterizes the state in which one is fully aware of reality in an empirical sense. As Deikman puts it:

On those infrequent occasions when thought and fantasy subside, the observing self comes into prominence. One experiences the world with the vividness and rich detail that comes with fully attentive perception. However, this clarity does not last long. Bright as the world is sooner or later one finds oneself reimmersed in fantasy, without any awareness of transition (128).

In the modern era, it is not only common to submit to these hypnotic tendencies, it is encouraged by society at large. Human communities have evidently expanded past familial bonds, and accordingly, the 'idea' is society's new mortar. These ideas are exalted to status of the utmost importance, regardless of how much they actually correspond to an individual's everyday experience. The communal experience suppresses the personal experience. And as I stated earlier, Anderson says, "In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined (6). The "nation," a product of our imagination, has inspired an extreme amount of devotion. A devotion that is considered one of the highest of modern virtues, despite the overwhelming amount of blood shed in its name. Certainly, all these results have been rationalized and justified with immeasurable inefficiency.

However, Anderson suggests we also inquire into the style in which communities, religious and nationalistic alike, are imagined. In doing so, we often find ourselves deconstructing and examining the "knowledge" of these different communities. Here we refer to Berger and Luckman, *The Social Construction of*

Reality to find knowledge defined as “the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics,” (1). This is truly an insurmountable task, especially when one considers all the levels of relativism that are laid before any “outsider” audacious enough to make an attempt at insight into what lies “inside” a community in which he does not belong. *In Sorcery’s Shadow* tells of Paul Stoller’s anthropological exploits in the northwest corner of Niger. From the very first pages, before Stoller even begins his novel, he introduces the reader to the Songhay proverb that declares “the (floating) log never becomes a crocodile.”⁸ For Stoller, this proverb succinctly verbalizes these limitations put on him as an “outsider.” Stoller could live with them, eat with them, speak their language, participate in their festivals, train as a Sorko (Songhay sorcerer), and even learn their proverbs, but ultimately Stoller could never “know” what it means to experience life as a Songhay. Stoller would always be just a log floating among crocodiles.

James has a name for this quality that lies just outside the “specific characteristics” that constitute Berger and Luckman’s view of “knowledge.” William James refers to the “noetic quality” of mystical states, in other words, a knowledge that is the exclusive possession of the experiencer. Indisputably, nationalism shares this characteristic of “noetic quality.” Now the rub, how can we hope to capture or even attempt an explication of something that only exists for the experiencer? We don’t, but we can do the next best thing. Modern phenomenology, under the influence of Brentano, teaches the basic principle of “intentionality,” that all

⁸ In the original Songhay, “Bundu si te kaare.”

consciousness must be directed at something. For there to be consciousness, there, in turn, must be something to be conscious of. [For perception, there is the perceived, liking...the liked, thinking...the thought of, and for the experience it is the experienced] Thus, in order for an imagined community to sustain itself, it must produce objects that inspire national consciousness and consequently provide the atmosphere needed to obtain the knowledge of the nationalist experience. Here begins our discussion of symbols.

Symbols, for us will start with the tangible, but ultimately end in the experiential. For Paul Tillich, symbols deserve our attention “because symbolic language alone is able to express the ultimate,” (Tillich, Dynamics of Faith 41). And thus, we will look again to Tillich in order to better understand the characteristics of symbols. First, like signs, “[symbols] point to something beyond themselves to something else,” (41). Second, “[the symbol] participates in that to which it points:”

The flag participates in the power and dignity of the nation for which it stands. Therefore, it cannot be replaced except after an historic catastrophe that changes the reality of the nation which it symbolizes. An attack on the flag is felt as an attack on the majesty of the group in which it is acknowledged. Such an attack is considered blasphemy (42).

The third function of a symbol is to open up “levels of reality which otherwise are closed for us,” (Tillich 42). The fourth characteristic of a symbol slightly exceeds

the scope of this analysis, but as Tillich sees it, the symbol also “unlocks dimensions and elements of our soul which correspond to the dimensions and elements of reality.” “Symbols which have an especially social function, as political and religious symbols, are created or at least accepted by the collective unconscious of the group in which they appear,” this leads Tillich to conclude that symbols cannot be produced deliberately, the fifth characteristic (43). Yet, it is essentially this fact that breathes life into symbols, determining that “like living beings, they grow and they die,” (43). They rise when the soil is fertile and they die “because they can no longer produce response in the group where they originally found expression” (43). This response, the dynamic exchange between people and their symbols, is the experiential pay-off. It is the symbol’s “noetic quality.”

The symbol, regardless of the institution from which it comes, inspires the emotions for which people long. In essence, we care nothing for the modifiers, “religious” or “nationalistic,” but the experiences to which they adhere are of the utmost importance. Essentially, the religious and political institutions are mutually interchangeable “means” to emotional “ends.” James pronounces that there is “religious fear, religious love, religious awe, religious joy, and so forth. But religious love is only man’s natural emotion of love directed at a religious object...etc,” (James 28). Surely, this illustrates why many critics feel that institutional politics are heavily influenced by the participants’ transference of religious commitment. As stated earlier, political philosophers have dubbed this phenomenon the “hydraulic model.”

Names, labels, language, objects, rights, and rituals, all methods of expression are at the service of emotions. Functionally, they aim at the acquisition of a particular experience, since the desired emotions couch themselves in an array of different experiences. Thus, we have yielded a community of symbols whose sole purpose is to provide an object at which one may direct his/her experiential gaze.

Making experience the ultimate objective of the symbol, puts symbolic action at the forefront of communal participation. “Take national anthems, for example, sung on national holidays. No matter how banal the words and mediocre the tunes, there is in this singing an experience of simultaneity. At precisely such moments, people wholly unknown to each other utter the same verses to the same melody. The image: unisonance,” (Anderson 145). Through this participation of a simple activity one is able to feel integrated into a community. The individual’s participation becomes a crucial part of the experience. The individual becomes part of the collective, despite a considerable lack of personal connectedness to the other individuals. A similar response, a feeling of unity, is evoked from the pilgrimage. Take for instance this passage concerning the Haj:

the strange physical juxtaposition of Malays, Persians, Indians, Berbers and Turks in Mecca is something incomprehensible without an idea of their community in some form. The Berber encountering the Malay before the Kaaba must, as it were, ask himself: ‘Why is this man doing what I am doing, uttering the same words that I am

uttering, even though we can not talk to one another?’ There is only one answer, once one has learnt it: ‘Because *we*...are Muslims, (Anderson 54).

Here we have this notion of an ‘idea’ cutting across the barriers of ethnicity. The ability to bind together strangers, despite a diversity of backgrounds, is the unique prerogative of the ‘idea.’ Individuals are able to separate themselves, both physically⁹ and metaphorically, from the homeland, oftentimes the land of their birth, in order to pursue the demands of some transcending idea. Denying the overwhelming seduction of the most basic symbol of one’s nationality, the home turf. Territory is symbolic, and regularly, so is the struggle over territory. Any attachment one has to it, outside the bare necessities of space and physical sustenance, are psychological. Nonetheless, these ties are real and powerful¹⁰. It is little wonder that Dostoyevsky avowed, “He who has no soil of his own has also no God.”

Here, we look to Anderson to provide the bridge linking that which is religious to the bank of the political, “Though the religious pilgrimages are probably the most touching and grandiose journeys of the imagination, they had, and have, more modest and limited secular counterparts,” (55). In *The Heart of Darkness*, with the ostentatious exploits of Conrad’s voyager, Marlow, the concepts of the supreme idea and the pilgrimage converge in the exercise of imperialism:

⁹ Victor Turner writes illuminatingly about the “journey.” Whether it be between times, statuses, or places, Turner avows that the journey is a meaning-creating experience.

¹⁰ Michael Ignatieff writes, “Statelessness is a state of mind, and it is akin to homelessness. This is what a nationalist understands: a people can become a complete human, completely themselves, only when they have a place of their own.”

The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only . An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to... (50-51).

Here the ‘idea’ is exalted to its greatest glory, the infinitude behind all earthly (temporal) deeds. In religious terms, it is the source of the “ultimate,” manifest through both devotion and salvation. Devotion being the “attitude of mind, or that project of life, thanks to which individuals determine to “devote” their activity, time, and riches to a collective cause that transcends their self-interest,” (Pizzorno 37). And salvation, in this context, gives the ‘idea’ potency in order to separate modern colonizers from “the damned,” barbaric conquerors of yesteryear. Unified in the pursuit of an idea that finds sustenance in the indefinite future, modern imperialists are “saved” from the finitude of the short-term conquest, (Said 69). This concentration on the ultimate, long-term, ends represents the most powerful of “spiritual” resources, (Pizzorno 35). This “spiritual” justification lends significance to imperial pursuits abroad, as well as absolves one of the unethical implications of conquest. Pilgrims contribute to the significance of the empire, even if only symbolically.

Imperialism presents us with a particularly loaded example of the symbolic nature of pilgrimages. However, childhood fieldtrips to the Capitol building would serve just as well as examples of the pilgrimage in their symbolic significance. In fact, maybe this mundane example serves our purpose better since it illustrates how truly democratic the pilgrimage can be as well as eliminating the complicating factors of imperial associations. Unfortunately, there is a substantial lack of good literary references to the grade school fieldtrip.

Even individuals, or at least the positions they hold within society, can be symbols. The monarch, for instance, is the symbol of the majesty of the kingdom as well as often representing the incarnation of God's will. However, how does this compare to the faceless individual, the individual that melts seamlessly into an aggregate? Here is a perspective that strips the person of his/her individuality and allows them to be branded as only a vehicle of the attributes exhibited by the collective, or at least, the attributes the collective is accused of exhibiting. Consequently, the individual becomes a symbol.

In view of this, dramatic acts of violence make "faceless" individuals of their subjects. Essentially, most politically motivated violence is symbolic action. When speaking on terrorism, Mark Juergensmeyer, a professor of Sociology and Director of Global and International Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, states, "creations of terror are done not to achieve a strategic goal but to make a symbolic statement," (Juergensmeyer 125). Politically viewing the individual as a symbol,

allows them to be props in “*dramatic events* intended to impress for their symbolic significance,” and as such, “they can be analyzed as one would any other symbol, ritual, or sacred drama,” (125-126). The finitude of the individual is subverted and devalued in order to understand an act of violence as extending beyond its immediate manifestation, “a struggle more awesome than meets the eye,” (123). “Performance violence,” as Juergensmeyer has dubbed it, is composed of spectacles intended to be “so powerful as to change people’s perceptions of the world,” (124). As my colleague Hannah Gamble once stated, “Performance violence has no respect, perhaps not even any ability to recognize, the individual.” Thus, the victim of performance violence is only recognized as long as he/she ties “into a special picture of the world, a specific consciousness that the activist possesses,” (Juergensmeyer 125).

Genesis 11 The Tower of Babel

⁵ But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. ⁶ The LORD said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. ⁷ Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

In order to discuss properly the language of symbols, it is also necessary to recognize the symbolic status of particular languages. The perpetuation of ideas, through time as well as space, has often rested in the charge of the written word. As a result, religions of the world frequently look towards sacred texts as the prime vessels of Truth and Absolute. Accordingly, the language with which the sacred text is first forged becomes sacred in itself. From this perspective, the sacred language is the exclusive path to the "ultimate." The words themselves are believed to have divine origin and thusly, encompass the only legitimate claim to accessing anything associated with the divine. The story of Babel demonstrates, that speaking a unified language gave the people of the world the power to reach Heaven.

Thus, preserving the integrity of sacred languages are perceived as crucial to establishing a religious community that transcends the linguistic boundaries of this "scattered" world. Consequently, uniting under a single language meant tapping into fraternal bonds that extended past the regionalism of personal experience, since advances in physical mobility for the masses significantly lagged the institution of sacred languages. Religion was to be brought to the entirety of mankind; the

uniformity of a sacred language conserved the authenticity with which each individual was able to regard him/herself in relation to the divine. To imbue all languages with equal potency in accessing the divine implied a relativism that subverted the only means to a consciousness that did not necessarily have genealogical origin.

Although sacred languages aided Truth and the religious community to bridge vast geographical expanses, it did not provide the principally monoglot populations much opportunity to participate in the community as more than a passive observer. Nor did it enable the common individual to pursue a direct relationship with the divine. The sacred language enabled a religious community to be “imagined,” but in a fashion that was considerably limited. The clergy was necessary to interpret the sacred language and thus, any genuine communal consciousness was restricted to this elite bilingual class.

In *Imagined Communities*, print-capitalism is presented as the drive behind the revolution of vernacularization. After saturating the elite market of the sacred language, namely Latin in Europe, printers began “peddling cheap editions in the vernaculars,” (38). The rise in significance of vernaculars in an age characterized by an “interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity,” dethroned the traditional sacred languages in favor of print-languages (42-43). Unifying the fields of communication, print-languages increased the prospect of a common individual’s direct participation in the imagining of their community.

However, this community's explicit religious affiliation declined as the nationally imagined community grew. Thus, "the old sacred languages-Latin, Greek, and Hebrew-were forced to mingle on equal ontological footing with a motley plebian crowd of vernacular rivals," (Anderson 70). Edward Said, in *Orientalism*, tells us that, "Language became less of a continuity between an outside power and the human speaker than an internal field created and accomplished by language users among themselves," (136). These "internal fields" were the embryonic forms of the national consciousness, soon to be modernism's most pervasive form of consciousness.

The Social Construction of Reality tells us that the reality of everyday life is only possible because it is filled with "objectivations," surrounding objects that "proclaim" the subjective intentions of others (Berger and Luckman 35). Language is the most common and permeating of these objectivations. It acts as a depository of meaning and experience, it creates typifications, as well as solidifies subjectivity. Language gives us a stock of knowledge that dictates our interactions with others.

As the efficiency of print-capitalism rocketed forward, the rapid circulation of secular "knowledge" created a vast populace more uniform in thought than ever before. The frequency with which the masses consumed modern texts brimming with symbols and abstractions progressed until it became a daily activity. In other words, a larger common stock of knowledge was available to a larger population and the masses were making it their fervent duty to maintain it. The curious nature of the newspaper illustrates this point:

The obsolescence of the newspaper on the morrow of its printing-- curious that one of the earlier mass-produced commodities should so prefigure the inbuilt obsolescence of modern durables--nonetheless, for just this reason, creates this extraordinary mass ceremony: the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ('imagining') of the newspaper-as-fiction (Anderson 35).

By saying "newspaper-as-fiction," one could infer that Anderson is calling into question the actual relationship between the reader and the events depicted within the newspaper. If the reader has no direct experience with the depictions he/she is presented each morning, how could he/she genuinely "consume" it as anything other than fiction? For the reader, each story is played out solely within his/her head. It is immaterial whether the events "really" happen at all. Without imagining them, the stories would not exist at all. Thus, this "extraordinary mass ceremony" is an exercise in maintaining the "trance of everyday life." Reality, for the reader, oftentimes consists of little direct experience, since his/her mind is drenched in imaginings.

Anderson goes on further to elucidate a second interesting relationship substantiated by the newspaper example:

The significance of this mass ceremony--Hegel observed that newspapers serve modern man as a substitute for morning prayers--is paradoxical. It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is

being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion (35).

The reader experiences this ceremony as a communal event, despite his/her physical aloneness. Again, the thousands or millions of participants with which the reader is in communion merely exist symbolically for the reader. Since direct intercourse between all or even a substantial percentage of the readers is impossible, their relation to each other is only a product of imaginings.

Here, it is imperative to remind ourselves of the importance temporal perspectives play in ceremonies, symbolic actions. In the past, emphasis was placed on participating in ceremonies that have endured through time (continuity). The proper practice of the rituals of one's ancestors, orthopraxy, was the aim of practitioners. However, today the goal is oriented towards achieving coincidence in practice. Instead of the community extending through time, the practice of modern rituals occurs simultaneously (much like the unisonance experience during the national anthem), but extends through space.

It may seem as if we have strayed far from discussing how a language, in itself, is a symbol for the divine. Clarification presents itself if we remember that for the nationalist the nation is divine. Linguistic nationalism argues that a specific language is an essential element of nationalism. It purports that the speaking of a particular language allows individuals access to the national consciousness. Thus, the language does, in fact, become a symbol of the imagined community.

If we were inclined to do as Anderson prescribes and evaluate the style in which communities are imagined (6) and nothing more, we would find this inquiry wanting. To concern ourselves with the process of imagining and to disregard what those imaginings point towards would be idolatrous. While defining “ultimate concern,” Paul Tillich teaches us that if we try to make finite reality into a god, the object with which we are ultimately concerned, we will enter the realm of idolatry¹¹. He also states that the “consequence is always destructive, because this finite then destroys other finites,” (Brown 25). Tillich uses the relationship between nations to illustrate what happens when something finite is elevated to ultimacy and the subsequent destruction:

If a nation makes itself absolute, then necessarily, although it is only a particular reality, in the name of its absolute claim it is compelled to overcome all other nations. Instead of trying to communicate with them, it tries to destroy them, because it makes itself absolute. Much imperialistic development can be traced to this (25).

If this were all, then we would likely conclude along with C. Wright Mills that Nationalism is today the world’s idolatrous religion.

However, in the very same seminar as the one quoted above, Tillich confirmed the hosting professor’s inference that “nationalism, the nation as the motherland, is a legitimate symbol of the divine—if we want to use that term—so

¹¹ A clear example of this move towards idolatry can be seen in the controversy over flag-burning starting in the 1960’s. Many United States citizens and legislators encouraged subverting the freedoms represented by the flag, in order to preserve the physical integrity of the flag itself. To value the flag over the freedom of speech, is to hold the finite above the infinite.

long as we see through it and beyond it.” But that “the moment we forget that it is only a symbol or a manifestation, and begin to worship it for itself, it becomes idolatry, becomes demonic¹²,” (31). Thus, we are only idolaters until we stop viewing nationalism as an end in itself.

¹² Nietzsche’s Zarathustra preached against the state as an idol and a monster. He finds the state guilty of perpetuating the slave/master dialectic he exposed in religion. “Yea, it findeth you out too, ye conquerors of the old God! Weary ye became of the conflict, and now your weariness serveth the new idol!” thus spake Zarathustra (Nietzsche 55)

At the city gate and by your fireside I have
seen you prostrate yourself and worship your own
freedom,
Even as slaves humble themselves before
a tyrant and praise him though he slays them.
Ay, in the grove of the temple and in the shadow of
the citadel
I have seen the freest among you wear their freedom as
a yoke and a handcuff.

--*The Prophet*, Kahlil Gibran

The best way to make a transition from idolatry to a legitimate form of faith is through understanding the individual's need for unity. Among all the anecdotes Howard Bloom uses to illustrate how isolation is "the ultimate poison," the study preformed by Rene Spitz is particularly potent. In the 1940's, Spitz studied the infants of women who were too poor to care for them. These babies, permanently placed in foundling homes that Spitz characterized as "solitary confinement," could see only the ceiling from their cribs with sheets hung from their sides. The nurses seldom looked in on them, feeding time offered them only the companionship of a bottle. The hygiene of the homes was impeccable, but the consequences of their isolation were devastating. Bloom states, "without being held, loved, and woven into the fabric of a social web, the babies could not maintain their resistance," (60). In some of the homes, the mortality rate reached a staggering 90 percent. Thus in combination with other studies it is clear that "babies can be given food, shelter, warmth, and hygiene, but if they are not held and stroked, they have an abnormal tendency to die" (60). Bloom concludes "our need for each other is not only built into the foundation of our biological structure, it is also the cornerstone of our

psyche,” (63). If isolation is truly as dangerous and fearsome as we have just seen, then clearly, the associations in which one finds refuge legitimately “concern” the individual, even if unconsciously so. Furthermore, since this is an issue of both the physical and psychic survival for the individual, his/her concern would carry “ultimate” significance.

Bloom finds himself in good company. Erich Fromm comes to a similar conclusion in his work, *Escape from Freedom*. Fromm believes there are human needs apart from, but as compelling as those needs rooted in bodily processes. He believes in “the need to be related to the world outside oneself, the need to avoid aloneness,” (19). This particular breed of aloneness is characterized by a lack of relatedness to values, symbols, and patterns as discussed in the previous section, to an intolerable degree. He contends that such “moral aloneness” leads to mental disintegration in the fashion that physical starvation eventually leads to death.

The birth of a child marks the being of his or her physical individuation from the mother. However, despite being a separate biological entity, the child continues to be functionally one with the mother for a significant period longer. Soon thereafter begins psychological individualization, and subsequently, the individual’s life-long battle against isolation. Recent human history has indiscriminately promoted freedom relentlessly. However, though freedom has brought independence and rationality, it has made the individual isolated and, thereby, anxious and powerless. In order to achieve this freedom modern man has severed all of his primary ties to the community. Fromm believes that as modern man gains freedom he emerges from his

original oneness with man and nature and becomes an “individual,” (23). As his isolation becomes unbearable, it becomes imperative that the individual reunites himself with the world. Moral aloneness is this debilitating aspect of one’s natural individuation and conquering it requires the attainment of a “spiritual relatedness to the world.” This relatedness can assume a multitude of forms:

the monk in his cell who believes in God and the political prisoner kept in isolation who feels one with his fellow fighters are not alone morally. Neither is the English gentleman who wears his dinner jacket in the most exotic surroundings nor the petty bourgeois who, though being deeply isolated from his fellow men, feels one with his nation or its symbols. The kind of relatedness to the world may be noble or trivial, but even being related to the basest kind of pattern is immensely preferable to being alone. Religion and nationalism, as well as any custom and any belief however absurd and degrading, if it only connects the individual with others, are refuges from what man most dreads: isolation (19).

Fromm asserts here that identification with something outside one’s self is a requirement for psychic survival.

Clearly, Emile Durkheim’s telling study on egoistic suicide gives us some idea of the severity and destructiveness of extreme individuation. In addition, Durkheim makes evident the inverse effect of an individual’s “integration” into a society. He shows that religion protects man from suicide "because it is a society.

What constitutes this society is the existence of a certain number of beliefs and practices common to all the faithful, traditional and thus obligatory. The more numerous and strong these collective states of mind are," Durkheim concluded, "the stronger the integration of the religious community, and also the greater its preservative value," (170). If salvation from suicide lies in religion because of the simple fact that it is a society, then it logically follows that similar results should be apparent in political societies. They are. In *Suicide*, Durkheim finds that "rous[ing] collective sentiments, stimulat[ing] partisan spirit and patriotism, political and national faith alike, and concentrating activity toward a single end, at least temporarily cause a stronger integration of society," and consequently inspire a decline in national suicide rates (208). One must be able to connect with a collective; find his place within the larger whole. Both Fromm and Durkheim fraternally link religion and nationalism in this endeavor. However, a quotation from Regis Debray most aptly illustrates this theme in its political context:

The nation, with its stress on a beginning and flow in time, and a delimitation in space, raises barriers to the flood of meaninglessness and absurdity that might otherwise engulf human beings. It tells them they belong to ancient associations of 'their kind'; with definite boundaries in time and space, and this gives their otherwise ambiguous and precarious lives a degree of certainty and purpose.

Hence, nationalism is a legitimate form of faith, as far as it cultivates the rudiments of significance necessary for the nationalist's psychic survival.

Even so, Philip Rieff in the *Triumph of the Therapeutic* declares, “faith is the compulsive dynamic of culture, channeling obedience to, trust in, and dependency upon authority,” (12). Fromm does little to discourage this line of thought. Though he sees the benefits of such commitments, Fromm asserts that they destroy both the individual’s freedom and the integrity of his individual self, condemning them as methods of submission (23). Fromm maintains that the individual will attempt “to become a part of a bigger and more powerful whole outside oneself, to submerge and participate in it. This power can be a person, an institution, God, the nation, conscience, or a psychic compulsion. By becoming part of a power which is felt as unshakably strong, eternal, and glamorous, one participates in its strength and glory,” (155).

This brings us to the final characteristic of the mystical consciousness as described by William James, passivity. James states that “the mystic feels as if his own will were in abeyance, and indeed sometimes as if he were grasped and held by a superior power,” (372). For the nationalist, this “superior power” is the authoritarian nature of the nation and the will of its people.

Rieff explains that older therapeutic efforts took the form of “therapies of commitment.” In these cases, it is the community that cures (68). He states, “The function of the classical therapist is to commit the patient to the symbol system of the community, as best he can and by whatever techniques are sanctioned (e.g., ritual or dialectical, magical or rational),” (68). Thus, the well-being of the individual was

dependent on his full participation in the community. Unification, in this sense, is integral to one's health, since the individual's completeness resides in the community.

In Rieff's terms, the nationalist maintains his extreme form of commitment therapy (and likewise, the trance of everyday life) through ritual participation. "What ritual participation," including that which is depicted within these pages, "is to the group, mysticism is, functionally, to the individual," according to Rieff (72). As a result, he concedes that ecstasies probably constituted the first therapeutic type. And evidently, when "mystical union with the saving symbol, and with the community that stands behind it, has been achieved, a climax of inner stability has been reached," (72). Hence, we find nationalism fitting Rieff's operational definition of mysticism as "a form of unification with a saving agencyⁱⁱ," (72).

Thus, we should feel justified in exploring nationalism as if it were a form of mysticism. This being merely an introductory journey into the heart of nationalism, our exploits were far from exhaustive. However, they did allow us to emphasize some of the inner dimensions of this phenomenon. We were able to explore how James' four characteristics of the mystical experience, ineffability, transiency, noetic quality, and passivity, apply to the nationalistic experience. With any luck, I have convincingly conveyed some of the appeals and dealings of nationalistic experience. While offering security and meaning to the individual, nationalism converges with mysticism at the human desire for unification. A mystical notion of the nation has

risen in the modern era to fill the vacuum following the declining religious authority of the Church. For the nationalist, the nation is divine.

Nationalism's integrative function has presented itself and the groundwork for further inquiry has been laid. It is now possible to recognize the mystical elements in nationalism. We have been given an opportunity to see past the myth of secularization. Spiritual power wasn't dissolved in history, it has donned sheep's clothing. Rather, it has been dispersed throughout the flock. In exchange for this access to spiritual power, each member of the nation is asked to forfeit individuality and embrace integration. The frontiers of the individual melt into the collective. The individual participates in common imaginings, preoccupied with the trance of everyday life, and envisions him/herself as a part of a greater whole. Finally, the individual achieves full integration once he/she submits to the will of the divine.

Nationalism is assumed to be natural. It is believed to be unchosen, much like gender, race, or parentage. Likewise, the sentiments associated with nationalism are assumed to be a natural part of the human experience. Identification with an imagined community is seen less as a social construction and more like a natural phenomenon common to every individual. Similarly, the unification we have discussed is also believed to be both attainable and desirable for each individual. Therefore, the emergence of nationalism marks the democratization of the mystical experience.

Notes

ⁱ Alessandro Pizzorno's table illustrating the four types of bonds he considers to cover the main possibilities of macrosocial organization:

		<i>Type of Membership</i>	
		<i>Predetermined</i>	<i>Optional</i>
<i>Type of hierarchical ordering</i>	<i>Predetermined</i>	kinship	religious
	<i>Optional</i> (outcome of an internal process)	territorial	associational

ⁱⁱ If commitment and unification are so therapeutic, then what sense can we make of dissenting opinions? The Rousseauian polemic finds the community a burden from which the individual is to free himself. Fromm preaches spontaneous love and work over any type of submission. Rieff believes the analytic therapies, portrayed as anti-authoritarian and informative, are wholly superior to those therapies of commitment, characteristically authoritarian and transformative. Even William James, who warns against the pitfalls of "medical materialism," must recognize, "If there were such a thing as inspiration from a higher realm, it might well be that the neurotic temperament would furnish the chief condition of the requisite receptivity," (26). Thus, validating the connection between religion and sickness. A connection previously solidified in minds like that of Freud, who believed that in the circumstances of modernity, to be religious is to be sick (Rieff 33). Similarly, Benedict Anderson quotes Tom Nairn's criticism of nationalism. Nairn argues, "Nationalism is the pathology of modern developmental history, as inescapable as "neurosis" in the individual, with much the same essential ambiguity attaching to it, a similar built-in capacity for descent into dementia, rooted in the dilemmas of helplessness thrust upon most of the world (the equivalent of infantilism for societies) and largely incurable," (5).

As interesting as these points are, they unfortunately exceed the capacity of this paper. Assuming we choose to listen to Freud, there appears to be little hope. He writes, in a letter to Marie Bonaparte, "The moment a man questions the meaning or value of life, he is sick, since objectively neither has any existence," (qtd. in Rieff 34).

Bibliography

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verso, 1999.
- Benjamin, Walter. *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- Berger and Luckman. *The Social Construction of Reality*. New York: Doubleday, 1966.
- Berry, Wendell. *The Unsettling of America*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1977.
- Bloom, Howard. *The Lucifer Principle*. New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995.
- Brockelman, Paul. *Time and Self*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1985.
- Brown, D. Mackenzie. *Ultimate Concern: Tillich in Dialogue*. New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1965.
- Camus, Albert. *The Rebel*. New York : A. A. Knopf, 1954.
- Conrad, Joesph. *Youth*. New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1923.
- Deikman, Arthur. *The Observing Self*. Boston, Mass. : Beacon Press, c1982.
- Durkheim, Emile. *Suicide*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1951.
- Fichte, Johann. "Addresses to the German Nation." New York: Harper Torch Books 1968.
- Fraisse, Paul. *The Psychology of Time*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1963.
- Frankl, Victor. *Man Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1959.
- Fraser, J.T. *Time: The Familiar Stranger*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987.
- Fromm, Erich. *Beyond the Chains of Illusions*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1962

-
- Fromm, Erich. *Escape From Freedom*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1941.
- Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.
- Gibran, Kahlil. *The Prophet*. New York: A. A. Knopf, 1923.
- Hobsbawm, E.J. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Hofstadter, Douglas. *Gödel Escher Bach*. New York: Vintage Books, 1980.
- James, William. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. New York: The Modern Library, 1929.
- Juergensmeyer, Mark. *Terror in the Mind of God*. Berkley: University of California Press, 2001.
- Maier, Charles S. *Changing Boundaries of the Political*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987.
- Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911.
- Orwell, George. "Notes on Nationalism." 1945
- Pirsig, Robert. *Lila*. New York: Bantam Books, 1991.
- Renan, Ernest. "What is a Nation?" in Eley, Geoff and Suny, Ronald Grigor, ed. 1996. *Becoming National: A Reader*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Rieff, Philip. *Triumph of the Therapeutic*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Rosenau, Pauline Marie. *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Vintage, 1994.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon, 1978.

-
- Spanos, WilliamV. *A Casebook on Existentialism*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1966.
- Stroller and Olkes. *In Sordery's Shadow*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Taylor, Charles. *Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Tillich, Paul. *Political Expectation*. New York: Harper and Row, 1971.
- Tillich, Paul. *The Meaning of Health*. Chicago: Exploration Press, 1984.
- Tillich, Paul. *Dynamics of Faith*. New York: Harper and Row, 1957.
- Weber, Max. *Politics as a Vocation*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965.
- Yourgau, Palle. *The Disappearance of Time*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.