

Yoram Hazony's Virtue of Nationalism

by [Friedrich Hansen](#) (July 2018)

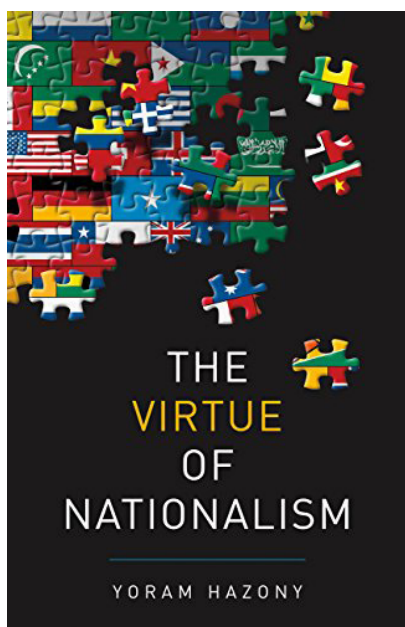


Conversation, Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 1879

This is the book many conservative readers in the West have been waiting for. It invariably touches on issues which are

extremely controversial, at least in liberal polite society, such as religion, family and tribes. An erudite political philosopher, Hazony is president of an institution that bears the name of Theodor Herzl, and well known for his political courage and untiring support for the Zionist cause. Like Herzl, Hazony strides into territories seldom explored, particularly by the European enlightenment: namely the world of family, clans, and tribes. These are concepts with deep Oriental appeal and, in our time, overlooked by many in the liberal West. Yet, at the same time, they are inspiring for conservatives with a religious affinity to the Middle East where biblical political ideas still occupy the most accomplished minds. A book on the virtues of nationalism could hardly be timelier.

It will be read almost certainly with enthusiasm by many eastern Europeans who are constantly chastised by the western media for their post-communist embrace of nationalism, family,



and religion—a blessed state of identity which many of them have been deprived of for the better part of the last century. Meanwhile, nationalism is also back with a vengeance in the west. The new Catalanian quest for independence, rumors about Irish unification, Brexit, and Trump’s “America First” approach are but the most popular examples. On top of all that comes a refreshingly particular Italian government, hostile to the Germanophile European Empire and instead looks to President Putin for inspiration. These are

all heretics of liberal globalism in the name of political self-determination.

Hazony's "The Virtue of Nationalism," (September, 2018 publication date) is a rare piece of political communication making it into European precincts while exuding as it does the flavor of the open and experimental political culture of Israel. Ironically, as a nation Israel is still "in the making" because its body politic is being permanently challenged with extinction. Personal disclosure: I had the pleasure to live in Jerusalem during 2011 and made the acquaintance of Hazony, a scholar like his wife Yael, and a committed family man raising ten children. There can be little doubt that Hazony's book, in many respects, runs against-the-grain of the liberal consensus. This makes it extremely stimulating and inspiring for conservatives and a perfect antidote to the liberal pastime of Trump bashing.

This liberal obsession can be traced to a categorial mistake in reasoning: the confusion of aesthetics with morals. Liberals have never been good at this distinction because their creed is all about replacing religion and hence morals with the beauties of unhinged individualism. On the other side of the political aisle we have the conservative "particularist turn" or Catholic retreat, also known as the "Benedict Option," propagated for quite some time by Rod Dreher in the American Conservative. Yet, very few conservatives—I can think only of Roger Scruton—have so far dared like Hazony to add nationalism to the mix of family and religion.

Hazony rightly points out the main lesson of WW II, which seems almost forgotten: "It was in the end British, American and Russian nationalism that defeated Germany's bid for universal empire." Usually we hear the exact opposite narrative: that it was German nationalism which set off WW II. Hazony's aim is to convince us that nationalism was not the problem but rather the solution to imperial chauvinism in the

20th century. Hazony describes two rival camps within liberal imperialism: 1) pragmatic or utilitarian free trade universalists or “economic liberals,” centered in Washington as the center of military and political power, 2) ideological and rationalistic political universalists or “political liberals,” who insist on a peaceful world government overseen by international institutions like UN and EU. Both, Hazony argues, are liberal imperialists. One is reminded of Max Weber’s diagnosis that Anglo-Saxon universalist economic liberalism was born from secular Protestantism, not Catholicism. This begs the question, why did Luther and Calvin create missionizing denominations, obsessed with proselytizing, if they are to be understood as driven by nationalism? In the end Protestants continued on the track of centrifugal global Catholicism—driving them away from the centripetal family.

Hazony makes an interesting point: after WW II the EU was designed by Conrad Adenauer to prevent Germany from ever becoming strong enough to dominate or threaten the rest of Europe again—which is nevertheless exactly what has come about in recent decades. This paradox is rarely discussed in Western publications today.

Surely Hazony is right in claiming that Luther and Protestantism were the midwives of nationalism to the German lands but so was Catholicism in France and the Latin South of Europe. Yet the northern Protestant lands including Scandinavia paid a high price for national self-determination, because they ruined the family and religion providing the centripetal pull to the national cause. Luther famously broke his monastic oath and switched Protestant loyalty and conscience to the state, hence “*cuius regio eius religio*” emerged after the 30-Years War. Protestants dislodged

conscience from the “truthful” deed, already corrupted by Catholic “indulgences.” The Deed is close to custom or Jewish “minhag:” the way of doing things which often does not require much thinking once it has been customized.

The book is concerned with the strength of families, which depends, Hazony tells us, “to a very great degree on this cultural inheritance that the older generations bequeath on the younger ones and on the degree to which this inheritance is successfully handed down.” He also gives us a definition of centripetal loyalty and coherence by stating that the ups and downs of the family, congregation, and nation are experienced by its members as if they were happening to themselves because all this is part of the individual’s “extended self” as opposed to escapist liberal individualism.

In a sense nationalism depends on substitutes for individual autonomy, religious, or collective self-determination. Hazony rightly points out that if not rooted in the family this risks setting free resentment and other forms of chauvinism. Loyalty to the state is commonly attributed to the French Revolution, but this is only an update of the Reformation. It also meant for people unable or unwilling to leave their ancestors’ home turf that the dominant religion would be imposed on them. This infringed on individual conscience and is widely considered as oppressive for it was handing over religious freedom and individual conscience to the regional powers to be. This birth defect of Protestantism is still with us in the West. It forces hair dressers and bakers to act against their religious identity—clearly an unintended consequence of the “spatial turn” that separates Protestantism from Judaism.

Forgotten is the horrible Protestant intolerance during the

Renaissance and again in the wake of its “cultural turn” during the second half of the 19th century, when the war against Catholics became tyrannical. Lord Acton meticulously documented the atrocities committed by Protestants from the Reformation onwards, stating that they have been far more intolerant than Catholics, particularly in Germany and England, if less so in the New World. Contrary to this Hazony frequently refers to the “Protestant construction” as the best we can wish for: “national independence and the biblical moral minimum for legitimate government.” We can certainly agree with Hazony that a national state is better than an imperial order of government not to mention the tribal political order with its endless infighting. However, an entirely different issue is the present moral decline being most advanced in Protestant lands.

No doubt Hazony considers the family as a paradigm for all other human collectives, to which loyalties are owed by individuals. They can be described and measured using the family as the fundamental template, Hazony maintains, based on criteria of physical flourishing, internal integrity, and cultural inheritance. All the same he equates individual loyalty to the family to that of the nation, which is certainly a matter of much divergence in advanced Western societies.

Israel, where Hazony lives, in this respect is rather the exception than the rule. Regarding national particulars, Hazony observes, no universal ideology “has succeeded in eliminating this intense desire to protect and strengthen the collective . . . or even in diminishing it, neither Christianity or Islam, nor liberalism or Marxism.” Inside the fortresses of families, clans, and tribes, he maintains, there are collectives of trust and hotbeds of experimentation,

development, and innovation, which “only later will radiate beyond its borders after it has been probed manifold within the walls.” The defense of a healthy particularism and tradition is one of the best elements of his book.

To his great merit Hazony discards the Rousseauan myth about the “state of nature” and about the modern state coming into existence by an “original contract” signed by all its citizens. Surely this modern fiction is meant to eclipse the family as the foundation of any society. For, Hazony tells us, all civilizations began with families, clans, and tribes. The state rests on the foundational “coming together of the heads of tribes” so that previous foundational theories by Hobbes and Locke fall by the wayside. Who has ever believed that each individual would have been personally asked to give his or her consent? The story on the foundation of states based on long-standing family or clan bonds of loyalty and mutual trust is by far more plausible. Contracts are almost exclusively signed by family and businesses and are the only contracts actually based on consent such as with marriage. Hazony goes on to make a realistic argument which is fairly little acknowledged that children must become fully mature, meaning at least between 25 and 35 years old, in order to understand what parents want them to internalize and preserve for the next generation. He thus makes the case for parental support and advice well beyond of the age of adolescence. In Judaism the purpose of this is so that parents enable their offspring to pay back the inheritance of the previous generation. If used with prudence it helps them to achieve their goals by sparing them some of the tragic errors that usually sets us back for years.

Which brings us back to national virtues and vices. The exceptionally secular Germanosphere, thanks to the Nazis, not only drove the sexual revolution which ruined family and

religion, but equally rejected the national state like no other people by moving toward a European Superpower after WW II. Hazony points to a continuity here: "The cause of the First World War was, in other words, the determination of Germany to revive imperialism on the continent, thus ending the European order of national states forever—and the equal determination of Britain to prevent this." The Serbian crisis of 1914, according to the famous 1960s thesis by German historian Fritz Fisher, was just an opportunity to unite the Slavs under German imperial rule over the continent. Today, after seventy years of the liberal fight against nationalism, German global (centripetal) aspirations have succeeded again, if only economically.

The opposite dynamic has engulfed Israel, Eastern Europe, and lately the Anglosphere. A religious renaissance with flourishing families, that invigorate local communities, thus fostering the internal integrity of the national states together with their cultural heritage. All this draws attention to material prosperity and creates resistance toward global wars by weakening universalist aspirations in politics. This explains the coalition between US president Trump's constituency of evangelicals with the nationalist majority of Israel. Hazony describes as exceptional episodes the late 19th century American imperialism of Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson which saw the conquest of many foreign territories (Philippines, Cuba, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, etc.), yet which did not last longer than Pearl Harbor. In Europe every Protestant power, just like Catholic Habsburg and France, had its own colonial empire, some lasting well into the 19th century; Japan, Germany, and Italy were late comers in the 20th century.

Hazony argues that collective self-determination enabled by

the national state opens up more resources and freedom for all members of tribes and clans while retaining traditional loyalties. By contrast, imperial orders push the centrifugal drive too far thereby transcending the individual toward unhinged individualism, bent on dropping any particularist loyalties to family, clan, tribe, and religion.

The difference between liberals and conservatives, according to Hazony, is method: liberal rationalism versus conservative empiricism. Hazony compiles an impressive list of thinkers in favor of nationalism such as Michael Oakeshott, Thomas Sowell, Gertrude Himmelfarb, Yuval Levin, João Carlos Espada, and Anthony Quinton. Those in favor of an international order of competing national states include David Hume, Adam Ferguson, William McDougall, Anthony D. Smith, and Pierre Manent. In addition, Hazony is convinced that “natural law” is not the solution to the problems of imperial entities such as the European Union. Claims by European leaders to “progressive transnationalism” are mere window dressing and do not change anything. Hazony also dismantles the myth of the neutral state and is critical of international institutions as he sees them principally bent toward an imperial order (which means being ruled by others and curbing self-determination of free nations).

The order of national states had historically emerged after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and was embraced by John S. Mill. It lasted until the Second World War, despite being denounced in Kant’s famous sketch of 1795 on “Perpetual Peace,” which Hazony dismantles entirely. It was only when the aggressive Nazi Empire was cast as “national state” by liberals that the tide turned against it. One of Hazony’s most fascinating arguments points to the paradox which led Western liberals to embrace the Nazi Germany after they mistook Hitler

for a nationalist, a man wedded to the rebirth of the Holy Roman Empire. There is also no denying that Hitler's "millennial" regime had been voted in by a Protestant majority while German Catholics abstained, resisted, and were persecuted consequently.

Part of the present nationalist rejection of the European super state is the perception that it continues the Nazi suppression of smaller European nations. Could it be that too many liberal Europeans cannot wean themselves from the dream of European greatness that just continued after the collapse of the Third Reich and sort of persists with clandestine German rule over Europe? It is only in this context that Habermas' euphemism of a post-national Europe has turned out to be little more than just another chauvinist liberal contraption—a point beautifully made by Hazony. He does not mention, however, "progressive trans-genderism" albeit it is just the other side of the coin of the EU's "progressive trans-nationalism" for both subscribe to the ban on sovereignty, be it national or personal. In other words, this infatuation with centrifugally removed important moral inhibitions which had served a minimum of particularist instinct control.

Now it is entirely understandable that against these pornographic culture wars a counter movement has emerged which has taken the form of a revival of national and ethical borders. Hazony particularly dismantles the myth that the European Union represents the best answer to Auschwitz or that the concept of liberal empire is the best insurance against the return of fascism. This has become the Western Liberal-Protestant *raison d'être*. With his contrarian view on the lessons of Auschwitz Hazony gives us the answer to an ever-increasing European hostility toward Israel. He speaks for

many conservatives who are upset about the unspeakable case of equating Israel with the Nazi state with reference to its defense against Palestinian acts of terror.

Hazony as an Israeli is understandably aghast over the identification of Israel with Auschwitz yet he may be forgiven for missing the perverse logic behind this moral equivocation.

Echoing Alexis de Tocqueville, Hazony leaves the reader in no doubt that hatred and intolerance exude from limitless equalization such as the "one size fits all" gender-imperialism, rather than from particular nationalists which survive only on a good measure of particulars like a distinct language, custom, culture and geography. Hazony also points to the continuity between Christian anti-Semitism and liberal anti-Zionism. No doubt the blueprint for global equalizing individualism was invented by Pauline universalism of antiquity, made possible only by Christ's global proxy victimology.

On the other hand, Christians so far are the only ones who have paid a heavy price for gay liberation promoted by the liberal elites of Europe and the US. "Populism" is just a derogatory liberal put down for the moral awakening upsetting the West.

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