Global Political Issues

Lecture 6

National self-determination
The plan for today...

1. The right to national self-determination

2. What is a nation?

3. Are nation states good for us?

4. Nations, justice and democracy
§1. The right to national self-determination
2014
Scottish referendum on independence from the United Kingdom...

2017
Catalan referendum on independence from Spain...
Is there a right to national self-determination...?

Do nations have a right to their own state and territory...?

Do nations have a right to secede from multi-nation states...?

Do nations have a right to some more limited form of self-government...?
Why national self-determination is valuable...

‘...why it is valuable for the boundaries of political units (paradigmatically, states) to coincide with national boundaries...’

(David Miller, On Nationality, p.82)
Do nations have a *remedial* right of self-determination...?

Do nations have a right to secede from multi-nation states if this state inflicts/has inflicted upon them serious injustices...?

Do nations have an *unconditional* right to secede from multi-nation states....?
§2. What is a nation?
‘...nations exist when their members recognize one another as compatriots, and believe that they share characteristics of the relevant kind...’

‘...the test of mutual recognition...’

(David Miller, *On Nationality*, p.22)
Nations have a common public culture...

...this might involve shared beliefs or preferences or values...

...it might involve a shared language and literary culture...

...it might be a matter of having *enough* of some bundle of these things...
‘Membership is a matter of belonging, not of achievement...

...to be a good Irishman... is an achievement...

...to be an Irishman is not.’

(Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, *National Self-Determination*, p.446-447)
Must a nation be a large group of people who are not personally familiar to one another...?

Must a nation have a special attachment to a particular portion of the Earth’s surface...?
§3. Are nation states good for us?
People identify themselves with the nations to which they belong...

People have an interest in being respected by others and in being able to respect themselves...

So people have an interest in the nations to which they belong being respected by others and in being able to respect these nations themselves...
‘...individual dignity and self-respect that the groups, membership of which contributes to one’s sense of identity, be generally respected and not be made a subject of ridicule, hatred, discrimination, or persecution...’

(Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, National Self-Determination, p.449)
‘... membership of such groups is of great importance to individual well-being...

...for it greatly affects one’s opportunities, one’s ability to engage in the relationships and pursuits marked by the culture.’

(Avishai Margalit and Joseph Raz, National Self-Determination, p. 449)
There are certain relationships and opportunities that satisfy the following conditions...

...part of what it is to be French is to regard these relationships and opportunities as particularly valuable and worth pursuing...

...the ease with which these relationships and opportunities can be pursued depends upon the prosperity of the French nation...
P1 Individuals have a strong interest in the nations to which they belong prospering and being respected by others and by themselves.

P2 Nations can prosper and ensure that they are respected by others and by themselves only if they have their own state.

C Individuals have a strong interest in the nations to which they belong having their own state.
Is it true of the Scottish nation – or the Catalan nation – that it cannot prosper or ensure that it is respected as long as it doesn’t have a state...?

Is membership of a multi-nation state really depriving these nations of prosperity and respect...?
‘A common culture... not only gives its bearers a sense of where they belong... but also provides them with a background against which more individual choices about how to live can be made...

...if it is destroyed those who had shared it either are left in a cultural vacuum or else have to undergo a difficult process of cultural adaptation.’

(David Miller, On Nationality, p.85-86)
P1  Individuals have a strong interest in their national culture not being destroyed.

P2  National cultures are secure against destruction only if the associated nations have their own state.

C  Individuals have a strong interest in the nations to which they belong having their own state.
Which group are you a member of...

...that gives you a sense of belonging...

...and provides a background against which individual choices can be made...?

For most people this is far more likely to be a religion...
Individuals have a strong interest in their religious culture not being destroyed.

Religious cultures are secure against destruction only if the religions have their own theocratic state.

Individuals have a strong interest in the religions to which they belong having their own state.
P1  Individuals have a strong interest in the religions to which they belong prospering and being respected by others and by themselves.

P2  Religions can prosper and ensure that they are respected by others and by themselves only if they have their own state.

C  Individuals have a strong interest in the religions to which they belong having their own state.
§4. Nations, justice and democracy
‘Free institutions are next to impossible in a country made up of different nationalities...

...Among a people without fellow-feeling, especially if they read and speak different languages...

...the united public opinion necessary to the working of representative government can not exist.’

(John Stuart Mill, *Representative Government*, p.428)
P1 A multi-nation state cannot be a liberal democratic state.

P2 We should do what we can to ensure that states are liberal democratic states.

C We should do what we can to ensure that states are nation states...

...i.e. that national boundaries coincide with state boundaries.
Why can’t multi-nation states be liberal democracies...?

Because instead of making political decisions based on the *general interest*...

...people will make decisions based on the interest of one part of the population...

...namely their nation.
Aren’t there perfectly good examples of multi-national liberal democratic states...?
We could also flesh out an argument similar to the one Rawls addresses in *Political Liberalism*...

Suppose that each nation has its own comprehensive moral doctrine...

Could there be a well-ordered, multi-nation state...?
P1    A state is well-ordered only if everyone accepts – and knows that everyone accepts – the same conception of justice.

P2    If a state is multi-national, its people will accept very different comprehensive moral doctrines.

P3    If people accept very different comprehensive moral doctrines, they cannot accept the same conception of justice.
From P2 and P3...

C1 If a state is multi-national, its people cannot accept the same conception of justice.

From P1 and C1...

C2 A state is well-ordered only if it is not multi-national.
‘Nations are *communities of obligation*...

...in the sense that their members recognize duties to meet the basic needs and protect the basic interests of other members...

...However, they are also large and impersonal communities...

...so in order for these duties to be effectively discharged, they must be assigned and enforced.’

(David Miller, *On Nationality*, p.83)
Is the idea just that securing social justice requires people to be sufficiently motivated that they are prepared to e.g. transfer some of their resources to the less well off...

...and that they are more likely to be sufficiently motivated if the less well off are co-nationals...?
Miller’s point is that people have *special duties of justice* towards their co-nationals...

...and that *these duties* can be effectively discharged only with the help of the basic structure of society...
P1 People have special duties towards people belonging to the same nation.

P2 People cannot effectively discharge any special duties they have towards people belonging to the same nation unless their state is a nation state.

C People cannot discharge their duties unless their state is a nation state.