Federalism as a Canadian National Ideal: The Civic Rationalism of Pierre Elliott Trudeau¹

The mind supplies the idea of a nation, but what gives that idea its sentimental force is a community of dreams.

- André Malraux²

When noble deeds are to be done, or great triumphs of progress and reform to be achieved, we appeal in vain to reason to lead the forlorn hope or mount the imminent deadly breach; but at the first trumpet blast, passion, enthusiasm, youth, step proudly to the front, and press forward with resistless eager pace. The political machine must have a motive power; where shall we seek that power if not in the national character?

- W.A. Foster3

Federalism and Logic

Jean Chrétien, who served as Minister of Justice in the cabinet of Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau, tells a story of an almost forgettable incident that is made memorable—and comical—by Trudeau's utter seriousness about the integrity of the Canadian nation and his commitment to relying upon reason to preserve it. The incident came at the height of the debates concerning sovereignty for Québec.

Trudeau and Chrétien were mapping strategy for the federalist side one day as they strode together toward the Centre Block of the parliament buildings, where the prime minister maintains an office. Chrétien at this moment was giving voice to some second thoughts. Both he and the Prime Minister were French Canadians, yet they stood in determined opposition to an initiative that the government of Québec considered vital to French survival. Just as Trudeau, who was leading the way, slipped into the revolving door, Chrétien stopped.

"Our position isn't logical, Pierre," he said. According to Chrétien, Trudeau "froze" for a second. The shocked leader then continued pushing the glass panel in front of him until he had whirled around one complete revolution and emerged back outside. "What did you say?," asked Trudeau.4

Pierre Trudeau has written and spoken on the faults of nationalism and the virtues of federalism countless times and in numerous places. Indeed, one could correctly contend that Trudeau has built his entire political reputation around his views on these issues. But Trudeau is more than an anti-nationalist. As the story illustrates, he is first and most crucially a man committed—even overcommitted—to the operation of reason. According to one of his biographers, George Radwanski, "Trudeau doesn't really acknowledge the individual's right to choose to be *irrational*, to put more weight on emotion or instinct than on intellect. He assumes that other minds function like his—and, indeed, have comparable intelligence—and shuns any other approach as a failure to meet the standard of acceptable behavior."6

Trudeau's insistence on rationality, however, goes so far in places as to take on the appearances of an ideology in itself. Indeed, the record of the former Prime Minister in office and beyond suggests that he is more than willing to abandon, if not reason, then at least reasonability, when any number of the first principles in his liberal credo are challenged. The nationalist economic thinker Abraham Rotstein has noted this tendency well:

The cast of mind is unmistakeably that of classical liberalism. Despite the P.M.'s personal motto—la raison avant la passion—he himself expresses the triumph of ideological passion, not only over reason but over history as well. This stance is his personal privilege, but in the circumstances it is also the country's burden. No ideological determinism need be invoked to appreciate that his anti-nationalist obsession is part of a coherent and unshakeable philosophy of atomistic individualism . . . ⁷

Trudeau objects to nationalism most strenuously because he deems it to be an ideology of feeling, and one that is therefore irrational. Trudeau's political philosophy, and especially this rationalism, equipped him capably to be the chief executive of a fractious modern state and to handle with skill the tensions that his country's internal divisions always generated. But that same philosophy's unwavering adherence to individualism may have precluded a lasting solution to the problems that beset Canada, for it admitted neither of the existence nor the appropriateness of any set of symbols that would integrate emotionally the entire nation, in spite of its divisions.

Unfortunately for Trudeau, nations are not reasoned into being. They issue forth not as the products of dialogue, deliberation, and discussion, but out of the facts of history. Around these facts are arrayed songs of noble and daring deeds, stories of virtue under trial, and claims to uniqueness among the peoples of the earth. Together these items form the symbolic substance of nationhood. This substance may be altered or augmented with difficulty, but it is denigrated or denied only at the risk of peril to the nation itself.

Trudeau appreciated this reality more acutely than perhaps any other Canadian of his generation. Nevertheless, his convictions as a liberal prevented him from ever acting purposefully on this knowledge. To the contrary, much of Trudeau's public energy was spent in an unceasing effort to render illegitimate in Canada any impulse to activate a "religious" (as opposed to rational) response to the collective concerns of the nation.

Hence, Trudeau's period in government provides an exemplary case study of the fate of even intelligent politicians and committed leaders when they decline or are deprived of the chance to situate state action in history and to motivate its acceptance by appeal to a transcendent plane. By the end of his time in office, Trudeau had managed to rid Canada of the last symbolic tatters of colonial status and thereby to bring it to full political maturity. He had managed, too, in a vaunted drive for "French power," to bring some extremely bright and ambitious Québec politicians into fuller participation in the federal system. Yet his neglect of the need to ground these accomplishments in something symbolic, a neglect both intentional and unavoidable, may ironically have made hopes for a unified Canadian nation more precarious than ever.

A Rational Form for the State

Despite all the opportunities that Trudeau has had to amend his opinions on nationalism, rationalism, and identity, they remain remarkably consistent. His clear and logical philosophical framework can be distilled from a close reading of his personal essays on political topics. Although others might give one or another point in this sequence greater emphasis, the skeleton of Trudeau's argument against nationalism and in favor of federalism can be stated as follows.

(1) Nationalism is not a constant and ever-present force in human affairs. Rather, it is a relatively new development in history.

For most of human history, Trudeau contends, nations—their populations and their boundaries—were unchallenged facts of life, "choses données" or "just data." People had no role in choosing their rulers, and hence they could not manifest their will or satisfy their longings by effecting any particular political arrangement. The domains of nations were taken to be fixed by superordinate powers, and individuals thought it neither necessary nor possible to change this situation. Territory was territory, and its extent was dictated by forces outside of and distant from normal social life. People were people, "the population came with the territory; and except in the unusual case of deportations, very little was to be done about it." 10

All of this changed, however, with the dissemination, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of the notion of popular sovereignty. "Since sovereignty belonged to the people" under this new notion, "it appeared to follow," according to Trudeau, "that any given body of people could at will transfer their allegiance from one existing state to another, or indeed to a completely new state of their own creation." 11

Henceforth it was to be the people who first defined themselves as a nation, who then declared which territory belonged to them as of right, and who finally proceeded to give their allegiance to a state of their own choosing or invention which would exercise authority over that nation and that territory.¹²

This transfer of popular allegiance was to result from more than simply the practice of democratic self-government. It was, in addition, to be the culmination of a collective march toward national "self-determination." That is, new nations would be formed not only because politics made such changes possible; they would be brought into being because history demanded their creation. The nation-state was lent what Trudeau calls "an ethnic flavour," and the national state emerged.

(2) States are made, not born.

"The nation is not a biological reality," Trudeau points out; "that is, a community that springs from the very nature of man." In modern times, the state has lost some of its previous taken-for-granted quality. Because the state is viewed, in the ideology of nationalism, as the outcome of the arrival of a people at self-consciousness, states could be dismantled or reorganized literally at will to fit more exactly the geographical and cultural contours of that people. "As each of the

peoples of the world became conscious of its identity as a collectivity bound together by natural affinities," under this theory, "it would define itself as a nation and govern itself as a state." 15

(3) Conceptions of nationhood are based on will, not reason. They are "little more than a state of mind." Nations try to will themselves to statehood.

What elements, at a given moment in history, determine which groups qualify as nations and which groups do not? "The foundation of the nation is will," declares Trudeau. Thus, the peoples who ultimately succeed in occupying a separate and distinct space on the political map of the world are those who have expended their resources and energies "labouring, conspiring, blackmailing, warring, revolutionizing and generally willing their way towards statehood." 16

Nowhere, Trudeau adds, is there clear evidence of the application of reason in this process. Few sets of new boundaries are in fact more "reasonable" than the ones that they replace. "For all their anthropologists, linguists, geographers, and historians," he pointedly observes, "the nations of today cannot justify their frontiers with noticeably more rationality than the kings of two centuries ago; a greater reliance on general staffs rather than on princesses' dowries does not necessarily spell a triumph of reason." 17

(4) Nations that are successful as states are vulnerable, ironically, to the same claims that first gave them rise.

Since states are rigged together by all manner of means, Trudeau argues, it is the rare state that is really as socially cohesive as its own nationalistic ideology would imply. What, then, is to prevent a disgruntled minority from speaking of itself as a nation, too, and pursuing the same solution to its problems that created the country in which currently it is held in subordination?

Imbedded in the theory of nationalism is the unspoken assumption that "every sociologically distinct group within the nation" possesses "a contingent right of secession." National states, notes Trudeau, therefore face "a terrible paradox: the principle of national self-determination which had justified their birth, could just as easily justify their death." It becomes possible to realize new nations in an old world if a nation is really "a state of mind." But it is widely understood that people often change their minds.

(5) Therefore, "a mysterious process" of consensus-building must be undertaken to make the state appear to be natural and permanent. This "gum" or "new glue" of state consciousness is also nationalism.

To avoid changings of the mind by the citizenry, the modern state, Trudeau insists, must cultivate consensus "as its very life." The burden for would-be nation-builders, as Trudeau was to discover himself as the Canadian prime minister, is that "it is physically and intellectually difficult to persuade continually through reason alone." Once again, the most convenient substitute for reason, under these circumstances as at the start, is nationalism. It is just "too cheap and too powerful" to be overlooked or dismissed. Nationalism is "the faith that takes the place of reason for those who are unable to find a basis for their convictions in history, or economics, or the constitution, or sociology." 21

(6) Nationalism arises, then, from an irrational will to form a state not already in existence, or to obey and thereby solidify one after its founding. Because nationalism is created as the unthinking handmaiden of the state, it too will pass when the preservation of the state and its "natural values" ceases to be important.

Nationalism is emotionally appealing because people want (and on some deep psychological level, need) to preserve and to obey the larger authority that the "national will" has established. However, this desire (or imperative) presumably must fade. "The nation first decides what the state should be; but then the state has to decide what the nation should remain." If such decisions are not authoritative, the original creation will come to be seen as bogus (or at least incomplete), the nation's legitimating ideology will crumble, and the nation itself will collapse.

(7) In the meantime, to promote nationalism without an awareness of the historical functions of nationalist ideology is dangerous. In theory, nationalism need not be destructive of rationality and freedom; in practice, it is.

Some well-intentioned political commentators have embraced nationalism, Trudeau reports: "they liken it to a dream which inspires the individual and motivates his actions, perhaps irrationally but not necessarily negatively." However, he rejects this stance as one which manages to "drain two centuries of history out of a definition."²³ The

historical record amply demonstrates to Trudeau the abusive nature of nationalistic ideologies. He instructs the reader that "history is full of this, called variously chauvinism, racism, jingoism, and all manner of crusades, where right reasoning and thought are reduced to rudimentary proportions."²⁴

"The moment the sovereign state was put at the service of the nation it was the nation that became sovereign—that is to say, beyond the law."25 In his own province of Québec, for instance, Trudeau fears "a public preparing to sacrifice all values—especially personal freedom and safety—to the idol of collectivity."26 And national collectivities, we are reminded, are customarily part of the "rubbish by which the strong justify their oppression of the weak."27

(8) Federalism replaces the drive toward national consensus on all matters with a habit, both rational and realistic, of compromise. A federal system thus reduces the need for nationalist emotion and the risks to individual liberty that accompany it.²⁸

Federalism offers to governments a refuge from dogmatism as well as a civilized opportunity for compromise, because it accepts the world as history has rendered it, and does not endeavor to transform it. In a federal system, it is still possible for different groups to live in dignity and with full recognition of their cultural particularity. They must, however, lay aside claims to exclusive control of mechanisms for national self-definition. In return, groups may expect fair treatment by the government, for the federal state protects the liberty of all by respecting the supremacy of none.

A federal state makes no attempt to impose a national consensus where none is necessary or feasible; instead, it "deliberately reduces the national consensus to the greatest common denominator between the various groups composing the nation."²⁹ Federalism makes no demands on the higher precepts of those who live under it, except to ask that they abide by the terms of the social contract. Nevertheless, that contract may change, and indeed it ought to change if government is at all responsive to the popular will.

Thus is federalism especially compatible with the requirements of liberal democracy in nations with a diversity of peoples. And so, also, is democracy incompatible with nationalism. "A truly democratic government cannot be 'nationalist,' because it must pursue the good of all its citizens, without prejudice to ethnic origin," says Trudeau. "The democratic government, then, stands for and encourages good citizenship, never nationalism." ³⁰ Federalism, for its part, promotes democ-

racy: "It is an attempt to find a rational compromise between the divergent interest-groups which history has thrown together; but it is a compromise based on the will of the people."³¹

(9) Canadian patriotism therefore consists in an ardent defense of the federal system and a rejection of claims to nationhood that would short-circuit its operation.

A country as heterogeneous as Canada can survive only as a federal state. The Fathers of Confederation understood this, and so they drafted for Canada a charter that is striking in "its absence of principles, ideals, or other frills." To Trudeau's eyes, "the Canadian nation seems founded on the common sense of empirical politicians who had wanted to establish some law and order over a disjointed half-continent." This they did, in short, by using reason. 34

(10) Rejection of nationalism, it must be conceded, is feasible only if something more attractive is put in its place. This substitute can take the form of a kind of federal nationalism, an elevation of the federal union to the emotional level of the nation.

According to Trudeau, "a national image must be created that will have such an appeal as to make any image of a separatist group unattractive." This image, of course, could be composed in many ways. Some contributing factors would be rather concrete: road, rail, and airline connections; extensive networks of communication; and safeguards against international economic dependency and exploitation, for examples. Other sources of national sentiment are cultural or symbolic: a flag, patriotic anthems, pledges and the like.

But for Trudeau, the government is well advised to undertake these efforts primarily as a method of incorporating the country's various parts more thoroughly into national life, and *not* to create a national life which is itself indicative of the essential character of the nation. That second option invites the hazard of igniting anew the flames of nationalism, and Trudeau has stated that he "cannot believe that a pan-Canadian or pan-American form of nationalism would be any less prone to chauvinism than the French-Canadian form." ³⁶

(11) This option will fail, however, unless all groups and regions given natural haven in a federal system are drawn fairly into participation in it, unless they all see that they have a stake in the system that is so valuable that they ought to be reluctant to relinquish it.

Federal states, because they also require some version of nationalism to maintain themselves, are not inherently more stable than other kinds of states. Furthermore, federal systems sustain local cultures and respect regional loyalties. In order, then, to offset the centrifugal pressures toward dissolution of the federal union, a country like Canada must "render what is logically defensible actually undesirable." It must, in other words, offer to its many constituent groups and regions tangible incentives to remain within the confederation. For as soon as the cost/benefit calculus shifts, the question of national unity is posed once more, and the absence for these groups of a more enduring connection to the country's future is especially glaring.

(12) Even if flawless, attempts to construct a new federal nationalism will see only limited results. For "in the last resort, the mainspring of federalism cannot be emotion, but must be reason." Reason is not easy, but it must be preferred to emotion.

Emotion can never be purged entirely from political life, but Trudeau prefers that it be "channelled into a less sterile direction than nationalism," which is at best "a rustic and clumsy tool" for national progress. History shows that nationalism, whatever its power to coerce the unity of a mass by violating the liberties of individuals, is ultimately destructive of peace between nations and of order within them. "A people's consensus based on reason will supply the cohesive force that societies require," Trudeau is confident. As for his Canada, "I am suggesting," he says in conclusion, "that cold, unemotional rationality can still save the ship."

The State of Rational Forms

The flat tone of rational rhetoric in a society devoid of the transcendent self-references provided by a national myth can be heard distinctly in the speeches and public comments of Pierre Trudeau.⁴² Trudeau is an especially eloquent man. His achievements as a lawyer, essayist, and politician rest substantially upon his ability to assemble words in a cogent pattern and to persuade others with their force. In this effort, however, he is doubly handicapped: as a man of reason, he will not permit an appeal of his to rest on other than rational grounds; and even if he were to wish to invite his fellow citizens to a deeper appreciation of their own nation, as a Canadian he does not have at his disposal a legitimate set of evocative national symbols.

Thus, even with the advantage of Trudeau's sizable deposit of natural talent, the limitations on meaning in the Canadian political vocabulary dictate that his arguments are always rather stunted, at least by comparison with those in societies possessing active "civil religions." As stirring as his expressions of belief in Canada and its people may be, the cumulation of verbal energy in Trudeau's speeches is routinely interrupted, because the speaker invariably must stop himself short of any mystically particularistic utterance—that is, any statement about the nature and future of Canada which could not be understood by rational observers anywhere, nor be shared in happy harmony with them. To Trudeau the orator, then, Canadian values are the values that any democratic polity would recognize as constituting good citizenship. These characteristics include tolerance, respect for others, and the pragmatic support of liberty.

"I have some basic principles which I like to see applied in our country," Trudeau explained to an audience in Winnipeg during his first campaign to become prime minister, in 1968. "They can be roughly and easily defined in terms of liberty, a democratic form of government, a parliamentary system, respect of the individual, balance between federal and provincial governments, and so on. But beyond these ideals, I am a pragmatist."⁴⁴

Trudeau's is quite a limited view of the necessary first principles of political leadership, and this view results readily in an identically limited sense of the symbolic weight of any governmental action. While Trudeau's ideal government is one that wields extensive powers, the meanings propounded in how these powers are exercised are exceedingly modest. "The role of the federal government then is to lend unity to Canada," Trudeau once told a meeting of his Liberal Party. However, the sacredness of this self-appointed task was diminished immediately in the Prime Minister's remarks by being coupled in the next phrases with a pair of somewhat more mundane goals of government: "to act as supplier of national services," and "to offer economic stability to those regions which are less wealthy." 45

The first challenge, preserving the unity of Canada, is as close to a spiritual quest as any that leaders in the profane circles of politics are likely to adopt; the latter two jobs, on the other hand, require merely feats of administration. That the man who was prime minister would link all three in the same litany implies that he cannot discern this difference. What is worse, it may imply that to him there is no difference, and that Canada's integrity is one more problem awaiting the application of a methodical governmental program. 46 Such is the vi-

sion of the liberal technocrat, one who believes that all public policy decisions hinge on a rational calculus which can be operated by any and all with identical results.

Trudeau is equally keen on deflating higher expectations of the Canadian government in the field of foreign affairs. "I hope that we Canadians do not have an exaggerated view of our own importance," the Prime Minister said in a talk before the National Press Club in Washington, only about a year after taking over the helm of the Canadian ship of state. In the veritable mouth of the American behemoth, Trudeau proceeded to damn his countrymen in Yankee eyes with the very faintest of praise. "We prefer to think that our place in the world," he said of Canadians, "is such that we can occasionally experiment with good ideas without risking a complete upset of the whole international order." Canada is free to innovate, in this account, because it enjoys a position of relative irrelevance in the world arena.

If Canadians are to be relaxed at home and flexible abroad, how are they to know in any given situation how to behave? What models for thought may be taken as authoritative, what modes of behavior may be regarded as normative? The answer, in the form of the Canadian self-conception outlined by Trudeau, is not very detailed. Canadians, Trudeau told fellow members of the House of Commons in 1969, "are participants in a land that is not a simple northern extension of a foreign state, not an historical accident, not a random collection of diverse persons, but a community of integrity, with its own dynamism, its own society and its own future." 48

All of this, of course, is negative definition. The mere insistence that one's country possesses distinctive features neither proves their existence nor exposes them to the scrutiny of others. It leaves unattended the need for a direct response to the question of Canadian national identity.

Trudeau realizes this much, and so he often struggled to fill in the picture, if only partially. "We should never doubt that we are Canadians—that we are different," Trudeau has warned. 49 Yet in what does this difference consist? Again, one may look to Trudeau's words for a tentative answer. One passage, excerpted from an address on cultural pluralism that the Prime Minister delivered to a group of Ukrainian Canadians, deserves quotation here at length. Trudeau argues that Canada's multicultural composition,

and the moderation which it includes and encourages, makes Canada a very special place.

It is a special place, and a stronger place as well. Each of the many fibres contributes its own qualities and Canada gains strength from the combination. We become less like others; we become less susceptible to cultural, social or political envelopment by others. We become less inclined—certainly less obliged—to think in terms of national grandeur; inclined not at all to assume a posture of aggressiveness, or ostentation, or might. Our image is of a land of people with many differences—many contributions, many variations in view—but a single desire to live in harmony. We have concluded in Canada almost without debate that true greatness is not measured in terms of military might or economic aggrandisement. On a planet of finite size, the most desirable of all characteristics is the ability and desire to cohabit with persons of differing backgrounds, and to benefit from the opportunities which this offers.

To those who argue—and some still do—that cultural differences are divisive and weakening, that Canada would be less susceptible to internal dissension if we were all of the same mould, I respond with an emphatic denial. Uniformity is neither desirable nor possible in a country the size of Canada. We should not even be able to agree upon the kind of Canadian to choose as a model, let alone persuade most people to emulate it. There are surely few policies potentially more disastrous for Canada than to tell all Canadians that they must be alike. There is no such thing as a model or ideal Canadian. What could be more absurd than the concept of an "all-Canadian" boy or girl? A society which emphasizes uniformity is one which creates intolerance and hate. A society which eulogizes the average citizen is one which breeds mediocrity.

What the world should be seeking and what we in Canada must continue to cherish, are not concepts of uniformity but human values: compassion, love and understanding. Our standard in all activities should be one of excellence, but our routes to its achievement may be as numerous as there are Canadians who pursue it.⁵⁰

The Canadian people, according to Trudeau, ought to be united most profoundly in two related convictions: the uselessness and even danger of national uniformity, and the value of the toleration that they extend—by principle, by necessity, and by habit—to the many differences that otherwise would divide them. Typically, Trudeau's Canada Day address to the nation in 1969 chose tolerance, and how the practice of tolerance distinguishes Canadians, as one of its themes. "It is the tolerance towards one another which forms such a basic part of the character of Canadians," the Prime Minister observed. "Tolerance and moderation are found in this country perhaps in larger measure than anywhere else," he asserted; "against them we can judge our stature as a country and as a people." 51

Judging from these statements, the destiny of Canada, for Trudeau, is to build a society in which different types of people may live in

comfort and peace. Canadians, moreover, will achieve this destiny by the practice of their own brand of civic virtue: by tolerance of others' traits; understanding of other cultures; compassion toward the weak; protection of the privacy of individuals and the openness of nature; use of reason as the governing standard in public affairs; ready accommodation to change; and an anti-deterministic commitment to pragmatism in political choices.

We believe that the character of Canada—Canada's nationalism if you will—is not marked or identified by a sense of eighteenth-century territorial grandeur or nineteenth- and early twentieth-century economic ferocity. Canada is known to its inhabitants and to others as a human place, a sanctuary of sanity in an increasingly troubled world. We need not search further for our identity. These traits of tolerance and courtesy and respect for our environment and one another provide it. I suggest that a superior form of identity would be difficult to find. 52

Canada's civic culture contains an impressive array of positive public values, ones that would be the envy of most of the rest of the Western world. Yet, the reason why so many other nations could subscribe so easily to the same goals as Canada is not that these goals would be easy to attain, or because each aspirant could match Canada's accomplishments in making a humane home for a variety of people; far from it. Rather, there is no formal obstacle to wholesale appropriation of the Canadian value system by others because it contains nothing that marks it as exclusively Canadian. No inconvenient history intrudes; no rigid chauvinism peeks through.

Indeed, most of the virtues that Trudeau's lists boast (tolerance, understanding, and pragmatic accommodation, for examples) are sharply anti-dogmatic. They do not exhibit anything that is noticeably Canadian. Furthermore, by their very nature, they cannot, for once they become Canadian, they cease being virtuously inclusive. Under Trudeau's philosophy of liberal individualism, humans are presumed to be bound by standards of reason that are equally applicable to all. Aspects of personal identity less expansive than one's very humanity, in contrast, are deemed in liberal theory to be irrelevant to collective life.

As the basis for a potential civil religion, then, the commandments of liberalism are fatally universalistic. Anyone may embrace them, and thankfully some nations do, and seriously so. But there is no reasoning offered for why *Canadians* are compelled to this choice, only the assertion that it is the rational thing to do. "Undoubtedly there are some broad values and beliefs held in common by most Canadians,"

the sociologist Ralph Matthews admits, "but most people throughout the world would profess similar ideals. They can hardly be considered distinctively Canadian."53

Individualism and the Canadian State

In an early political manifesto published before his election to the House of Commons, Pierre Trudeau, along with a group of francophone intellectuals, appealed for a modern politics based on "realism." The authors noted that in an improved Canadian polity, rational objectivity—and the realistic leadership that should follow from it—would be premised upon a single value: "the importance of the individual, without regard to ethnic, geographic, or religious accidents," for "the cornerstone of the social and political order must be the attributes men hold in common, not those that differentiate them." 55

Considered in its own time and place, political advocacy in behalf of the individual was primarily a broadside assault on the notion that the special history and composition of Québec society qualified it collectively for special treatment by other governments. Of course, the reiteration of this position by a group of avowed federalists was not in itself a surprise. However, what ought to be noticed in this appeal, now as then, is the philosophical rationale for resisting a possible weakening of the federal system in Canada. The reason, which the authors proclaim with disarming clarity, is that particularistic bases for group identification, traits like religion and nationality, ought in a modern polity to be invested, they feel, with no more significance than any "accident."

An individual, it is true, does not choose the others to whom blood, place, or history has tied him or her. But it is a longer step to the opinion that such ties, for all their arbitrariness, are at best meaningless, are additionally illegitimate, and are usually destructive of larger human projects like a political federation. Indeed, it is not at all clear that one can easily surrender these sorts of identifications. "The story of my life," argues Alasdair MacIntyre, "is always embedded in the story of those communities from which I derive my identity. I am born with a past; and to try to cut myself off from that past, in the individualist mode, is to deform my present relationships." 56

Another problem of the "realists" lies in their failure to animate adequately a moral and political philosophy of individualism. In comparison, nationalism, which is individualism's chief competitor for popular allegiance, is overwhelmingly powerful. Yet not everyone assumes, as does Trudeau, that this power is to be feared. According to Charles Taylor, who is both a philosopher and a one-time electoral opponent of Trudeau, the "resacralization of politics" that is evidenced in nationalism carries "an immense contemporary appeal." This appeal, further, has as its cause "a deep, human aspiration, which is so far from being evil that it plays a central role in our development as creative individuals." 57

As long as the nation is made of ultimate significance, then we are all in some way priests of its cult by being citizens or members of that nation. The idea is so simple, and the potential so electrifying that it is not surprising that the cult of nationalism can release vast stores of energy.⁵⁸

"But we gain nothing," Taylor adds, "by condemning all its fruits indiscriminately." Realists" are likely to be frustrated, then, when they try to replace the emotional attraction of group affiliation with some individualist conviction, if there even exists one of comparable power.

Groups of people, if they are to persist, must somehow have what constitutes them as groups interpreted for them. They must, in other words, sense their deepest feelings of identity being given form in the conduct of collective affairs. The language of individualism, however, is by its nature and design wildly ill-suited to the task of formulating identity, for to accomplish it one must speak of history and destiny in ways that circumvent, if not obliterate, the individual. One must speak, if not mythologically, then at least sociologically.

So the impediment to the creation of a plausible national identity for Canada in this instance is not in the subject matter (the history of almost any country is variegated enough to serve as a source), but in the choice of the technique. It simply cannot be done with an exclusive focus on the individual as the sole agent of moral and legal consequence, and with a reading of history not as a story but as a literal succession of facts. The poet and playwright Robin Mathews has observed this weakness. The Canadian identity has been cramped, Mathews believes, because

The liberal ideology teaches, invites, encourages the Canadian to think of himself or herself as responsible to self, to his or her own personal development. It teaches the Canadian to scorn history, to reject communal values unless they are the values of a fragmented, experimental, a-historical little ephemeral society of contemporaries.⁶⁰

Certainly, the prevalence of the liberal ideology in Canada is not impossible to explain. Pierre Trudeau, as one famous liberal, understood a fundamental truth about his country: in Canada, to examine the historical roots of the nation is ironically not to encourage its solidarity but to risk its division and possible dissolution. He therefore held out to the Canadian people an above-ground substitute for politics-by-roots: namely, political guarantees of respect and protection as individuals. In principle, these guarantees should usher in the benefits of democracy and equality that the operation of an individualist ethic promises.

But individualism promises (or threatens) other developments as well. It removes persons from the guidance of the group and the comfort of tradition. It in addition forces upon them a new identity as autonomous citizens. Given what went before them in Canada, and especially in Québec, it is easy to see how these changes might be preferred—indeed welcomed—politically. Nevertheless, this preference is flawed. The flaw is not that the preference exhibits a concern for the problems of concrete persons, nor that it shuns a decrepit tendency to evaluate them by their communal roots. Rather, the flaw is that this approach refuses to acknowledge that meaningful action presumes some ideological orientation, and that any ideology needs to sink roots in the values of a community. The assumption of a group's values, furthermore, is not a contingent or "accidental" element of an individual's life; it is a prerequisite of moral action. MacIntyre writes convincingly of this necessity:

. . . we all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone's son or daughter, someone else's cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. This is in part what gives my life its own moral particularity. 61

If the use of emotion is to be banished from appeals for good civic behavior, what motivation besides narrow self-interest remains to commit citizens to the preservation of individualism as a system? What account is left to shore up the plausibility of the synthetic identity that individualism makes necessary? And where is direction to be found for the unending deliberation on the future that individualism makes inevitable? The extreme nature of the liberal individualist position

leaves these fundamental questions unanswered. In the end, the liberal eschews the task, replacing the hard work of nation-building with a blanket condemnation of the excesses of nationalistic fervor. But, as Charles Taylor wrote in 1970,

To condemn nationalism as such, for instance, as many liberals do (our present Prime Minister is one example), makes no more sense than the general condemnation of sex because of all the sexual perversions that we see in human life. Today the nation is one of the most important communities in relation to which men develop their sense of identity. That it should also sometimes be given the rank of ultimate reality, so that it overrides more fundamental values, does not alter this fact. And we do nothing to combat these perversions in just wishing that the whole thing did not exist. We can only fight such perversions effectively by understanding what underlies them.⁶²

Conclusion

In the hands of a master rhetorician like Pierre Trudeau, descriptions of the political mechanisms of constitutionalism and federalism fairly shine with republican purity. The necessarily impersonal fixtures of liberal democracy—the inviolability of conscience, the sanctity of individual freedom, and the dignity of governments installed by the exercise of the franchise—are lent in Trudeau's discourses a moral purpose high enough to promise their perpetual defense. At this same point, however, the power of liberal democratic rhetoric naturally reaches a plateau, for in making all persons citizens of a state (as opposed to members of a people), and in conceiving of the state as a creature of its laws (and not a manifestation of superordinate will), democracies lacking a coordinate civil religion neuter themselves. They may become so calculating that they sell short the futures of their own people. The threat, in essence, is that liberal democracies will sell off destiny for security, will trade a standing in history for a standard of living.

A country certainly could make worse bargains. But the danger in such a deal is that even the immediate political and material rewards to be found in the avoidance of national ideology may slip away once citizens begin to question what, apart from self-concern, obliges them to remain in a land so reasonable, yet so seemingly without reason. Fine precision in tending the affairs of state ultimately is wasted if the state can compose no more compelling a rationale for itself than that it is already in place and that it functions smoothly. Governments often attempt to provide for the well-being of their citizens, but they try to do

so in a manner which suggests that both state action and individual welfare reflect larger imperatives that draw together in common purpose the citizen and his or her government. This approach to political life is impermissible, however, when a guiding theory portrays as illegitimate any concerns of the state that are larger or more abstract than the conditions of individuals.⁶³

This is the bind into which Trudeau's own fidelity to liberal orthodoxy backs him. The sole available escape from this trap is to imitate the American philosopher John Dewey and consecrate the symbols of democracy as the sacraments of a new civil religion.⁶⁴ However, the iconoclast in Trudeau resists even this option, which to him smacks of unreason. It would be, from his perspective, a concession to mass penchants for political idolatry. Trudeau thus succeeds in claiming for himself the undisputed role of high priest in a civic cult with an exquisitely wrought theology, but one built of only the barest fundamentals. His church of reason has no eschatology, no soteriology, no effective ecclesiology, little distinctive ritual, and very few adherents. Unfortunately for Trudeau, the last fact follows directly from the others.

Trudeau is a Canadian with no room in his rational mind for the backwardness of his country's ancien régime. He has no stomach, either, for the revolutionary madness that gave France the guillotine and put bombs in Montréal mailboxes. Democracy, and democracy alone, is his middle way. Trudeau is committed to democracy, and this commitment may be his most lasting contribution to Canadian political life. All the same, he could never bring himself to explain, in other than consequential terms, why democracy serves well the mission of the government of Canada. By reason of his reticence, he may in the end have failed the country that he worked so tirelessly to save.

In an address before a joint session of the United States Congress in 1977, Trudeau repeated, in strikingly basic terms, his opposition to any of the trappings of nationalism.⁶⁵ The Prime Minister quoted the American revolutionary Tom Paine, who in his work on *Rights of Man* (1792) declared, "My country is the world, and my religion is to do good."

A worthy sentiment that, but one better suited to the patriot like Paine who has already won for himself a nation. "English Canadians [i.e., federalists] should build a country, and then maybe we would want to be part of it," says the Québec separatist Pierre Bourgault. "Be creative, believe in yourselves, and maybe then we'll believe in you too." 66

NOTES

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 This expression is quoted at the head of Graeme Gibson's contribution to Laurier LaPierre (ed.), If You Love This Country: Facts and Feelings on Free Trade (Toronto: McClelland

and Stewart, 1987), 46.

3. W.A. Foster, Canada First; Or, Our New Nationality; An Address (Toronto: Adam, Stevenson, and Co., 1871), 34-35.

4. Jean Chrétien, Straight from the Heart (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1985), 220.

5. Cf. Claude Savoie, Les Crises de Pierre Elliott Trudeau (Montréal: Editions Scriptomédia Inc., 1979), 27-35. Compare the opinion of the economist Abraham Rotstein: "The Prime Minister's anti-nationalism is well known," he wrote of Trudeau in 1969, "but not so apparent is the classical liberalism out of which this derives and how that shapes his basic outlook. A man of many sides claiming a pragmatic approach to politics, he is the most deeply ideological of Canadian prime ministers." Rotstein, "The Search for Independence," The Canadian Forum 49 (October, 1969), 147. See also Rotstein, "Constitution Without Tiers?," The Canadian Forum 47 (March, 1968), 266-268. Both of these essays are reprinted, under other titles, in that author's The Precarious Homestead: Essays on Economics, Technology and Nationalism (Toronto: New Press, 1973), 69-77 and 107-111.

6. George Radwanski, Trudeau (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1978), 121. The emphasis appears in the original. Other biographies of Trudeau, which vary in their degrees of rigor and reliability, include: Richard Gwyn, The Northern Magus: Pierre Trudeau and Canadians, edited by Sandra Gwyn (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980); John D. Harbron, This is Trudeau (Don Mills, Ont.: Longmans Canada, 1968); Jean Pellerin, Le Phénomène Trudeau (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1972); Savoie, Les Crises de Pierre Elliott Trudeau; Douglas Stuebing, with John Marshall and Gary Oakes, Trudeau: A Man for Tomorrow (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, and Company, 1968); and Michel Vastel, Trudeau le

québécois (Montréal: Les Editions de l'homme, 1989).

Works of political journalism, especially ones dating from the 1968 federal election campaign, also contain extensive material on Trudeau's personal background and ideological formation. See, among others: Gérard Bergeron, Notre miroir à deux faces: Trudeau, Lévesque (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1985); Dorval Brunelle, Les trois colombes: Essai (Montréal: VLB éditeur, 1985); Ron Graham, One-Eyed Kings: Promise and Illusion in Canadian Politics (Don Mills, Ont.: Collins, 1986); Edith Iglauer, "Profiles: Prime Minister/Premier ministre," The New Yorker 45 (July 5, 1969), 36-42, 44, and 46-60; Peter C. Newman, A Nation Divided: Canada and the Coming of Pierre Trudeau (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969); Donald Peacock, Journey to Power: The Story of a Canadian Election (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1968); and Martin Sullivan, Mandate '68 (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1968).

The memoirs of Trudeau's associates and contemporaries in Canadian politics are an additional source of reflections on the character of the former prime minister, when these recollections are not too clouded by the passage of time or the desire of the author to serve his own interests. See Chrétien, Straight from the Heart; Keith Davey, The Rainmaker: A Passion for Politics (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Company, 1986); Donald J. Johnston, Up the Hill (Montréal: Optimum Publishing International, 1986); Tom Kent, A Public Purpose: An Experience of Liberal Opposition and Canadian Government (Kingston, Ont. and Montréal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1988); René Lévesque, Memoirs, translated by Philip Stratford (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986); Gérard Pelletier, Years of Impatience: 1950-1960, translated by Alan Brown (New York: Facts on File, 1984); and Pelletier, Years of Choice: 1960-1968, translated by Philip Stratford (Toronto: Methuen, 1987).

Finally, there are a number of analyses—more or less critical—of Trudeau as an intellectual leader and leader of a government. Among these are: Philip C. Bom, *Trudeau's Canada: Truth and Consequences* (St. Catharines, Ont.: Guardian Publishing Company,

1977); Gordon Donaldson, Eighteen Men: The Prime Ministers of Canada (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1985); John L. Hiemstra, Trudeau's Political Philosophy: Its Implications for Liberty and Progress (Toronto: The Institute for Christian Studies, 1983); James Laxer and Robert Laxer, The Liberal Idea of Canada: Pierre Trudeau and the Question of Canada's Survival (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1977); B. W. Powe, The Solitary Outlaw (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1987); Walter Stewart, Trudeau in Power (New York: Outerbridge and Dienstfrey, 1971); Anthony Westell, Paradox: Trudeau as Prime Minister (Scarborough, Ont.: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1972); Lubor J. Zink, Trudeaucracy (Toronto: The Toronto Sun Publishing Company, 1972); Larry Zolf, Dance of the Dialectic: How Pierre Elliott Trudeau Went from Philosopher-King to the Incorruptible Robespierre to Philosopher-Queen Marie Antoinette to Canada's Generalissimo Ky and Then to Mackenzie King and Even Better (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1973); and Zolf, Just Watch Me: Remembering Pierre Trudeau (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1984).

7. Rotstein, "The Search for Independence," 148.

- 8. Above all else, see Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Federalism and the French Canadians (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968). The French-language version of this collection of essays is Trudeau, Le Fédéralisme et la société canadienne-française (Montréal: Editions HMH, 1967). Also consult Trudeau, Approaches to Politics, translated by I. M. Owen (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1970); and Trudeau (ed.), La Grève de l'amiante (Montréal: Editions du jour, 1970), which was translated by James Boake as The Asbestos Strike (Toronto: James Lewis and Samuel, 1974). On more recent concerns, see C. David Crenna (ed.), Lifting the Shadow of War (Edmonton, Alberta: Hurtig Publishers, 1987); and Donald J. Johnston (ed.), With a Bang, Not a Whimper: Pierre Trudeau Speaks Out (Toronto: Stoddart Publishing Company, 1988). Collections of Trudeau fragments include: Trudeau en direct (Montréal: Editions du jour, 1972); Conversation with Canadians (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1972); and The Best of Trudeau: A Compendium of Whimsical Wit and Querulous Quip by Canada's Putative Prince (Toronto: Modern Canadian Library, 1972).
- Pierre Elliott Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," in P.-A. Crépeau and C. B. MacPherson (eds.), The Future of Canadian Federalism / L'Avenir du fédéralisme canadien (Toronto and Montréal: U of Toronto P and les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1965), 16-17. Cf. Trudeau, "The Practice and Theory of Federalism," in Michael Oliver (ed.), Social Purpose for Canada (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1961), 371-393.
- 10. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 17.
- 11. Ibid.
- 12. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 18.
- 13. Ibid.
- 14. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, "New Treason of the Intellectuals," translated by Patricia Claxton, in Trudeau, Federalism and the French Canadians, 156-157. In French, "La Nouvelle trahison des clercs" appears as pp. 159-190 in Trudeau's Le Fédéralisme et la société canadienne-française.
- 15. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 19.
- 16. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 20.
- 17. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 20-21.
- 18. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 22.
- 19. Ibid
- 20. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 27.
- 21. Trudeau, "New Treason of the Intellectuals," 173.
- 22. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 23.
- 23. Ihid
- 24. Trudeau, "New Treason of the Intellectuals," 175.
- 25. Trudeau, "New Treason of the Intellectuals," 161.
- Pierre Elliott Trudeau, "Separatist Counter-Revolutionaries," The Canadian Forum 44 (July, 1964), 77. The original French version of this essay is reprinted as "Les Séparatistes des contre-révolutionnaires," in Le Fédéralisme et la société canadienne-française, 217-227.
- 27. Trudeau, "New Treason of the Intellectuals," 161.
- 28. Trudeau's model in this approach is derived from his study of the writings of Lord Acton. See especially John Emerich Edward Dahlberg [Lord Acton], "Nationality," in Gertrude Himmelfarb (ed.), Essays on Freedom and Power (New York: Meridian Books, 1955), 141-170.

- Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 24.
- Trudeau, "New Treason of the Intellectuals," 169.
- 31. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 27.
- 32. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 29-30.
- 33. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 30.
- More accurately, the Fathers of Confederation may be portrayed as reasonable, and not as reasoning. The consensus of historical commentators is that Canada's founders did what they could with what they had; they were, in the words of an old joke, "as Canadian as possible under the circumstances." This type of pragmatic political accommodation may follow as a welcome by-product of a federal system. Still, it is a far cry from the process of decision-making that Trudeau favors—one of rational deduction from shared premises for politics.
- Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 26.
- 36. Pierre Elliott Trudeau, "Québec and the Constitutional Problem," in Trudeau, Federalism and the French Canadians, 37. The original version of this essay, in French, has been reprinted as "Québec et le problème constitutionnel," in Le Fédéralisme et la société canadienne française, 7-59. "When I speak of Canada," Trudeau indicated elsewhere, "I do not have in mind an 'identity' which competes with that which a French-Canadian and a Québecer, conscious of his or her specific history and roots, holds dear." He envisioned no "higher-order Canadian personality in which would be absorbed or subsumed" the cultural allegiances of the nation's many minority groups. Quoted in Gwyn, The Northern Magus, 244
- 37. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 25.

- Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 28. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 34. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 28. Trudeau, "Federalism, Nationalism, and Reason," 35.
- 42. Political addresses that are written by others and delivered while the speaker is a central actor in the government are obviously not the same as philosophical tracts composed alone and in refuge from the public realm. The two forms of political communication therefore ought not to be evaluated identically.
- See Hiemstra, Trudeau's Political Philosophy, 33-35. Cf. William A. Stahl, Symbols of Canada: Civil Religion, Nationality, and the Search for Meaning (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, California, 1981).
- Trudeau, Conversation with Canadians, 11.
- Trudeau, Conversation with Canadians, 80. In an interview broadcast during the Prime Minister's 1970 visit to New Zealand, Trudeau placed a similar stress on the role of government as a provider of physical comforts. He identified Canada to his inquisitors as a country that must be preserved because, he added triumphantly, it is "one of the countries in the world which has the greatest potential for creating a society in which quality of men's lives is foremost in government's minds." Part of the transcript of this interview is reprinted in Trudeau, Conversation with Canadians, 194.
- Stahl, Symbols of Canada, 9-10; Hiemstra, Trudeau's Political Philosophy, 93.
- 47. Trudeau, Conversation with Canadians, 155.
- 48. Trudeau, Conversation with Canadians, 6.
- 49. Trudeau, Conversation with Canadians, 196.
- 50. Trudeau, Conversation with Canadians, 32-33.
- 51. Trudeau, Conversation with Canadians, 191.
- 52. Trudeau, Conversation with Canadians, 201.
- 53. Ralph Matthews, The Creation of Regional Dependency (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1983),
- 54. Albert Breton, Raymond Breton, Claude Bruneau, Yvon Gauthier, Marc Lalonde, Maurice Pinard, and Pierre Elliott Trudeau, "An Appeal for Realism in Politics," The Canadian Forum 44 (May, 1964), 29-33.
- 55. Breton, et al., 29.
- Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory (Notre Dame, Ind.: U of Notre Dame P, 1981), 205.
- Charles Taylor, The Pattern of Politics (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), 110. Cf. Taylor, "Why Do Nations Have to Become States?," in Stanley G. French (ed.), Philosophers Look at Canadian Confederation | La Confédération canadienne: Qu'en pensent

les philosophes? (Montréal: The Canadian Philosophical Association / L'Association canadienne de philosophie, 1979), 19-35.

58. Taylor, The Pattern of Politics, 110.

59. Ibid.

60. Robin Mathews, "Canadian Culture and the Liberal Ideology," in Mathews, Canadian Literature: Surrender or Revolution, edited by Gail Dexter (Toronto: Steel Rail Educational Publishing, 1978), 191-192.

61. MacIntyre, 204-205.

62. Taylor, The Pattern of Politics, 111.

63. Savoie, Les Crises de Pierre Elliott Trudeau, 30. Cf. Breton, et al., 29-33.

64. See John Dewey, A Common Faith (New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1934). Cf. J. Paul Williams, What Americans Believe and How They Worship (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), 363-375. See also the "theology" of democracy as elaborated in Herbert Agar, Frank Aydelotte, G. A. Borgese, Hermann Broch, Van Wyck Brooks, Ada L. Comstock, William Yandell Elliott, Dorothy Canfield Fisher, Christian Gauss, Oscar Jászi, Alvin Johnson, Hans Kohn, Thomas Mann, Lewis Mumford, William Allan Neilson, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Gaetano Salvemini [The "Committee of Fifteen"], The City of Man: A Declaration on World Democracy (New York: The Viking Press, 1940); and the quasi-liturgical devotions outlined in Mordecai Kaplan, J. Paul Williams, and Eugene Kohn (eds.), The Faith of America: Readings, Songs, and Prayers for the Celebration of American Holidays (New York: The Reconstructionist Press, 1963). I am indebted to my colleague Philip Gleason for these last two references; see his paper, "Immigration, Religion, and Intergroup Relations."

65. The text of this address is reprinted as Pierre Elliott Trudeau, "Canadian and American Friendship: Canada's Unity Will Not Be Fractured," Vital Speeches of the Day 43 (March 15, 1977), 322-324. See also Bergeron, Notre miroir à deux faces, 174.

66. Quoted in Gwyn, *The Northern Magus*, 291; and in Douglas Hall, *The Canada Crisis: A Christian Perspective* (Toronto: The Anglican Book Centre, 1980), 84.