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The Virtues of Inconsistency: Identity and Plurality in the Conceptualization of Europe

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When we speak of a European identity, we are not just asking whether there is a common image of the continent, the EU, or their people. European cars and clothes may have some stylistic similarities by contrast to American or Japanese, but this is at most tangentially related to the question of identity. That question, rather, concerns to what extent internal cultural similarity and external cultural distinction form the basis for European unity and produce a coherent and consistent European behavior from one context to the next.

We say that an individual has achieved a strong identity, thus, when she or he is able to maintain much the same way of thinking and the same sense of who she or he is when moving from family into public life, from one job to another, from work to leisure, or from a room full of friends to one full of strangers. We say people have a weak identity when their sense of personal autonomy is subordinated to others, as children's may be to parents'; when different contexts and external stimuli bring out very different versions of them; when it is unpredictable which of their conflicting internal impulses will come out on top.

Achieving a strong personal identity is generally considered a good thing. It is a desirable part, we usually think, of the individual maturation process. It is what gives each of us a sense of self in relation both to others and to our own biological needs and drives, our sensory experiences, and our impulses. It allows us to think of ourselves from the point of view of others, and as coherent and consistent enough to have biographies.

There are those who question whether this individualistic understanding of identity is altogether a good thing, who point to its costs in psychological stress and arguably loss of community. They point out that

this kind of individual identity is especially valued within the modern European cultural traditions (with America perhaps an extreme case). They rightly suggest that "strength" can be taken too far and amount to rigidity, that when we understand strength as maintaining the same identity rather than achieving flexibility within a reasonable range of difference, we may wind up with brittleness instead of suppleness.

The questions may be multiplied at the collective level. Even if we accept the broad Western approach to individual identity, we must ask anew how much such identity is a good thing in large-scale political, economic, or cultural units; how it ought to be produced; and on what models it ought to be understood. Identity implies—indeed literally means—selfsameness. We should remember that even at the individual level we do not think this is an alloyed good. We worry, for example, that "a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds." At the large-scale, collective level, the pursuit of consistency, of strong cultural identity, of selfsameness may be a hobgoblin of another kind.

For most of its history, Western Europe has been characterized by a high level of local variation. In many ways villages differed from their neighbors; regions at the scale that eventually became counties and provinces commonly differed sharply from one another. Cities and towns differed dramatically from the surrounding countrysides. Artisans in the towns may have had more in common with members of the same crafts in relatively distant towns. Urban merchants may have had stronger links to their trading partners hundreds of miles away.

Gradually, as we know, this was changed in the era of absolutist monarchies and the formation of more powerful states. The major products were the units we now see as the primary bearers of large-scale collective identity: nations, or nation-states. As recently as the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, however, on matters as basic as fertility practices—the size of families, age at first birth—there was still more variation among counties and provinces within European countries than there was among those countries.[1] It was only with the spread of national communication systems, the development of national educational systems, that internal homogeneity in these practices came to coincide with the ever more strongly defended borders between countries. The countries, in other words, were not selfsame units, and neither was Europe as a whole.

The projects of making national identities have been very powerful and have been directed against many kinds of internal differences as well as external threats. In many cases international immigrants were more eager to assimilate to the new national identity than were "domestic" provincials.[2] Of course, national identity building required its infrastructure of roads, schools, administrative apparatus, citizen armies, and

mass media. My point is not to trace its history so much as to point to its relative novelty.[3] We need to ask whether the attempt to achieve European identity is primarily a continuation of the same project. This project has been more attractive, to be sure, where coupled with high levels of political democracy, cultural freedom, and social self-organization in civil society. But the fact remains—shocking to modern ears— that by and large empires have been more tolerant of internal diversity than have nation-states.[4]

One relatively narrow definition of *Western* Europe might focus on the relative absence of empire, at least since Charlemagne's sons botched his effort at unification.[5] It was partly the history of empire that kept Iberia out of Western Europe despite geographic westernness. It was empires (and their aftermaths) as much as geography that defined "Central Europe" as something other than simply Europe. The less it recalled the Holy Roman Empire, for example, the more Germany joined the broad "Western" path of development. Habsburg Austria was famously ambivalent, but it was empire that distinguished it from Western Europe (as well as gave it much of its distinctive cosmopolitan cultural vitality, especially in the last half century of its existence). Western Europe has not had much history of the looser kind of large-scale integration brought by empires but quite a lot of nationalist history.

Is this a good thing or a problem to be solved? The cause of European identity has many attractions today. Some are material. But "identity" also figures as an approach to the legitimation of the European Union. The earliest and most successful framings of the basis of European unity were economic and political. Treaty-based cooperation after World War II was intended to bring prosperity and peace, and the second largely because of the first. Faced with challenges from national populations (and sometimes governments) resistant to greater unification, and with challenges from would-be members, the arguments for the EU, and for specific definitions of Europe and its boundaries, have become increasingly cultural. They turn, for example, on the declared common "civilization" of Europe.

But let us keep the picture complex. Europe has been internally diverse and sharply disunified for most of the last 1,000 years. It has resembled India more than China, but unlike South Asia it has never been successful at transforming imperial projects on the scale of the Mughals. Lacking imperial peacekeepers, Western Europeans have devoted a great deal of energy to killing each other and may have offered the world more innovations in the field of warfare than any other. This creativity has been closely linked to European development of the nation-state as a political institution and ideological project. But this disunified subcontinent (Western Europe) has also been creative in

other ways, inventing perhaps most notably capitalism and the democratic modern public sphere.

In this chapter I call attention to the virtues of inconsistency, the advantages of being an internally heterogeneous and sometimes conflictual setting for creativity. I even maintain that this might be a good thing for freedom. I argue for the project of conceptualizing Europe not as a unitary, comprehensive, singular identity—not, certainly, a unity on the model of the integral nation-state—but as an institutional arena within which diversity and multiple connections among people and organizations can flourish partly because they never add up to a single, integrated whole. What is most important, in other words, is to build institutions that encourage and protect multiple, discontinuous, sometimes conflicting public spaces and modes of public engagement rather than to attempt to nurture or impose some unified European culture. Since cultural creativity always produces cultural differences, I should hate to see cultural unity assume primacy in the European project.

The Politics of Identity

It was long assumed that politics was largely about economic and national security interests, and perhaps about power and its limits. Recently, however, issues of identity have begun to claim a place in the foreground of political theorists' attention. The issues are not altogether new, of course, and though the jargon is newly fashionable, it, too, is of older provenance.

What is at stake in a "politics of identity"? To start with, sovereignty and legitimacy. Much historical thought vested sovereignty in rulers, not people, and approached the question of which ruler as a matter of identification: which king, determined by divine right and/or lineage. Legitimacy flowed downward, from God or the ancestors. Increasingly in the modern era, an idea of ascending legitimacy gained ground. The notion was that ultimate authority was vested in the people, and so the legitimate ruler (or system of rule) was that which (1) served the interests of the people or (2) better yet, received the consent of the people or (3) best of all, was positively chosen or created by the people. All of which raises the question, Who are the people?

The question is even thornier than might at first appear, because it is not obvious that divided and plural opinions of various people will do for such a question. At least on many theoretical interpretations, something more like Jean-Jacques Rousseau's general will is required. It is necessary either that the people speak with one voice or that there be some procedure available for determining how to represent the people

in a determinate, singular fashion. So in a sense, the question becomes the ungrammatical, Who is the people, the whole, the corporate body, as distinct from the heterogeneous and ill-bounded multitude? Now we see the question of identity.

Identity appeared in modern discussions simultaneously at two levels: individuals and nations. We are so accustomed today to distinguish the individual from the collective that we don't always grasp how closely connected the two are. But the early modern era saw an emancipation of individuals from restraints of family and pedigree, restrictions on mobility and economic opportunity, sumptuary laws, and especially, with Protestantism, from the need for intermediations between themselves and the word of God. All these helped to create the individual in such a way that he or she could be a unit of identity, separate and distinct from his or her fellows. Such identity required autonomy, according to many early modern thinkers. John Locke, for example, argued that someone who lacked the property to support himself and his family without relying on employment by another lacked full legal personality and accordingly lacked full political rights.

Such individuals no longer derived their basic identities in the same way from complex webs of social relations or fixed positions in a stable order. But they could constitute "the people" of an ascending claim to political legitimacy. They could appear as equivalent to each other not only in formal law and economic relations but as members of the nation—which emerged at about this time as the primary anchor to talk of legitimacy.[6] It is one of the distinctive and almost universal features of the rhetoric of national identity to treat each individual member as equivalently national and as directly and without mediation tied to the whole. National identity, as it were, is inscribed in the individual's body, not attached to the individual through membership in family, community, or other intermediate association.[7] While families had once been the basic unit of membership and had given people their distinctive sense of location in the world, now nations became basic. In place of the family home, increasingly lost to mobility if not expropriation, there was the national territory.[8]

The nation itself was conceptualized in ways very similar to the individual person. In the first place, it was a kind of "superperson" with a history that was conceived often in quasi-biographical terms as a kind of maturation. The problem with Germany, late-nineteenth-century nationalists thought, was not that it had to be created but that it had not achieved its maturity. This required that they become agents of its *Bildung*, cultivators of the national will as well as its culture. The problem with the image of maturation is that it implies not only prior existence as the same being but a foreordained path of development rather

than an open and contingent process in which actual people make history and make the nation.

In the second place, the nation was "self-identical" and "indivisible" (as the American pledge of allegiance I recited in my youth put it). The nation, in other words, was literally "individual." It is no accident that the German philosopher Johann Fichte should have been a pioneer in both individualism and nationalism. Fichte's notion of self-recognition, of the person who seemingly confronts himself or herself in a mirror and says "I am I," is inextricably tied to the notion of the nation as itself an individual.[9] Just as persons are understood as unitary in prototypical modern thought, so are nations held to be integral. In general, each nation—or at least each nation that has succeeded in the process of individuation and become what Fichte called a "historical nation"—is understood as indivisible (individual) and as the bearer of a distinctive identity.

It is precisely in the context of and in response to this powerful modern account of identity vested in the twin individuals of person and nation that the "politics of identity" emerged. It emerged in contestation first over the definition and autonomy of nations and second in claims of various categories of people for public recognition, rights, and legitimacy. Although schoolbook histories of nations commonly present them as always already there, they are actually products of struggle. As Ernst Renan phrased it memorably: "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial. Unity is always effected by means of brutality."[10] Or as Benedict Anderson summarizes one English version: "English history textbooks offer the diverting spectacle of a great Founding Father whom every schoolchild is taught to call William the Conqueror. The same child is not informed that William spoke no English, indeed could not have done so, since the English language did not exist in his epoch; nor is he or she told 'Conqueror of what?'. For the only intelligible modern answer would have to be 'Conqueror of the English,' which would turn the old Norman predator into a more successful precursor of Napoleon and Hitler."[11]

Ironically, the writing of linear historical narratives of national development and the claim to primordial national identity often proceed hand in hand. It is no accident that nationalist history is generally written as though the nation were always already there. Indeed, the writing of national historical narratives is so embedded in the discourse of nationalism that it almost always depends rhetorically on the presump-

tion of some kind of preexisting national identity in order to give the story a beginning. Atlantic crossings thus make English colonists into Americans *avant la lettre* when it comes to writing U.S. history books, whether or not they ever thought themselves part of an autonomous American nation. I saw a popular version of this in Sweden (just before the vote to enter the European Union). An extremely well attended museum exhibition presented Swedish history. It began with a display of fur-clad cave dwellers, whom, it confidently assured viewers, were Swedish cave-dwellers, in fact, the first Swedes.

It is common to suggest a sharp contrast between French and German nationalism, the former prototypically "civic," the latter "ethnic." There is something to this, of course, but it is easily exaggerated. The common contrast between France and Germany is at least in part between two different styles of invoking history and ethnicity, not radically between nonethnic and ethnic claims. French schoolchildren learn that their commonality is not merely ethnic but was achieved in the collective action of the revolution. Yet they learn also to claim as French a history stretching back 1,000 years before that revolution. French unity, after all, achieved the hexagonal shape that is etched into the minds of schoolchildren in the age of absolutist kings, not of Robespierre. It was forged by military conquest and administrative centralization before the revolution consecrated the product as the nation. French nationalist historians help schoolchildren "forget" that events like the massacre of Huguenots known as Saint-Barthélemy helped unify France even while they claim them as moments in French history. German nationalist historians, by contrast, put forward stronger claims for the primacy of common culture and ethnicity partly because their narratives must help schoolchildren "forget" that Germans spent most of their history as members of separate polities (often combative and not all uniform culturally), even while they celebrate the roles of Otto von Bismarck and others in unifying Germany. In France in 1991 Jacques Chirac found a brilliant rhetorical weapon against Jean-Marie Le Pen. When Le Pen appealed to "real Frenchmen" by pointing to the importance of being French by birth, Chirac neatly accused him of being "un-French" with all his "German" talk of a *nationalisme du sang*.

There is no need to belabor the extent to which the history of European nationalism has been conflict-laden. The 1848 "springtime of peoples" may have featured the Romantic belief that every nation could rise freely and take its rightful place in a peaceful community of nations, but by World War I it was clear that the ambitions of different nations crowded each other. It is rather surprising, then, that the idea that national identities are ancient and stable, even primordial, has survived with such force. It is clear that more potential nations have vanished or

been subordinated into mere regions or ethnicities or stateless peoples than have flourished as hyphenated partners of states. Yet early in the Bosnian disaster, the U.S. secretary of state Warren Christopher could declare that the conflict was simply a reflection of ancient ethnic hatreds and there was nothing the rest of the world could do about it except ameliorate the suffering through the Red Cross and similar agencies. This kind of explanatory recourse to ancient hostility fails to make sense of the timing of the crisis and the ways in which it was actively shaped by state action under Habsburgs and Communists alike. Not least, it completely obscures the fact that the redeployment of nationalism in Yugoslavia came after years of economic crisis that sharply opposed the interests of Slovenia and Croatia to those of Serbia and other poorer parts of the country. It also conceals that Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina had much brighter prospects in the Western camp than Serbia, which had been tied in trade as well as religion much more to the East. Finally, it makes it hard to see that it was the early and rapid departure of Slovenia and Croatia that first precipitated conflict (and Serb panic)—though the case for ancient ethnic hatred makes little sense for Slovenia.

The point of these brief remarks on nationalism and violence is to indicate that the violence is not simply fighting between clearly established, already neatly identified nations. It is, rather, a by-product of struggles to forge greater internal unity as well as to expand territory and weaken rivals. What we see today as the history of internal conflict involved in making France whole is only a retrospective view. That conflict did not always appear "internal" to protagonists—to the duke of Burgundy, for example, or to many a speaker of regional languages and dialects sacrificed in the pursuit of a standard national language. Nationalism, in other words, has always been a matter of "politics of identity." The famous Wilsonian edict about "self-determination" presumed that the identity of the selves in question was much more neutrally established than has ever been the case.

Indeed, the phrase *politics of identity* came to the fore in political and sociological discussions not with regard to issues of relations among states or nations but in response to mobilizations of women, gay men and lesbians, ethnic and regional groups, and a variety of other categories of citizens—vegetarians, environmentalists, youth—who claimed that their identities were not properly recognized and treated as legitimate *within* their nation-states. Retrospectively, we can see that class politics, too—the paradigmatic original social movement based on economic interests—was largely a matter of the politics of identity. Workers had to be persuaded to think of themselves as members of the working class and to put their class identity ahead of religion, region, and even nation when vot-

ing and ahead of craft, community, and company loyalties when deciding about economic struggles.[12] Contrary to Karl Marx's predictions, by no means all workers were so persuaded. Many continued for generations to find their primary large-scale identities not with other workers but with fellow speakers of regional dialects, fellow Catholics, or fellow masters of skilled crafts worried that the working class in general might swamp their trade and destroy their standard of living.

The long struggle for women's rights was a paradigmatic matter of identity politics. Women were, quite simply, subordinated to the identities of men—particular men rather than men in general. They were legally and politically placed under the authority and protection of first fathers and then husbands. Their rights to property and to public voice (e.g., voting) were restricted or denied largely on the original Lockean grounds that they lacked independent identity, independent legal personality. In some settings women could own property outright only if they were widows. As late as the 1980s, I heard a Swiss political scientist explain why women ought not to have full voting rights because they were already represented by their husbands. A gracious guest will not press the point.

This is not just a matter of ancient sexism, however, but of a distinctively modern construction of public rights. Women, for example, were excluded from the English Parliament and the French National Assembly in ways they had not been excluded from aristocratic salon culture and were not excluded from popular political discourse.[13] "Free" citizens of color had their political rights actually reduced in many European settings in the early nineteenth century as racial boundaries took on new significance.

All these sorts of "domestic" politics of identity have in common with issues of immigration and with nationalism the fact that they are about the rights of citizens and therefore about the identity of the "self" of national self-determination. The classical models of citizenship in European national states worked by treating citizens as presumptive equals, by making them equal before the law and equal in voting, even if they were manifestly unequal in wealth or other terms. The class and other differences of civil society were thus separated from the political realm by an account of identity not as difference but as equivalence. It is in this sense that all Belgians are equivalent to each other regardless of their linguistic or ethnic community and regardless of their class. But this model of citizenship came with two catches. First, it produced long struggles over the exclusionary rules that originally restricted full citizenship—especially the franchise—to segments of the population. Second, it tended to disqualify discourse over differences of identity among those fully enfranchised as citizens.

The issue of "democratic inclusiveness" is not just a quantitative matter of the scale of a public sphere or the proportion of the members of a political community who may speak within it. While it is clearly a matter of stratification and boundaries (e.g., openness to the property-less, the uneducated, women, or immigrants), it is also a matter of how the public sphere incorporates and recognizes the diversity of identities that people bring to it from their manifold involvements in civil society. It is a matter of whether in order to participate in such a public sphere, for example, women must act in ways previously characteristic of men and avoid addressing certain topics defined as appropriate to the private realm (the putatively more female sphere). Marx criticized the discourse of bourgeois citizenship for implying that it equally fitted everyone when in fact it tacitly presumed an understanding of citizens as property owners. The same sort of false universalism has presented citizens in gender-neutral or gender-symmetrical terms without in fact acknowledging highly gendered underlying conceptions.

All attempts to render authoritative a single public discourse privilege certain topics, certain forms of speech, certain ways of constructing and presenting identities, and certain speakers.[14] This is partly because of emphasis on the single, unitary whole—the discourse of all the citizens rather than of subsets—and partly because of the specific demarcations of public from private. If sexual harassment, for example, is seen as a concern to women but not men, it becomes a sectional issue rather than one for the public in general; if it is seen as a private matter, then by definition it is not a public concern. The same goes for a host of other topics of attention that are inhibited from reaching full recognition in a public sphere conceptualized as a single discourse about topics consensually determined to be of public significance.

The liberal model of the public sphere pursues discursive equality by disqualifying discourse about the differences among actors. These differences are treated as matters of private, but not public, interest. On Jürgen Habermas's account, the best version of the public sphere was based on "a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether."[15] It worked by a "mutual willingness to accept the given roles and simultaneously to suspend their reality."[16] This "bracketing" of difference as merely private and irrelevant to the public sphere was undertaken, Habermas argues, in order to defend the genuinely rational-critical notion that arguments must be decided on their merits rather than the identities of the arguers. This was, by the way, as important as fear of censors for the prominence of anonymous or pseudonymous authorship in the eighteenth-century public sphere.[17] Yet it has the effect of excluding some of the most important concerns of many members of any polity—both

those whose existing identities are suppressed or devalued and those whose exploration of possible identities is truncated. In addition, this bracketing of differences also undermines the self-reflexive capacity of public discourse. If it is impossible to communicate seriously about basic differences among members of a public sphere, then it will be impossible also to address the difficulties of communication across such lines of basic difference. In more recent writings, Habermas has suggested a greater role for "identity" in public discourse, but only in the thin, lowest-common-denominator form of "constitutional patriotism."[18] By this he means above all attachment to certain procedural norms, a love of the conditions one's country provides for communicative action tolerant of differences, rather than of other, substantive manifestations of collective identity. Habermas somewhat surprisingly assumes the nation as the tacit locus of such constitutional patriotism. There is no intrinsic reason why "constitutional patriotism" could not work on the scale of Europe; a bigger question is how the concept helps to provide for the introduction into public space of other kinds of identities besides those that unify the polity as a whole. Habermas continues to presume that the cultural conditions of public life, including individual identity, are established prior to properly public discourse itself. It might be helpful to look at the public forging of diverse identities that fit together well enough to enable specific agreements about life together and collective action on multiple scales including (but not limited to) the nation-state or the European Union.

When protagonists of the so-called new social movements brought identity issues to the fore in the 1960s and after, they were protesting among other things the extent to which national unity and the norms of citizenship presupposed or called for a uniformity of personal identity. They were objecting to the notion that there was one right way to be a French man, for example, or to be an Italian woman. They were demanding that the rights and respect due citizens not be conditional on conforming to any set cultural ideal but instead be open to those who found in themselves or wished to forge different kinds of identities. These were movements of people who felt literally "alienated," made to feel like foreigners in their own countries.[19] It is worth remarking how very international these movements were.

Making Sense of Identity

All this is significant in the context of a discussion of European identity because a basic question is, How much internal commonality—or conformity—does political unity (or economic integration) require? I do not

know the precise answer, nor do I propose to speculate. My goal is more to raise the issue, but I do want to comment on what is at stake in the very concept of identity. This will take the form more of a catalogue of different meanings than a serious and sustained discussion of the issues raised by each. We can gain an introductory purchase on the complex debates over identity by seeing several dimensions that focus different approaches and/or differences in understanding and constituting identities.

Self-Equivalence Versus Hegelian Non-Self-Identity

To start with, there is the Fichtean image I invoked above, of the man who looks in the mirror and recognizes with satisfaction, "I am I." As Marx and countless later sociologists have pointed out, this kind of solipsistic identity is not normal to human beings, who in fact recognize themselves primarily in the mirrors of their relations to other human beings and thereby see themselves as both linked and at the same time qualitatively distinct. The same is true of nations: The existence and self-recognition of a nation is never entirely an internal matter; it always presumes and depends on the existence of other nations. Which international mirror is most powerful makes an interesting question: The English seem mainly to see themselves as the not-French, the French as the not-German, and so forth. One of the spurs to European unity has been the protonational self-perception of Europeans as the not-Americans, though lately there have been some who perceive themselves in a multicontinental European civilization as the not-Asian.

It is crucial not to stop with Fichte. Hegel offered perhaps the key challenge early on by holding that the nature of creative, conscious human selfhood was precisely non-self-identity. This suggests, among other things, the possibility of wanting to be different than we are, wanting even, perhaps, to have different wants than those that drive us now.[20] It stresses the heterogeneous makeup of even the individual self, let alone any larger collectivity like Europe.

Essentialist/Constructivist,
Determined/Chosen, Ascribed/Achieved

A basic issue in the politics of personal identity has been the question of whether there is some biological or other deep "essence" to any particular identity—say, gender identities—or whether these are socially constructed.[21] This has implications for how malleable such identities are understood to be. The analogous distinction in discussions of nationalism is between essentialist and constructivist theories of national identity. It seems clear that essentialists overstate their case if they do not recog-

nize that all traditions and identities have to start somewhere and are subject to human action and manipulation. Conversely, constructivists too easily assume that once people are shown that their national identities are constructed, that their traditions are invented, then these will lose their force.[22] There is little evidence for this, and we might ask under what conditions historically constructed identities come to take on the sense of givenness and essential inevitability that fuels patriotic heroism and genocide alike.

Both essentialist and constructivist positions tend to emphasize the creation of identities by external determination, whether that of biology or of society. They accordingly downplay choice. Thus, while it has been a source of encouragement to some homosexuals, for example, that there is evidence that predispositions to homosexuality may be inborn, it has equally alarmed others who see dependence on such arguments as eroding the more basic liberal proposition that sexual orientation should be a matter of free choice.

The old sociological and anthropological distinction between ascribed and achieved identities captures a bit more of the dimension of self-making, while assuming that the alternative to choice is that which others will see in one regardless of one's own choice. The power of ascribed identities in politics is great and can easily act as a trump over personal choice. As Hannah Arendt, one of the most distinguished of the largely assimilated and secular Jews who were driven into exile from Germany in the 1930s, put it, when one is attacked as a Jew, one must respond as a Jew, "one can resist only in terms of the identity that is under attack."[23] One of the important features of the modern world is that a variety of ascribed identities hitherto treated as politically insignificant have become eminently and sometimes dangerously political (especially in the face of pressure for nationalist conformity).

We/They

In social psychological terms, one of the most basic questions is when and why people think sometimes in collective terms as "we" and sometimes in individual terms as "I." It appears that the capacity for "we-images" is an achievement, both historically and in terms of individual development.[24] We-images seem to be embedded deeply in individual personality, but people have a repertoire and can make use of different ones under different circumstances.[25] "We women" can give way to "we workers" or "we Irish" depending on the context and even the intention of the actor. These various collective identities may be more or less congruent; there is no sociological law indicating that they cannot be contradictory or in tension, and they often are. As the examples suggest, a

large part of the contextual basis for shifting from one collective iden-
tity to another is contraposition to other groups. This is equally true for
the experience of identity and its presentation or representation in
speech or other action. Like people who switch linguistic codes from
creole or pidgin to standard elite languages depending on who is lis-
tening, we all experience and even choose shifts in relevant identities
based on our situations. Much identity is always identification by con-
traposition. Whether "European" will be a meaningful identity depends
not just on internal cultural, political, or economic integration, in other
words, but on whether there are other identities of the same order to
which European can be counterposed. The possibility of discovering
such a similar collective identity was one of the forces driving the eager-
ness of European participation in the February 1996 Asian summit.

Categorical/Relational

Nationality is only one of a number of "categorical identities" that have
assumed central importance in the modern era. The discourse of nation-
alism thus shares much with those of race, class, gender, and other
appeals to cohesion based more on the similarity of individuals than on
their concrete webs of relationships.[26] In many traditional settings, kin-
ship is the primary way of conceiving social identity; a specific person is a
member of the whole (which is often very fuzzy at its boundaries) and var-
ious intermediate groupings because he is related to others as brother,
cousin, and so on. Where categorical identities operate, individuals
become more autonomously the units of identity. Well before modern
nationalism, religious identities worked this way. One could thus become
a Christian by conversion, no matter who one's relatives were, and
Christians were understood to form a group—a very large group—
because of their common beliefs and practices, not because of any spe-
cific kinship of other relationships among them. While Christians did
have such relationships with each other, there were too many of them for
this to be the primary basis of their common identity; each could have
direct relationships with only a tiny minority of the whole. Conversely, the
Protestant Reformation (like many civil wars) divided many people with
close personal relationships against each other on the basis of categorical
identities (though also on bases of networks of allegiances).
    While nations may have ideologies of common descent and shared
kinship, they are organized primarily as categories of individual mem-
bers, identified on the basis of various cultural attributes: common lan-
guage, religion, customs, names, and so on. Where the segmentary lin-
eage system suggests "I against my brothers; I and my brothers against
my cousins; I, my brothers, and my cousins against the world," the dis-
course of nationalism suggests that membership in the category of the

whole nation is prior to, more basic than, any such web of relation-ships.[27] This suggests as well a different notion of moral commitment from previous modes of understanding existence. Advocates of nation-alism and other categorical identities are particularly likely to demand conformity, to treat membership in the category as a trump card to be played against all competing identities. Nationalist ideology thus offers the chilling example of children called to inform on their parents' infractions against the nation precisely because each individual is understood to derive his or her identity in such direct and basic ways from membership in the nation. This is sharply different from the dis-course of kinship and the ideology of honor of the lineage. There chil-dren derive their membership in the whole only through their rela-tionships to their parents.

Given the tendency to treat ethnicity as a matter of primordial tra-dition, it is worth noting that it is in some ways an intermediate forma-tion between the relational identities of kinship and more categorical identities, including nation. Ethnicity emerges primarily with the cre-ation of states, which draw people from remote regions into capitals and/or armies. In their local settings, kinship provides a highly specific sliding scale of relational identities. When, say, the Tallensi of Northern Ghana leave their FraFra region, however, and move as labor migrants to Accra, they discover a commonality with other Tallensi—including in the ascriptions of others—that does not depend on the internal specifi-cations of kinship that would make sense at home. Ethnicity is the cate-gorical construction of such common identity that organizes dealings with other groups or with the state.

Categorical identities require representation; they are not simply outgrowths of interaction but depend upon cultural labels and the pro-duction of ways of speaking about them. Their power reflects our aware-ness that the necessarily local relationships we may construct with con-crete others are incapable of managing the very large-scale modern world of states, capitalism, and global media and population movement. Nationalism draws its power and importance partly from this scale of social life. This is one reason why many forces that are held to spell the end of the nation-state, such as global economic integration, do not so readily do so. States respond most vigorously with nationalist ideology and policies precisely when threatened in this large-scale world.

What Is at Stake in
Talk of European Identity?

The first question has to be whether the identity of Europe is a being approached on the model of national identity. There is nothing fixed in

advance about the appropriate scale of nations. They come as small as San Marino and Palau and as large as China. It would be an entirely plausible prospect for the amalgamation of European countries into a unified Europe to follow the path of the amalgamation of separate principalities, free cities, and other polities and cultural regions into the various national states. There might be greater or lesser respect for cultural difference and greater or lesser regional devolution of power in such a European state, just as there is in various current member states. But the logic would be that of the nation-state.

This is the model of seeking maximal internal coherence, partly as a support for maximally coherent foreign policy and maximally effective external economic competition. But it is not clear that such a model plays to Europe's strengths in all respects. One of the key questions any debate about identity needs to ask is in what realms coherence is really a positive good. The standardization that seems to me reasonable only with regard to electric circuitry, for example, may not be so appropriate with regard to intellectual life or even the organization of business institutions.

Take the latter as an example. Should it be a European goal to produce *a* single European business culture? To create a number of European superfirms that are largely similar to each other? Such a strategy would fly in the face of a great deal of current management theory (though I would not want to hold too much of a brief for the durability of any particular phase of that notoriously faddish field of knowledge). It would very likely stifle creativity. Whether the firms were public or private, they would be apt to behave all too much like Europe's existing, often nationalized behemoths. It seems to me that Europe's strength would more likely lie in creating an institutional framework that encouraged a diversity of business practices and organizational forms. This would be more likely to spur creativity. It would, indeed, be closer to the European approach that led the world in the nineteenth century.

Similarly, a great deal is made of the potential for European-wide media networks with the introduction of new technologies and partnerships among providers. But analysts tend to presume that the sole question is whether Europe will develop a single common media public or will be divided on national lines; they seldom consider the issue of subnational diversity and development of a multiplicity of specific cross-national media publics at a level much below that of Europe as a whole.[28] This is surprising given that the EU's facilitation of regional autonomy has been a major topic of discussion for years.

The arrival of common media may bring many commonalties, but we should be careful not to overestimate their impact. The enormous sharing of culture between the United States and Britain has kept the

countries close, but (jokes in the era of Thatcher-Reagan friendship notwithstanding) links have stopped well short of political unity. If all Europeans watch Hollywood movies, this will add to their common frame of reference, but it will not produce a common European identity. That would be more likely to come, perhaps paradoxically, out of more heterogeneous cross-fertilizations of cultural *production* than from simple common media reception. If European policymakers are worried about Americanization by media, the answer is to produce, not restrict. In terms of the development of European political culture, surely a key issue is the development of the capacity for discourse, for engagement across lines of different opinions, not merely the representation of some putatively singular European field of political information. This, too, depends on diversity rather than singularity of models. It is worth noting, though, that while Europe has produced a substantially integrated economy and an increasingly integrated administrative framework, it has not produced an integrated public sphere. Political discussion—and the relevant media, like newspapers—is still organized overwhelmingly on national lines.

If Europe is not to be a large nation-state, the issue of European identity must also include the question to which I already alluded above, Identity as a member of what category of like units? In a world system of nation-states, how does the EU fit in? What status should it have in relationship to the UN? Should it push for a regionally structured complement to national membership?

One model for allegedly supranational unities is the idea of civilizations—proudly claimed by many Europeans who see the Continent on the model of Hellas or Christendom. Civilizations have sometimes formed the basis for empires, historically, but otherwise have not been bases for political units at all. Does the future lie with a division of the world into civilizational blocs? Would such blocs be constructed as empires or super-nation-states or federations? The thinking of the leading advocate of this view, Samuel P. Huntington, is actually very close to nationalism writ large.[29] We can thus ask about such blocs many of the same questions we ask about nations: Are these blocs really as internally homogenous as Huntington suggests? What level of conformity would be required as a price of integration (perhaps a bigger question in possibly neo-Confucian Asia but not insignificant for Europe)? Above all, does such a view radically underestimate the constructed character of these groupings, present them as much more historically continuous than they really are, as a base for overstating their likely unity? We may recall, for example, that at the time of those very European ventures the Crusades, Greece was decidedly a part of the non-Europe, the Christian East that crusaders set out to help but that turned out to have very dif-

ferent ideas from the West and not much interest in the help. The ancient Greeks were chosen by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western Europeans as their preferred ancestors. They are still idealized by many as the founders of European civilization and those who bequeathed it its characteristic love of freedom and democracy. But such assertions too easily forget not only that democracy has hardly been characteristic of all of European history but that today's chosen ancestors of European civilization were Byzantine "others" during much of European history. Claimed historical unities tend to be constructed on the basis of highly selective readings of history.

What is an alternative to selfsameness as a way of approaching large-scale collective identities? We can get one good idea from a point Ludwig Wittgenstein offered in a different connection: family resemblances. Why not think of Europe as a field of multiple, overlapping, and sometimes even conflicting identities? Europe is constructed out of both categorical similarities and relational ties, but no one set of these reaches all Europeans without joining a range of non-Europeans as well. Europeans derive their similarity not from a lowest common denominator nor from rigidly enforced boundaries but from characteristics that many Europeans hold in common without any being definitive of the whole. As some children have the family's characteristic eyes, others (for better or worse) its nose, and still others its immediately recognizable jaw, so some Europeans may share musical tastes but not politics; others may share trade union ties but resist cultural similarity; others may join European-wide political parties within which they form national or linguistic blocs; still others may develop close working ties in a European-wide business setting and spend their leisure time in enclave communities based on life-style choices. A family-resemblance view has the advantage of recognizing close connectedness without reducing it to the pursuit of simple sameness or consistency. It also has the virtue of approaching coherence—the sticking together of the Continent—on the basis of the multiple and diverse actual connections among people, mostly bottom-up rather than a top-down imposition of uniformity. Not least of all, it leaves room for continued cultural production, recognizing that a vital Europe will be the setting for a number of lively cultural fields, not simply a reflection of a single culture, already fixed in its essence. So, too, democratic politics must be a matter of difference, disagreement, and even conflict—peacefully pursued—not merely consensus.

We need to be wary of arguments that trade on illusions of homogeneity, of ancientness and natural or historical givenness. They forget that immigration is an old not a new phenomenon—and only sometimes a problem. Even France, after all, has long

been a melting pot, as Gerard Noiriel has reminded us.[30] We forget this because France was for some time very good at assimilation, though not without considerable symbolic and sometimes quite physical violence, and because until recently the primary immigrants were other white Europeans. But Europe need not be simply a melting pot, *le creuset européen*, in which previous cultures are combined in a single new blend. This kind of consistency is not the only source of interconnection, of working together.

We might do well to remember, in praise of inconsistency and plurality, that the most creative loci of identity and individual action in much of European history were not nations, but cities. We should not let the dominance of nationalist ways of thinking over our intellectual categories too sharply dominate our ways of imagining European identity—or rather, imagining Europe as a place where institutional arrangements foster a plurality of identities.

Choosing inconsistency and a plurality of forms of social solidarity and collective identity does raise a hard challenge, which I can only raise here. To what extent are different kinds of groupings entitled to special status, or protected treatment of various sorts? Scholars are familiar with this less from European examples than from those of Quebec and aboriginal groups in Canada. Somewhat similar issues have arisen with regard to the Sami in the Nordic countries. There are two basic directions for approaching the issue. One is through the extension of special categories of rights and/or state services. The other is through some combination of federation and devolution of central state powers. The latter has much to recommend it, for it does not raise the issues of favoritism and corrosive jealousies as does the former. The former could be justified, as Charles Taylor has argued, when complete difference-blindness would in fact materially disadvantage a group—for example, by allowing urbanites of different ethnicities to buy up its ancestral lands for weekend homes—but it gives cause for worry.[31] First, it tends to make the state the guarantor of fixed lines of difference rather than allowing these to vary fluidly and overlap. Second, it encourages sharp distinctions among enclaves rather than development of lateral linkages among groups. Even while arguments for protected status commonly challenge nation-states in favor of smaller-scale or crosscutting groups, they often approach the issue of legitimate identity in terms deeply shaped by nationalist discourse—and indeed largely through ethnohistorical rather than civic claims as to what constitutes a group.

In short, differential claims on a central state that in general purports to treat its citizens equally raise problems that centralized protections for self-organizing group formation and maintenance of distinct identities do not. Beyond this I am not able to go in this chapter; I can

note only that if Europeans choose the course of pluriform social organization—as I think they should and almost inevitably will—then they will be sailing in poorly charted waters and in need of serious theoretical work to make sure the taken-for-granted assumptions of nationalist discourse and its intellectual cousins do not close off attractive possibilities.

Notes

1. Susan Cott Watkins, *Provinces into Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

2. Recall Eugen Weber's point that it was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that most Frenchmen began to speak French as their primary language; *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976). See also Gerard Noirel, *Le Creuset français* (Paris: Seuil, 1987); translated into English by Geoffroy de Laforcade as *The French Melting Pot* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

3. I have considered these dimensions of nationalism (and reviewed much of the literature debating the issue of novelty) in Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and Ethnicity," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (1993): 211–239; Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and Civil Society," in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993); and Craig Calhoun, *Nationalism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1997).

4. See discussion in Jeff Weintraub, "Introduction," and Craig Calhoun, "Nationalism and the Public Sphere," in Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar, eds., *Public and Private in Thought and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

5. Obviously, I do not mean that Western Europeans were never imperialists. Far from it. The point is that for the most part they did not organize their political relations in Western Europe on the basis of empires.

6. See Calhoun, "Nationalism and the Public Sphere."

7. Swiss national identity constitutes Europe's most striking exception to this, insofar as it works very much in an "upward" direction emphasizing that individuals gain their Swiss nationality by being citizens of cantons, and Switzerland indeed exists as a confederation of these intermediate associations They rather than the federal state are arguably primary, though for all the Swiss domestic emphasis on local distinction, Swiss identity is surprisingly cohesive and compact when projected outward and viewed from any distance. The Swiss model contrasts sharply with the categorical thinking (described later in the chapter) that makes the nation as a whole the primary collective identity, directly inscribed into individuals, who are from this point of view equivalent members of a set, tokens of a single type.

8. See Hannah Arendt's evocative discussion of this in *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 257.

9. Schwarzmantel somewhat misleadingly portrays Fichte's idea of the nation as simply a domination and total absorption of the individual rather than seeing the sense in which Fichte sees self-recognition and self-realization as having noncontradictory individual and national moments. John J. Schwarzmantel, *Socialism and the Idea of a Nation* (London: Harvester, 1991), 37–40.

10. Ernst Renan, "What Is a Nation?" in Homi Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), 11.

11. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 201.

12. See Craig Calhoun, "'New Social Movements' of the Early 19th Century," *Social Science History* 17, 3 (1993): 385–427.

13. See Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), and Geoff Eley, "Gender, Class and Nation," in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

14. In March 1996 *Le Figaro* ran an article asserting that "ultrafeminist" demands for abortion rights (and ultratraditionalist opposition) were simply failures to speak "the language of reason." In the same issue, Alain Peyrefitte wrote that this language was French—a language made for the expression of universal aspirations. Bernard Bonilauri, "Le Langage de la raison," and Alain Peyrefitte, "Le Contraire d'un ghetto," both in *Le Figaro*, 20 March 1996, 2, 1.

15. Jürgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962; reprint, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 36.

16. Ibid., 131.

17. See Michael Warner, *Letters of the Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

18. See Jürgen Habermas, "Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe," *Praxis International* 12, 1 (1992): 1–19 and Jürgen Habermas, "Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State," in Amy Gutman, ed., *Multiculturalism: Exploring the Politics of Recognition*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

19. See, among many, Alberto Melucci, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

20. See Charles Taylor's helpful exposition and development of the Hegelian arguments in *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) and *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991).

21. This is a central point of conflict in the debates over identity politics; I have reviewed many of the issues (but only a fraction of the literature) in Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), ch. 7.

22. This is the flaw in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's otherwise helpful account in *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). The same notion that "invented" traditions (and therefore identities) are somehow less "real" is carried forward in Hobsbawm's influential survey, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

23. Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1968), 18.

24. See Norbert Elias, *The Society of Individuals* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) and Stephen Mennell, "The Formation of We-Images: A Process Theory," in Craig Calhoun, ed., *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

25. My emphasis is thus slightly different here from that of psychologists and political psychologists who study the relative propensity of different personalities for we- or I-images and language.

26. The distinction of categorical from relational identities was pioneered by social anthropologists, including especially Siegfried Nadel (*Theory of Social*

Structure [London: Cohen and West, 1957]), and brought into contemporary sociology by Harrison White (*Identity and Control* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992]) and Charles Tilly (*From Mobilization to Revolution* [Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1977]).

27. As Ekeh (1990) has noted, there has been a move to abandon the use of *tribe* in social anthropology and African studies and to replace it with *ethnic group*. But this has the effect of imposing a categorical notion—a collection of individuals marked by common ethnicity—in place of a relational one. Where the notion of tribe pointed to the centrality of kin relations (all the more central, Ekeh suggests, because of weak African states from whose point of view "tribalism" is criticized), the notion of ethnic group implies that detailed, serious analysis of kinship is more or less irrelevant. Peter P. Ekeh, "Social Anthropology and Two Contrasting Uses of Tribalism in Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, 4 (October 1990): 660–700.

28. Likewise, there is a great deal of discussion in contemporary Europe about subsidies for the arts and certain forms of media. The debate focuses heavily on the relationship between market logics and quality (however the latter is defined). Too little attention is paid in this discourse, however, to the issue of diversity itself. If maintaining diversity is considered at all, it is usually with regard to linguistic diversity and primarily to the reproduction of dominant national languages. But it might be appropriate to consider what kinds of actions both within markets and by governments encourage the production of a differentiated field of media options and different artistic style cultures (which are hard to rank on any single index of quality). Thus, tax codes might be modified to encourage both philanthropic foundations and venture capital investments in the arts, with the explicit goal of encouraging diversity in funding sources, production activities, and taste cultures. More attention might also be paid to the role of cities rather than nation-states as the key geographical loci of cultural production (and to some extent consumption). Cities and municipalities might be aided in entering into their own decentralized, hopefully divergent programs of support for and presentation of arts and media.

29. See Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993): 22–49; see also the various criticisms in the following issue, especially that by Fouad Ajami, and Huntington's response, "If Not Civilizations, What? Paradigms of the Post–Cold War World," *Foreign Affairs* 72 (1993): 186–194.

30. See Noiriel, *Le Creuset français*.

31. "What Is the Meaning of Equal Citizenship?" paper presented to the Northwestern University conference "Citizenship Under Duress," 11–12 April 1997.