Hurka’s Analogy Defense of Nationalism—a Critique
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1. Introduction

This paper discusses a defense of nationalism that was sketched by Thomas Hurka, who tries to support nationalism by drawing an analogy between nation and family. The defense essentially runs as follows: partiality is morally permitted within the family, and the nation is similar to the family in a relevant respect. Hence, partiality is permitted towards one’s conationals. In this paper, I argue that this defense does not support nationalism as it is commonly understood, and that there are severe problems with the defense.

In the debate around nationalism, two main senses of the term ‘nation’ can be contrasted. The first is roughly that of a state or country as those concepts are commonly understood—a territory over which some kind of government has authority, and which has politically established boundaries and political institutions that pertain specifically to that territory. The second can be approximately described as a culture or community of persons who are bound to one another by common descent, language, history, customs, and the like; such a culture can stretch beyond national borders, and many such cultures can exist within a country. Hurka uses the term ‘nation’ in both of these senses. He uses ‘nationalism’ to mean partiality toward one’s conationals – that is, the state of caring more about one’s conationals than about others. Consequently, the term ‘nationalism’ in Hurka’s text sometimes concerns partiality toward members of one’s country, and sometimes concerns partiality toward members of one’s culture. This terminology could be considered to be problematic, since partiality to one’s country and partiality to one’s culture are different phenomena and require different justifications. However, we need not use separate terms, because Hurka uses the same argument to defend partiality within both countries and cultures; and my reasoning applies to partiality within both countries and cultures. By ‘partiality’, Hurka seems to mean greater concern for one person’s or group of people’s interests over those of others. According to Hurka, some examples of partiality toward one’s conationals would be caring more about relieving economic hardship within one’s own nation than outside it, or deciding immigration policy primarily by considering its effects on people already in the nation rather than on those who want to join. I imagine the typical example of partiality between members of a family to consist in devoting more time, resources, and attention to benefit one’s family members than to benefiting others.


2 ‘Nationalism’ is sometimes taken to mean things other than partiality toward one’s conationals. Judith Lichtenberg, for example, uses ‘nationalism’ as the normative claim that cultures ought to do certain things or have certain rights, such as rights to political sovereignty or autonomy. Judith Lichtenberg, "How Liberal Can Nationalism Be?", Philosophical Forum, vol. 28, issue 2, pp. 53-72, 1997. She shows her use of ‘nationalism’ and ‘nation’ on p. 54f.

3 Hurka, p. 149.
Hurka tries to justify these partial attitudes and the actions they give rise to; that is, he purports to show that they are morally permitted. In this paper I will address the questions of what kind of nationalism, more precisely, he is defending, and whether his defense succeeds. The question of whether partiality towards one’s country or culture is morally permissible is an important one in the study of ethics, since such partiality is a widespread phenomenon. Thomas Pogge writes about partiality toward one’s country thus: “Most citizens of the affluent countries […] are nationalists in this sense, and extreme ones at that.”

It is, in addition, a phenomenon that, according to Pogge, has very negative effects on global poverty: “Despite its grievous effects upon the global poor, this exceptional tolerance for nationalist partiality is widely approved.”

An investigation of Hurka’s defense of partiality toward one’s country using an analogy to the family is especially relevant, since, as Pogge notes, “[F]riends of a nationalist concentration of concern often invoke the family as an analogue or metaphor.”

The first premise of Hurka’s defense is the assumption that partiality between family members is permitted: from this standpoint, he urges readers to look more closely at the nature of the relations within the family that justifies partiality. Those relations are then formulated into a principle about what types of relations justify partiality in general. The next step is to apply this general principle to nations and to see whether the relations hold between conationals; if they do, partiality is, according to Hurka, justified among conationals. One of the relations justifying partiality among family members is, according to Hurka, a shared history of interaction that has produced good. Nationalism is supported when such a relation exists between conationals – for example, when they have sustained a beneficial health care system.

In the next section, I will give a more extensive account of Hurka’s defense of nationalism, and after that, my three points in this paper will be presented. My first point is that Hurka’s defense does not support ordinary nationalism, since according to Hurka the primary element in rendering nationalism justifiable is a history of beneficial interaction between the members of the nation; this account stands in contrast to nationalism as it is commonly understood, in which we are justified in being partial to our conationals simply because they are our conationals. As well, according to ordinary nationalism, we receive a certain amount of justification of partiality towards our conationals; Hurka’s defense, meanwhile, argues that we are justified in being partial to different degrees to our different conationals, since we have had differently beneficial interactions with them. My second point is that there is a shortcoming in his defense: If

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4 Thomas Pogge, World Poverty and Human Rights: Cosmopolitan Responsibilities and Reforms, Polity Press, Cambridge 2002, p. 119. By ‘nationalism’, Hurka means, on one hand, to care more about one’s compatriots than others, to be partial toward members of one’s country. Pogge’s conception of nationalism is very similar to this; he writes: “I take a somewhat broader view of nationalism, focusing on persons who have an ordinary patriotic commitment to their own country. Quite content with the status quo, these persons view it as legitimate and even admirable that they and their political leaders should show a preeminent concern for preserving and enlarging their own collective advantage,” p. 118f.

5 Pogge, p. 129.

6 Pogge, p. 120.
beneficial interaction generally justifies partiality, as Hurka suggests, then beneficial interaction that is done out of self-interest or compulsion seems to justify less partiality. Since much beneficial interaction among conationals is done out of self-interest or compulsion, significantly less justified nationalism would result from Hurka’s argument than it would seem from a first impression. My third point comprises a more severe shortcoming of the defense. The problem is that one cannot conclude that a history of more beneficial interaction justifies more partiality by observing familial relations, since such interaction does not seem to affect the justification of partiality within families.

This paper will conclude that the defense of nationalism sketched by Hurka is unsuccessful, since its fundamental premise—that a history of more beneficial interaction justifies more partiality—is incorrect. If the fundamental premise were largely correct, Hurka’s argument supports less justified nationalism than at first appearance, since self-interest and compulsion decrease the justification of partiality gotten from conationals’ beneficial interaction. It is also important to note that whether it is or is not successful on its own terms, Hurka’s argument does not support nationalism as commonly understood.

2. Hurka’s defense of nationalism

Hurka does not try to defend nationalism instrumentally, by claiming that it has good consequences. He writes:

"I will consider only intrinsic justifications of nationalism. There are various instrumental arguments for national partiality, ones claiming that, starting from impartial moral principles, we can show how people’s being partial to their conationals will have good effects impartially considered. I do not find these instrumental arguments very persuasive. In any case, the more interesting philosophical question is whether national partiality can be justified noninstrumentally, or at the foundational level of morality."  

Such instrumental defenses are presented by Charles Taylor and Stephen Nathanson. Taylor understands patriotism as a stronger identification, solidarity, and bonding with one’s country than with humanity in general. His defense of patriotism is that democracy, our best option for governance, requires a special, patriotic commitment to be successful. By ‘nation’, Nathanson means “any sufficiently large body of people whose members regard themselves as members of a ‘nation’”. Nationalists are people

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7 Hurka, p. 140.
who identify with their national group and want it to flourish. Nathanson claims that nationalism is instrumentally valuable, since many people flourish when they identify with and belong to a nation. In contrast, Hurka’s idea of using an analogy with the family to defend nationalism is formulated as follows:

“According to common-sense moral thinking, one not only may but also should care more about one’s family members than about strangers. But other instances of partiality, most notably racial partiality, are in most circumstances widely condemned. Is national partiality more like familial partiality or more like racial partiality? To answer this question, we must know what in general justifies attitudes of partiality. Caring more about certain people is appropriate when one stands in certain special relations to those people. But what are these relations, and to what degree do they hold among members of the same nation? Assuming they are present within families and not within races, to what degree are they present within nations?”

“[T]he basis of national partiality must be some objective relation—that is, some relation that holds independently of people’s attitudes. To determine which relation this is, we must look more closely at the objective side of personal or familial relations.”

Hurka assumes that the relations justifying partiality are present within families, since common-sense moral thinking says that partiality is justified and even a duty within families. He also wants to analyze familial relations to know which these relations are, in order to determine whether these relations hold between conationals. Hurka does not consider in his text whether the relations he proposes to justify partiality are present between members of a race; he seems to imply they are not, but if they were, the relations would not be relations that would justify partiality, since racial partiality is in general widely condemned.

Hurka ultimately finds two relations that justify partiality between family members, and he claims that one of them holds true to a marginal degree when applied between conationals and one to a large degree:

“[A]long one important dimension the relations among conationals have less of the character that justifies partiality than do the relations among family

10 Hurka, p. 139.
11 Hurka, p. 149f.
members, but it will argue that along another dimension they have roughly as much. The result is not that we should be as partial to our conationals as we are to our children—that would be absurd—but that we may properly be partial to some degree.”

The relation that only holds to a marginal degree between conationals is a relation of close intimate contact, and the one that holds to a large degree is a shared history of interaction that has produced beneficial results. In order to come to the result that these relations are among those that justify partiality within families, Hurka reasons in general steps. He starts by stating:

“What does it mean to love a person “as an individual”? […] It involves loving the person for certain historical qualities, ones deriving from his or her participation with one in a shared history. Thus I love my wife not only as trustworthy, intelligent, and so on but also as the person who nursed me through that illness, with whom I spent that wonderful first summer, and with whom I discovered that hotel on Kootenay Lake.”

These seem to be examples of a history of close intimate interaction and a history of interaction that had produced good, as well. The next passage claims that a shared history of mutually beneficial interaction, and joint beneficence of others beneficial for those interacting or others, is a relation that justifies partiality between spouses.

“Consider again a personal relationship like that between spouses. Here the shared history is predominantly one of mutual benefit or beneficence; two people have helped each other through difficult times and also shared good times, giving and taking pleasure in each other’s company. And I think a history of reciprocal benefit or, alternatively, one where people have jointly benefited others, such as the students in a school where these people thought, can be a legitimate basis of partiality.”

On the basis of observations such as these, Hurka derives general principles about what justifies partiality.

“These points suggest a general account of the basis of duties of partiality. Some activities and states of people, most notably their doing good or suffering evil, call for a positive, caring, or associative response. Others, such as their doing evil, call for a negative or dissociative response.

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12 Hurka, p. 140.
13 Hurka, p. 150.
14 Hurka, p. 151.
Partiality between people is appropriate when they have shared in the past in the first kind of activity or state.\textsuperscript{15}

“If certain people have a shared history of doing good, what determines the degree of partiality that is justified between them? Two factors suggest themselves: the degree to which the people’s history is shared or involves interaction between them, and the amount of good their interaction produced.”\textsuperscript{16}

Thus, according to Hurka, the larger the amount of good that is produced in the interaction between people, or the more intimate their interaction, the greater the degree of justified partiality among them will be. Finally, Hurka asks whether these relations hold between conationals, and concludes that conationalists share to a significant degree a history of good-producing interaction, which is a relation that justifies nationalism. The sort of intimate relations within families that justify partiality in that context, however, are concluded to have virtually no applicability in the national context.

“Other things being equal, people whose history involves closer relations or more intimate contact have stronger duties of partiality. Also, other things being equal, people whose interactions produce more good, for themselves or for others, have stronger duties of partiality.

The history of family members scores extremely high on the first of these dimensions—namely, closeness of contact. Family members interact intimately on a daily basis, with large effects on each other’s lives. Family history also scores high on the dimension of good done, given the large benefits given by parents to their children, spouses to each other, and even children to their parents. […]

A nation’s history, by contrast, scores very low on the first dimension. As I have said, I have not met the majority of my fellow Canadians and do not know who they are. But a nation’s history does much better on the second dimension. Consider another example from my history. In the 1960s Canadians created a national health care system that continues to provide high-quality medical care to all citizens regardless of their ability to pay. The benefit this medicare system provides any one citizen is probably less than that provided by his or her family, but it is still substantial, and it is one Canadians have provided together. Canadians derive equally substantial benefits from many other aspects of their political activity. When these benefits are added together, they constitute a significant counterweight to

\textsuperscript{15} Hurka, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{16} Hurka, p. 153.
the weakness of national relations on the first dimension, that of closeness of contact.”\textsuperscript{17}

Hurka mentions some different kinds of beneficial interaction at the larger scale that justify of partiality: in the previous quote he mentions creating a health care system, and in the next he references sustaining a language through communicating, and sustaining a tradition of art and literature through writing and reading.

“Nations as defined by political institutions are not the only large groups that can have this kind of history. Consider a linguistic and cultural group. Its members have together sustained a language and through it the possibility of beneficial communication for all its speakers. […] They have also, as writers and readers, sustained a literature and an artistic tradition that provide further benefits. When political and cultural groups coincide, these two grounds of partiality reinforce each other.”\textsuperscript{18}

He does not claim that it is the total amount of produced good or the amount of people benefiting from a history of interaction that affects the justification of partiality, which would suggest that a larger family or nation is more justified in being partial because some good is produced for more individuals.

“Whether a nation is defined politically or culturally, its history differs from a family’s in involving many more people, both as recipients of its benefits and as participants in producing them. If only the first of these differences, in the number of beneficiaries, matter morally, the nation’s history would score much higher on the dimension of good done than the family’s, since its benefits are much more widely dispersed. The total good resulting from Canadian medicare, for example, is vastly greater than any produced in a family. But it is more plausible to count both differences about numbers, so that what matters for this dimension is not the total benefit produced in a history but something closer to the average benefit per participant.”\textsuperscript{19}

Hence, an interacting large family needs to produce twice the amount of good, as compared to a family of half its size, to receive equal justification of partiality from their history of beneficial interaction. Presumably, therefore, the amount of good that is produced by interaction within the average nation has to be quite large for this interaction to provide any substantial support of nationalism.

\textsuperscript{17} Hurka, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{18} Hurka, p. 154.
\textsuperscript{19} Hurka, p. 154.
3. Hurka’s defense does not support ordinary nationalism

In this section, we will investigate what Hurka’s account of partiality truly means. In so doing we will see that the nationalism it supports differs, in two respects, from nationalism as it is commonly understood. His defense amounts to the idea that it is a complex network of beneficial interactions that justify partiality among conationals. Because people have had differently beneficial interactions with different conationals, justified partiality will vary among conationals. Hurka’s nationalism differs from ordinary nationalism, since, according to ordinary nationalism, we receive equal justification for being partial toward our conationals, simply due to their status as conationals.

Hurka is not sketching an instrumental or a communitarian defense of nationalism. Neither is he defending the idea that national partiality is justified because there is something special about the nation in itself. According to Hurka’s account of partiality, there are many other groups in which partiality is justified because of the good-producing interaction in the group: these would include municipalities, sports teams, perhaps NAFTA, and the like. To understand what Hurka is doing, one can compare his approach to nationalism with the way in which Thomas Hobbes approached morality as a whole. As Hobbes did with morality, Hurka tries to reconstruct the notion of nationalism and give it a new theoretical foundation.

3.1 Varying partiality

To understand the final meaning and impact of Hurka’s account of nationalism we need to know more about which specific relations within the nation justify partiality. Hurka writes that interactions that justify nationalism are: sustaining a language, sustaining a literature tradition through writing and reading, and creating institutions such as a health care system, presumably through voting and paying taxes. Other such interactions would presumably include sustaining a judicial system by adhering to laws or serving on a jury, sustaining a national defense, or contributing to a civil culture by being polite and friendly. These are further examples of the types of beneficial interaction that typically occur between conationals. Yet do these interactions only justify partiality?

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A communitarian reasoning that supports partiality among conationals can be found in Alasdair MacIntyre’s “Is Patriotism a Virtue?” According to him, patriotism is a kind of loyalty to one’s nation; to value the characteristics, merits, and achievements of one’s nation, and he takes France as an example of a nation. These attitudes are action-generating and create special regard for particular persons, institutions, or groups; they involve being partial and putting one’s community’s interest above others. MacIntyre contrasts impersonal morality to the moralities within specific communities. He is essentially saying that patriotism is supported since one is unlikely to flourish as a moral agent if one is deprived of one’s feeling of belonging to one’s community—that one obliterates and loses a central dimension of the moral life if one does not understand the enacted narrative of one’s own individual life as embedded in the history of one’s nation. Alasdair MacIntyre, “Is Patriotism a Virtue?”, The Lindley Lecture, Department of Philosophy: The University of Kansas, 3-20, printed in R.J. Arneson (ed.), Liberalis, 3:246-263, Elgar, Aldershot 1992.
when they are mutually beneficial and jointly beneficial, or do they justify partiality as well when they are one-way interactions that benefit one party, but not the other? The only claim Hurka makes explicitly for justification of partiality, and the only examples he cites, indicate mutually beneficial interaction between people, and joint interaction that benefits others together. However, if only mutually beneficial and joint interactions would justify partiality, many members of a nation would fall out of the interactions that justify partiality, since they are only benefiting and not contributing in the interactions. Examples of such individuals would include non-voters, those who do not pay taxes (such as the unemployed), and children. They would be left out of groups that interact in ways that justify partiality, and justified nationalism among and toward them would hence be considerably restricted. Hurka do not need to claim that only mutually beneficial interaction justifies partiality; he can also reasonably claim that one-way interactions—in which only one or some parts benefit—justify partiality on the part of those who have benefited from the actions. Accordingly, there exist in a nation complex webs of relations that justify partiality, as people benefit each other in many direct and indirect ways. For example, people would be interacting in ways that justify partiality when producing or consuming goods and services, or benefiting from a public sector. Essentially everyone in the nation benefits directly or indirectly from the functioning of the nation as a whole; therefore, they are all justified in being partial to everyone who is a cog in the big wheel. Moreover, those who participate in sustaining the functioning nation receive justification for partiality toward one another. Thus, if Hurka’s defense succeeds, it must be accepted as given that there are relations that justify partiality among most in the nation, and that the amount and type of partiality that one is justified in showing would vary depending on how much one has participated with a conational in mutually beneficial interaction, joint beneficial interaction, and interaction that benefited oneself. Some conationals would hardly be justified in being partial toward one another at all. The idea that justified nationalism varies by beneficial interaction is an aspect of Hurka’s account of nationalism that differs from ordinary nationalism, which claims we are justified in being partial to some certain degree toward all our conationals. In section 4 we will see that the motives people have in interacting affect the justification of partiality that they receive from their interaction. This is another factor that can make justification of partiality vary among conationals: for example, some conationals may have interacted in only a few ways that justify partiality, and if those interactions were done out of compulsion, they are even less justified in being partial.

3.1 Being conational does not in itself justify partiality
We have seen that Hurka’s account of nationalism differs from ordinary nationalism since the resulting justified partiality among conational is varied. They also differ in their account of what it is that justifies partiality between conational. The common understanding of nationalism seems to be that we are justified in being partial toward
our conationals just because they are our conationals. But, according to Hurka, it is the relation of having a history of beneficial interaction that justifies nationalism; he therefore support another thought than the one constituting ordinary nationalism. He supports a new and different way of understanding the relation to ones conationals.

4. The defense’s shortcomings

4.1. Self-interest and compulsion decrease the justified nationalism
Section 4.1 notes that beneficial interaction that is done with the wrong motives does not justify partiality, or else justifies partiality to a lesser degree than would an interaction performed with other motives. The wrong motives are self-interest and compulsion. This is relevant for the justification of nationalism, since much beneficial interaction between conationals—which, according to Hurka’s defense, justifies partiality—seems to be done with the purpose of benefiting oneself, or because the conationals believe they must interact. This is a shortcoming in the defense, since if Hurka’s defense is largely correct, self-interest and compulsion cause nationalism to be justified less often or less wholly than Hurka seems to imply. I believe it to be an uncontroversial claim that if beneficial interaction justifies partiality, then these motives hamper the justification of partiality that is received from the beneficial interaction—whether this consists of one-way interaction, mutually beneficial interaction, or the joint beneficence of others. We can realize that self-interest and compulsion hampers the justification of partiality that is received from beneficial interaction by taking examples of beneficial interaction from both the family and the nation.

4.1.1. Self-interest
To see that beneficial, joint interaction done out of self-interest does not justify partiality, or at least that it provides less justification than do other motives, we can think about two siblings who always benefit their brother because they think that their rich mother will give them a larger share of her inheritance if she sees them help their brother. This interaction does, intuitively, not justify partiality between the two siblings who are helping the brother. Neither does the brother, who is benefited in the one-way interaction, seem to receive justification of partiality toward his siblings in this situation.

At the national level, joint interaction that is performed out of self-interest seems to justify partiality less than the same interaction done with other motives. We can imagine people sustaining a national free health-care system by voting and paying taxes because they are afraid they might run out of money and need health care, and not because want to benefit the worst of in their country. The ones sustaining the health-care system seem to be less justified in being partial to one another when they are sustaining such partiality due to self-interest rather than benevolence. The worse off, who benefit from
the health care system, also seem less justified in being partial to the ones sustaining it when they sustain it out of egoism.

4.1.2. Compulsion
As with self-interest, we can consider concrete cases to determine whether compulsion hampers the justification of partiality that is received from beneficial interaction. Let us first look at an example from the family: two siblings have been helping each other during their childhood and adolescence because their parents keep telling them they have to, although they have never wanted to. The siblings seem to receive less justification of partiality than if they had helped each other because they cared for each other.

As an example of involuntary beneficial interaction at the national level, we can consider long-term prisoners who are forced to perform beneficial community service activities as punishment for their crimes. The prisoners seem to receive less justification of partiality among them; as well, the society receives less justification of partiality toward the prisoners for the beneficial work they have done, as compared to when people do beneficial work voluntarily.

That self-interest and compulsion hampers the justification of partiality received from beneficial interaction is relevant to nationalism, since much beneficial interaction between conationals is done out of self-interest or involuntarily. The taxes that sustain the public sector are, for example, drawn directly from our salaries before we receive the money, and there is not much we can do about it. Human productivity is something that supposedly justifies nationalism, but it is common for people to go to work because they want money or because they feel they have to, at least sometimes, and not because one wishes benevolently to be a cog in the big wheel. At times, politeness, communication, reading, and writing may also arise from self-interest or compulsion.

Someone might object that many pay taxes to contribute, are productive in order to benefit their customers, adhere to laws because they want to, and so forth. That is correct, many do, but many people also do these things out of self-interest or compulsion—enough to significantly decrease the justified partiality within nations. The conclusion of this section is that it is important to consider the decreasing effect of motives when assessing the degree of justified partiality that would result from the defense Hurka sketches.

4.2. Beneficial interaction does not justify partiality

In this section I present my last point, comprising a second shortcoming in Hurka’s defense. I will argue that, although it is a good idea, the defense of nationalism suggested by Hurka does not work.
A fundamental premise in Hurka’s defense is his claim about what justifies partiality in general:

“[T]he degree of partiality a history justifies depends partly on the quantity of goodness it produces or embodies.”

It is likely that Hurka here uses the word ‘partly’ because the degree of partiality a history justifies also depends on the degree of close, intimate interaction within the history, and because the stakes involved in a given choice affect the extent of partiality. I understand the general principle to be that a shared history of interaction that has produced or involved more good justifies more partiality. This principle regarding what justifies partiality in general is derived from the rationale of what justifies partiality within familial relations. However, it seems incorrect to derive this general principle from the family, since it seems not to be the case that a shared history of interaction that has produced or involved good increases the justification of partiality within families. In the previous section, we discussed the ways in which some motives hamper justified nationalism. A more severe problem for Hurka’s defense of nationalism is that partiality is not justified by a history of beneficial interaction, regardless of the motives the participants have. Several counterexamples show that a shared history of beneficial interaction does not always increase the justification of partiality within the family. For example, parents do not seem to be less justified in being partial toward a newly adopted child, as compared to a child who was brought up from birth, because the adopted child and the parent lack a shared history of interaction that has produced good. Someone might object to this counterexample by claiming that the parents have taken on responsibilities and made commitments in adopting the child and that these commitments justify partiality to the degree that the loss in justified partiality because of the lack of beneficial interaction is negligible, and that this is why the degree of justified partiality toward the adopted child and the child one raised from birth does not differ noticeably. So the objection against my example is that the lack of a beneficial history does make the parents less justified in being partial to the child than the child who was brought up from birth, but that this difference in justified partiality is negligible since it is so small compared to the large degree of partiality that is justified because of the parents’ commitments. Yet this objection fails, since, according to Hurka, it is the good produced per person in the interaction that justifies partiality, and the good

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22 Someone might object that it is uncharitable to take this to be Hurka’s fundamental premise, and that it would be more generous to take the defense to make only the weaker claim that a history of good-producing interaction justifies some partiality (not that the more good produced the more partiality is justified). The objection could claim that the defense only needs to establish this weaker claim for some nationalism to be justified. But we cannot take the defense to make the weaker claim, because Hurka could then not explain why very beneficial interaction justifies more partiality than marginally beneficial interaction. And we cannot take him to be making the implausible claim that they both justify partiality, and equally so.
produced per person in the relationship between parents and a child brought up from birth is considerable: the child has gotten everything it needs to survive and lead the life it does, and the good produced should therefore, according to Hurka’s defense, significantly and noticeably affect the justification of partiality. That it does not suggests that if any relation justifies partiality, it is something other than a good-producing history.

We can also think about a family where the members do not take much pleasure in each other’s company—we all know of one—and compare it to a family where the members take more pleasure in each others company; but there seems to be no difference regarding the families’ moral justification for being partial. They seem to be equally permitted to be partial to their family members if they wish to be. Neither does the justification of being partial differ between a loving couple of plumbers compared to a loving couple of politician-colleagues, whose interaction benefits others much more than the plumbers’. These counterexamples show that a shared history of interaction that as produced good is not something that always provides justification of partiality within families, and hence that the general principle that are to be applied to nations, is incorrect. Since this is a fundamental premise in Hurka’s defense, the defense does not succeed.

5. Summary and conclusions

Thomas Hurka tries to defend nationalism by drawing an analogy between the nation and the family. He uses ‘nationalism’ in both the sense of partiality toward one’s culture, and toward one’s country. His defense consists of the following steps: He assumes on the basis of common sense that partiality within the family is justified and looks more closely at the specific relations within the family that justify partiality. From these observations, he formulates a principle about what relations justify partiality in general. After that, he applies this general principle to nations and determines whether the relations hold between conationals. If they do, partiality is, according to Hurka, justified among conationalists. He claims that one of the relations that justifies partiality between family members is a shared history of interaction that has produced good. Nationalism is, according to him, supported since such relations exist between conationalists; for example, many conationalists have sustained a beneficial health care system together.

I set out to investigate in more specific terms what kind of nationalism Hurka’s argument supports, and to find out whether his argument is successful. His defense supports a nationalism that is different from nationalism as it is commonly understood. They differ in two respects. First, Hurka supports a vision of partiality that varies depending on the level of beneficial interaction the conationalists have had, while ordinary nationalism claims we receive justification of a certain amount of partiality towards our
conationals. Second, Hurka’s nationalism does not involve the thought that being a conational is something that in itself justifies partiality, as ordinary nationalism does.

We have come to two conclusions regarding the success of the defense. The most important is that the defense of nationalism sketched by Hurka fails, since a fundamental premise—that a history of more beneficial interaction justifies more partiality—is incorrect. If I am right about this, Hurka’s defense must be considered an interesting approach that did not work. Second, if I am wrong and the defense is largely correct, a lesser amount of justified nationalism results from Hurka’s argument than it first seemed, since self-interest and compulsion decrease the justification of partiality that is obtained from conationals’ beneficial interaction. If this is the case, an interesting subject for continuing research would be to investigate to what extent conationals’ beneficial interaction is done out of self-interest or compulsion, in order to learn what degrees of nationalism are justified within different nations.
6. Bibliography


