Patriotic Loyalty

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My purpose in this essay is to explore various dimensions of patriotic loyalty. I do this, first, by reviewing the claims that loyalty can legitimately make on us; secondly, by considering the relationships and associations to which loyalty is appropriately given; thirdly, by focusing on the particular case of patriotism and considering whether patriotic loyalty is justifiable; fourthly, by discussing what it demands; and, finally, by offering some suggestions about limits to (patriotic) loyalty. The gist of my position is that loyalty is an important virtue, that patriotic loyalty is legitimate – indeed, given our current human situation, generally obligatory – but that, like other obligations it can be overridden or extinguished. The general framework for such a position is what I endeavour to provide in this essay.

I The value of loyalty

Loyalty, I want to argue, is an important associative virtue. As with other virtues, it is an excellence of character that is partially constitutive of what it is good for a person to be and, moreover, partially constitutive of human goodness. Like other virtues it is most likely also good for its possessor. In the case of loyalty, though, I will argue that it can be a costly benefit. Exercises of loyalty generally involve some degree of self-sacrifice.

In speaking of loyalty as a virtue, I do not want to claim that, as a virtue, it is exclusively a moral excellence. It is an excellence of character but, like courage and perseverance, it can also be displayed in contexts that have no specifically moral reference or even implications. Loyalty to one’s football team or an airline company may be fine, but – in that context – probably not invested with significant moral worth. This raises in advance a question that is likely to be raised about patriotic loyalty, namely, whether, if it is a virtue, it is morally virtuous or only politically (or otherwise) so. How we answer this question will turn, I suggest, on the status we accord a country or patria.

But loyalty, I have suggested, is not just a virtue; it is an associative virtue. That is, it is a virtue of our associations or affiliations. These may comprise relationships, memberships, institutional affiliations, or role associations. Strictly speaking, almost any affiliational grouping or relationship can become an object of our loyalty. Loyalty may be given to sports teams, schools, and gangs, as well as to friends, families, employers, ethnic groups, or countries. ¹

Once we allow that almost any associative relationship may constitute an object of loyalty, we may also reasonably wonder whether loyalty is a virtue in every affiliational connection and, if not, whether any virtue it has is contingent solely on

¹ I am claiming therefore, that the primary objects of loyalty are persons or personal and personalised collectivities. Secondarily, or, perhaps, derivatively, loyalty can also be given to principles, values, ideals, ideologies, brands, and programs. Although there is a debate about this in the literature, I shall prescind from it here.
the affiliation. For example, assuming (as I do) that we can speak of a loyal Nazi, is such a person better or worse for being loyal? The argument might go either way.\(^2\) We might claim either that the loyalty aggravates the Nazi’s evil, manifesting the depth and perseverance of his commitment, or we might claim that his loyalty is a redeeming feature, because a disloyal Nazi would be doubly despicable. My own inclination is to say that a character disposition that I would call a default virtue may become a vice if it is associated with an inappropriate object. In this vein, I would also argue that the philanthropic generosity of those who bankroll terrorist groups or settlements on the West Bank constitutes a vice under those circumstances. But generosity is still a default virtue; its primary nature is to be a virtue. Every virtue is prone to pathological expressions.\(^3\) There are “women who love too much” and those who would pursue justice “though the heavens fall.”

Not all will be convinced by this account. The possibility represented by a loyal gang member or mafioso might be offered as something of a reductio ad absurdum of the view that loyalty is a (default) virtue. Does that possibility not show that loyalty is only a sentimental attachment to others with no intrinsic value? I believe we should be careful about drawing such a conclusion, for it reflects no less on other virtues. The honour that exists among thieves, the courage of enemy soldiers, and the generosity of misguided philanthropists may equally be used to cast aspersions on virtues we otherwise prize. The fact that loyalty can be displayed toward unworthy objects does not undermine its default status as a virtue any more than the fact that industriousness, conscientiousness, discipline, and sincerity can be attached to inappropriate objects shows them not to be virtues.

Nevertheless, not all virtues are of the same kind. Loyalty, like sincerity and conscientiousness, is better seen as an executive than as a substantive virtue. Executive virtues, “virtues of the will,” are those that assist one in carrying out our projects or what we may have a duty to do. We need them, even though they can come to be associated with inappropriate objects. Not only that, even when they are associated with appropriate objects they can go astray. We can enter into bad relationships of a “legitimate” kind (such as friendships and marriages), and our continued loyalty to a once-worthy object may come to be unjustified. Consider the conscientious accountant who is seduced into “creative” bookkeeping. The virtue that infuses his professionalism is now directed to less worthy ends. Loyalties may also be perverted and, alas, often are.

Although loyalty can be developed in relation to almost any associational object (brand loyalty represents an outer edge), we generally think of loyalty in connection with certain key relationships and associations. That is, it is more appropriate to think of loyalty in connection with one’s friends and family than in connection with one’s membership of a book club or automobile association. Or, to put it in terms that will be better suited to our later discussion, it is (generally) more important to have loyalty to friends and family than it is to have it to a book club or automobile association. One way of marking this differentiation is to say that some associations are of greater

\(^2\) It has, I believe, some parallels to the debate about whether immoral promises are obligatory.

\(^3\) We tend to be overly impressed by Aristotelian views about virtues as means between extremes – rashness as an excess of courage and cowardice as a deficit. But Nazis may be courageous as well as rash.
importance and of greater intrinsic value to us than others and that the development
and maintenance of loyalty to them is therefore of greater importance.

In this connection, some writers consider it important to distinguish chosen from
unchosen loyalties, seeing an element of bad faith in the latter.4 The argument, at
bottom, is that whereas chosen loyalties reflect deliberation, unchosen ones (of which
patriotic loyalties are seen as paradigmatic) tend to be unreflectively self-defensive.
However, I will suggest that the chosen/unchosen distinction is of practical rather than
moral significance.5

We can grant that the conditions of our nurture tend to create in us a loyalty to the
social institutions within which we are raised – loyalty to family and country, for
example. And these are distinguished from the later loyalties arising out of choices we
make – of partner, professional association, etc. It is suggested that we enter into the
latter with “open” eyes. (Well, we sometimes do.) But of the former it is said that
once we have them we do what we can to resist (or discount) negative judgments
about the objects of our loyalty, thus manifesting bad faith. This, however, is a
practical issue and not strictly a moral one. The deliberative processes prior to
acquiring a loyalty tend (only) to be more searching than those engaged in subsequent
to its acquisition. The chosen-unchosen dichotomy, moreover, is better represented by
a continuum than as exclusive categories. We emigrate. Someone “grows” on us or
we “find ourselves” in philosophy. Whether chosen or unchosen, loyalties will of
course incline us to take the side of those in whom our loyalties are placed. But they
do not require the distortion (“discounting”) or self-deception of bad faith. Perhaps
the principle of charity (which might lead us to view associations to which we are
already loyal benignly) should be exemplified more widely than it is. But it is hardly a
counsel for distortion. Trust is no vice, even if it is sometimes corrupted into
gullibility or blind trust. And loyalty – even established loyalty – need not be and
almost certainly should not be unreflective. To the extent that loyalty is blind it is
defective as loyalty. One might reasonably expect those whose loyalties are relatively
unchosen to commit themselves to being “clear-eyed” about them: “Yes, he is my
father, but he’s also dishonest”; “Though I love it, my country has a lot to answer
for.”6

To the extent, then, that we are not dealing with a corrupted version of loyalty, all
loyalties should be accessible to revision or forfeiture. If an object is one to which I
am loyal, I will be inclined to trust it. I will also be inclined to trust those I love. But
that does not mean I have to be closed-minded about them.

Revision of a loyalty may legitimately concern the demands that the particular object
of loyalty places upon one. Does loyalty to my parents require that I lie for them?
Does loyalty to my country require that I risk my life for it? In such cases, the issue
may not be one of the legitimacy of the loyalty so much as the obligations appropriate
to it. Our answers to such questions may be nuanced. We will want to know more

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4 Not all who make the distinction see it as significant in this way. But for one who does, see Simon
Keller, “Patriotism as Bad Faith,” *Ethics* 115 (April, 2005): 563-92. See also Keith Horton’s critique of
Keller in this volume.
5 To some extent we see this in the different ways in which people characterise loyalties – some seeing
familial loyalties as chosen, others as unchosen (contrast Keller and Primoratz).
6 Whether one should say such things publicly may sometimes be a bit trickier.
about the circumstances. Does the question concerning parents relate to their religious affiliations (and vulnerability to persecution) and would they want me to conceal them? Or does it concern the abuse of my little sister and what do I owe her? Am I being asked to fight in the Pacific or in Iraq and should it make a decisive difference when it is my country that calls?

Forfeiture of claims to loyalty may be appropriate when the object of loyalty shows itself to have acted in ways that undermine (what are taken to be) the legitimate presumptions of the relationship. Thus the womanizing husband, the sexually abusing father, and the traitorous citizen may sometimes be said to have forfeited any claim to mutual loyalty on the part of those they have betrayed.

A significant aspect of the particular relationships and associations that garner our loyalty is that they have or have come to have intrinsic and not (merely, or even, perhaps, at all) extrinsic or instrumental importance for us, even though they are also likely to have instrumental value (and indeed it may have been that instrumental value that originally connected us). Those associations for which we come (or should come) to have loyalty are those with which we have come to (or should) identify ourselves – our families, our employment, our ethnic group, and our country (for the moment, not passing judgment on the appropriateness of these associational identifications). In the case of relationships such as friendships, the language of identification tends not to be appropriate (except for those who identify themselves as, say, FOBs – Friends of Bill), though we are coloured by our association with them. That with which we identify ourselves usually becomes ours in an identity-constituting and responsibility conferring sense – that is, our association has been incorporated into our sense of who we are and we have come to assume some responsibility for what it becomes. If we value an association merely instrumentally, we have no loyalty to it (though in certain cases it might be argued that we should develop loyalty to it, that is, we should come to value the connection for its own sake). As far as friendships are concerned, we sometimes draw a firm distinction between those who are real (or end-)friends and those who are only friends of convenience (or means-friends). Just as often, we might be unwilling to consider the latter as friends.

Because of this identification, there is usually implicit in our loyalty a judgment that its objects are compatible with what we stand for. That is, embedded in those relationships to which our loyalty is owed are certain presumptions about the compatibility of values attributable to the objects of loyalty with those for which we stand. To the extent that we learn otherwise we have a reason for taking some action – either to try to bring about change in the object of our loyalty or to abandon it (on

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7 Friends are not usually incorporated into our identities in the same way that other associations are – such as our being, say, Australian or Protestant. On the other hand, friendships constitute the only relationships in which loyalty is implicit in the relationship. Friends (end-friends, that is) may count on our loyalty by virtue of the friendship; our families and countries may (sometimes justifiably) expect it but cannot count on it.

8 We may feel proud of their success and ashamed by their failures.

9 This is not to be confused – as is so often the case – with grounding our loyalty in the qualities that we presume to be implicit in the object of our loyalty. For in that case we might be tempted to argue that our loyalty is to the qualities. Rather, our loyalty is to the object of our association – the friend, organization, or whatever. It is the association with that object that we value – not just the object and not just the association. See what follows and compare also with the troubling case (in Section II) of the woman who seems to be more loyal to marriage than to the man to whom she is married.
the grounds that it has forfeited its claims to our loyalty). We have what Albert Hirschman refers to as *voice* and *exit* options. Appropriate loyalty will generally encourage voice and delay exit until we have sufficient reason to think that necessary change is unlikely to be forthcoming, and that the associational object no longer expresses values we deemed essential to the relationship. Nevertheless, the loyalty we have to an affiliational object or person is not a loyalty to the particular values that are instantiated by them. The loyalty is to *the objects of an association or relationship*.

Because we identify with the objects of our loyalty, critical – and often painful – decisions will need to be made should we discover significant dissonance between the values exemplified by the object of loyalty and our own – if, for example, I learn that my lover once murdered someone, that my country is engaging in something close to genocide, or that my university is sponsoring research into biological weaponry. We will be confronted with the possibility of severing our connection with something that has become part of us.

The non-instrumental character that the objects of our loyalty (have come to) have for us reveals something about its general importance as a virtue. Loyalty is constituted by perseverance in an intrinsically valued relationship or association even (especially) when it is not advantageous to do so. Loyalty is not a fair weather virtue: it puts us out or even at risk. It manifests itself in situations in which self-interest would probably dictate a different course of action. That is, it bespeaks persistence, self-sacrifice, constancy, and steadfastness when self-interest, self-seeking, personal advantage, ambition, personal projects, and various other egoistic inclinations or considerations would counsel otherwise. If there is no cost there is no occasion for the exercise of loyalty.

Of course self-interest may also prompt conduct that would be interpreted as loyal. If acting in ways that would be seen as lacking in loyalty would bring recriminations upon one, one may feign loyalty and act as if loyal in order to avoid them. But self-interested displays of loyalty manifest only its outer husk and not its inner commitment.

The issue of motivation is critical to determinations of loyalty and disloyalty. Despite what is likely to be claimed by those who find their expectations of loyalty dashed, disloyalty is not constituted merely by forsaking an association or shifting loyalty to another. Choosing to stay in an association may express cowardice or misguided loyalty, whereas leaving it may involve an act of courage. Disloyalty is usually involved when self-serving reasons lead one to abandon what is usually considered to be a core or close affiliation. Thus Robert E. Lee was not counted disloyal for choosing to align himself with kith and kin in the south rather than the Union, for that choice, though misguided and tragic, was a morally intelligible one. Benedict Arnold, however, was seen as a traitor, for, even though he may have been poorly treated, his ultimate motivations were taken to be self-serving.11

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11 This is one reason why strenuous attempts are usually made to show that whistleblowers have acted self-interestedly. If such attempts are successful, the charge of (self-serving) disloyalty can be sustained and the whistleblowers’ credibility is undermined.
The lack of hypocrisy involved in Lee’s decision highlights a further feature that distinguishes his situation from that of someone who is disloyal. One might reasonably argue that the physicist Klaus Fuchs, and who passed atom secrets to the U.S.S.R. for ideological rather than narrowly self-serving reasons, betrayed Britain and the United States, not simply because he chose to give the U.S.S.R his primary political loyalty, but because he hypocritically affirmed his continued loyalty to his adopted Britain (and, presumably also betrayed commitments he had made to United States’ authorities).

Finally, if, as Hirschman and other proponents of institutional entropy argue, organizations, relationships, and institutions will generally have – over time – an endemic tendency to decline, loyalty will assume an important place in our associational life. For it is often loyalty (rather than self-interest) that commits us to remain in an associational relationship to an object after we learn that it is no longer immediately advantageous to do so. As we have noted, however, remaining in such a relationship is not unbounded: the (recuperative) voice option that we might exercise to recall the object of our relationship to what it was presumed to be may properly be followed by exit in the event that it proves unresponsive.

So far, then, I have argued that not only is loyalty an important associative virtue but also that by virtue of the importance of associational relationships to human flourishing it is an important human virtue. That is not to say that it cannot be misplaced or distorted or overemphasized. But the various pathologies to which loyalty is vulnerable should not lead us to diminish or eschew it.

II What is patriotism?

It is frequently said that patriotism is “love of one’s country.” I am not altogether comfortable with that as a general account, even though patriots frequently do love their countries. Some part of my hesitation stems from the multiple ambiguities of “love.” Even more significant is the critical stance one may often have as part of one’s patriotism – for example, the bumper stickers that proclaim “It is patriotic to dissent,” or the critical role that may be played by a “loyal opposition.” Although love may also be critical/tough, the informal or popular focus on love as expressive of devotion and positive emotional support too easily allows for a misleading exploitation of patriotic identification when characterised as love of country. Moreover, the loyalty one sometimes shows to one’s country may amount to little more than a decision not to act in ways that would jeopardise its interests rather than a positive commitment to advance them (much as a woman may loyally stick with her no-good husband: she has more feeling for the institution of marriage than for the particular man she married). Even though it often is, loyalty need not be accompanied by a great deal of affection.

Thus, without necessarily eliminating all reference to feeling or at least to a sense of identification and commitment, it seems to me to be less misleading to construe patriotism as a form of loyalty (toward country) than as love for country. Patriotic loyalty is therefore to be understood as the loyalty one has (or might have or should

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12 Hirschman, Exit, Voice, and Loyalty, Ch 1.
13 See, for example, C.S. Lewis, The Four Loves (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960).
have) for country (as against the loyalty one has or might have or should have for other objects such as friends, family, or God).

But how should we understand a country or patria in this connection? The answer starts simply enough but gets increasingly complicated. It is common to distinguish patriotism from nationalism by seeing the former as loyalty to a group conceived of in juridical and political terms and the latter as loyalty to a group conceived of primarily in ethnic and cultural terms. Ignoring for the moment the fuzziness of (and contestation involved in) terms such as “juridical,” “political,” “ethnic,” and “cultural,” this way of making the distinction would seem to allow for a patriotism that is nationalistic and a nationalism that is patriotic. And it also appears to allow for a patriotism without nationalism and a nationalism without patriotism, a boon to those who believe that nationalism is repugnant but consider patriotism to be a legitimate vehicle for liberal democracy.

In any serious analysis, however, the distinctions are drawn too starkly. Each must be territorially sustained, and this conduces to some sort of partial convergence, even if not identification. Juridical and political institutions tend to take on and foster a cultural, if not ethnic cast (even American patriotism tends not to be just about borders and structures but also about a richer, somewhat amorphous cultural glue called “the American way of life”), and “national” cultural and ethnic groups usually seek some form of juridical and political expression (Quebecois nationalism is not just about preserving Francophone identity and French culture but also about achieving some form of political self-determination). The tendencies in each direction are stronger in some cases than others. We should not, however, abandon an analytic distinction between them, and in practice we may wish to argue for a society in which one form of group identity predominates. Presuming that at least one of them has traction for us, we may, for example, wish the mix to be more patriotic than nationalistic, or, often more problematically, given its exclusionary tendencies, more nationalistic.

The complications are deepened by the fact that even when a country is conceived of primarily as a political and juridical entity, its members usually also think of it historically as a narrative or project in the making (or, sometimes, recovering) rather than as a fully realised structure or status quo to be preserved. As there tends to be for nationalism a set of values and aspirations that are realised only partly by the status quo and that may be set over against the status quo, so there is often for patriotism a sense of “becoming.” Thus we see founding, constitutional, or evolving values as being only partly realised in socio-political practices and seek through political and legal processes to advance them more adequately.

III Engendering patriotism

14 We may find little attraction in either. See, for example, Jeremy Waldron, “Minority Cultures and the Cosmopolitan Alternative,” University of Michigan Journal of Law Reform 25 (1992): 751-93, and Igor Primoratz’s unenthusiastic acknowledgment of patriotism in this volume.

It is generally in the interest of those committed to the well-being of a relationship, association, or organization to foster loyalty to it. In many (though certainly not all) cases there will be a reciprocity of interest and loyalties will be mutual. The loyalty will help to sustain the association of the parties involved through stormy periods, when it might be convenient for one or other of the parties to opt out. Loyalty is a preservative virtue. When associational or relational decline occurs, loyalty is also potentially recuperative, for those who possess it will express it by seeking to realise, restore, or retrieve the association or relationship so that it (re)manifests the values that sustain the loyalty it has engendered.16

As noted earlier, acceptance of some notion of associational entropy will make loyalty a significant value for almost any relationship or institution that aspires to some sort of ongoing commitment or longevity. Loyalty will ensure that those involved in continuing affiliation with such associations will, in the event of decline, work to ensure that they maintain or recover their valued character. This is an important plus side to loyalty.

What is true of loyalty generally is also true of patriotic loyalty. Those concerned with running the affairs of a country will consider that loyalty to it is of considerable importance, given the various challenges to which it might be subject.17 As part of that expectation of challenge, a country’s governing powers will also be presumed to show some loyalty to its citizens. A standing army will represent one expression of that. In addition, citizens in distress overseas might expect their government to reach out with assistance if it is needed.

But this picture has a darker side to it. Those with a self-aggrandizing or particular ideological interest in some relationship or association will also have an interest in fostering the loyalty of other parties to that relationship or association. For they realise that the benefits that they or some “cause” can reap from such an arrangement will be achieved and sustained only if they are able to encourage and exploit the sacrificial loyalty of those who are parties to it. This exploitation need not be cynical. They may well be “true believers.” And the loyalty of associational members will not be the only virtue exploited. Generosity, kindness, and courage may also be exploited. But because loyalty is an associative virtue, its exploitation can be particularly dangerous, and it becomes critical that actual and contemplated objects of loyalty be carefully scrutinised.

Exploitations of loyalty may occur in any associational context. But they are particularly prevalent where political leaderships have partisan agendas. Whether the political power in question is despotic or representative, those who have power normally wish to retain it and therefore have reason to encourage the loyalty of their followers/supporters. Such loyalty need not be reflective; indeed, an unquestioning allegiance may be encouraged, even enforced. Political loyalty is thus a very risky virtue, for we may be gulled into giving our loyalty to false gods or for continuing our loyalty to gods who have in fact betrayed us.

17 This desire is not confined to a country’s rulership/leadership. It will be shared by all who have come to identify with the country.
It is because loyalty is focused on associations or collectivities that its political expressions can be particularly dangerous. Though tyranny may be engineered by individuals, it is implemented by collectivities, and political collectivities, if misguided in their loyalty, can wreak terrible havoc.

IV Is patriotism justified?

Making a case for loyalty is not ipso facto a case for patriotic loyalty, even if those who oversee or participate in patriae have strong motivations to engender it. We need to determine whether the patria an object toward which we may – and even should – direct our loyalty. That some – or even we – do is not sufficient reason for claiming it to be so. As we noted earlier, some relationships or associations may be inappropriate objects of loyalty – say, the Aryan Brotherhood, the Bloods or Crips, and “the Party.” Associations that are organised round morally unacceptable values and goals are not proper objects of loyalty. Loyalty to them would be unjustifiable.

There are other associations that are innocuous and to which some people will be loyally attached, such as garden clubs, Sam’s Club, and the Sunset Coast Yacht Club. To such, loyalty will not – for the most part – be of any great moral moment. Although those who run such organizations might desire (for legitimate or illegitimate reasons) that members develop a sense of loyalty to the club, there is probably no compelling reason why one should or – usually – may not. Problems of institutional entropy aside, most people’s commitment to such clubs is likely to be largely utilitarian. The clubs give one easier access to certain benefits or things that are needed or enjoyable. A small core of loyalists may be enough to keep them going.

But some associations have much more central role in our lives. We count them as important because of what we consider to be their (more or less) clear and universal connection with human flourishing – usually friends and families, but perhaps a broader and more controversial range of associations, such as those connected with careers, ideological or religious commitments, and ethnic or cultural groups. Such affiliations may be considered important to our flourishing, not simply instrumentally (because such associations are able to assist us in various ways), but also intrinsically. Having friends and family are (usually) constituents of a good life – not the only ones, but important ones. And for many, a career, and ethnic or cultural group, life plan or religious association will provide critical meaning and structure. That is, in their various permutations they are seen as constituents of the good life for people as we are.

We might seek to reinforce the last point with certain claims of an anthropologico-moral nature in which we argue that, along with our commitment to autonomy and individual responsibility, there is something fundamentally communal about the kind of human life that humans both need and aspire to. Relationships and associative connections are of critical significance not only to our sustenance as persons but also to our autonomous flourishing. Many important expressions as well as the requisites of that flourishing are communal or associative. Different forms of association are constituents in a good life as we conceive it to be for people such as ourselves.

18 I am willing to concede that for some people, though not for people generally, membership in these associations could figure as constituents in a good life.
Whether it is team activities, fellowship, or large intrinsically worthwhile projects, our lives are communally embedded.\textsuperscript{19}

Of course, these are not uncontroversial assertions. Religious associations may be considered outmoded or even mischievous; and some have considered family relationships to be dangerous perpetuators of dogma. A more sustained discussion would take us into the large and intractable debates surrounding individualism, communitarianism, and human nature. My more modest purpose here is simply to distinguish those associations that we might consider more optional from those that we would be more inclined to nurture as environments for human flourishing, or at least our flourishing.

Our question, then, is: Is a patria the kind of association that we can reasonably posit as important to our being the beings we aspire to be? My answer, in brief, is a contingent “yes.” But let me first provide some caveats. At a certain level, of course, patriae are not essential to human flourishing. Many humans have flourished – not, perhaps in our fashion, though in their own way – in tribal communities that it would be anachronistic to characterise as countries, states, or even polities. However we may have wanted to characterise their tribal and other loyalties, they were not recognizably patriotic. The state or patria, though not entirely modern, does not have the deepest of historical roots, and, moreover, does not appear to be as central to our sense of being as we may consider friends and family to be. Nevertheless, our – post-Enlightenment – sense of being probably could not have been created or sustained by merely tribal life. What we count as our flourishing is not generally something we could have conceptualised or realised had our lives remained tribally based. What we require as the arena for our growth and satisfaction has demanded much greater social complexity, involving a fairly elaborate social infrastructure. The point is not simply that patriae provide the conditions for our flourishing but that for many of us, our individual patria is partially constitutive of our flourishing.

\textit{We} (the readers of this essay) are expressions of the potentiality that particular social formations have enabled, and thus our conception of what it is that constitutes a good life and the social conditions for our achieving it, will be significantly influenced by the social environment within which we have been formed. At this point, at least two questions immediately arise. First, to what extent does our self-conception presume the existence and maintenance of the patria in which we find ourselves? And second, might we conceive our possibilities differently within a different socio-political environment (in which our patria no longer existed)? Since the two questions are connected, my response will bear on both.

Liberal selves – the kind that we are considering here – are often adaptable. They are not usually wedded to a single way of living as the only or best way for humans or even as the only or best way for them. We can be born and raised in Australia and move to the United States or United Kingdom without too much trauma. For many so born and raised, Australia is not critical to our flourishing (or continued flourishing). We might, however, think that some liberal democratic patria is important to our way

\textsuperscript{19} “Feral children” represent a social pathology and, more than that, a human tragedy.
of being – the thought of relocating to or being taken over by a Fascist or Stalinist regime would be highly threatening to our sense of self.20

Some liberal selves might also develop cosmopolitan tendencies – even aspirations – finding themselves equally at home in Sydney, London, Paris, New York, and probably other places, and without any particular (or at least strong) patriotic ties. That is certainly a possibility. Not all, however, will thrive in such a multicultural environment. They will retain strong patriotic allegiances to their countries of origin because they have imbibed – and feel particularly at home in – distinctive aspects of their early culture (one thinks of Annette Baier, refusing to give up her New Zealand citizenship and later retiring to New Zealand21). Certain of its features resonate with their deepest sense of who they are. Yet other liberal selves may come to identify so strongly with the culture and ways of the country to which they have relocated that their loyalties shift. This is often – though certainly not always – the case with those who migrate to establish better lives for themselves and their children.

However, the attraction that cosmopolitans feel for a world community is, I suspect, partly an attraction because they conceive of it in fairly liberal terms. Were the cosmopolitanism to have the form of a Trotskyite international communist regime or of an extended Muslim umma wahida (universal community), it would not be as attractive (for us, at least). For us, it is often our patria, and for some others, their patria, that constitutes the guardian of a way of life that sustains both the requisites and “vocabulary” for flourishing. It may not constitute an exclusive venue for flourishing, but insofar as there are perceived to be “forces” abroad that might and indeed want to change it radically, we may acquire considerable loyalty for it. Were circumstances to arise in which our liberal democratic way of life radically challenged, our loyalty might well prompt us to defend our particular patriae with our lives.

There need not be anything chauvinistic or jingoistic about such patriotic loyalty. The popular critique of loyalty generally (and of patriotism in particular) that claims that loyalty enjoins or requires a belief in the superiority of the object of one’s loyalty, and/or denigrates the objects of others’ loyalty (especially their country), is misguided. Chauvisims, like many exploitations of loyalty, hijack loyalty for nefarious purposes.22 Just as there is no need to think that the family and friends to whom we are loyal are ipso facto superior to those of others, there is no need to build claims of superiority into patriotic loyalty.

Nevertheless, there is little doubt that, given a very different socio-political environment, we might conceive of the possibilities for our flourishing differently. In a more expansive socio-political environment than I now inhabit, I might be able to conceive of possibilities for myself that do not currently cross my radar screen. As women and historically suppressed or marginalised minorities in liberal democracies know from their own and historical experience, it has required significant socio-

20 It is not uncommon for those who must relocate to problem regimes then to live in enclaves.
22 As a side note on a theory of the virtues, almost any – if not every – virtue if taken in isolation or absolutised will lead to some form of excess. As Portia memorably observed, even justice, that pre-eminent of virtues, needs to be tempered with mercy (and probably prudence).
political changes for many members of those groups to have even conceived of certain social roles and possibilities for themselves; for others, such changes have been essential to their ability to translate such broader conceptions into some sort of reality.

A patria, in other words, though important enough for many of us, is not deeply necessary to human flourishing. Were the conditions of our socio-political environment different from what they are, many of us might move relatively easily from one patria to another or into some more cosmopolitan federation of communities.

I am not postulating a completely malleable conception of human flourishing. We have the biological structure we have, along with its potentialities (albeit incompletely mapped). If enabled, I would anticipate that our self-conception as reasoning and responsible beings (characterisations that are, admittedly, contestable) is likely to translate itself into non-oppressive polities. Except when seen through the lens of certain ideologies (protection against which there are no guarantees), there is likely to be a desire for movement from polities that are closed to polities that are open. But that need not lead to a rejection or downgrading of patriotism. Patriotism is likely to be a reasonable expectation in an open society. Within such open societies, patriotism is more likely to be kept in check. And a plurality of free societies is more likely to keep each in check. But only more likely.

Although there are rich cultural possibilities to membership in some patria, especially a pluralistic one, I suspect that the deeper roots of patriotic loyalty probably lie in the desire to secure from serious encroachment or destruction the elements of a way of life with which we have come to identify, and which are components of our own flourishing. And that is risk laden.

For endangerment might initially be construed in largely cultural terms. We might fear and even resent the cultural changes brought about by immigration or foreign media. And even if we are not averse to cultural change – indeed, welcome it – we may wish for it to occur at a pace that does not leave us feeling culturally stranded. We do not want to find ourselves isolated from the social environment that has provided important elements of meaning for our lives. There are often historical as well as current dimensions to this status quo – considerable pain may be involved involved if one’s socio-political history is “swallowed up” in the history of another.

Also important, however, is the sorry and ongoing history of human predation. The lion, cosmopolitans need to recognise, is not yet ready to lie down with the lamb. In a world that will foreseeably remain deeply divided by inequality of opportunity, the patria is always “at risk” of conquest (or secession), and to assure ourselves in the event of challenge we need the patriotic loyalty of citizens who are prepared to defend a way of life they value not only instrumentally but for its own sake. Even – perhaps especially – liberal states need armies (or military alliances) and a population willing

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23 I prescind from the issue of future genetic manipulation.
24 Joel Feinberg usefully addresses some of these issues in Harmless Wrongdoing (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), Ch. 29
25 This can happen on micro as well as macro levels – changing neighborhoods as well as changing societies.
to make sacrifices for their preservation. We may – and should – work to diminish some of those inequalities, but it is unlikely that we will eliminate them. Though patriotic loyalty may be an imperfect obligation, it is not dispensible.

V  Obligations and patriotic loyalty

We acquire patriotic loyalty when we come to an understanding that the country whose ways we have adopted has become intrinsically valuable for us, part of our identity. If my observations in the previous section have been reasonably on target, patriotic loyalty is something that those of us in liberal democratic communities should contingently develop, just as we should develop friendships and loyalties to other associational groupings that figure as elements in our flourishing. The associations we develop with such groups or people will bring with them certain particularistic affiliational obligations. Not only may I not assault, rob, or kill, my friend or fellow citizen, but I will acquire special obligations to aid that I do not have to others. Loyalty will heighten or intensify those obligations, though its focus will be those obligations as they manifest themselves in a particularistic form.

The obligations that we have to friends and fellow citizens will not be identical. There is no universal cluster of obligations that go with affiliation, and maybe not even with a general category of affiliational object. Rather than attempting to enumerate the kinds of obligations applicable to particular associations, it might be better to express them generally, leaving it to circumstantial or situational considerations to determine how they are appropriately articulated and therefore what loyalty will require of us.

Cast in the most general terms, though, loyalty obligates us to act in relation to the object of loyalty in ways that can be expected to maintain or further the interests of that object. In some cases it might be possible to state particularistic obligations in fairly explicit and general terms. So, for example, it would almost certainly violate obligations of patriotic loyalty were one to sell state secrets to a rival power. But does patriotic loyalty require me to answer my country’s call to serve in Iraq? About that there will be disagreement. (The powers-that-be may consider it a duty of citizenship, but if the war is seriously ill-conceived, we may dispute its being a loyal citizen’s duty.) There might also be disagreement about whether to answer the call to fight barbarian hordes were they to be massed militarily on our border, but in that case there would be much less disagreement. Perhaps only pacifists could argue for some exemption – though, their loyalty (insofar as they have it) might need to be expressed in some non-combatant service.26

Some of the disagreements that are likely to arise at this point will be the result of disagreements about the identification of the “interests” to be served – whether, for example, they are interests as I, the loyalist, perceive them to be or whether they are interests as perceived by the object of loyalty. I may not think it in my country’s interests to be fighting in Iraq, and so my patriotic efforts may be exercised by working for as speedy a withdrawal as is compatible with humanitarian considerations. But the ruling authorities may not see it that way. They may think the country’s best interests are served by “staying the course.” Who is right about

26 Do Jehovah’s Witnesses owe a duty of loyalty to the state? Is it overridden by a “higher” loyalty?
determination of the relevant interests? Should we objectivise the issue by talking about “reasonable interests”? As important as this issue is, we cannot pursue it here.

Perhaps, too, the obligations of loyalty will vary with characteristics of the particular associative instantiation. My obligations to one friend may differ from those to another. The intimacy is greater and the satisfactions flowing from the relationship are more significant in my life. Greater and different sacrifices may be appropriately called for. Thinking of patriotic loyalty, the obligations of loyalty that one country may legitimately anticipate may be stronger and more extensive than those reasonably expected by another country. A mismanaged and corrupt polity may have much less claim on me than one characterised by reasonable transparency and integrity. The obligations that I have to it may depend significantly on the nature of the threat or challenge it faces.27 As this example illustrates, some legitimate objects of loyalty may be more worthy of loyalty than others. We may, therefore, not think it reasonable to make considerable sacrifices in the case of a person or association that is flawed in important respects.

We may also differ in the extent to which we are capable of showing our loyalty. Two friends may be willing to give me financial assistance. In one case, however, it would be costly but not a great hardship, whereas in the other it would be potentially ruinous. Our obligations to our country may therefore differ with our capacities. Although the loyal fulfilment of our obligations is likely to require some sacrifice on our part, some sacrifices may, in the circumstances, be too demanding (and in such cases any assistance we provide might be supererogatory, even in relation to our loyalty).

VI The limits of patriotic loyalty

Loyalty is sometimes advocated as though it is an absolute. Any deviation from what, in the circumstances, is seen as loyally required, is taken to be disloyalty and disloyalty is viewed as one of the more egregious vices. But the elevation of loyalty to an absolute risks self-defeat (given conflicting loyalties) and is almost certainly a perversion, the strategy of those who seek to exploit loyalty for their own aggrandisement (or, to put it slightly more charitably, for the cause of the One True Way).28 As is the case with any virtue, some moderation is required. Justice should be tempered with mercy and loyalty should not be blind to more universal obligations. Loyalty needs to be accompanied by discernment.29


28 Might we compare it with those who proclaim: Fiat justitia et ruant coeli – let justice be done though the heavens fall? Perhaps. Absolutes are few and far between.

29 For a particularly perspicacious and perspicuous exploration of the tension between the particularistic obligations of loyalty and more universal moral demands, see Samuel Scheffler, Boundaries and Allegiances (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
Not only may the obligations sustained by loyalty be overridden, but they may also be forfeited. In Hirschman’s phrasing, we must determine when voice is appropriate and when exit is required.

We should note, first, that loyalty does not require complaisance, even though those who exploit it – and who gather about them loyalist “yes-men” – sometimes treat it as though it demands conformity to the wishes or ambition or vision of the object of loyalty. Not only is there room for a loyal opposition, it is important to the integrity of loyalty that it is able to express itself oppositionally. Real friends let one know when one has acted badly or foolishly or when one is about to. To be correctly opposed is part of the obligation to be responsive to/mindful of a friend’s interests.

The “corrective” qualification is important, Not anything may go. A loyal opponent is not just an opponent, but one who remains loyal. What that entails is that the opposition stays within bounds that are compatible with the well-being or best interests or flourishing of the object of loyalty. Generally speaking a loyal opposition will not advocate rebellion or revolution for the latter would endanger the object of loyalty (and perhaps replace it with an alternative object of loyalty). Some mediaeval critics found themselves placed in a particularly difficult situation when confronted with a king who needed to be deposed. Given that the occupant of the throne was not determined by a plebiscite, they were forced into distinguishing between loyalty to the king and loyalty to the idea of kingship as a way of indicating that the “rebellion” they favoured was not intended to undermine or challenge the fundamental structures of the polity.

It is the commitment to opposition within (what are judged to be) the prevailing structures that has led some radical critics of loyalty to see it as – at bottom – a conservative virtue. It is conservative, though in the best sense of that word: it involves a commitment to securing or preserving the interests of its object, an object that is valued for its own sake (whatever else it may be valued for). But the existence of a loyal opposition does not preclude the possibility that a more radical opposition should subsequently be mounted. Should the loyal opposition prove incapable of “reforming” the object of loyalty, the exit option (or something stronger) might be taken. In such cases we would argue that the object of our loyalty was no longer worthy of it or had forfeited any claim to it. Only if we mistakenly or misguided think of loyalty as making an absolute claim on us will the charge of derogatory conservatism against a loyal opposition have any traction.

To sum up the discussion, we have adverted to two possibilities. One concerns patriotic loyalty as a general political (and, generally, moral) virtue. The other concerns patriotic loyalty with respect to a particular state. Neither patriotic loyalty generally nor a particular patriotism is sacrosanct. Regarding the first: if we come to the view that patriae qua countries or states are more trouble than they are worth – and that viable alternative structures for framing social life exist – then patriotic loyalty may be something we should downplay if not dispense with. No doubt these are the directions in which anarchists and some cosmopolitans wish to move. But I have suggested that this move currently lacks the conditions that would make it viable. Regarding the second: if we come to the view that some particular state has degenerated to the point at which it no longer warrants our connection (the American colony prior to independence?), then we should abandon it for a better one.
I have suggested that loyalty to a particular object is forfeited – that its claims for the protection and reinforcement of associative identity and commitment run out – when the object shows itself to be no longer capable of being a source of associational satisfaction or identity-giving significance. That is, the claims run out for the loyal associate. (Others, of course, may dispute this.) But whether or not loyalty is thought to be justifiably forfeited, the breakpoint may differ for different people. Return for a moment to the case of infidelity. For one woman, a husband’s infidelity may be a challenge to the future of the relationship but not automatically destructive of it. The relationship will be considered repairable. The issues of trust that are involved may be addressed and the relationship repaired. But for another, such infidelity may collapse the structure in which the relationship has been housed. Essential trust will have been smashed like Humpty Dumpty.

Is there a right and a wrong in such cases? Does the first woman lack an appreciation of the “sanctity” of marriage/intimacy? Does the second fail to appreciate our shared frailty and the possibilities for redemption and renewal? I am inclined to think that we should not acquiesce in the relativistic view that what is right for one is wrong for the other. At the same time, however, I do not think there is an easy answer. The two positions constitute the beginnings of a consideration of the nature of intimacy, what it reasonably demands of us, and how we should deal with transgressions of its expectations.

Similar debates may be conducted over the limits of patriotic loyalty. We might all agree – more or less – that if our country somehow shows itself to be incapable of providing a structured context for important satisfactions, it has lost its claim to our loyalty. But we might differ quite markedly over when such a point is reached. For some Americans, the country’s involvement in the Vietnam War represented a moral transgression of such magnitude that it forfeited its claims to their loyalty. They abandoned their American citizenship for Canadian or some other citizenship or simply lived elsewhere. For others, the Vietnam War was the occasion for a loud and insistent voice – for registering a bitter protest against what was being done along with a determination to return the country to its founding ideals. The War was seen as an aberration, but not as an irremediable abdication.30 We do not need to leave the discussion there, though the true tests of and challenges to patriotic loyalty occur without the benefit of the hindsight that we currently possess. The lessons of hindsight are as much – if not more – a lesson for the future. They provide perspective on whether a country has irredeemably blotted its copybook or merely suffered a setback in its progress to a future that will better realize its narrative aspirations.

I am cautious about the particulars. About the general value and obligatoriness of patriotic loyalty, however, I am less sceptical. Problematic though such loyalties are, I believe the burden of establishing a better and practical alternative lies on those who would advocate one. Though I am sceptical, I would not be averse to their discharging that burden.31

(WC 9239)

30 And of course for others it was a war in which the United States had every right to be involved. Those who protested or departed were seen as unpatriotic or worse.
31 I am very grateful for the critical comments that Stephen Nathanson, Igor Primoratz, and Tziporah Kasachkoff provided on an earlier draft.