

Yoram Hazony, 'The Virtue of Nationalism'

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome back. Today I'm going to be discussing this book, The Virtue of Nationalism by Joram Hazony, recently released, causing a lot of conversation and controversy, and well worth reading.

There's a lot that he says within it that people may find thought-provoking, even if frustrating and unpersuasive at times. I've had a lot of different thoughts when reading it, and I wanted to share some of these with you, but I'll give, first of all, an outline of the book. I'll leave the link below for any person who's interested in buying a copy of the book.

It's well worth buying, and there's much to discuss. His definitions of nationalism, a book called The Virtue of Nationalism, is bound to be controversial, but he defines nationalism as, Then later on, he goes on to say, For centuries, the politics of Western nations have been characterised by a struggle between two antithetical visions of world order.

An order of free and independent nations, each pursuing the political good in accordance with its own traditions and understanding, and an order of people united under a single regime of law, promulgated and maintained by a single supranational authority.

And that's what he defines as imperialism. And these two ideal types are explored throughout the book as they compete and oppose each other. It's a very stimulating and, again, as I suggested earlier, frustrating thesis at points.

[1 : 5 4] He sees both the European Union and the American world order as aspects of this imperialism, as manifestations of this attempt to bring humanity under a single sort of government.

And globalism is a new version of this, the old imperialism that we've had for quite some time. Now, the rise of this sort of globalised order and this resistance to nationalism and this pathologisation of nationalism arises, he believes, from a certain reading of World War II, that World War II was caused by nationalism.

And he will go on to argue against this, but it's important to see the sort of theory that he's presenting and where it finds its historical basis.

He argues that scripture presents us with the ideal of the independent nation. And so Israel is seen very much as an ideal of a nation that is charting its own course, that is defined by a certain people that share a common culture and shared history.

Now, he distinguishes this from a certain sort of state that's founded upon race. It's important to notice that the Israelites' conception of the nation has nothing to do with biology, or what we call race.

[3 : 1 6] For biblical nations, everything depends on a shared understanding of history, language and religion that is passed from parents to children, but which outsiders can join as well. Thus, the book of Exodus teaches that there were many Egyptians who attached themselves to the Hebrew slaves in fleeing Egypt, and that they received the Ten Commandments at Sarnia with the rest of Israel.

Similarly, Moses invites the Midianite sheikh Jethro to join the Jewish people, and Ruth the Moabite becomes part of Israel when she is ready to tell Naomi, your people is my people and your God is my God, her son being the forefather of King David himself.

But the ability of Israel to bring these foreign-born individuals into its ranks depends on their willingness to accept Israel's God, laws and understanding of history. Without embracing these central aspects of Israelite tradition, they will not become a part of the Israelite nation.

Now, I think he's overstating things a bit here, that it may not be reduced to a certain people or ethnicity. That's clear enough. But it's very clearly grounded in a shared ancestry, and that does make the concept of nation a bit more complicated.

The whole idea of nation comes from the idea of to be born in a certain place, a place of birth. And he even talks within that context of passing things on from parents to children.

[4 : 42] There is a legacy. There is an inheritance, which means that certain people are insiders to that, to that history, to that culture, to that legacy, in a way that others are not within a traditional nation state.

There are people who can be welcomed as outsiders and gradually integrated into the state. But that process can take generations to occur. It's not something that happens just overnight. And so I think this is something that adds a bit of complexity to his particular claims here, and is one of the areas where he, I think he dodges some of the tough questions.

He argues that the peace of Westphalia after the Thirty Years' War, and the triumph of, leads to the triumph of the Protestant vision of independent nations, over the Catholic vision of some sort of universal Christian empire, and some universal order that's imposed upon Europe and elsewhere.

So this vision, which is a Protestant vision, is founded upon, he believes, two scriptural principles, which he believes are Jewish principles as well. There's a moral minimum that needs to be maintained, some principle of justice and right, that we see an appropriate just order.

And that is something that we see in a king or a ruler, upholding standards of justice and righteousness, and proper courts, these sorts of things within their realm, ensuring that each person is treated appropriately within that realm.

[6 : 13] And then the second principle is the right of national self-determination. This is not a one-size-fits-all approach. So whereas there are principles of justice that can apply across different realms, there are, those principles are applied in a very specific way within this particular national context.

And it's shaped by the customs, by the traditions, by the conventions, and by the various institutions of that people, their shared history, their shared locality, and these things that give them their identity as a distinct people.

So there's some degree of tension between these principles. The plurality of polities allows for creative experimentation as well. So on the one hand, you have these principles that push in a more, arguably a sort of more universal direction, this moral minimum.

And this moral minimum is not just a generic thing. He sees it as founded upon the law of the Old Testament. So there's expectations of some sort of religious foundation as well.

There's religious order. There's an upholding of the basic morality of not killing, not committing adultery, not bearing false witness, these sorts of things.

[7 : 30] But also some sort of expectation of some upholding of religious commitments implied. And also practice of Sabbath, things like that.

And so these things are not just a generic set of commandments. This encourages exploration of different types of life, different ways of living, while preventing dangerous ideas and practices from spreading too quickly.

So if one country experiments with some dangerous ideas, those don't instantly spread to the next country. National self-determination allows for cross-pollination of ideas, but those ideas are held in some degree of check by boundaries.

And it means that we can take on good ideas from other nations. As different nations experiment with different sorts of polities, people can learn from their neighbouring nations. And nations can change and evolve and take on new ideas, but they don't have to just succumb to this universal order, this one size fits all.

Liberal construction, by contrast, presumes that only the principle of individual freedom lies at the basis of legitimate political order.

[8 : 43] And this is a failure to take into account just the basic character of human society. Human society is characterised by certain fundamental human bonds that are easily ignored in these sorts of approaches.

He writes, It is painfully lacking as a description of the empirical political world, in which mutual loyalties bind human beings into families, tribes and nations, and each of us receives a certain religious and cultural inheritance as a consequence of being born into such collectives.

It ignores the responsibilities that are intrinsic to both inherited and adopted membership in collectives of this kind, establishing demands on individuals that do not arise as a result of consent, and do not disappear if consent is withheld.

And it is oblivious to the effects of a common adversity, which brings inevitable challenges and hardships to families, tribes and nations, reinforcing the responsibilities of the collective, and turning them into the most acutely felt and often immovable features of the moral and political landscape.

So, he writes, In real life, nations are communities bound together by bonds of mutual loyalty, carrying forward particular traditions from one generation to the next.

[9 : 57] And this also requires a recognition of the significance of boundaries between nations. Boundaries between nations are not just arbitrary lines on the map. They are boundaries that are deeply felt.

They represent the movement from one body of people to another, and that body language is important. A body is connected with the self, that this is one national selfhood to another.

And so, replacing the nationalist Protestant order by a rationalist liberal order that seeks to overturn those boundaries, and to seek to bring all human beings into this collective under one principle of government, is something that he's firmly opposed to in this book.

He argues, along those lines, that Nazi Germany was an imperialist state. It was seeking to dominate the entire earth, and to overthrow the freedom of nations. It was not, as some people would suggest, a fundamentally nationalist order, but it was an imperialist order.

And what we have within the Second and the First World Wars are attempts to resist and stand against German imperialism in its various forms.

[11 : 07] It's German imperialism that sought to dismantle the system of independent nations and bring all of Europe under some sort of German rule or German dominance.

And this is related, again, to Immanuel Kant's vision of dismantling nation states and uniting all of the world under a universal government to bring perpetual peace. Another expression of this is the Pax Americana, the order that's established worldwide by American political dominance as the world power, the world superpower, that is fairly...

We have a single world superpower for a number of decades, and now this offers peace in exchange for a loss of independence or a limiting of countries' independence, that they give up a measure of their sovereignty, but as they become protectorates of the US order, they can have security and peace.

There's analogies between this liberal imperial order and that of the medieval period, and he makes some interesting remarks on this front. These disagreements over how the international liberal empire is to be governed are often described as if they are historically novel, but this is hardly so.

For the most part, they are simply the reincarnation of thread-worn medieval debates between the emperor and the pope over how the international Catholic empire should be governed. With the role of the emperor being reprised by those, mostly Americans, who insist that authority must be concentrated in Washington, the political and military centre, and the role of the papacy being played by those, mostly European but also many American academics, who see ultimate authority as residing with the highest interpreters of the universal law, namely the judicial institutions of the United Nations and the European Union.

[13 : 06] And so within this sort of liberal universal order, there is this notion that the unification of Europe, for instance, is the only reasonable position.

Any movement in the direction of nationalism is regarded as ignorant or pathological, a reversion to a more primitive stage of government. And there are various forms of resistance to this sort of liberal imperialism that he describes that have different characters to them.

So first of all, there's the neo-Catholic opposition to liberal imperial order. And that's based upon resisting the... It's based upon upholding the first principle of Protestant government, which is the moral minimum.

And in that case, it's Roman Catholics arguing on issues like abortion, arguing on issues like same-sex marriage, these sorts of issues that argue for a fundamental principle of law that is not just a neutral system of law, but it's founded upon a tradition that's handed down of scriptural law and of natural law that's associated with that, that's seen from that particular perspective.

Now, this sort of neo-Catholic approach is, on the other hand, quite favourable to international bodies, whether that's the European Union, it's quite friendly towards that, and it can be very friendly towards things like the United Nations and these sorts of systems.

[14 : 37] On the other hand, there's a neo-nationalist or statist approach, which holds loyalty to the state as the highest end and, on the other hand, can overturn or undermine or not really take seriously this moral minimum, this importance of the state upholding an impartial justice.

And as a result, these movements can go often in a fairly troubling direction, a fairly ugly direction, that sort of nationalism. Conservatives, he argues, however, should bring both principles together.

Both this fundamental deposit of biblical and natural law and also a recognition of the need for nations to govern their own destiny, to be independent and self-determining.

We need, he argues then, that we need both, to understand the significance of the nation, we need both a philosophy of government and a philosophy of political order.

He discusses this within the book in a helpful way. He writes, When these questions are taken into, actually, I have in mind questions such as the following.

[15 : 49] What allows a community to be sufficiently cohesive to be ordered as a state? Is the state formed when independent individuals consent to living under government or through the unification of previously existing cohesive communities?

Is the state really the best institution for ordering human life? Or are there other forms of political order, such as a clan or a feudal order, that are better? And if the state is the best form of political order, should authority be in the hands of one universal state or dispersed among many competing states?

When these questions are taken into account, we see that political philosophy is naturally divided into two subjects, one more fundamental than the other. One subject is the philosophy of government, which seeks to determine the best form of government, given the existence of a state with a high degree of internal unity and independence.

Prior to this is the philosophy of political order, which seeks to understand the causes of political order, and on the basis of this understanding, determine what are the different forms of political order available to us and which of them are best.

Individuals who are confident of the cohesion and independence of the state in which they live are naturally attracted to the philosophy of government. On the other hand, if we're talking about the philosophy of political order, that is something that goes down to the very foundations, the depths of what it means to live in a political society.

[17 : 12] He writes, philosophy of government is useful in its proper, limited sphere, but to be competent, it must be built upon an understanding of the underlying causes of the formation, cohesion, and independence of the state, as well as of its destruction.

And so political order, he argues, is founded upon institutions. It's not just something that randomly arises as people consent or agree to live together.

Rather, there are these fundamental institutions which are the foundation of the order that we exist in. Family, clan, and tribe first and foremost, and things built up out of these orders.

Political order can be held, or these institutions can be held together by various things. They can be held together by coercion, that if you step outside of their bounds or go up against them, you can be met with force, or it can be, they can be held together by financial incentives and interest, or they can be held together by a deep common interest.

And this is associated with the idea that our self is an expansive thing. The self expands in loyalty as others are implicated and included in our identities. And this creates an inside and an outside.

[18 : 28] So for instance, as I am related to my family, there is an inside to my family. I'm loyal to my family members. I have a deep affection for them and a concern for their well-being.

And their well-being is not something that's hermetically sealed from my well-being. These things are related together. So as they do well, I do well. We are bound together in our well-being.

And so this creates, for a nation, as people are brought together in a common interest, it brings a certain sort of cohesion. And when he talks about the nation, he talks about this movement from tribes or from family to clan to tribe.

These are different levels of loyalty. Like ties of loyalty to the clan, the bond of loyalty to one's tribe or nation grows out of loyalty to one's parents. The child experiences the suffering and triumphs of his tribe or nation as his own, because he experiences the suffering and triumphs of his parents as his own.

And the parents feel and give expression to the suffering and triumphs of the tribe or nation as these unfold. And so these things are very much transmitted through family ties.

[19 : 46] So the strength of the nation, the strength of the tribe, are very much associated with the bond between parent and child. The order of tribes and clans is the proto-political order.

The state develops out of the weakness of this order, because this order of tribes and clans is held together in a way that makes it difficult to achieve peace, because you have these warring tribes and warring interests.

It's also difficult to achieve justice, because you have capricious leaders and you have a system where it's very hard to achieve justice, where people are fundamentally at war, because justice becomes weaponized and justice cannot really arbitrate when there is no fundamental peace at the root of society.

And so there's a need to move beyond this tribal order. This proto-political order then leads to the development of the state. And free states, as different tribes join together willingly, or despotic states, as certain tribes dominate over others and establish a rule through military might.

Now, these different sorts of institutions can be distinguished from each other. So a family is not like a business. A business is held together by financial interest. Individuals are fairly dispensable.

[21 : 10] You can hire and fire. And little loyalty exists. People aren't going to work for their business at great personal sacrifice to themselves. Not usually.

Except in certain extreme cases, people don't have a deep sense of loyalty to their company or to the boss that they work for. Families, however, are different.

They pass on a legacy from generation to generation. And there's a sense of deep loyalty and mutual connection within these contexts. The empire is a state that is in principle boundless.

It's an amorphous collective. And so it does not have the same structures of loyalty at its heart. There's a difference between the sort of tribal order and the order of the empire that is not just one of scale.

So it's not just that we relate on a very local scale in the tribe or the clan or the family and then that's just scaled up and up until you get the nation and then the empire. Rather, the empire is a fundamental shift in the notion of order.

[22 : 14] It's the difference between loyalty to familiar individuals, to one's neighbours, and loyalty to the abstract imperial project, its ideology, and to a generic humanity.

A humanity that isn't particular, that isn't the humanity of one's neighbour, but is the humanity of just a humanity in general, an abstract humanity, and often an ideologised humanity, a humanity that appears as such within an ideology that can often exclude certain people as falling short of the true reality of that humanity.

The tribal person who places loyalty to their family and their clan over loyalty to empire will be seen by an imperialist as pathological. Tribal order is vulnerable, as I've already noted, to war, to capricious rule, and to injustice and the inability to obtain justice.

Imperial order, by contrast, establishes an expanding realm of peace at the cost of independence and self-determination. The principle of the unity of humanity encourages violation of the boundaries of other people in order to expand rational government order over all of them.

And so the empire works in terms of abstract and universal categories of humanity. It works in terms, it works in terms of concepts of justice that are universalised and detached from any sort of distributive sense of justice.

[23 : 48] universal human rights, that sort of thing. And an empire will usually have a particular ruling nation at its heart. Even as they champion the universal interests of humanity, the domination of one particular group or the hierarchical superiority of that group tends to be advanced.

The nation is a third type of political order and this is at the crux of Hazoni's argument. By a nation, I mean a number of tribes with a shared heritage, usually including a common language or religious traditions and a past history of joining together against common enemies, characteristics that permit tribes so united to understand themselves as a community distinct from other such communities that are their neighbours.

By a national state, I mean a nation whose disparate tribes have come together under a single standing government, independent of all other governments. These definitions mean in the first place that a nation is a form of community, a human collective recognising itself as distinct from other human collectives.

Such a community can exist independently of the state and does not have to include every individual living within the state. Second, these definitions mean that the unity that's created is always a composite because the tribes united in this way continue to exist after national independence.

So this is not an abstraction. The nation is not comprised of familiar individuals but it is an impersonal abstraction in the same way that humanity is an abstraction.

- [25 : 32] Yet at the same time, the nation is also distinguished from all of humanity in that it possesses a quite distinctive character, having its own language, laws and religious traditions, its own history of past failure and achievement.

This means that each nation is different from all other nations and that to the individual who is a member of a certain nation, it is known as a concrete and familiar being, much like a person, family or clan.

And the life of a nation is also transmitted through families and through this very familial order which is not the imposition of a universal order from above but the transmission of something through these familial ties as those draw you out into a greater order but also are part of these most familial bonds, the family, the clan, the tribe and the people.

And so the nation comes at the inflection point between anarchy and empire, he writes, a new ordering principle rooted in the moral order, the principle of national freedom.

From the principle of empire it takes the idea of an allegiance that is directed towards the abstraction of the state rather than to familiar men, the practical effect of which is the creation of a large space of domestic peace and the possibility of an impartial judicial system that is no longer tied to the politics of familiar collectives.

- [26 : 59] From the principle of anarchy it retains the ideal of a ruler devoted to the unique needs and interests, traditions and aspirations of a particular community that is different from all others.

This finds expression in the aim of government over a single nation, an aim that devalues foreign conquest and for the first time permits the conception of the freedom of nations other than one's own as a potential good in itself.

So nations establish a sense of collective agency and self. The independence of the nation is experienced by the nationalist as his own independence. When your nation has freedom that's something that you experience at a gut level that your nation has some self-determination that it is charting its own course and you are part of that, you are invested in its destiny and you are part of something that's far bigger than yourself, something that's a transmission of a heritage that goes back to your ancestors, distant ancestors and is the experience of participating in things that have been laid up for you by past generations and giving those to generations still to come.

It's very much an order based upon the generative order of humanity. This is not just individuals in a single snapshot in time.

This is something that transcends generations, that passes on from one generation to the next. Nations can push violence to their periphery and they also discourage imperial expansionism.

- [28 : 32] It recognizes the weakness of empires in their unnatural agglomeration of people. So an empire is weak when it brings together a lot of people that don't naturally fit together. They have no coherent peoplehood and so they easily fracture and end up dividing from each other.

When that central power loses its power then all the people start to divide and go their different ways and we see familial lines appearing again on the maps.

This sort of attempt to alloy these different people seldom works very effectively. It does not have the strength of independent peoples who are bound together by a shared spirit.

Now this is not a denial that nations can be violent. Nations can definitely be violent but the ends of national violence are limited and this is a very important passage where he makes that point.

Even if the national state does not necessarily tend towards peace there is another claim to be made on its behalf which is hardly less significant. Because the national state inherits a political tradition that disdains the conquest of foreign nations wars between national states tend to be relatively limited in their aims in the resources invested in them and in the scale of the destruction and misery they cause.

[29 : 51] This has frequently been emphasised with respect to the national states of Western Europe after the Westphalia treaties which for centuries continued to fight limited wars among themselves with an eye to gaining political or economic advantage but refrained from engaging in unlimited warfare with the purpose of eliminating other national states entirely.

Europe has of course known general wars of virtually unlimited destruction devastation in the past 400 years. The wars that now haunt Europe and with it the world were not however wars among national states seeking to gain advantage over their rivals rather they were ideological wars fought in the name of some universal doctrine that was supposed to bring salvation to all of humanity.

For the sake of this universal doctrine armies were sent out into the world to swallow one nation after another with the aim of overturning the established order of life in every nation conquered.

This was the case in the 30 years war which was fought in order to assert a German Catholic empire over Europe. It was true as well of the Napoleonic wars which sought to overthrow the old political order and establish a French liberal empire across an entire continent and beyond it and it was no less true of the Second World War in which a Nazi German Nazi empire aimed at establishing a new order according to its own perverse universal theory of how mankind's salvation was to be brought about.

So nations can pursue a collective freedom in mutual loyalty and concern but they can also champion a sort of non-monopolistic order with multiple competing centres of power and this balance of power between nations this national order with many different nations in a certain location is not primarily about securing safety, security and peace as we tend to speak a balance of power but about securing independence.

[31 : 49] It's to ensure that people are not dominated over by one particular state but rather there are different states present that ensure that one state does not rule over all even if that state might bring peace.

Competitive political order rather than one based upon universal rational order is what is at stake here. National independence is based not upon universal reason but upon empiricism a sort of modesty epistemic modesty and a sort of I mean what I think Rowan Williams calls contemplative pragmatism in the case of Hooker's philosophy that this vision is one that takes into account these ideals and thinks about deeper principles but it's very pragmatic that's rooted on the soil of reality.

He writes again The choice between an imperialist and a nationalist politics thus corresponds to a choice between two theories of knowledge.

In western history at least imperialism has tended to be associated with a rationalist theory of knowledge. Having an unbounded trust in human reason such a theory is bold in its assertion that the great universal truths are always at hand and that this knowledge needs now only to be brought to bear on humanity.

Nationalism on the other hand has tended to be based on an empirical standpoint exercising a moderate scepticism with regard to the products of human reason and mindful of the calamities that men have brought upon us in the political realm time and again by their overconfidence in their own reason.

[33 : 29] And so he compares this to the difference between socialist order and capitalist order. Socialist order is very much this universal theory of government and political rule and economic rule whereas capitalism recognises the need for competition between different agencies and the need for something other than centralised order.

For instance if you want to distribute resources well socialist order and central planning can often fail desperately in that it just does not have the requisite knowledge of the particulars whereas capitalist order with its supply and demand and its market structures can achieve that.

That's important to recognise here that capitalism is not the same as the free market. There can be socialist free markets and anyway the point stands as a more general point about free markets as opposed to central planned economies but he's talking about a more empirical and competitive order and the benefits of that and the nation tends to produce a certain sort of creative fruitfulness in its citizens as they have a sense of an expanding self a self that is rich and enlarged a self that has a deep agency and investment in a national project that is not merely protected by a government that it is not part of but is part of an intergenerational project of forming a particular peoplehood such a national selfhood that is produced in individual persons can foster a deep creativity and imagination and a rich culture of creation and art and these sorts of things.

It's one of the reasons why he suggests that there has been particular flourishing of art and creation and invention within the context of the nation state that it allows for an enlargement of the human spirit in a way that empires do not.

It also allows for greater individual liberties within the imperial order we do not have the same investment in the well-being of our neighbours whereas in a national order we do have that sort of investment and when an imperial state experiences triumph or failure the subject nations and their subjects more generally the individuals within them do not necessarily experience this as happening to them it happens on this vast scale far above them but it's not our identity that's at stake in the same way so when individual liberties are given they're often used against the empire they're often used in a way that breaks down the central authority and so the empires can often restrict individual liberties and close down these things limit freedom of expression because there is not the same sense of a common good a common investment in a shared project and when that is lost individual freedom becomes a threat rather than a boon and he argues controversially that federalism does not provide a viable alternative to imperialism there's a difference of course here he argues between voluntary and compulsory adjudication in a federal realm so you could have a number of states getting together to voluntarily adjudicate some of their disputes but as soon as you have some sort of force that backs up that adjudication then it becomes a problem when an international federation has coercive power it will tend to overwhelm and undermine national freedom to impose peace and it will maintain something of the original order perhaps but in an increasingly weakened form so he gives the example of the US originally intended to be a fairly federal order with very distinct states within it increasingly state self-determination was revoked by central government and this was for various reasons some of them are quite understandable and justified but that federal order will not sustain the autonomy of different groups this is similar to the tribal order when the nation is established there will still exist a residual tribal orientation and identity but that will increasingly diminish in its strength and the centre of gravity of power will shift towards the nation and so when you have a federal order that will tend to lead to the internationalist order becoming the centre of gravity of power the EU is another example for him where national self-determination is slowly ebbing away and so in this context a certain theory of subsidiarity has become a euphemism for empire there's no strong central executive as there is in the case of the US but he argues that in the case of the EU the lack of a strong central executive is largely because the

[38 : 28] EU is a protectorate of the US now is it possible to establish a neutral or civic state a state which divides nation from state that says it doesn't matter where what culture you have what religion you have what background you have all these sorts of things people are fairly interchangeable there's no need for these sorts of things to form a working state divorcing state from family tribal and national traditions where we learn to honour and revere particular things is this a possibility can we establish a neutral state and he argues we can't really what happens in this sort of situation is the motives that lead to loyalty that give the state its strength are lacking when we no longer have these structures when it's no longer tied into familial tribal and national traditions and the strength of a particular culture and peoplehood and we can see this in various ways with the degree to which people are willing to fight for their country and in many countries in the

West the willingness to fight for the country has rapidly diminished as they've ceased to function as nations and have sought to act as neutral states and he talks about the problem of transmitting this sort of thing if it's going to work it has to be transmitted even this sort of neutral state ideal has to be transmitted in a familial structure and within that familial structure what you tend to have is just it gains its strength from familial loyalties and it will become associated with those familial loyalties and so there's no neutral state every state is to some extent or other a national state and the United States he argues is held together by the bonds of mutual loyalty that unite the American nation an English speaking nation whose constitutional and religious traditions were originally rooted in the Bible Protestantism

Republicanism and the common law of England the passage of centuries and the incorporation of a large Catholic community and other smaller communities means in effect that new tribes have been adopted into the same American nation but this has not in any way changed the fact that Americans remain a single highly distinctive nation again this is something worth returning to in the future it's a very strong statement and I think wrong particularly in the current situation I'm not sure that America qualifies as a nation in the sense that he's talking about it anymore the feasibility or appropriateness of national identity depends upon various contingent factors so it could be geography so the fact that there's the Atlantic Ocean between the US and Europe gives it some sort of natural tendency to become an independent nation same with the fact of the English Channel and the identity of the British Isles as distinct entities and the way that government works within for instance England

Scotland Wales is very much has a natural connection to just the geography of being all on the same Ireland defensible territory if there's not a defensible territory it's hard to have a nation there needs to be military might sufficient military might to maintain that territory there has to be some sort of internal cohesion a capacity to exercise robust government that ensures a monopoly of power a monopoly of force there has to be a relation a positive relation to the broader order of nations etc etc and so for all of these things it's prudential there's no common principle by which every single people must be an independent nation rather the viability of national independence and the desirability of national independence must be determined prudentially not all people are in a position to have national independence many people couldn't defend a territory for instance and there's a principle he argues of parsimony as well that if there's a group of people that we don't want to just multiply national entities beyond reason and so we'd like to connect them in as in relatively we need to cut with the grain of reality we need to recognize the shape of peoples but we also need to recognize that there are some natural affinities between people so rather than in many cases forming a distinct nation why not just connect it with an existing nation in the neighborhood and bring the two together and so we need to be empiricists recognizing the shape of peoplehoods the shape of peoples in a particular region and how a nation would correspond to those people groups now he defends nationalism against the charge of hatred and so nationalism has often been accused of stirring up hatred and sectarian passions but then he argues that universal imperialist governments actually can be even more driven by hatred they cannot tolerate opposition to their values when they meet people who will not accept their values there is a deep hostility and he connects that with the practice of

Christianity as well that Christianity with its universal values finds it very hard to deal with the fact that there are people who resist and represent sites of opposition to those values and there's a degree of truth there that needs to be considered I think there are problems with this approach and some of these things again go back to his treatment of these issues of universalism particularism within his treatment of Hebrew Scripture and Jewish values as opposed to Christian values and his philosophy of Hebrew Scripture but there is something here to consider what is it about a certain form of Christian universalism that has led to a deep hostility and imperial impulse to override other cultures where they do not submit to that universal principle is there something about Christian universal values that can be protected against some of these criticisms that can guard against some of these dangers when applied properly

[45 : 14] I think there are ways to protect them against this misuse but this is a discussion for another time it's an important criticism to consider though he also connects this resistance to the particular this resistance to something that holds out against the universal principle as something related to the hatred of the state of Israel Israel the state hatred for the state of Israel arises from a fierce opposition to nationalism the Jewish desire for self-determination and for nationhood was to establish agency national agency to protect them from another holocaust to give them some sense of a firm secure peoplehood being able to secure their identity their destiny and their to determine their own selves rather than depending upon the fickle and proven unreliable protection of other states that they would have a state of their own corresponding to their national identity they have a distinct national identity so they should have a distinct state identity as well to correspond with that the Jews however are hated for this reason he argues because and he's writing from a Jewish context in Israel because they're judged as

Europeans who have apostatized from the ideal of universal government according to universal reason that limits the significance of national boundaries national identities peoplehoods and treats people as interchangeable and treats people as Jews are judged as Europeans they are seen particularly harshly to have fallen away from the ideal of post-nationalism from this international rational order and as they have pursued their own nation-state they are seen to have apostatized that Zionism is a rejection of the European ideal and we see this in other cases as well whether it's in Hungary whether it's in its failure to go along with the European expectation to open its borders to lots of immigrants or whether it's the UK in Brexit or whether it's something like America's determination to set its own course on certain matters on environmental policy and other things like that and not submit to the universal order of international law or whether it's seen in more problematic cases like

South Africa and apartheid in these sorts of cases people of European origin are held to a particularly high standard and while other countries of Africa or the Middle East Muslim or African countries may be regarded as backward and not expected to have moved beyond the stage of nationalism any people of European identity that seek self-determination or that push against this internationalist order are treated as people who are resisting something that they should have risen to they are people who are backwards in some way or other and that hatred of the universal order of these dissidents is very clearly seen in the way that people who support Brexit for instance are regarded as ignorant or pathological not just wrong but as those who are in some sense they've fallen short of what they should be as human beings now this resistance to Israel and Jewish identity is also something that has some history if we go to the book of

Esther and chapter three we see the description of Haman of the Jews within the nation he writes what happens here is you have a nation without a land a nation without a coherent place to call their own they're scattered all among the different peoples of the provinces but yet they have a distinct way of life they have distinct customs and it just isn't fitting to leave them like that it's as if they are a creature in a cartoon that has run off the edge of the precipice and just is refusing to fall it's time that they did fall and recognised that their nationhood has gone and any nationhood they could possess is in resistance to the rationality of the enlightened imperial order which they're supposed to succumb to they're supposed to give themselves into that and then they'll enjoy peace and prosperity and security within that empire but to maintain national identity and that sense of independence is to go against everything that the empire stands for and so the empire comes with hatred for the individual distinct people group that will maintain its identity against the empire and it promises peace in exchange for independence whereas the state the national state has a certain sort of epistemic modesty it weakens tribalism it weakens skepticism and it brings skepticism and imperialism to temper tribal loyalties but it does still root us in a particular context in a particular shared identity imperialism he argues at the very conclusion of his book is in the final analysis a shrinking back to a sort of childhood he writes there is no moral maturity in the yearning for a benevolent empire to rule the earth and take care of us judging for us and enforcing its judgments upon us it is in fact nothing but a plea to return to the dependency of childhood when our parents took care of us and judged for us in all important matters true moral maturity is attained only when we stand on our own feet learning to govern ourselves and to defend ourselves without needlessly harming those around us and where possible also extending assistance to our neighbours and friends and the same is true of nations which reach a genuine moral maturity when they can live in freedom and determine their own course benefiting others where this is feasible yet with no aspiration to impose their rule and their laws on other nations by force so what should we say about this book there are a lot of thoughts that I have from

Hazoni's arguments some very basic things to note is that this should be read in dialogue with his philosophy of Hebrew scripture as the grounding of a lot of Hazoni's thinking can be found in that book where he goes into a lot more depth other things to notice the theological and philosophical roots within Old Testament scripture are important to consider especially where he presents those as standing in contrast to Christianity as he does very strongly within the treatment of this subject in the philosophy of Hebrew scripture nonetheless he sees this nationalist order as a Protestant order an order that arose around Protestant thought within Europe and that it should be celebrated on that particular front and developed as a Protestant order perhaps ironically his approach isn't empirical enough this is rectified to some extent within the end notes where he does get into some detailed discussion of various issues but there's a lot that needs to be said about the particular way in which certain nations qualify as nations so what it means for Japan to be a nation is very different from what it means for the

[53 : 27] US to be a nation or what it means for England to be a nation England is a nation as part of the United Kingdom and what does the United Kingdom mean relative to nationhood these sorts of questions raise a lot of complexities that unsettle something of the ideal types that he has going on these ideal types more concerningly tend to falter precisely where they need to bear the most weight so for instance in his discussion of Nazi Germany I think he fails to grasp something of the strength of an emphasis upon the particularism of a specific people and the problems there that this is not just imperialism and imperialism again needs to be spoken of in different ways what the British empire means is very different from the sort of empire that the

Napoleonic empire would represent or the Pax Americana or the Roman empire these are very different principles that govern these different sorts of empires and it seems to me that often collapsing these into just these single ideal types of empire or nation obscures as much as it reveals at the points where they are most needed to reveal key distinctions so particularly in the case of Nazi Germany I think there are real problems there and he would need far more careful categories if he's going to truly be illuminating in his discussion of those issues other comments to make I think that his discussion of the Jews needs to be tempered by recognition that the Jews have not just represented nationalism as a resistance to universal law these sorts of things but they've also been seen as resistant to national particularity as unpatriotic rootless cosmopolitans and this notion of international

Jewry this Jewish international conspiracy that's involved in radical movements that's involved in secret organizations that's involved in the high regions of government and finance and the economy and money lending all these sorts of things seeking to undermine national independence and to establish this order that is run in a way that advantageous that is advantageous for dispersed people that breaks down the power of people that are located and rooted in a specific context and makes Jewish interests less dependent upon their protection and enables that sort of breaking down dissolving of peoplehoods in the name of an international order and his approach focuses a lot upon the threat of Zionism but often the hatred for the Jews has depended far more upon the way that they represent a certain sort of cosmopolitanism that is far more closely associated with his imperialism and that

I think he needs to take into account he hasn't done justice to that particular issue and beyond this there were certain key issues he barely touched upon in the book certain issues that are absolutely at the heart of the current debates so the first one is immigration it's all very well to talk about nationhood but what does this mean in societies that are increasingly formed of immigrants what do we do at the point and when is the point when the foundation of peoplehood has become so corroded that it cannot sustain a nation anymore I think we're seeing some of this within the UK where any attempt to assert nationhood or peoplehood and a majority people that is hospitable to other groups but really maintains its majority and really maintains its peoplehood and the nation state is attached to that majority peoplehood that would be met with considerable opposition and understandably so because increasingly it does not seem to be feasible and there is a danger of nationalism arising in such context precisely because there has been such considerable immigration that arising nationalism is a push to return to an order that is now inaccessible to us apart from great violence or certainly seems to be that way so how do you make the current situation workable

I'm not sure has only helped so much on that front he points towards a better order a more humane order an order that's related far more closely to the natural organic structure of human society but when you have broken up and dissolved human society with mass immigration what then I don't think there is a humane return to such an order to be found I think it's going to be difficult we can mitigate the order that we find ourselves in to some extent and we can maintain a certain degree of nationalism but the very fact that our nations are seeking to astroturf a sort of peoplehood with notions like British values is a sign that they do not believe that there's a peoplehood to be found much anymore rather what we must do is work with these poor ingredients that we have people that aren't really connected together lots of detached individuals that are seeking their own interests but which do not coalesce to form something greater than themselves and so what you have then is a government trying to create peoplehood out of detached individuals rather than recognising that there is a peoplehood that pre-exists the government and the government stands for the nation and so nationalism really is a danger in such a context because nationalism is no longer rooted in an actual peoplehood that can be empirically located and identified there is a tradition that's moving throughout history but it becomes this construction of the state that is imposed upon reality that isn't really it doesn't fit very neatly and it has to cut off or excise certain elements that it cannot be removed without some sort of violence or oppression and that really is a problem at what point have we gone too far

[60 : 09] I think there is a need to return to a certain sort of nationalism but we need to invent it can only ever be a half turn because we need to invent something that enables us to assimilate a great number of people that have disparate backgrounds the old order of the UK for instance with English Irish Scottish and Welsh identities coming together with a broadly shared Protestant order in a system of common law in a system with common customs and tribal identities and these sorts of things that's not sustainable in the long term something else has to be invented and so there needs to be a work of imagination I think in our current context and has only doesn't really help with that it also his work does however help to show why things like immigration and the EU are such flashpoint symbolic issues it helps to see why nationhood is the agency of a people we talk about our government not just as the government that is over us but a government that represents us that stands for our distinct identity as a nation that's distinct from other peoples as a people that has a particular legacy that carries on now other people may be knit into that legacy over time but that legacy is a particular one it's a legacy bound up with the

English language with its culture with its literature with its institutions even its political institutions and its governmental institutions like the monarchy or the House of Commons and the House of Lords around sports that we play like cricket and football and around a certain location a certain sort of countryside a certain set of certain tradition of architecture all these sorts of things that's part of what it means to be within the UK now for the continuation of that tradition it's hard to see how that's going to continue on its current form or its historical form and there's a danger that when we've lost that what do we have what we have instead is no longer something that is our government no longer something that is expressing our peoplehood standing for and representing our peoplehood but we have something that's imposed upon imposing a universal order that uproots us and that's imposed upon our peoplehood in a way that is oppressive and I think that's one of the reasons why mass immigration is so strongly opposed because it's one of the means by which a peoplehood is broken down and the government ceases to be our government representing our peoplehood and standing for our nation and increasingly becomes the imposition of an internationalist technocratic order upon the population something that undermines our sovereignty and our dominion as well that this is our land our land that we have grown up in that we have roots in that go back centuries millennia and so there's a shift in power from people to abstract government now I mentioned earlier his description of the US and he quotes from

John Jay in the Federalist Papers Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country the US to one united people a people descended from the same ancestors speaking the same language professing the same religion attached to the same principles of government very similar in their manners and customs and who by joint councils arms and efforts fighting side by side throughout a long and bloody war have nobly established general liberty and independence now that's a very romantic view of the US even back when it was written in the 1800s 18th century but it's even less feasible now after mass fairly indiscriminate immigration from different countries America does not represent a majority nationhood in the same way that it once did there are ways in which that still hangs on to some degree but it does not seem to me that that national vision is realistic in the modern context in the US and indeed even historically it has been a vision that has marginalised certain large communities and continues to do so so how does this work in the current context

I don't believe that has only helped on that and his failure to get into these nitty gritty questions I mean how do you deal with racial tensions within the US when the US is supposedly a nation formed upon an Anglo dominant Anglo maybe Anglo German dominance in society how do you deal with that when there's a rapid change in the demographics of the nation so that that dominant community may no longer be the dominant community in or may no longer represent majority in 40 years time how do you deal with that sort of situation again I don't think he helps I think he's presenting a number of visions here that are unrealistic overly romantic and not sufficiently grounded in the historical and current realities and this brings to me to a second issue which is probably at the nub of so much of what's the so many of the problems here because I'm very sympathetic to

Hazzoni's vision of the good but I'm far less convinced by his idea that it's prudent or realistic within the current context to move to that sort of order in the way that his approach would seem to suggest so within a piece from the national review a couple of days ago it quoted John Jay that same quote from that same quote that Hazzoni quotes but it presented him as the opponent of Alexander Hamilton's position which is a true alternative and in the words of the author of that article as a nation we are united by our desire to make money off one another which is a pretty apt description of what national identity increasingly becomes in a capitalist age has only mentions capitalism positively as an alternative to the universalism and the ideological tendencies of socialism but modern capitalism is arguably far more insidious in its inherent drive to universalise things and to move towards a universal and deracinated world order and I don't think he gets into this capitalism dissolves social ties uproots people moves them around all the time mixing them up it overthrows customs!

[67 : 05] and traditions it celebrates individualism over the common good choice over loyalty and it renders people interchangeable within the managerial structure which is increasingly determinative of our existence that we are determined as consumers and as labour indiscriminate labour and we have now the structures of our life and our work are not the organic structures of human societies but scalable replica and transplantable systems and our governments increasingly take that approach too for nations that exist within the current globalized economy it's very hard to maintain that sort of identity when all the force of the globalized economy is pushing in the other direction the global economy is one that is encouraging all this movement of people that's encouraging a formation of selfhood that no longer has a sense of agency in a collective national agency or something like that it no longer has a sense of selfhood achieved through having a realm of dominion of one's own land sovereignty these things don't register in the same way in an individualistic capitalist order it no longer does the movement from generation to generation to generation and the transmission of a legacy matter in the same way rather what matters is money here and now and so that whole order that the nationalist structure is built upon is broken down and increasingly as we function as detached individuals the state the nation state is hollowed out its principles its values and it no longer is as feasible in the same way empires have been built around economies for a long time peoples are held together by their economies and so

Hamilton's vision is not entirely unrealistic in the sense that we are united by our dealings with one another but an economy and the dealings that we have with one another should be so much richer and broader within the vision of the nation it's a vision where people intermarry it's a vision where people live together and worship together it's a vision of reality where people live and develop strong communities over many generations in a single location and yet when that is all reduced we just have this residual desire to make money off each other and for the nation that's built around the economy genuine independence of agency and dominion the strength of community these sorts of things are sacrificed for economic wealth and security and I think increasingly the sort of imperial order that we have today is not primarily defined by the EU or by the

United Nations or by American power and its world order it's defined by the economy it's defined by globalism it's defined by big business by Apple Google Facebook these big movements of the new economy and then these big businesses of the old economy too and so that is the reality that he just fails to deal with and again I think for all the values that he puts forward which are really good values and things that are ideals to be pursued and recognised I think that he does not engage with the actual problem as it exists on the ground which is that our society is determined by its economy and the economy has broken down all these structures it's scattered us moved us around it's assimilated us it's acted as a universal asset upon society and what is left is a structure where the deeper forms of identification the expansion of the self has been replaced for security and it's been replaced for just prosperity in a very narrow sense we've lost the sovereignty of the self we've become alienated from our labour we've become people that no longer have a sense of dominion and sovereignty in the land we've lost a sense of a peoplehood that extends over history but we've got

TVs we've got lots of good consumer goods we've got fast cars we've got all these other things and that's what we have in exchange for it and this is essentially an imperial order of a different type and his failure to deal with that or even to I think fully appreciate the problem or appreciate even to a large extent is one of the greatest weaknesses of this book furthermore I think that this highlights one of the dangers that we face in the current coming years what happens when there's little that binds us to our neighbours when we no longer need to engage in economic dealings with them now there has been a certain form of economic order of peace that's been maintained through trade as people trade with each other across states the danger of war is an economic danger and so there's a greater incentive to maintain peace and so trade and merchants have been a real force for good in certain respects in maintaining peace peace but what happens when we lose an economic interest in our neighbour what then what happens when parts of the population become an economic liability as they are increasingly becoming what about the situation that we have at the moment when big companies routinely make statements that are directly against the values of vast numbers of the

US population what in that sort of situation and here I think there needs to be a return to some sense of national identity identity some recovery of something along those lines or some rather discovery some imaginative creation of something of that sort in the current context now it's great if you live in a country that has these things maintained to some degree but very few do and even those countries that would seem to maintain a national identity of so dissolved and broken down internal structures of identity the structures of the family the clan the tribe these sorts of things the connections between the generations the connections between the sex the sexes in marriage but then also the sexes in their own groups those groups have all been dissolved in various ways and as a result even things that would look like nations are fairly sickly and I think example in certain ways somewhere like

[73 : 56] Japan it retains a very strong national identity in some respects but many other areas society is ailing so what do we do I think we need to present something a bit more realistic than his only gives gives here a lot of what he has to say is positive and thoughtful but ultimately I think it falls short if you have found this helpful please subscribe to these videos and and lord willing I'll be back again tomorrow with another video if you'd like to ask a question you can do so using my curious cat account the link for that is below along with my patreon account if you'd like to support this and future videos thank you