Minding the Nation Anew: Reflections on Recent Studies of Nationalism

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We may temporarily neglect fundamental questions about the origins and sources of order, community, and solidarity, but we cannot escape them altogether. In fact, recent events of the young twenty-first century – including the Great Recession, the rise of so-called “populism,” the vote for Brexit, and most recently the Coronavirus crisis – expose some of our reflective indifference on the one hand, while helping to concentrate minds anew, on the other. We can no longer avoid asking what holds people together and how a common political life among others is possible. Facile assumptions about the insignificance of borders and the withering away of differences between peoples must be reexamined. Since the end of the Cold War, we have taken globalization for granted, having assumed since the end of the Cold War that higher degrees of global unity and integration were the most self-evident, ineluctable facts of our political and economic lives. Now, we are again confronted with the reality that as much as particular political communities change over time, they retain a certain shape or structure, and thus they maintain a certain form insofar as they remain politically ordered and articulate. This includes having a body. Indeed, past thinkers spoke readily of the body politic. And one such embodied form is the nation.

Rich Lowry, *The Case for Nationalism: How it Made Us Powerful, United, and Free* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2019). 280 pgs. ISBN: 9780062839640. \$26.99

R. R. Reno's *Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism, and the Future of the West* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 2019). 182 pgs. ISBN: 9781621578000. \$28.99

Yael Tamir, *Why Nationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019). 205 pgs. ISBN 9780691190105. \$24.99

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The promises of globalization obscured this truth about politics and people, and it was further overlaid by the widespread opinion among elites that the nation is itself the root cause of social maladies, conflict, and war. Today, however, the nation is up for reconsideration by thinkers of different political persuasions, as indicated by Yoram Hazony's conservative argument in *The Virtue of Nationalism* (2018) and Jill Lepore's liberal account in *This America: The Case for the Nation* (2019). Just as each nation has characteristic features and unique elements to its origins, history, and practices, so too are cases for the nation and nationalism unlike. What is more, the value and persuasiveness of nationalist arguments vary as much as nations and regimes differ in their degree of virtue or goodness. Therefore, now is the moment to recultivate our judgment about political things like the nation and arguments in its defense. And this requires rediscovering how to think politically.

As with any complex human or political phenomenon, there are many ways to approach the nation. One might suggest a typology of the different accounts. There is, for instance, the ideological divide of conservative and liberal views on the nation. One might categorize works according to discipline or methodology: a sociological account of the nation looks to the role of classes; an economic consideration focuses on national productivity and prosperity; a historical perspective accounts for the nation's genesis and development; an anthropological viewpoint analyzes national symbols and rituals; a psychological approach examines aspects of national identity formation; and so on. All of these have validity as far as they go, and this simple list neither exhausts the various ways to study the nation, nor are the disciplines enumerated necessarily confined to the particular topics mentioned. But as already suggested, a nation is first and foremost a political form. We fail to realize this and tend therefore to study things like the nation from sub-political or trans-political perspectives, perhaps because we are less and less capable of truly thinking politically and seeing the world with a political gaze, even—perhaps especially—when it comes to truly political

things. We must come to truly appreciate again what one of the most prudential French political thinkers of the last century, Raymond Aron, referred to as the undeniable “existential primacy” of politics.

Such a claim may strike readers as odd, for we are told we live in “hyperpolarized” times, and we find our daily news full of reports on political dramas domestic and international. Many suggest our lives are increasingly “politicized.” This may all be true, but paradoxically, these things are likely more the result of an absence than a surplus of political thought, well understood. These days, we are drawn to a variety of alternative perspectives and ideologies that seek to explain things away, to “deconstruct” phenomena to something other than what they are, to reduce them to their aggregate parts, or to dismiss *prima facie* the common-sense perspective of citizens and statesmen. As a result, political thinking becomes clouded or suppressed. Some of the most sophisticated opinion engages more in imaginary projections or literary creations than in an effort to understand the world as it is in all of its manifold complexity. Thus, what transpires is more a battle of ideologies or dogmas (what Eric Voegelin once called “dogmatomachy”) than any substantial political reflection or instillation of practical wisdom.

The result is the politicization of thought, rather than political thinking. So often, our thought begins and ends with ourselves, or with the individual self as the primary *subject* of all sentiments, whereby politics is relegated to but one of the instruments for satisfying our own desires and protecting our rights. Furthermore, in democratic ages like our own, when the self stands as the alpha and omega of our reflective experience, a sense of similitude or sameness toward others overwhelms us, as Tocqueville so clearly analyzed. Thus, we are led to believe that other individuals must or ought to share our same desires and ideas in just the way we feel them, instilling the sense that similarities are always more significant than differences as we draw inferences but from ourselves. How could it be otherwise, one might ask? Can we possibly think of the world without reference first to ourselves and to our personal lives or private desires? My suggestion is that thinking politically is indeed an effort to do just that. Political thought starts from the premise that the political world precedes us, and that as subjects we enter into a complex situation we must take as an *object* of our thought. We must seek something *objective* with which to begin. By living in and through the objective forms of our lives wherein we discover others too, we make possible a common life with them, even as these forms cannot be altogether open to all.

In the language of the Greeks, political thought always takes the *polis* or “the city” as its point of departure, an insight from which follows appreciation for the fact that peoples find themselves in a given grouping or community—an order that is greater than the self but is less than humanity. The restoration of political thought begins from an objective appreciation

of “the city,” which for us today is the nation. With attention to the nation as an *object* of our thought, we may appreciate anew its formative power in our lives and in that of other peoples as well, so as to know something about the differences across peoples even as each lives nationally. We may thereby restore to mind the significant fact that communities must have foundations and take on some form to be genuinely political, and thus to be capable of action. As the French political philosopher Pierre Manent underlines in *A World Beyond Politics?: A Defense of the Nation-State* (2006) and as reiterated in *Seeing Things Politically* (2015), “there is no indefinite political form,” and “as soon as people live politically, they live in a political form, or in transition from one form to another,” for “one cannot live politically in an undefined way.” Manent poignantly reminds us that “life takes shape and presents itself first in political life,” and for us it is the nation that “hold[s] together the diverse aspects of human life” allowing “diverse experiences to communicate with one another,” thereby serving as “the guardian of the wealth and complexity of human life.” Without the nation, one wonders whether common life today could be possible at all? A global marketplace or international arena of disparate competitive individuals resembles more the state of nature, or a pre-political life, against which many now stand athwart, as they demand greater concern for what is at home rather than abroad—for the national interest rather than the concerns of humanity. Insofar as the nation—as a political form—gathers and guards the different parts of human life, a political analysis of the nation must similarly order and relate higher- and lower-order parts and aspects accordingly, to shed further light on what one may call its mediating capacity to hold things together.

It is a concern for sustaining common life that has led various observers to direct their attention to the nation once more. However, most are more interested in nationalism than in the nation *per se*. In 2019, three books of note written for broad audiences by intellectuals of diverse scholarly orientations bore “nationalism” in the title: Rich Lowry’s *The Case for Nationalism: How it Made Us Powerful, United, and Free*, R. R. Reno’s *Return of the Strong Gods: Nationalism, Populism, and the Future of the West*, and Yael Tamir’s *Why Nationalism*. Nationalism, however, is something of a derivative phenomenon. Like any “ism,” it is an apparent system of ideas, and yet the nation is not born of ideas alone. To put matters otherwise, it is more the terminology of social science than it is the natural language of citizens. Beginning from secondary things does not always lead one back to fundamental things, and risks perpetuating intra-ideological disputes rather than drawing out what is genuinely common, but it may nonetheless be a helpful start. Thus, one is reminded of Roger Scruton’s helpful distinction, sketched in *A Political Philosophy: Arguments for Conservatism* (2006), between a humane “national loyalty” and a doctrinal “nationalism.” The

need for striking such a prudential balance today is arguably all the greater.

The strength of R.R. Reno's work, *The Case for Nationalism: How it Made Us Powerful, United, and Free*, is its clearing the way for further reflection. Reno's time horizon is our recent present and he astutely analyzes what he calls the "postwar consensus"—a bipartisan perspective of elite opinion constituted by a series of "*anti* imperatives," or an "all-or-nothing dogmatism." As though the only lessons of value about human life and political order are to be drawn from the history of the first half of the twentieth century, today's consensus has distilled wisdom into the belief that "war and destruction arose from close-minded modes of life and thought." With such a contraction of political imagination, the future envisioned and remedies proposed for present ills derive from "openness and weakening." The only acceptable policies and positions are ones motivated by the will to be anti-totalitarian, anti-fascist, anti-racist, and anti-nationalist. Little reason then for the left's incessant cultural appeals for "diversity, multiculturalism, and inclusivity," and the right's unwavering economic push for "market expansion" and "global economic liberalization." The singular ambition of the postwar consensus consists of open cultures and open markets, and while these two movements may appear to be at odds—representative as they are of two opposing parties—they are in fact mutually reinforcing. Cutting across the parties gives the consensus its great strength, which has resulted in one of the ironies that Reno so ably illuminates: while calling for openness above all, it practices a rigidity of its own in punishing dissent.

According to Reno, we are not therefore experiencing a "crisis" of the West, nor one of liberalism or of modernity at large. Instead, we are now reaping the consequences of the truncated political perspectives of the ruling elite. Many are wed to "a general theory of society" that is "characterized by a fundamental judgment: whatever is strong—strong loves and strong truths—leads to oppression, while liberty and prosperity require the reign of weak loves and weak truths." Dominant opinion is unified by the continuous effort to "prevent the return of the strong gods," by which Reno means "the objects of men's love and devotion, the sources of passions and loyalties that unite societies." Most of the leadership class have simply failed to see clearly and have altogether misunderstood the last five decades at least. Under the false belief that it is once again 1945, the only discernable alternatives are "either an open society or Auschwitz." But, Reno argues, "our problems are the opposite of those faced by the men who went to war to defeat Hitler. We are imperiled by a spiritual vacuum and the apathy it brings." Having become "politically inert" and "winnowed down to technocratic management of private utilities and personal freedoms," we must instead restore an appreciation for what brings us together. "Our time," Reno writes, "begs for a politics of loyalty and solidarity, not

openness and deconsolidation." He adds: "We don't need more diversity and innovation. We need a home. And for that, we will require the return of the strong gods."

It is in this light that Reno offers what he calls "a thematic reframing" to better appreciate much of what falls under the categories of nationalism and populism today—phenomena best viewed as an attempt to correct, if not jettison, the postwar consensus. The latter, Reno contends, is itself to blame for stoking the emergent political crisis, especially as many voters across the West now not only sense but are convinced that their leadership class lacks any attachment or loyalty toward the people it leads. Their leaders are therefore failing to fulfill their duty in protecting and preserving the nation so that we may "sustain and build up our shared home." Citizens are now demanding that those in positions of rule, after years of failure, once again take up the mantle of genuine leadership, which Reno characterizes as "help[ing] men shelter together within traditions and communities of shared loves." Thus: "More and more people in the West want the strong gods to return."

This desire, Reno observes, leads some to reach for "transcendent legitimacy." Insofar as we are the beings we are, he argues that "public life requires the aroma of the sacred." While Reno expresses some concern about "the power of the sacred in public life," he argues that we cannot ignore certain truths about ourselves: "To be human is to seek transcendent warrants and sacred sources for our social existence." However, as he helps to clear the way for deeper reflection on what it means to live politically and as a citizen, Reno's adoption of the abstract language of Durkheim's sociology inhibits the prognosis. His insight regarding love(s) as a binding force for community and as part of what undergirds the "we" of human groupings is important, but to speak of "the strong gods" says both a great deal and not enough. Reno is best when highlighting the fact that we cannot wish or imagine away fundamental loves even as they remain ambivalent in potentially being creative or destructive—if not sometimes both. However, learning to better shape and orient human desires is not particularly aided by sociological abstractions.

Consequently, Reno's suggestion for a re-sacralizing is without sufficient discrimination – and what is more, if the nation becomes a sacred or transcendent thing, then it is harder to grasp. It may be loved but not understood. Reno risks making too much of the nation or misloving it. That said, he underlines that love of the nation ought to be moderated from below as well as from above—by the family and by the church. Thus, he hints toward a rank-ordered pantheon of strong gods, which reminds one of certain arguments about the hierarchy of values—precisely the sort of claims that are subject to greater openness and weakening insofar as they underappreciate the forms and formalities of such loves. One can appreciate Reno's desire to correct for the active desirelessness that is much encouraged at present, but his

proposal amounts to a kind of overcorrection on the one hand, and the very use of bloodless abstractions against which he cautions, on the other hand. Are our moral and political imaginations sufficiently enriched by the notions of strong versus weak “gods”? Furthermore, there are a number of real anti-totalitarians, like Aron, Scruton, Manent, Solzhenitsyn, and Orwell, who remained well-disposed toward the nation, and were able to strike the prudential balance we so need today. There are surely varieties of opposition to the worst regimes, and we still have much to learn from the most thoughtful diagnosticians and opponents of tyranny. Thus, we cannot help but wonder more about the concrete ways—or forms—in and through which the strong gods Reno embraces might best be mediated, so that each is given their proper due without any becoming themselves unruly.

Lowry and Tamir share Reno’s concern regarding the weakening of human ties through the ever-greater openness of our collective lives. Lowry takes up the case of American nationalism, and thus his focus is particular, whereas Tamir’s argument proceeds along more general lines in defending a variety of liberal nationalism. Both, however, defend the claim that liberalism and nationalism are compatible, even mutually dependent, yet they each understand these ideologies in different ways. In considering their works together, one enters the often interesting, but sometimes frustrating task of comparative ideologies. For one sometimes gets the impression that there are as many definitions of liberalism as there are liberals, or of nationalism as there are nationalists. And while these opinions and arguments are not without importance, it reminds us of the aforementioned problem regarding the best way in which to consider political things for the sake of thinking politically.

At any rate, Lowry’s own aim seems less one of inquiry than to offer a spirited appeal to readers to love America as a nation, as Lowry himself does. His passionate plea seeks to remind us of what he calls “the American nationalist tradition” that spans from the Revolution to the present. Insofar as he seeks to restore a sense of gratitude for America and his past, among so many today who fail to “credit our ancestors for achievements on an epic scale,” Lowry’s motivations for the work are sound. The book is an episodic tour through some high points of American history, with short discussions of the Declaration, Gettysburg Address, the Atlantic Charter and other important texts alongside vignettes of Washington, Lincoln and others he labels great American nationalists. Additionally, he discusses what he sees as major nationalist projects in U.S. history: independence; dominating the continent; warding off foreign threats; assimilating immigrants; and establishing an international system. The conclusion of Lowry’s sweeping retelling of American history is that in the United States nationalism has been an unvarnished good: “American nationalism in particular is not to be feared.” It may be true that the United States was “never infected with

the dream of universal empire” that was such a recurring and overwhelming ambition and part of European political development, but surely American nationalism contains its own ambivalences as well. By hitting every nail with his nationalist hammer, important complexities and differences in beliefs are overlooked, as for example in reducing the debate over slavery to a contest between nationalist abolitionists and anti-nationalist slaveholders. The consequence is to make American history less interesting—perhaps even less exceptional—than it is; it amounts to a sort of flattening out of the narrative for the sake of the nation, without ever quite grasping the nation, *per se*. He does raise a number of important questions, however, not least regarding recent certain imbalances on immigration from both parties; he proposes the need to rethink the effectiveness of “assimilation” yet sees great hope for breaking down tribal group loyalties through “racial and ethnic intermarriage”

Part of the challenge of Lowry’s case is due to his overemphasis of culture. American nationalism past and present is, on his telling, a species of *cultural* nationalism. To Lowry, it is an error to focus on America as an idea, or to make more of American ideals than of cultural practices and symbols. One can sympathize with his caution against turning America into an abstraction, or merely a product of the intellect. And in our time of confusion regarding identities, the appeal to a common culture is understandable. Lowry’s quest to evade unnecessary partisan disagreement in finding that which binds Americans “whatever our political, ethnic, or religious differences” is something many readers will appreciate. But his list of prerequisites for a “culturally American” person – “basic norms of speech, dress and cuisine, and a basic familiarity with American pop culture and history,” alongside the English language and an appreciation for American geography – culminates in less than satisfying banalities. Is there really a shared American style of dress? Furthermore, it is no longer self-evident that even those immersed in popular culture share much of anything anymore, given the fragmented and decentralized digital and social landscape. What to say about those who are culturally out of step? With such a concentrated focus on culture, it is hard to see how Lowry’s nationalism can in fact offer a cure for identity politics, rather than exacerbate this very matter. And while certain holidays and cultural practices do indeed bring people together, Lowry verges on the folksy in saying that “Thanksgiving represents the heart of the cultural nation.” In his commendable effort to make a case for the cultural unity of America to circumvent presently polarized politics, Lowry’s sub-political case for the nation may not convince non-nationalistic individuals without his same cultural sensibilities.

Arguing that a creedal account of America underappreciates the importance of loyalty and the sense of “natural devotion” that individuals have toward their home and country, Lowry seeks something more substantive that

nevertheless turns out to be rather elusive. To be clear, there is nothing ethnic or biological about Lowry's case. But in so strongly arguing against the idea of a purely "civic nation," his claim about the "thickness" of nations downplays the ways in which a civic sensibility, or the self-understanding of a citizen, is shaped and inculcated through particular political institutions and practices—the formal structures that embody a creed, as it were. This point has been masterfully articulated by Yuval Levin in his latest work, *A Time to Build* (2020), which acknowledges the formative role of institutions that bring practices and habits together with defined ideals and purposes. One might suggest that a Levinian understanding of institutions grasps the crucial nexus between "civicness" and "thickness" so as to get at the dynamic interplay between ideas and culture, as well as structures and activities, that together have been conducive to so much liberty and prosperity in the American nation. By contrast, the cultural content Lowry presents appears at times amorphous or haphazardly drawn up. He duly emphasizes the English and Protestant cultural inheritance that has made America and beckons a renewed appreciation of it while likewise admitting that it will continue to change. What then is it that can hold past and present together as we move into the future? While it is certainly conceivable that America would be culturally different had Spanish or French traditions come to dominate, Lowry's deflection from civic institutions, and from the structures of national life, becomes problematic. His cultural focus parallels a conspicuous absence of any extended reflection on citizenship and civic education, or such distinctively American principles as federalism. In so adamantly contesting the claim that America is reducible to an idea, he ends up stripping American history of its many significant contestations over ideals – and thus risks reducing American history to a single idea, or ideology: nationalism. And all the same, he cannot help but fall back upon American ideals; in fact, he boldly states that the distinctiveness of America is that "our ideas are true." But Lowry does not so much analyze as assert these ideas, for engaging them at length would take Lowry down the road of the creedal approach he seeks to relegate to secondary or lesser status. Thus, he finds himself in a curious position: he wants to account for an ideological tradition while deemphasizing ideas so as to elevate culture in making his case for the ideology of American nationalism. One can appreciate the endeavor to draw these things together, and indeed both ideas and culture very much seem to matter, for neither a strictly creedal nor wholly cultural focus could possibly grasp the American nation. However, Lowry's aggregation of parts fails to produce the most satisfying whole. It just may be that Lowry's difficulties follow from his trading in "isms."

Nevertheless, Lowry is most convincing when refuting contemporary arguments against the nation. What Lowry calls the "nationalist crack-up" and "the treason of the elites" began

in the 1970s, by his telling, and is among the gravest threats to American solidarity. Lowry illustrates the remarkable quickness with which Western elite opinion dismissed the nation by falsely equating nationalism with illiberalism. Such unreflective antinationalism is indeed "ill-informed and ahistorical." He ably dismantles "the mistaken assumption that the rumble of Prussian jackboots can be heard underneath [nationalism]," as though nationalism leads "inexorably to fascism and Nazi Germany." "True nationalism," he convincingly argues, "proved the antidote to the twin totalitarianisms of the twentieth century." Yet while there is nothing inherent to nationalism that it should inexorably become "authoritarian" or "extreme," the dizzying litany of qualifying terms for Lowry's own nationalist case ("true," "run-of-the-mill," "universal," "Washingtonian," "Hamiltonian," "Lincolnian," "consensus," "inclusive," and so on) makes clear the malleability of nationalism as a doctrine. As a result, one may be drawn back to ask once again about the nation itself—just what it is and what it ought to be. Lowry's cultural collage only goes so far in defining or defending a particular nation

Nevertheless, Lowry's book is right to renew the call for defending American national sovereignty, and for "unabashedly mak[ing] the interests of American citizens the test of government policy." He briefly recounts that nationalism protects self-government, and that democracy is only possible within a national framework. The important points that Lowry might have elaborated further are matters that constitute much of the core of Yael Tamir's work. "No social contract and no system of distribution," she writes, "can function as an open political framework. This is especially true for democracy," the legitimacy for which "depends on the support it gathers among its citizens." Liberals—among whom Tamir counts herself—have, she argues, been captivated by the idea of community membership as grounded in "voluntarism," and fail to see that "true voluntarism is enjoyed by only a fortunate few." Dismissive as they generally are of borders, history, and fate, liberals have consequently misinterpreted human freedom: "Freedom was never just about the ability to move or trade freely; it was about the ability of individuals to govern their life, make meaningful choices, and live productively." Sharing in the views of Reno and Lowry about elite blindness, she argues that liberals have muddled their understanding of liberty and are unable to answer key questions about who or what makes a political people; what constitutes a common political identity; and how peoples can act to shape the community and future they desire. For Tamir, nationalism can address these very questions.

That said, Tamir is fully aware of the Janus-faced nature of nationalism, and she endeavors to reintroduce nationalism with moderation. As she writes: "The biggest challenge of the century is to stop the ideological pendulum halfway," which for her means "offering a social contract that balances human rights and freedom with social solidarity and group

identity.” While it has rarely been found, “there is no task more important than its pursuit.” And an important part of this undertaking resides in restoring “the three-way partnership among nationalism, liberalism, and democracy.” She admits that these ideologies will likely never operate in perfect harmony, but a conscious effort to hold them together—to formulate a manageable “partnership”—is necessary to preserve what is best in each of them, and therefore all of them, for the sake of human liberty. Ideological disputes are a continued part of our politics—*pace* the end of history crowd—but the best way to prevent any one set of ideas from reaching their extreme is to bring them into a larger framework of contestation and coordination, rather than assume any one of them is suddenly irrelevant. And in the case of nationalism, we must better appreciate its psychological and political importance, for “despite being fabricated, nationalism helps individuals to cope with the modern world,” and to “[live] active and meaningful lives.” For while many believe that the best of the post-war years resulted from nationalism’s repression, Tamir contends that many celebrated achievements of the twentieth century were in fact “dependent on an alliance between the nation and the state,” which most now fail to appreciate.

Tamir is therefore explicit that without the maintenance of a “political *we*, states disintegrate.” The sense of peoplehood is something that must be created and requires an ongoing effort in preservation through institutions and ideas, as well as by imagination and symbols—that is, of both politics and culture. The existence of a cohesive people is not to be assumed, say, in the way that Lowry does, but is something that must be constantly and actively restored, as Reno has counseled. For Tamir, in the context of modern nations this has everything to do with the making and formation of citizens. And although she tends to equate the ends of politics with her preferred social democratic policies, she nonetheless gives the political its proper due. Tamir argues that reducing social tensions is best done by “joining forces to combat social inequality and injustice” rather than seeking to combat the fact that humans gather in groups and may tend toward stereotyping, in-group favoritism, and ethnocentrism as a result. Thus, she chastises her fellow liberals for a depoliticized variety of thought. Most liberals now cling to a belief in historical progress that distracts from age-old truths regarding the formation of peoples—that is, they trade in “the illusion that all problems can be solved, that progress is eternal and there will be more for everyone.” In seeking to shatter this illusion, Tamir also dismantles the claim that globalism is morally superior to nationalism, as though greater education, affluence, and mobility results in superior judgment. Moreover, she demonstrates, there is little evidence suggesting that international organizations or agencies are any less susceptible to influence

and manipulation than national states; rather, what is clear from the record is that the former are no better at protecting people and their rights. To assist an increasing number of individuals suffering from a process she dubs “hyperglobalization,” and in order to secure democratic representation while rebuilding lost social and political trust, the nation-state, she concludes, is our best bet. For as she concisely proclaims, “a borderless world is far from ideal; it can be neither democratic nor just.”

Over the course of 21 concise chapters, Tamir addresses a number of challenges that nationalism both creates and helps to address, as she triangulates between nationalism, liberalism, and democracy. Her work avoids an excess of abstractions found in the analytic texts of many democratic and liberal theorists – indeed, it appears these are among those she hopes most to convince regarding the value of nationalism. But this is also one of the shortcomings of the text, in that its treatment of ideologies still leaves it once removed from political reality, while its concern with values precludes discussion of underlying human motivations. In other words, the ambition to fit systems of ideas together draws attention away from the operative action of concrete peoples and nations, while her focus on value claims fails to say much about the cardinal virtues required for genuine political activity.

Reno, Lowry, and Tamir have each provided some of the initial groundwork for reconsidering the relevance of nationalism in our world today, but we have continued need for inquiry into just what the nation is. In this respect, one is well served by turning to the aforementioned work of Pierre Manent, who has made significant headway in thinking about the nation by comparing it to alternative political forms, as found in the previously cited works and especially developed in his *Metamorphoses of the City: On the Western Dynamic* (2013). Manent offers not yet another rumination on the derivative phenomenon of nationalism but an insightful science of political forms, a significant enterprise in restoring our ability to think politically—to think about the nation itself, in terms of its nature and its history. Thus, as we find ourselves discontented with certain ideological patterns of thought, we may yet return to think of the things themselves, asking anew what is required of us as citizens and therefore what virtues we must cultivate as individuals and as peoples in order to live well together.

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