Reclaiming Patriotism in an Age of Extremes

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To Rick and Jane Levin
and the things we care about

I am an American, Chicago born.
—SAUL BELLOW, *The Adventures of Augie March*

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Preface

What is patriotism, and who is a patriot? Does patriotism require us to affirm “my country right or wrong” or to protest at injustice? What should we do if patriotism or love of country conflicts with other loyalties and obligations? Is patriotism even a virtue and, if so, what kind is it? Has patriotism outlived its usefulness? These apparently simple questions form the core of this book.

I am not alone in asking these questions. Books about patriotism are a dime a dozen. The most familiar kind is the book written by some earnest American, often a celebrity or other well-known figure, affirming his or her faith in flag and country. My favorite work in this genre is *Black Belt Patriotism,* by the martial arts action hero Chuck Norris. There is also a serious philosophical literature on patriotism that has grown out of Alasdair MacIntyre’s classic article “Is Patriotism a Virtue?,” which asks whether it is possible to give ethical preference to one’s own country if this offends universal standards of justice. I believe it is, and will explain why later in this book.[1]

There are two absolutely indispensable books on this topic. The first, by political theorist Maurizio Viroli, is titled *For Love of Country.*[2] This work admirably tries to disentangle patriotism from the tortured history of European nationalism. It is learned and wise but focuses entirely on European examples, and therefore it does not address the singularity of American patriotism. The other work, by constitutional scholar Walter Berns, is called *Making Patriots.*[3] There is much of value in this short work, but since it was written before 2001, it could not anticipate the renewed attention given to national

security, immigration, and the rise of ethno-nationalism—themes that have framed recent debates over American national identity. No doubt some future events will make my own analysis seem equally innocent, but that is a danger for anyone who commits pen to paper. This book is for this moment.

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RECLAIMING PATRIOTISM
IN AN AGE OF EXTREMES

Introduction

In 1782, a French immigrant named Hector Saint-Jean de Crèvecoeur asked in his *Letters from an American Farmer,* "What is the American, this new man?"[1] We have never stopped asking this question.

One answer, standard for generations, is that an American is someone who subscribes to the principles set out in our founding documents, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. America is, on this account, a creedal nation, perhaps the first in history, with Americans defined by an adherence to certain beliefs about equality, liberty, individual rights, and limited government. This idea of America as a creedal nation goes back to Alexis de Tocqueville, who found the peculiarity of our national experience—at least in relation to Europe—to be the absence of a feudal past, that is, the lack of a tradition of hierarchy, hereditary aristocracy, and serfdom (which, of course, is not quite true). What impressed him most about the American experience was what he called "the generative fact" of equality from which all else derived. We could call this Tocqueville's Thesis. It forms the traditional core of American patriotism.

As Tocqueville outlined it, the American creed was by and large a liberal one. It grew out of the fortuitous combination of an extensive territory, a Protestant political culture, and an entrepreneurial middle class that was at liberty to pursue its economic purposes largely free of government supervision. There was a pleasing openness and even universalism about these aspirations. The American creed was

understood as a product not of geography, tradition, or inheritance, but of reason. Its principles were not “ours” in any parochial sense, but the property of all who wanted to participate in the blessings of liberty. Anyone, on this account, could become an American. It requires only a willingness to express support for our founding creed and live by it. This conception of American selfhood has been developed and repeated by many of our most incisive students of politics, including Martin Diamond, Samuel Huntington, and Seymour Martin Lipset.[2]

Today this Tocquevillian conception of America is under assault from those who regard Americans as less a creedal people than an ethnic nation. The new nationalism, not only in America but throughout the world, is about identity rather than aspiration. Taking a page from the multicultural left, it turns the nation into the ultimate identity group. Not race, class, or ethnicity, but national identity is said to form the core of peoplehood. The people in their collective capacity are said to define the nation—but what defines the people? The concept of the people and who speaks for them is one of the most contentious in current politics. It is a weapon for defining who is in and who is out. Nationalism is by definition exclusionary. Its appeal is often explicitly xenophobic, identifying enemies—both foreign and domestic—as posing an existential threat to the solidarity and purity of the nation.

The new nationalism was given powerful expression in July 2019 at the National Conservatism Conference held at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Washington, D.C. There a range of media celebrities, policy analysts, journalists, and academics sought to give voice to this newfound sentiment of national solidarity. “Today,” the conference organizer declared, “is our Independence Day”—meaning independence from neo-conservatism, libertarianism, and “what they call classical liberalism.”[3] The conference was intended to replace the shibboleths of the old conservative orthodoxy, like free markets and limited government, with a new awareness of the state and national identity. “Statist doesn’t mean socialist,” Aaron Sibarium, who covered the conference for *The American Interest,* has written,

but it does tend to view the state as the expression of the nation and the nation as the vehicle of a collective fate or destiny.[4] Although the group sponsoring the conference calls itself the Edmund Burke Foundation, it seems to lack Burke's Whiggish sense of moderation and political prudence. It aims not to preserve but to overthrow what it sees as the hegemony of classical liberalism espoused by John Locke, Baron de Montesquieu, and Tocqueville. The face of national conservatism is no longer Friedrich Hayek but Martin Heidegger.

To be sure, there is nothing inherently illiberal about national identity. The nation-states that came of age in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were the original homes of modern liberal democracy. National identity was seen to provide emancipation from the suffocating parochialism of family, religion, tribe, and clan. The term "liberal nationalist" was by no means an oxymoron; it could easily be applied to leaders as diverse as Abraham Lincoln, William Gladstone, Giuseppe Mazzini, Theodor Herzl, Walter Rathenau, and Chaim Weizmann.[5] Nationalism took a wrong turn only when (as inevitably seems to happen) it came to be regarded as the sole source of a person's identity, a way of separating "us" from "them"—when it came to require a deep rootedness in a particular people and place, conferred by ethnicity, race, or religion. One of the National Conservatism Conference speakers, employing a claim that has since been widely repeated, alleged that nationalism is "an integral part of human nature," common "to all human beings in all times and places."[6] This would no doubt sound like a cruel joke to the millions of people who have been uprooted and rendered homeless by wars of national liberation. The idea that nationalism is as old as human nature would be disputed by every serious student of the topic. Nothing about nationalism is inherent to human nature, because the nation-state itself is a distinctively modern political form.[7]

This book is an attempt to reclaim patriotism—not nationalism—as the most fundamental political virtue. Patriotism, in the most rudimentary sense, is a form of loyalty to one's own, one's people, one's community, but especially to one's constitution or political regime. Patriotism is far older than nationalism, but it is also more

endangered and subject to abuse. It is frequently identified with or subsumed under the nationalist rubric, even though the two speak in very different intellectual and emotional registers. What seems to me to be missing among the new nationalists is any sense of what makes American patriotism unique. It is not based on European beliefs about “blood and soil,” or biblical beliefs about attachment to the land, but from the beginning has contained a deliberative and self-questioning character. American patriotism is not only a statement of who we are, but also an aspiration to what we might become. To be an American is to be continually engaged in asking what it means to be an American.

Unlike nationalism, which can trace its origins back to the European Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and whose early leading theorists were figures like Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Herder, and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, patriotism has no single point of origin or founding text. It is an old, even an ancient, disposition, but for that reason is harder to identify and define. The words *patriot* and *patriotism* go back to the Greek *patris* (place of one’s ancestors) and the Latin *patria* (fatherland). Both are inseparable from the word *politics.* Patriotism, as the name suggests, is associated with love of country where this means a due regard for our collective values, what we look up to as a people. It is an expression of our highest ideals and commitments, not only to what we are, but also to what we might be. It is devotion to the republic and the way of life for which it stands.

Nevertheless, the idea of patriotism remains contested, possibly our most contested virtue. This goes back to the beginning. The ancient philosophers—Plato and Aristotle—held that love of country occupies a second-best alternative to the love of the good. The political life or life of citizen virtue was held to be inferior to the life of the philosopher or the life of intellectual virtue. This demotion of patriotism was carried on by the early Christian polemicists who argued that the city of God, not the earthly city—the church, not the state—was the highest locus of human loyalty. The first thinker of note to consider patriotism as an uncontested good was Niccolò Machiavelli—who I realize is not the most respectable authority. “I

love my country more than my soul," he wrote in a letter to his friend Francesco Vettori.[8] Since we know that Machiavelli did not believe in the soul (*anima*), this does not seem to have been a real trade-off, but his point is that spirited love of country will substitute for any principle above or beyond one's country.

Like every form of love (or loyalty), the love of country is partly determined by the object of its affection. Patriotism is not an unreflective acceptance of "my country right or wrong" but depends on our country's meeting certain standards of conduct. "To make us love our country," Edmund Burke wrote in the *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* "our country ought to be lovely."[9] But what if our country fails to meet those standards? Then what? Patriotism, as I will argue, is never simply blind devotion but is always informed by reason and judgment. These qualities demand not just deliberation but action when we fall short of our own expectations.

There is also the question of what makes love of country an admirable sentiment. In his famous "Funeral Oration," Pericles exhorts his fellow Athenians to "feed your eyes" upon the city until "love of her fills your hearts."[10] Does love of country as a form of erotic attachment force us to ignore the flaws in the beloved? Hannah Arendt once wondered whether it is even possible to love an abstraction like a country consisting of millions of people one can never know.[11] Isn't love something we can only express toward individuals? What if love of country conflicts with other forms of loyalty to family, friends, or religious communities? As any reader of Sophocles' *Antigone* would immediately recognize, the conflict between loyalty to family and loyalty to country is as old as Western literature. These are just some of the questions that I intend to address in defense of what I want to call *enlightened patriotism*.

I do not mean that patriotism is on the verge of disappearing—far from it—but in educated circles it has come to seem morally questionable. Attend any sporting event and you will see thousands of patriotic Americans rise for the singing of our national anthem, but raise the issue of patriotism on a college campus and the first thing you will likely hear is Samuel Johnson's barb about its being the last

refuge of a scoundrel.[12] At the very least, this points to an alarming disconnect between everyday American citizens and our educated elites. On campus, patriotism is seen as an unenlightened preference for one's own at the expense of a more enlightened, cosmopolitan point of view. It seems like a primitive sentiment, one tied to nationalism; chauvinism; an aggressive, militaristic mind-set; and a desire to dominate other people or at least proclaim the superiority of one's own ways over all others.

Things were not always this way. Colleges and universities were once considered the custodians of our most important civic values. Fields like history, political science, and literature were thought of as preparation for a life of national service. Patriotism is a learned disposition. It is not indoctrination into an ideology, but a component of an educated mind. The proper love of country belonged to a literary tradition that might include Shakespeare's great patriotic speech in *Richard II* ("This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England"); in an American context it included works like Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography,* Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Self-Reliance," Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address," and F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby,* all of which taught generations of students what it means to be an American. Today this canon has expanded considerably to include works such as the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass,* Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man,* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*.

At Yale University, where I have taught for more than thirty years, we are surrounded by plaques and memorials dedicated to the men and women who have given their lives for their country. The great rotunda in Woolsey Hall has inscribed on its walls the names of all the Yale graduates who have died in every war since the American Revolution, including those who lost their lives fighting for the Confederacy. The cenotaph in Beinecke Plaza commemorates Yalies who gave their lives in World War I, and behind it, the names of the great battles of the war are etched on the entrance to the Commons. Over the Memorial Gate at Branford College, where I was master for fifteen years (although we no longer use that title), is

an inscription that reads “For God, for Country, for Yale.” When students read this today—if they read it all—it seems no more than a quaint reminder of a benighted past.

The question of patriotism is even more urgent now than in the days and months after 9/11. Then we were attacked by an external enemy, someone we could rally against, even if the subsequent “War on Terror” squandered the moral capital we had accrued after the fall of the Twin Towers. But today we are confronted with an even more difficult and elusive enemy—ourselves. “We have met the enemy and he is us,” the old *Pogo* cartoon says. The election of 2016 was a watershed moment. It divided the country nearly in half, not just on the question of who should be the president, but on the even more vital question of who should count as an American. This challenge has only been exacerbated by recent events. The call to Make America Great Again, echoed by one part of our citizenry, is answered by the call that Black Lives Matter from another. These are the polarized ends of our political spectrum. Not for the first time, we find ourselves deeply divided over the very question of what it means to be an American. We are a country at peace (at least for the moment) but find ourselves increasingly at war over our national identity.

Today it is necessary to reclaim patriotism from two contending dispositions. The political right has weaponized patriotism, turning it into a litmus test for determining who is a real American, and the political left has largely anathemized it as unnecessary, undesirable, or both. On the right, patriotism has become indistinguishable from nationalism. Patriotism and nationalism, I will argue, grow out of a similar need to belong, but they move in quite different directions. Nationalism inevitably becomes a language of exclusion, of separating “ins” from “outs,” while patriotism is a sentiment of gratitude and appreciation for who we are and what has made us. On the left, the critics of patriotism range from multiculturalists, who have fostered a sense of grievance politics, to globalist elites—the kinds of people who attend the Davos conference and similar events for international businessmen and celebrities—who regard things like

place and country simply as a cost of doing business. America today, Singapore tomorrow.

Both of these extremes are dehumanizing. The first sees national identity as rooted in a life-and-death struggle against some “other”—the foreigner, the stranger, domestic enemies of all sorts—who is said to threaten our very existence as a people. The term “white nationalist” makes perfect sense; the term “white patriot” is an oxymoron. The nationalist views the world as a jungle full of deadly threats. The patriot regards it as a garden that needs tending and pruning, to be sure, but that provides a home and sense of place. The second extreme views our identity either as rooted in certain forms of racial and ethnic solidarity or as soaring gloriously above politics and nationhood to embrace a vision of globalized humanity. Multiculturalism has turned our national narrative into a cacophony of conflicting voices; cosmopolitanism has left ordinary citizens bereft of what makes life a coherent and meaningful whole. Neither view captures the specificity of what it is to be an American and a patriot. This book, a defense of patriotism in an age of extremes, is a work for the rest of us.

CHAPTER ONE

Patriotism and Loyalty

At a recent Fourth of July picnic at the home of a colleague, the hostess asked the group if we all felt patriotic. This question created a moment of acute embarrassment; it seemed to have breached some unspoken rule of political correctness. Was it even appropriate to ask such a thing? Had any of us grown up in a house that flew the flag? (She was the only one who had.) We then read the Declaration of Independence before tucking into our hamburgers and hot dogs. This was hardly an unusual experience. We were celebrating our national founding, and yet for several around the table, the meaning of this celebration was cloudy. It is not that they were unpatriotic but that the language of patriotism had become strangely foreign to them. Many Americans have a vague feeling of patriotism yet would be unable to offer any articulate rationale for this feeling. The aim of this short book is to provide it.

Americans have become deeply divided over the meaning of patriotism. When the San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick decided to take a knee during the national anthem to protest racism and police brutality, was he being unpatriotic? Many clearly thought so; many others did not. What of those who—as I write—are taking to the streets to protest the murder of George Floyd and calling for racial justice? Is their protest patriotic? How you answer will depend on what you believe patriotism involves.

Patriotism is above all a form of loyalty. We admire loyalty to family, friends, sports teams, even institutions—up to a point. I am deeply devoted to the New York Yankees; the team is a formative part of my identity. I am a loyal Jew who cares deeply for the land of Israel, warts and all. And I believe myself to be a loyal American. Yet loyalty often sits uneasily with other qualities that we equally admire, such as fairness, justice, mercy, equality, and open-mindedness. There seems something primitive, almost primordial, about patriotism. It seems like the mafia code of silence, or *omertà,* which protects members from outsiders. Does loyalty to my country require me to adopt a belligerent attitude toward other countries? Does it require me, in the jargon of our time, to put "America first"? Does loyalty to America mean that I overlook the nation's faults, or would this be a form of bad faith? These are some of the vexing questions I want to consider.

Loyalty—to parody the political philosopher John Rawls—is the first virtue of social institutions. It is the tie that binds society together, without which much of human association would be impossible. Loyalty to country is perhaps the most demanding and, in many ways, the most problematic form of loyalty because it may require the ultimate sacrifice. In one of the best books on the subject, Eric Felten has acknowledged that loyalty is a "vexing virtue" because our loyalties, being multiple (to friends, family, country, faith), inevitably come into conflict with one another.[1] How are we to decide whether family trumps friends, or country trumps family? Yet even among the great philosophers, loyalty has never quite received the respect it deserves. It is the Rodney Dangerfield of the virtues.[2] To take a tiny but revealing example, Aristotle—the most sober-minded of the ancient philosophers—did not even include loyalty in his canon of virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Patriotism was already seen by the ancient philosophers as something incomplete. Instead, Aristotle distinguished between the good citizen and the good human being. The good citizen, he argued, had virtues relative to the regime of which he was a member; the good human being had

qualities that would be regarded as outstanding anywhere. Citizen virtue was at most a second-best alternative.[3]

Yet Aristotle may have missed something important. Loyalty is a foundational virtue that undergirds all forms of social relations. This is not to say that all forms of loyalty are good. The loyalty oaths required of teachers and public servants during the McCarthy era destroyed the lives of many honorable and decent people. Loyalty to unjust institutions is no virtue, just as disloyalty to unjust institutions is no vice. As the constitutional lawyer George Anastaplo famously argued in a case that went all the way to the Supreme Court, the invasion of privacy that such oaths required was at odds with the freedoms of the First Amendment.[4] But without loyalty, there would be little foundation for human solidarity. Loyalty can be a virtue of character: when someone says “I’ve got your back” or when we describe someone as a “stand-up person,” it means that person is someone we can count on. Whether loyalty is hard-wired into our makeup, as some social psychologists have argued, or whether it is a litmus test for distinguishing conservatives (who ostensibly value loyalty to particular groups) from liberals (who ostensibly value more universalist causes) is irrelevant for my purposes.[5] Loyalty is inseparable from our nature as political animals, and we function poorly without it.

An interesting way to think about loyalty was proposed by the economist Albert O. Hirschman. In his seminal work *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty,* Hirschman examined three modes of consumer response to failing organizations.[6] The most common path is exit: we simply take our business elsewhere. The second is complaint, or registering customer dissatisfaction, in the hopes of improving product quality. This is the path of voice. The third is the path of loyalty. Brand loyalty is something that we hear about, but economists rarely explore. Why should a person remain loyal to a faltering product or institution? My in-laws always bought Fords, partly for patriotic reasons, even though they could easily have afforded a more luxurious foreign car. Loyalty, Hirschman argued, makes sense only in a world where exit and voice are possible. In a monopolistic system with only one brand

and thus no option for either exit or voice, loyalty would lose all meaning. Loyalty can only be an incentive to reform and improvement. “Thus loyalty, far from being irrational,” Hirschman writes, “can serve the socially useful purpose of preventing deterioration from becoming cumulative.”[7]

Hirschman, a refugee from Nazi Germany, hinted at but did not apply his theory of loyalty to politics.[8] Why do people choose to remain loyal to their country even if they have the choice of exit? Of course, emigration is far more difficult and costly than changing one’s brand of toothpaste. Hirschman considers loyalty only as a move in a game of strategic interaction; he does not consider that loyalty may be a good in itself. Our desire to improve a product or a public policy is predicated upon our caring about it, a loyalty that is not merely utilitarian or instrumental, but is also integral to our sense of well-being. This kind of loyalty, like any virtue—courage, honesty, justice, integrity—is more than a strategy for deterring exit or improving brand quality. It is an affective disposition that grounds our deepest commitments. It is what Tocqueville called “a habit of the heart,” a feature of moral character that cannot be fully exhausted by rational reflection alone, but is integral to the self. One can imagine, for example, that a person could emigrate to Canada and simply cease to care about the place he or she had left behind, but this seems psychologically impossible. Emigration is in most cases an extremely painful decision and a choice of last resort. We continue to care about the people and the place we have left behind, even if we choose to leave them. Full exit, then, is never a real option. For most of us, loyalty is the default position whether we believe it or not.

Patriotism or loyalty to country is ultimately a species of care, and care requires a degree of empathy. We care about things to which we feel an emotional attachment because we feel them worthy of our care. It is not just fealty to a leader or a cause. To care about something or someone is to be devoted to it as an object worthy of our concern. “A person who cares about something is, as it were, invested in it,” writes Harry Frankfurt, one of the few philosophers to address this subject. “He *identifies* himself with what he cares about

in the sense that he makes himself vulnerable to losses and susceptible to benefits depending on whether what he cares about is diminished or enhanced."[9] There is, of course, no guarantee that what we care about will be admirable or good. People care about all manner of things. There is nothing inherently praiseworthy about steadfast loyalty to a family tradition, a religious ritual or practice, or a political leader. Stephen Decatur's famous toast, "Our country, right or wrong," would make no sense if we expected our country always to be in the wrong or if we never tried to get it to do better. That we expect it to be right more often than not, and that we bear some responsibility for trying to ensure that it does right, indicates that even the most unwavering patriot is able to distinguish between good and bad forms of loyalty.

There is no good that cannot be abused. Like any virtue, loyalty has its pathologies. The demand for justice, admirable in itself, can easily become harsh and punitive. The demand for equality can blind us to the need for excellence. The desire for autonomy can run afoul of our desire to belong. Similarly, loyalty can morph into fanatical partisanship and blind faith. Søren Kierkegaard's famous depiction of Abraham's readiness to sacrifice his son Isaac is a case in point.[10] Just how far is loyalty, untempered by judgment, willing to go? However it may appear, loyal behavior must always be informed by reasoned judgment if it is to avoid descending into blind obedience.

The opposite of blind faith is the case of the "whistleblower"—a term coined by Ralph Nader—or someone who exposes the perceived misconduct of an institution that he or she represents. This is especially problematic when the person in question is entrusted with handling sensitive materials. When Army PFC Bradley—later Chelsea—Manning released thousands of pages of classified documents to WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, was she betraying the trust of an institution she had sworn to uphold, or helping to shed light on American injustices in Iraq? Was she playing the part of the noble truth-teller or the resentful underling? As I said earlier, not all forms of loyalty are necessarily praiseworthy, but there must always

be a high burden of proof on those who choose to break ranks and a willingness to accept responsibility for one's deeds.[11]

Like much else in our public lives, patriotism or loyalty to country has become politicized. It would be easy, as we witness the rise of ethno-nationalism in many parts of the world, to reject patriotism as tainted with xenophobia, racism, and other forms of religious and ethnic bigotry. But things are not so simple. Those are not expressions of patriotism but corruptions of it. I submit that nearly every person, even those who seem the most alienated or most cosmopolitan, feels some form of love of country. Certainly the guests at that Fourth of July picnic do: all of them have the option to live elsewhere, yet they choose to stay. So long as we remain political animals, we cannot avoid patriotism. The question is only what form it will take. Will it be harsh and barbarous, or humane and enlightened? There is no third option. It might be possible to wish for a world without patriotism, as many from Leo Tolstoy to Martha Nussbaum have done, but such a world would be a world without politics. Maybe it would be a more desirable world than the one we have now, but I find it hard to imagine what it would be like to live there.

RETURN OR PROGRESS

Today American patriotism finds itself at a crossroads. Patriotism presupposes some kind of national consensus around which citizens might coalesce. But at this time of intense partisan conflict, when we are deeply divided by class, race, education, and culture, even that minimal consensus seems to be lacking. Are the American framers to be celebrated for creating the first and most enduring experiment in self-government, or condemned for their complicity in the evils of slavery and their blindness to the fate of indigenous peoples? Is American hegemony in the postwar era a source of freedom and a beacon of light to other nations, or are we the agents of a new imperialism spreading a degrading commercial culture? Are companies like Amazon and Google a tribute to American creativity and entrepreneurial genius or products of an out-of-control business

culture that has become an engine of inequality and corporate exploitation? Are the immigrants flooding our southern border aspiring participants in the great American experiment in freedom, or are they illegal aliens who would take our jobs while corroding our culture? We cannot agree even on the basic facts by which to debate these questions. We seem no longer to possess an agreed-upon narrative that could provide a foundation for national unity.

Part of our current discontent grows out of the bifurcated origins of American identity. Being an American has never been easy. Those of us who were born here take it for granted. America, we like to say, is an idea but it is not a single idea, more like a cluster or a family of ideas. There is a polarity at the heart of our identity. This is not simply a difference between liberals and conservatives, multiculturalists and nationalists, Democrats and Republicans; it gets to something more fundamental. At the core of our identity are two conflicting narratives—by which I do not mean stories or histories but the basic beliefs, cognitive values, affective dispositions, and prescriptions for action that constitute our shared way of life. These two competing accounts are the bifocal lenses through which we understand ourselves. I will call them the narrative of return and the narrative of progress.[12]

The narrative of return is an origin story. It tells who we are by taking us back to our beginnings. In Hebrew, the term *Ba'al teshuva* is a person who has returned to God, driven by feelings of sin, guilt, and atonement, as well as by hope for redemption. The Hebrew origin story, based on the prophetic ideal of a chosen people that goes back to ancient Israel, connects faith with fidelity to tradition. In the American context, the narrative of return is usually associated with the founding. It suggests a golden moment that can never be recovered but to which we can and should remain faithful. This moment might be associated with the Pilgrims who landed on Plymouth Rock, George Washington at Valley Forge, or the founders who signed the Constitution in Independence Hall—all of whom are seen as more venerable, more worthy of honor and respect, than any present-day person could be.

The first people fully to espouse this narrative of return were the Puritans. “I see the entire destiny of America embodied in the first Puritan to land on its shores, just as the entire human race was embodied in the first man,” Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America.*[13] This is a bit of hyperbole. The legacy of Puritanism was peculiar to New England, not to the entire United States, and it is what made New England different. You might even call it New England Exceptionalism. Had Tocqueville spent more time in Virginia or South Carolina, he would have found a very different political culture. Still, he was on to something. America was and to some degree still is a Puritan republic. We continue to see ourselves through the old Puritan conception of a chosen people, the indispensable nation, the bearer of the torch of liberty. To be sure, Puritanism has never entirely lived down its reputation for hypocrisy and sexual repression, canonized in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. “Puritanism,” according to H. L. Mencken’s famous quip, is “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.”[14] Nevertheless, its legacy has done as much as anything to shape the American character.

Puritans, as the name suggests, were purists. The term was originally pejorative, coined by their opponents to convey religious extremism and zealotry, but a number of Protestant sects quickly adopted the label as a way to distinguish themselves from the Church of England.[15] The Puritans began as a set of cults in seventeenth-century England that took exception to the official church, which they considered insufficiently purified of Roman practices. Their aim was not merely to found a new sect, but also to redeem the religious life of society. For the most radical Puritan leaders like William Bradford who emigrated to the Plymouth Colony on the *Mayflower* or Roger Williams who founded Providence Plantations—later known as Rhode Island—reforming the established national church was not enough. Because they deemed society irreparably corrupt, it was necessary to remove themselves from it altogether in order to build a new world in the promised land. This new world was America, and their promised land was New

England, where they could live in covenanted communities uncontaminated by the old order.

This idea of establishing a new community, untouched by history and the Old World, has its roots in these Puritan founders who came to this country to found "a city upon a hill" as John Winthrop declared in his 1630 sermon "A Model of Christian Charity," delivered on board the *Arabella*.[16] America would be a new Jerusalem for a new chosen people, one that would serve as a light to nations around the world. These men and women saw themselves as a new community of saints who were on an "errand in the wilderness"; they would create towns and cities across New England with names like New Canaan, Bethel, Salem, and New Haven.[17] This Puritan tradition established the university where I teach, and where the Hebrew *urim v'tumim,* the sacred stones worn as part of the breast plate of the high priest, very loosely translated as "Light and Truth," remain the centerpiece of Yale's motto. Every year at graduation, Yale students sing—or used to sing, until the university administration found the lyrics politically incorrect—the following verse in memory of those Puritan founders:

> Laws, freedom, truth, and faith in God
> Came with those exiles o'er the waves;
> And where their pilgrim feet did trod,
> The God they trusted guards their graves.[18]

Winthrop's vision of the city on a hill, famously revived by Ronald Reagan, became the basis for the idea of America as an exceptional nation with a special mission, even while there has been much disagreement on what that mission is.[19] Our modern idea of American exceptionalism is inseparable from this sense of mission. Winthrop's phrase has its source in the parable of Light and Salt from the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus tells his listeners, "You are a light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden" (Matthew 5:14), although Jesus was himself echoing Isaiah: "we shall be as a city upon a hill; the eyes of all people are upon us" (Isaiah 42:6). Yet behind these aspirational words lay the perpetual fear of backsliding. "The eyes of all people are upon us," Winthrop

warned, “so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken and so cause him to withdraw his present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world.”[20]

The idea that the “eyes of all people” were watching the fate of this tiny band of religious dissidents departing for a largely uninhabited world—uninhabited, that is, by Europeans—testifies to the remarkable strength and confidence they drew from religious faith. The fear of dealing “falsely” with our founding principles remains a staple of present-day conservatism. For conservatives, American patriotism means a *return* to the “original intent” of the founders as expressed in the jurisprudence of Antonin Scalia and other icons of the right.

The second narrative we tell about ourselves is the narrative of progress. Progress is a secular idea, a product of the Enlightenment, that is less concerned with veneration of the past than with hope for the future. The belief in progress is rooted in the modern conception of science. Science, as everyone learns in school, is a cumulative activity capable of almost infinite improvement. Through trial and error, it builds on previous knowledge to improve and surpass what went before. We may not know where science is going, but we do know that the truths of today will be replaced tomorrow by higher truths. The central idea is that through the application of the scientific method, the human condition can be bettered; want, poverty, and ignorance can be abolished; and the future will be superior to the present, just as the present is superior to the past.

The progressive ideal stresses not perfect beginnings followed by backsliding and punctuated by periodic calls for moral renewal, but imperfect beginnings followed by cumulative efforts at correction, reform, and improvement. Progress, or what became known as progressivism, was based on the belief that history—dubbed the “historical process”—could be shaped and directed by human intelligence. In the past, progress was achieved piecemeal and haphazardly, but with new methods of scientific planning and expertise, it would be possible not only to know the direction of history but to get there more quickly as well. For progressives,

history is the story of the collective self-improvement of humankind.[21]

The idea of progressivism owed much to German philosophers of the nineteenth century, especially Georg Hegel, who saw history as the immense unfolding of the idea of freedom over time. In the American context it is expressed in the philosophy of John Dewey, who regarded democracy as a kind of laboratory experiment subject to perpetual revision and change. The greatest document of American progressivism was Herbert Croly's *The Promise of American Life* (1909), which in many ways anticipated FDR's New Deal a generation later. Progressivism can take credit for a host of notable accomplishments, including the passage of the Sixteenth and Nineteenth Amendments, which created a national income tax and legalized women's suffrage, respectively; the establishment of the Labor Department and the protection of workers' rights; Social Security; and the founding of the Tennessee Valley Authority, an enormous national public works project. While progressivism as a political movement achieved dominance in the early part of the twentieth century, it came to exert a powerful influence over a large section of the American left with its call for more expansive welfare provisions.[22]

For progressives, patriotism is not so much loyalty to an already established nation, but an aspiration to a country still to be accomplished. It is not that progressives do not love their country; they have just become less certain about whose country it is. On their account, America is rooted in a flawed beginning tainted by slavery and other moral failings that require continual adjustment to the needs of the present. The recent dispute over the roles of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson, once considered democratic heroes, is a case in point. Jefferson's failure to free his slaves and Jackson's Indian policy have made them anathema to progressives.

Progressivism has become less concerned with improving on the past than with erasing it. The debate over national memorialization has morphed from a demand to remove monuments to Confederate

heroes—men who actually fought against the Union—to the removal of monuments to Christopher Columbus, George Washington, Ulysses S. Grant, Teddy Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson. For progressives, patriotism is best exemplified by protest movements like the abolitionists of the nineteenth century, the suffragettes and civil rights protesters of the early and mid-twentieth century, or the Stonewall riots of 1969 that set off the LGBT movement. They believe that "dissent is the highest form of patriotism," a phrase wrongly attributed to Thomas Jefferson that is still enshrined in our national discourse. America is regarded as a continual work in progress, and celebration of past accomplishments draws attention away from the considerable work still to be done.

The pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty gave pitch-perfect voice to the progressive view in his aptly named book *Achieving Our Country.*[23] Following his heroes William James and John Dewey, he saw America as a continual work in progress. Patriotism, Rorty acknowledged, is based on the stories we tell about ourselves. These stories are not intended to be accurate representations of historical truth, but are an effort to forge a moral identity. The problem, as he diagnosed it, is that many on the progressive side of the ledger have come to associate patriotism with an attempt to paper over the worst American atrocities. Invoking the names of Lincoln, Whitman, and Dewey, he put forward his own progressive narrative of what America might yet become:

> Dewey and Whitman wanted Americans to continue to think of themselves as exceptional, but both wanted to drop any reference to divine favor or wrath. They hoped to separate the fraternity and loving kindness urged by the Christian scriptures from the idea of supernatural parentage, immortality, providence, and—most important—sin. They wanted Americans to take pride in what America might, all by itself and by its own lights, make of itself, rather than in America's obedience to any authority—even the authority of God.[24]

I disagree with Rorty's militant atheism, but admire his attempt to wrest an affirmative ideal of America away from a progressive left that has become self-absorbed and caught up in an inward-looking cult of identity politics.

Each of these views, the exceptionalist and the progressivist, captures one aspect of patriotism. Both are necessary but neither is adequate for my purposes. The exceptionalist narrative attempts to capture the singularity of the American experience, but it can too easily morph into the language of nationalist triumphalism. The idea of biblical chosenness without biblical humility risks an idolatry of the nation. It is too often bound up with sentiments like “my country, right or wrong” and, more recently, “America First.” If America is truly an exceptional nation, it can be so only at the expense of others. It is precisely this attitude of moral preening and obliviousness to one’s faults that gives patriotism a bad name. One remembers the flak that President Obama received when he declared that he believed in American exceptionalism in the same way that the British believe in British exceptionalism and the Greeks in Greek exceptionalism. Every nation, on this account, is exceptional in its own way. For many, this was not exceptional enough. There can only be one exceptional nation, and that nation is America. When the disgraced television comedienne Roseanne Barr tried to explain her racist tweet about Valerie Jarrett, she claimed it was because Jarrett and Obama “don’t like the idea of American exceptionalism.”

American exceptionalism has always been a double-edged sword. It can be an ideal to which we may aspire, or a mask to rationalize public behavior that often falls far short of the ideal. Do we judge our actions by our standards, or our standards by our actions? Faced with repeated accusations of not loving America, President Obama eventually declared at a speech delivered May 28, 2014, at the U.S. Military Academy commencement ceremony, “I believe in American Exceptionalism with every fiber of my being.” In 2015, however, Donald Trump told a convention in Houston called “Celebrating the American Dream” that “I don’t like the term [exceptionalism]” because it insults other countries, a view he has since repudiated. Trump’s initial characterization was later echoed by the progressive congresswoman Ilhan Omar, who criticized the language of American exceptionalism at a Netroots Nation

Conference, telling the audience, “We export American exceptionalism . . . but we don’t live those values here. That hypocrisy is one that I am bothered by.”[25]

If exceptionalism has become a kind of litmus test for how we think about America, the origins of the term tell a very different story. *Exceptionalism* is often traced back to Tocqueville, who asked what distinguished American democracy from its French counterpart. For Tocqueville, who believed that democracy or what he called “the equality of conditions” represented the future, America was exceptional only in the limited sense of having got there first. The language of exceptionalism took on a new meaning during the Cold War, when a number of historians wondered why America had never developed the kind of class-based political parties found in England and Europe. While European politics were riven by competing ideologies and “isms”—communism, fascism, syndicalism—America seemed peculiarly consensual and pragmatic, untouched by these major currents of thought and practice. The “genius of American politics,” Daniel Boorstin argued, was our imperviousness to grand theories.[26]

For better or worse, American politics was deemed irretrievably middle of the road. Our two great political parties (at least then) tended to meet in the center. In 1950 the American Political Science Association issued a report titled “Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System” complaining that the parties of that era did not offer clearly defined ideological alternatives.[27] Why do we have a Democratic Party but not a Labor Party? Why is there a Republican Party but not a Tory Party? Why did America produce a Thomas Jefferson but not a Maximilien Robespierre, a Lincoln but not a Lenin? Put more bluntly, “why was there no socialism in America?” This is a question that many on the left are beginning to ask again.[28]

The answer, most famously developed by Harvard historian and political scientist Louis Hartz, was that from its beginnings the American liberal tradition, based on the philosophy of John Locke, exercised an ideological dominance that made it impossible for movements of either the extreme right or the extreme left to gain

traction.[29] Americans of all stripes, Hartz believed, subscribed to Lockean ideas about individual rights, private property, and equality. Lacking a feudal past based on a system of inherited hierarchy and status, America was by the same token cut off from a socialist future. The nation was, for Hartz, a case of arrested development, with our political identity permanently locked into eighteenth-century Whig political theory. The dominance of the liberal tradition—the key to American exceptionalism—was viewed ambiguously by Hartz and his contemporaries. For some, like Boorstin and Arthur Schlesinger Jr., it provided the basis for a broad-gauged consensus politics that helped to explain American political stability, while for others, like Hartz himself, it contained the germ of conformism, McCarthyism, and the kind of "soft despotism" that Tocqueville feared.[30]

If the narrative of return can become too exclusionary, the progressive narrative is insufficiently American. Here we should distinguish an older version of progressivism from its current form. The progressives of the early twentieth century, like Randolph Bourne and Walter Lippmann, were ardent patriots and nationalists. They sought to create a more robust national state in reaction to the doctrines of federalism and "states' rights," which they viewed as having led to civil war and the dominance of private interests over the public good. This strain of progressivism can still be found occupying the mainstream of the Democratic Party, but a different form has developed alongside it. New age progressives, as I call them, have adopted a form of multicultural politics increasingly focused on race and ethnicity as hallmarks of identity, but they reject any appeal to patriotism or national selfhood. Multiculturalism represents a fragmentation of the older progressive narrative that was centered around the patriotic idea of a single people engaged in a common enterprise.[31]

Many on the new age left still support traditional progressive policies such as single-payer health care, extended parental leave, and college tuition forgiveness, but they regard any assertion of American patriotism as the problem, not the solution. They have nurtured a deep hostility to the nation-state and national institutions

—even some who aspire to national political office—regarding them as the source of all political evil. Indeed, it is difficult to understand why so many call themselves progressives when their theory of history is often anything but. The earlier optimistic narratives of progress, from the Civil War to the New Deal and Great Society to the election of Barack Obama, described America on an upward trajectory toward greater justice and inclusion. While progressives once believed that "the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice," today's new age progressives view the prospect of piecemeal political reform as hopelessly naïve. The optimistic narrative of progress has been replaced by counter-narratives of victimization and irredeemability that have produced racism, climate catastrophe, and an impending fascism foreshadowed by the election of Donald Trump.[32]

New age progressives, like their nationalist counterparts, have walled themselves off into self-reinforcing enclaves with little reason to communicate with the outside world or hear challenges to their certainties. They have fostered a kind of grievance politics that never misses an opportunity to take offense at a slight, either real or imagined.[33] They may call themselves progressives and may celebrate certain universal values—democracy, human rights, freedom—but nothing as ostensibly parochial as God or country. New age progressives lack a core value of patriotism, a sense of loyalty to a particular tradition and way of life. Anyone can embrace the ideas of progress and rights, but only an American can be patriotic about America. The progressive patriot—like most of those in attendance at my colleague's Fourth of July picnic—is devoted not to the America that exists, but to the idea of America as it is yet to be. What remains of actual patriotism has become vanishingly thin.

Patriotism needs to be distinguished—and reclaimed—from these two competing dispositions. On the right, patriotism has become indistinguishable from nationalism, a quite different sentiment. Nationalism, I will argue later, initially grew out of a legitimate desire for self-determination and independence, but over time it has morphed into an ideology of grievance and resentment.

Nationalist stories are typically narratives of treason and betrayal by unscrupulous elites, in which listeners are encouraged to feel contempt for fellow citizens who fall outside the dominant ethnic group.[34] They seek the warmth of community but always at the expense of an out-group, who are deemed un-American, traitors, and enemies of the people. The nationalist mentality thrives on the language of "us" and "them" and cannot survive without it.

Patriotism speaks a different language, one of loyalty and respect. It suggests a home or an extended family. We love our families not because we think they are better than other families, but because they have nurtured and sustained us through good times and bad. Like a marriage that we accept for better and worse, it is connected to a sense of gratitude to one's birthplace—its climate, music, language, contours, and cuisines—for providing our lives with meaning and purpose. Patriotism is rooted in a rudimentary, even primordial love of one's own; the customs, habits, manners, and traditions that make us who and what we are.

On the left, patriotism is often contrasted unfavorably with cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism has roots in the Western tradition that go back to the Roman Stoics, who thought of themselves as "citizens of the world" with no particular allegiances to state or nation. This idea of world citizenship had a counterpart in the Christian idea of the City of God, where people would be judged not by their place of origin, but only by their faith. In such a world, there would be neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, but all one under a monolithic Christian faith (Galatians 3:28). Contemporary cosmopolitanism is a secularized idea of this Christian faith, which is in turn guided by an ideal of humanity or humanitarianism. Modern humanitarianism is based on the idea of human dignity: that each person, regardless of race, ethnicity, or national origin, is entitled to equal moral respect. This is in many ways a noble ideal. But too close an attachment to the idea of a global humanity runs the risk of ignoring the specific loyalties that bind people to their own countries. At the extreme, cosmopolitanism cuts people off from their national

traditions, leaving them alienated from the culture in which they are embedded.

In contrast to both nationalism and cosmopolitanism, American patriotism has a dual structure that captures elements of both progress and return. Against the charge that patriotism represents an insular and exclusionary mind-set, I want to argue that it can be an enlarging sentiment that democratic societies cannot afford to do without, founded on something more than a primitive attachment to blood and soil. We are, as Samuel Huntington argued, a “creedal nation” subject to periodic bouts of “creedal passion” and insurrection that grow out of a sense that we are not what we ought to be.[35] From the beginning, Americans have been a people of the book who have sought to ground national identity in higher principles like equality, rights, and freedom of religion. These ideas are embedded in our earliest national documents, from the Mayflower Compact, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights to their later articulation by our leading jurists, political leaders, and public figures. American patriotism is a uniquely principled patriotism.

Yet American patriotism is based not solely on the high principles of self-government and civil rights, but also on the sentiments and dispositions that have shaped our common history, both good and bad. Patriotism is tied to place and rooted in experience, in how we have been brought up, our rituals and habits, our customs and feelings. It is not only a matter of the head, but also one of the heart. It is not entirely rational, but neither is it irrational. Being a patriot is like possessing a language—by which I do not mean simply written and spoken English or any national vernacular, but the whole network of signs, informal codes, cultural references, gestures and inflections that shape our perceptions, feelings, and beliefs, as well as our body language, facial expressions, posture, and accent. It is what makes us instantly recognizable to each other as ones who share a common background. Language has been called the house of being. It houses our deepest commitments, our loves and desires, our goals and aspirations, and no essential communication can be

made outside of it. I have struggled for much of my life with French and have attained a fair degree of competence, but this does not mean I can think and feel like a Frenchman. In fact, quite the opposite. The more I learn, the more I realize the distance between myself and the experience of what it must be like to know French from the inside. We can truly know and hence truly love only what is our own.

What is true of language also applies to patriotism. Anyone can come to America, but only those who have lived here and decided to make it their home can understand what loyalty to this country means. This is why some of the most ardent patriots are those who have recently arrived or have taken what we revealingly call a "naturalization" test. America is a bounded community, held together by affective ties and dispositions such as duty, loyalty, and service. These sentiments can be found only where there is a history or ethos that binds a people as part of a common moral tradition. "A man's ethos is his destiny," wrote the wise Greek philosopher Heraclitus.[36]

This word *ethos*—meaning habit and character—defines the source of distinct national identities, what it is that distinguishes one people from another and gives each its distinctive character. It is something like the experience of inhabiting a place or a home, and like every home, over time it acquires peculiarities and idiosyncrasies. An ethos is not a steel-and-glass skyscraper—who would want to live there?—but a house that has been added to over many years and by now may have a slightly ramshackle feel. It is not that we believe our house is better than any other house, but it is *ours* and it makes us feel at home. Patriotism is like inhabiting such a place. As I will argue later, it is an ethos, a shared habit, a learned disposition, something that must be not only taught but also felt. These feelings are embedded in our laws, habits, manners, and most importantly in our collective self-consciousness—what Lincoln, our greatest patriot, called "the mystic chords of memory."[37]

CHAPTER TWO

Patriotism and Its Critics

PATRIOTISM remains a deeply contested virtue. Some even deny that it is a virtue at all. The charge most frequently raised is that patriotism represents an unjustified moral preference that leads us to attach greater partiality to our own country than is due. George Bernard Shaw made the point with characteristic wit: "Patriotism is your conviction that [your own] country is superior to all other countries because you were born in it."[1] Patriots on this account are constitutionally incapable of entertaining harsh or disconcerting truths about their country or themselves. Simon Keller called patriotism a "delusion" because it forces us to act on epistemically unjustified beliefs.[2]

Leo Tolstoy, one of the great anti-patriots, saw in patriotism nothing more than a form of collective egoism that leads only to war and death. "Patriotism in its simplest, clearest, and most unmistakable significance is but a weapon for the attainment of aggressive and mercenary aims," Tolstoy wrote in "On Patriotism." "Patriotism is slavery," he concluded.[3] The idea that patriotism is simply jingoism and warmongering is often connected to a second complaint, that love of country stands in conflict—often tragic conflict—with other forms of loyalty. This is more than a claim about the inevitability of multiple loyalties. It suggests that if patriotism comes into conflict with other loyalties, so much the worse for patriotism. In *Two Cheers for Democracy,* E. M. Forster famously stated that if he

had to betray either his country or his friend, he hoped he would have the guts to betray his country.[4]

Later I will take up the question of conflicting loyalties. For now, it is enough to note that Forster's way of posing the problem is highly misleading. It all depends on the context in which we are being forced to choose friendship over country. We would have to know what our friend did—or what our country did—to make such a choice necessary. What if our friend had committed or was contemplating an act of domestic terrorism to protest a public policy? Is it so clear that our first obligation is to our friend, even if such an act would take the lives of many innocent bystanders? We cannot easily say that friendship should always trump patriotism, or that patriotism should trump friendship. Forster's claim that personal friendships must always take priority would deprive us of the ability to exercise judgment.

Forster was only reformulating ideas that he had learned from G. E. Moore and his circle at Cambridge a generation before. They argued that the experience of certain private pleasures such as intimate friendships and the enjoyment of beautiful objects should be accorded a higher priority than the virtues associated with public life. For this circle, which would later become the Bloomsbury Group and which included such luminaries as John Maynard Keynes, Virginia Woolf, and Lytton Strachey, the affirmation of personal affections and aesthetic enjoyments necessarily meant removing from the list of virtues all claims made on behalf of patriotism, country, and public service. Forster was being completely consistent with this perspective when he presented the choice of friendship over country —of private over public goods—as a tragic, even a noble decision. No doubt influenced by ideas like these, three Cambridge undergraduates in the 1930s—Kim Philby, Donald Maclean, and Guy Burgess—chose to betray their country. They became Soviet agents and for years passed on vital secrets to Moscow as they ascended the ladder of the British intelligence services, until they were finally exposed in the 1950s and 1960s. Before long they began to betray one another. Treason is not like a bus that you can get off at will.

Treason has always had its defenders. To paraphrase what Oscar Wilde said of war, so long as treason is regarded as evil it will always have its fascination. Only when it is regarded as vulgar will it cease to be popular.[5] In his foreword to Philby's autobiography *My Silent War,* Graham Greene sought to provide a high-minded justification for Philby's betrayal, which had cost the lives of hundreds of loyal and patriotic Britons. "He betrayed his country—yes, perhaps he did," Greene wrote, "but who among us has not committed treason to something or someone more important than a country? In Philby's own eyes, he was working for a shape of things to come from which his country would benefit."[6]

This is an extraordinary piece of sophistry for its combination of moral fastidiousness ("who among us") and a Machiavellian logic that claims that in the long run Philby was actually working for his country's interests. Greene went on to compare Philby to an English Catholic under the reign of Elizabeth I working for the victory of Spain. "How many a kindly Catholic must have endured the long bad days of the Inquisition with this hope of the future as a riding anchor?" Greene asked.[7] Revealingly, his concern was with the "kindly Catholic" who suffers at a distance from the injustices and cruelties inflicted by his own faith and not at all with the victims of the Inquisition—or Stalin's purges—of whom he has nothing to say. As a Catholic writer, Greene might have remembered that Dante reserved the innermost circle of hell for those who betrayed their own people. Worse than gluttony, lust, or violence, betrayal was the vice deserving of the most agonizing fate.

But if treason is a vice, it is by no means clear that patriotism is a virtue, and if so, what kind of virtue it is. The defense of patriotism must still confront a minefield of obstacles.

THE CASE AGAINST PATRIOTISM

The most powerful recent case against patriotism was stated in a brilliant article titled "Is Patriotism a Mistake?" by the Princeton political theorist George Kateb.[8] Kateb attacked patriotism as incompatible with the central ideas of the Enlightenment, especially

intellectual freedom, a hatred of fanaticism, and a rejection of all forms of groupthink. Patriotism, on this account, is simply one part—the most dangerous part—of a larger tendency to find meaning in group membership. “Group membership and allegiance,” he writes, “simplify life by tying the identity of each member to a structure of inclusion and exclusion, of questions and answers, of rites and ceremonies, of allowable and censurable fantasies.”[9] He considers patriotism, like all forms of group identity, a kind of bad faith that subordinates the principles of autonomy and liberty of conscience to the dictates of a largely fictitious—imaginative or aesthetically induced—abstraction called one’s country.

“What is patriotism?” asks Kateb, who then answers his own question: “It is a readiness to die and to kill for an abstraction: nothing you can see all of, or feel as you feel the presence of another person, or comprehend.” For the sake of this abstraction, “one commits oneself to a militarized and continuously politicized conception of life, a conception that is entirely masculinist.”[10] Most damningly, Kateb finds that patriotism is often combined with a military cast of mind that mistakes loyalty for principle. “Patriotism needs external enemies,” he writes. “Devotion to a free constitution for its own sake is not patriotism.”[11] Patriotism necessarily endorses the logic of friend and enemy, those who are with us and those who are against us. “Patriotism is, if it is anything, a passion to forsake moral principle with an easy conscience. We misunderstand patriotism if we see it as given to moral doubt,” Kateb writes in one of his best sentences.[12] The certainty and moral self-righteousness that patriotism induces lead Kateb to conclude that it is not only a mistake but a deadly mistake.

A related attack on patriotism has been made by Martha Nussbaum, perhaps the foremost advocate of cosmopolitan citizenship. In her widely discussed article “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” she invokes the model of ancient Stoicism to defend her views on cosmopolitan citizenship. When the Greek philosopher Diogenes called himself “a citizen of the world,” she writes, “he meant, apparently, that he refused to be defined by his

local origins and group memberships, so central to the self-image of the conventional Greek male."[13] Diogenes argued, in a way that drew on Plato and anticipated Saint Augustine, that we actually inhabit two worlds: the local community into which we have been born as a matter of accident, and the global community of humanity from which our moral obligations derive. Diogenes understood that being a citizen of the world was a lonely business, an invitation to permanent exile from one's family and way of life:

> The accident of where one is born is just that, an accident; any human being might have been born in any nation. Recognizing this, his Stoic successors held, we should not allow differences of nationality or class or ethnic membership or even gender to erect barriers between us and our fellow human beings. We should recognize humanity wherever it occurs, and give its fundamental ingredients, reason and moral capacity, our first allegiance and respect.[14]

This did not mean that Diogenes and the Stoics advocated the abolition of all local and national forms of government. "Their point," Nussbaum asserts, "was even more radical, that we should give our first allegiance to no mere form of government, no temporal power, but to the moral community made up by the humanity of all human beings."[15]

Nussbaum's account of cosmopolitan citizenship wavers between two different ways of thinking about patriotism. On one variation of the Stoic creed, it is not necessary to give up our local identifications and loyalties, which, she admits, "can be a source of great richness in life." It is only necessary to think of them as part of series of concentric circles beginning with the self, extending to the family, then neighbors and fellow citizens, and so on until we reach the widest circle of all, the circle of humanity. "We need not give up our special affections and identifications, whether ethnic or gender-based, or religious," she writes. "We may and should devote special attention to them in education. But we should also work to make all human beings part of our community of dialogue and concern."[16]

Yet Nussbaum also treats patriotism and the whole range of local attachments and identities as a childish security blanket that we

should get rid of once we reach full moral maturity. She recognizes that being a citizen of the world can seem a loveless disposition that puts reason before emotion and universalism before the symbols of national belonging. “Becoming a citizen of the world is often a lonely business,” she writes. “It is, as Diogenes said, a kind of exile—from the comfort of local truths, from the warm, nestling feeling of patriotism, from the absorbing drama of pride in oneself and one’s own. In the writings of Marcus Aurelius (as in those of his American followers Emerson and Thoreau), a reader can sometimes sense a boundless loneliness, as if the removal of the props of habit and local boundaries has left life bereft of any warmth or security.”[17] Like Kateb, Nussbaum finds patriotism a misplaced form of paternalism. “If one begins life as a child who loves and trusts his or her parents, it is tempting to want to reconstruct citizenship along the same lines, finding in an idealized image of a nation a surrogate parent who will do one’s thinking for one.”[18] Patriotism, ultimately, is morality for children, and Nussbaum’s advice is simple: grow up.

These two articles provide in a nutshell the contemporary brief against patriotism. At the core of Kateb’s argument is the claim that patriotism is a form of bad faith. The patriot willingly subordinates his judgment and independence of mind to an imaginary, often highly idealized expression of the nation. Unflattering truths are filtered out, and what remains is seen through rose-tinted glasses. There is some truth to this. It is often difficult for us to accept harsh truths about someone or something we care deeply about. But Kateb takes a distorted or one-sided conception of patriotism for the whole. He writes that “a good patriot is a good killer” without ever asking for whom or for what purpose a person might kill. Are war heroes like Joshua Chamberlain or Colin Powell equivalent to mass murderers? Kateb’s world of absolute moral purity versus absolute evil seems to have no room for these distinctions. Yet there is surely a difference between men and women who go to war in the service of preserving democracy, and those who do so to spread tyranny.

Furthermore, patriotism can be self-correcting. It is not blind obedience but instead entails judgment and discrimination. This is

what allowed certain members of the German officer class during World War II to work against Hitler while expressing loyalty for what they saw as the highest German traditions. The officers who attempted to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944, could be accused of waiting until their plot required little moral courage—they acted to save Germany only after it was clear that the war was already lost—but we can at least say that they could have imagined no defeat worse for Germany than Hitler's final victory. For them, the defeat of National Socialism was the truer patriotism because Nazism represented a deformation of their national traditions.[19] The same could be said of those like Václav Havel or Czesaw Miosz who fought against Communism in Eastern Europe. Kateb associates patriotism with a need to create external enemies in order to prove one's superiority. This confuses patriotism with nationalism—an understandable mistake—but the distinction between them is central to the view of enlightened patriotism I am arguing for here.

Nussbaum's Stoic ideal of world citizenship is admirably high-minded, but it fails to account for the actual human beings who are reading her work. It fails the first test of philosophy, which is to make sense of the convictions and experiences we have in common. The idea of a world citizen is a contradiction in terms. Citizenship is a political conception, and politics presupposes laws, sovereigns, authority, duties and obligations, and peoples with bounded identities. We may find these realities regrettable, but that's what politics is. A citizen of the world is a citizen of nowhere. At the same time, Nussbaum seems to forget that Stoic universalism was not simply an ethical doctrine. It made sense only within the context of the Roman imperial state. She cites Plutarch's *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander*—"We should regard all human beings as our fellow citizens and neighbors"—without acknowledging that Alexandrian universalism was based on the destruction of the previously autonomous Greek city-states. The Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius announced that we are all equal members of the great state made up of all rational beings. Was it only happenstance

that this state mirrored the vast Roman Empire of which he was the emperor?

Nussbaum's reference to Alexander reveals more than she admits. For Plutarch, Alexander was responsible for bringing the concept of empire into the lexicon of political philosophy. To those who might argue that Alexander never wrote a word on any philosophical subject, Plutarch replied that Socrates also never wrote but nonetheless is considered the first political philosopher. Alexander's deeds were his philosophy. He had the boldness to put into practice what Plato and Aristotle had only cautiously suggested. They had posited that human beings were a species with a knowable nature or essence—the rational and political animal—but drew from this the faulty conclusion that man was intended to live under different, arbitrarily constructed city-states, each with its own laws. Alexander believed that by virtue of having a definite species-character, we were destined to live together as a single species under one universal law. On this account, humans are not so much political animals as species-beings. The only true *politeia* is the *cosmopoliteia.* Plutarch emphasized that in attempting to create a universal empire, Alexander was not driven by a vulgar desire for domination but by the purest philosophical motives of bringing the rational truths of philosophy into being, to unify theory and practice. The deeply totalitarian impulse underlying this form of cosmopolitanism is evident.[20]

At the same time, Nussbaum's conception of world citizenship makes it difficult to account for our moral duties to individual human beings. Consider the case of the family. Why is it ethically important for me to give special attention to my child rather than another chosen at random? Nussbaum admits that "child care will be poorly done if each thinks herself equally responsible for all, rather than giving the immediate surroundings special attention and care."[21] This is certainly true as an empirical matter, and it has been borne out by a host of studies. But for the consistent universalist, it is hard to see why the needs of one child, even one's own, should outweigh the needs of others, especially if those others may be far needier. If the

moral universalist's concern is not for the good of one child or one family but for humanity as a whole, why should I be especially concerned with the well-being of my own? Perhaps my time and resources would be better spent elsewhere. It is hard to see, on Nussbaum's account of cosmopolitan citizenship, why we should prefer the welfare of our families, friends, and country over that of any other people on earth.

One version of cosmopolitanism that makes sense, if any version does, has been suggested by Kwame Anthony Appiah in his book *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers.*[22] Appiah suggests that cosmopolitanism is composed of two contradictory strands. There is first the idea that we have obligations to others that stretch beyond the local world of kith and kin and even beyond the formal ties of shared citizenship; this might be called the universalist strand. Second is the idea that not just human life in general but also particular ways of life—cultures, peoples, nations—have meaning in and for themselves; this could be called the multiculturalist strand.[23] For Appiah, there is no single metric for judging how to live, and a cultured cosmopolitanism will entail a robust sense of human diversity as a good in itself. The problem is what to do when these ideals clash. Which is to take priority: our status as citizens of the world with duties to humanity as a whole, or our allegiance to local people and communities?

Appiah considers the case raised by contemporary advocates of moral universalism like Peter Singer and Roberto Unger.[24] Is it immoral to buy an opera ticket or support a wealthy cultural institution when the money could go to relieving diarrhea in the Third World? Shouldn't the relief of suffering always be granted moral priority? Most people would forgo a dinner at a four-star restaurant if the alternative were to save a dying child, but Appiah maintains that this is a false choice. By attributing absolute moral worth to the alleviation of suffering, Singer and Unger suggest that all choices should be judged by this single moral currency. This form of moral absolutism would quickly become intolerable if it were allowed to intrude into the most basic decisions of everyday life, Appiah

explains. A world where everyone is constantly striving to repair injustice would become “a flat and dreary place.” “It was terribly wrong,” he writes, “that slaves were worked to death building the pyramids—or, for that matter, in building the United States—but it is not therefore terrible that those monuments, or this nation, exist.”[25]

This last statement is especially needed at a time when American history is being rewritten to make slavery and anti-black racism the core of the American experience from the very beginning. The “1619 Project” promoted by the *New York Times* dates the American founding not from the arrival of the first European settlers, but from the time when twenty African slaves were sold to the Jamestown Colony in Virginia.[26] American history, on this account, is both founded on and marked by persistent racial oppression and hierarchy. Even the American revolution is being presented as a struggle to preserve slavery. Such one-sided moralism diminishes our founding principles and views our founders as either hypocrites or knaves. It denies or diminishes the efforts of generations of Americans—black and white—in their struggle against slavery and racial oppression. Racism is, to be sure, an irreparable stain on American national character, but it is not the essence of America. Neither Appiah nor I wish to deny the evil of slavery, but rather to argue that the world is a morally complex place and that good and evil are often found mixed together rather than neatly opposed. As Appiah puts it, “If the founders of this nation had dealt only with the most urgent problem facing them—and let us suppose that it was, indeed, slavery—they would almost certainly not have set in motion the slow march of political, cultural, and moral progress, with its sallies and retreats, that Americans justly take pride in.”[27] This is a welcome antidote to the language of victimhood and persecution maintained by the new age left.

THE CASE FOR PATRIOTISM (SORT OF)

One of the few philosophers of the first rank to defend patriotism is Alasdair MacIntyre. In his seminal essay “Is Patriotism a Virtue?” originally given as the Lindley Lecture at the University of Kansas in

1984, MacIntyre descends from the lofty heights of moral universalism to offer a different conception of the philosopher's charge. "One of the central tasks of the moral philosopher," he asserts in his first sentence, "is to articulate the convictions of the society in which he or she lives so that these convictions may become available for rational scrutiny."[28] This view gives moral credence to the complex web of affections and loyalties that we feel as historically and politically situated human beings—at least to the extent of taking these affections and loyalties seriously.

MacIntyre goes on to treat patriotism as a form of loyalty and includes it in a class of "loyalty-exhibiting virtues" such as love of family, friendship, and allegiance to clubs and teams. Central to these virtues is the importance of belonging. They cannot exist apart from the particular communities to which they are attached. Yet MacIntyre is clearly aware that patriotism should not be confused with "mindless loyalty" to one's nation. Patriotism is a regard for the merits and achievements of one's nation, what its values are, and what it looks up to. One's feelings of loyalty to country are like the loyalty we feel to a spouse. A person may, for example, feel respect for the institution of marriage, but this is not to say that we feel the same love and affection for all spouses. Just as it would be ridiculous to say that I should love all spouses, so I cannot feel the same love for all nations. I may admire the skills and commitment of the French soccer team that won the World Cup, but only the French can take pride in the team as representing the best of their country. "The particularity of the relationship," MacIntyre writes, "is essential and ineliminable."[29]

Yet MacIntyre also hears the demands of a very different conception of morality that he believes has taken root in the West from the Renaissance onward. This is the view, often associated with Kant but equally at home with utilitarian consequentialists, that associates morality with the impartial spectator. From the standpoint of this rational or "liberal morality," the specifics of who I am, who my family or friends are, and to what country I belong are of no particular moral importance. They must be "bracketed" so that they can be

judged according to moral standards that should be ostensibly acceptable to all rational persons. The term “bracketing” was coined by the phenomenological philosopher Edmund Husserl but revived by John Rawls, who used it as part of an elaborate thought experiment in which persons imagine themselves behind a “veil of ignorance” that prevents them from knowing key features of their positions in society.[30] This is meant to ensure that our selection of moral principles is not swayed by self-interest, bias, and partiality. Only when we agree to set our own loyalties and attachments aside can our judgments rise above the local and parochial and aspire to some moral objectivity. From this point of view, MacIntyre concludes, “the moral standpoint and the patriotic standpoint are systematically incompatible.”[31]

What to do, then, when our local commitments and loyalties conflict with our universal duties and obligations? Can a patriot morally oppose his own country and its leaders if it engages in an unjust war, or do attachment and loyalty trump universal moral principle? MacIntyre sees this conflict as essentially irresolvable:

> It is the essence of the morality of liberalism that no limitations are or can be set upon the criticism of the social *status quo*. . . . Conversely the morality of patriotism is one which precisely because it is framed in terms of the membership of some particular social community with some particular social, political, and economic structure, must exempt at least some fundamental structures of that community’s life from criticism. . . . But if so, the adherents of the morality of patriotism have condemned themselves to a fundamentally irrational attitude—since to refuse to examine some of one’s fundamental beliefs and attitudes is to insist on accepting them, whether they are rationally justifiable or not, which is irrational.[32]

MacIntyre regards it as an inescapable feature of large modern states to be torn between these competing conceptions of the moral life. While the liberal will claim that patriotism is a source of moral danger because it puts our ties to country beyond rational criticism, the patriot will claim that liberalism is at fault because it leaves the bonds of social life open to endless self-critique and deconstruction. MacIntyre concludes that each is right with respect to the other. The true danger comes when we confuse these two equally valid

moralities, that is, when we present the claims of national loyalty as though they were universal claims and present the claims of reason as though they belonged to one particular nation or people. MacIntyre finds this tendency especially in the United States, which, he claims, tends to identify the cause of America with the cause of all humanity. “The history of this identification,” he concludes, “could not be other than a history of confusion and incoherence.”[33]

I agree with MacIntyre’s identification of patriotism as a species of loyalty to which he attributes genuine moral weight, but he is wrong to contrast this to liberal morality, at least as I understand it. What Macintyre calls liberal morality is only one version of liberalism —the version expressed by contemporary philosophers like John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin. For them, liberalism requires “neutrality” toward competing conceptions of moral virtue and human flourishing. The liberal state, on their view, must stand outside the domain of moral life and intervene only when necessary to adjudicate conflicts and prevent any group from tyrannizing others. The liberal state is desirable not because it promotes a specific way of life, but precisely because it does not. It is this claim to moral neutrality that has created the counter-claim that there is a moral void at the core of contemporary liberalism.

But MacIntyre confuses contemporary liberalism, and its aspirations to moral neutrality, with the classical liberal theories of philosophers like John Locke, Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill. For those writers, liberal morality was decidedly not neutral. It was intended to produce and justify a certain liberal ethos. From this older point of view, every community nurtures a particular kind of character and way of life. It creates a distinctive type of human being that is regarded as representative of the community. “We would be surprised,” writes Martin Diamond, “to find Cotton Mather fully formed and flourishing in the Berlin of the 1920s. We would be surprised to find a full-fledged, homegrown Oscar Wilde in old Dodge City. It is likewise most unlikely that George Babbitt would have turned up in the early Roman republic; he belongs to Zenith, the fast growing city in the Middle West.”[34] Liberalism in this sense was not

just a juridical theory of rights, but a full-fledged philosophy that aimed to produce certain capacities and character traits such as independence, fair play, acceptance of moral responsibility, and critical self-reflection—a distinctive canon of liberal virtues that characterize a particular kind of moral community, what might be called a bourgeois society. They also provide the basis for the conception of enlightened patriotism that I want to defend later on.

MacIntyre's distinction between the morality of patriotism and the morality of rational principle suggests that there is something irrational about patriotism, that it belongs to a lower-level morality—a morality of folk tales and communal ties. He invokes the Hegelian distinction between *Sittlichkeit* (customs, habits, manners) and *Moralität* (reason, principle, impartiality) to make his point. The besetting sin of American patriotism is to have conflated these two different moralities. Attempting to give our merely local or municipal patriotism a universal coloration, MacIntyre believes, is bound to induce incoherence.

But MacIntyre's defense of patriotism as a form of local, customary morality is based not only on a misreading of Hegel but also, more importantly, on a misreading of patriotism. Hegel's stated views are in fact closer to the conception of enlightened patriotism that I want to defend. In his major work of political theory, the *Philosophy of Right* (1821), Hegel describes patriotism as a "political disposition" (*politische Gessinung*) that is based on truth.[35] In calling patriotism a disposition, he means that it is more than an occasional desire or passing whim; it is rooted in certain stable features of human character. In suggesting, further, that this patriotic disposition is rooted in truth, he does not mean that it corresponds to some external reality but that it expresses a personal desire—a rational desire—to be part of a society that shares one's interest in freedom. Patriotism is an affect, but it is a rational affect because it aspires to freedom. This suggests that a true and effective patriotism cannot be based simply on the accident of birth. It requires institutions that reflect a civilized social order based on law and the guarantee of rights. Hegelian patriotism is a form of *Bildung* or moral education

that may begin as a matter of trust and habit, but it gradually passes over into rational self-awareness.[36]

Hegel makes a second point about patriotism as well. In the remark added to paragraph 268 of the *Philosophy of Right,* he calls it a mistake to consider patriotism only as "a willingness to perform *extraordinary* sacrifices and actions." Patriotism is not something expressed only in times of war and national crisis; it is required under "the normal conditions and circumstances of life." It is a quiet virtue, which does not demand continuous acts of heroic self-sacrifice, but rather a willingness to be "tried and tested in all circumstances of ordinary life." He chastises those who would preserve patriotism exclusively for times of political crisis while ignoring their day-to-day civic duties. Most patriotic activities, such as standing during the national anthem, take place in the realm of everyday life. "But just as human beings often prefer to be guided by magnanimity instead of by right," he writes, "so also do they readily convince themselves that they possess this extraordinary patriotism in order to exempt themselves from the genuine disposition or to excuse their lack of it."[37] Hegel does not mean to deny the occasional need for wartime sacrifice—although he believed such occasions would become increasingly rare—but to argue that we should not mistake the extraordinary case for the everyday need for the patriotic disposition.

I want to consider one more example, Michael Walzer's essay "What Does It Mean to Be an 'American?'" from 2004. Walzer begins from the premise that American patriotism is by definition something of an anomaly. "There is no country called America," he begins. "We live in the United States *of America* and we have appropriated the adjective 'American' even though we can claim no exclusive title to it."[38] Unlike countries where families can live for generations without their members gaining full citizenship—Japan or Germany, for example—virtually anyone can become an American. America is not, and has never been, a nation-state in the European sense of basing its citizenship on an ethnic majority or religious affiliation, even though people have sometimes tried to do this. Rather, what

identifies America is our sense of “manyness,” not in some mystical trinitarian sense but because of the pluralism that constitutes American national life.

Walzer sees an ongoing tension or argument over what constitutes American patriotism. From one side, there is a “republican” or what could be called Rousseauian tendency to view America along the lines of a classical *patria* or fatherland. Although American republicanism (not to be confused with the political party) has taken many forms, Walzer associates it with the Know-Nothing or “nativist” party of the mid-nineteenth century. Alarmed at the sudden influx of German and Irish Catholics, the Know-Nothings were the first to attempt to establish cultural markers for what made an American. These markers were racial and ethnic—the original conception of the WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant)—and would later be used to justify harsh restrictions on immigration as well as the creation of everything from the House Un-American Activities Committee to the American Legion.

In opposition to the republican emphasis on unity, Walzer locates our distinctive national identity in the tradition of American pluralism. Drawing on the work of the Progressive-era sociologist Horace Kallen, Walzer views the hyphenated American as the exemplar of American national character. In a classic essay titled “Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot” (1915), Kallen took issue with the view that American identity required a melting down of all ethnic and cultural differences. The older “melting pot” image of American identity—so named after the novel by Israel Zangwill in which all ethnic origins and particularities are gradually blended into a common culture—has been accused, not without justification, of providing a pretext for white Anglo-American hegemony. America, Kallen argued, is instead “a democracy of nationalities” in which “each nationality expresses its emotional and voluntary life in its own language.” He regarded the assertion of ethnic differences as an essential bulwark against the debilitating effects of mass culture.[39]

For Walzer and Kallen, being an American means embodying the contradiction between the common or universal requirements of

democratic citizenship and the recognition of the cultural and ethnic particularities that characterize civil society. Where they differ is that Kallen believed that we cannot escape our inherited identities. “Whatever else [a person] changes,” he wrote, “he cannot change his grandfather.” Walzer takes the more postmodern view that our identities are pliable. Being an American may be to embrace or reject the past, but above all it means the ability to fashion our own identities.[40] Pluralism is either the price we pay or the advantage we accrue from belonging to an immigrant society. “Pluralists,” Walzer writes, “do not make good republicans—for the same reason that republicans, Rousseau is the classic example, do not make good pluralists. The two attend to different sorts of goods.”[41]

Walzer might have stopped at recognizing republicanism and pluralism as the two competing strains of American patriotism, but he goes further. The republican ideal, he suggests, is a fraud. “Republicanism is a mirage, and American nationalism or communitarianism is not a plausible option; it doesn’t reach to our complexity.”[42] The unitary republic, modeled to some degree on the classical city-state, is simply false to American experience. Its attempt to make a one out of many—the original meaning of *e pluribus unum*—ends up sacrificing the many to the one. To be an American means always to live in conflict with oneself—and this, for Walzer, is a good thing. “It isn’t inconceivable that America will one day become an American nation-state, the many giving way to the one,” he speculates, “but that is not what it is now; nor is that its destiny.”[43]

Walzer’s conception of the hyphenated American offers a useful corrective to the often coercive aspects of the republican tradition with its unitary model of citizenship. But Walzer misidentifies the source of this republican strand in our history. It was not a creation of the Know-Nothings but is derived from the English political thought of the seventeenth century. Consider John Jay’s description of American national identity in the second *Federalist Paper:*

> Providence has been pleased to give this one connected country to one united people, a people descended from the same ancestors, speaking the

> same language, professing the same religion, attached to the same principles of government, very similar in their manners and customs and who . . . have nobly established their general liberty and independence.[44]

"This country and this people seem to have been for each other," Jay concluded.

To be sure, this was an overstatement even when Jay wrote it. Americans have never been one people descended from common ancestors, speaking the same language, and practicing the same religion. At the time of the founding, America included Congregationalists, Catholics, Quakers, Jews, and others, many of whom spoke Dutch and French. There were millions of African Americans and Native Americans who were left out of Jay's description of "one united people."

But if the republican model goes too far in sacrificing the many to the one, Walzer succumbs to the opposite vice, sacrificing the one to the many. All that remains of our national ethos is a watery commitment to toleration as a form of "muddling through." America is not just a congeries of multiple identities but a people with a history and set of public loyalties, an articulation of what we are and what we aspire to be. More than simply the sum of our differences, the American regime is the expression of our character as a people and a nation. It is our constitutional ethos that has survived and given shape to something called the American way of life.

ENGLISH-SPEAKING PATRIOTISM

To understand what patriotism means in an American context, it helps to consider some history.

The term *patriotism* did not enter the English-speaking world until the sixteenth century.[45] Even then, it was a purely descriptive word that meant a "compatriot," someone living in or coming from one's own country. Our modern evaluative sense of the term did not appear until later. The terms *patriot* and *patriotism* do not occur even once in the works of Shakespeare, who commanded a greater vocabulary than any other English-language author. The word *patriot* was often modified by adjectives like "good," "true," or "worthy" to

describe a good citizen or true lover of country. That is how it appeared in 1611 in the preface to the King James Bible, where the translators asked, “Was Catiline therefore an honest man or a good patriot that sought to bring [his city] to a combustion?”[46]

The language of patriotism entered English political discourse through the “Commonwealthmen,” who opposed what they regarded as the tyranny of the crown and the ministerial usurpation of power. Works like James Harrington’s *Oceana* (1656), Algernon Sidney’s *Discourses Concerning Government* (1698), and John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon’s *Cato’s Letters* (1720–1723) offered an image of England as an idealized republic based on virtue, economic equality, frugality, and political liberty. Sidney was a direct descendent of Harry Percy, the model for Hotspur in Shakespeare’s *Richard II* and *Henry IV, Part I,* and we can see from his opposition to the restored Stuart monarchy that he inherited his great ancestor’s fiery nature. After Sidney was executed in 1683 for his involvement in the Rye House Plot, patriotism was linked further to the cause of political resistance and martyrdom. The patriot was someone willing to die for his country, and the Commonwealthmen often celebrated tyrannicides like Brutus and Timoleon. Borrowing the language of Machiavelli and Florentine civic humanism, these oppositional figures extolled the ancient British constitution as enshrining a republic of virtue in which none of the three estates of the realm—kings, lords, and commons—was able to exercise sufficient power to tyrannize the others.[47]

The concept of patriotism came into its own only at the end of the seventeenth century, when the Revolution Settlement of 1688 created the conditions for the emergence of the first two modern political parties—Whigs and Tories—to contest for political power. Whiggism was an entirely English tradition that has no precise counterpart elsewhere, even though an American political party of that name flourished during the first half of the nineteenth century.[48] In recent years, the term has fallen on hard times as something synonymous with bourgeois liberalism, although its origins were more aristocratic. It is far more complex than Toryism, which Samuel

Johnson defined as adherence “to the ancient constitution of the state and the apostolical hierarchy of the Church of England.”[49] The Whigs were defenders of liberty, parliamentary government, and the rights of Englishmen. They were able to combine intellectual liberalism with religious agnosticism and (occasional) skepticism about the monarchy. “What constitutes Whiggism,” one writer has said, is “the inbred attitude of a ruling oligarchy whose loyalty was solely to parliamentary government as such, coupled with almost total indifference to the precise content of policy or legislation.”[50] The last known specimen of an English Whig died in captivity around the time of World War I.

The modern conception of patriotism emerged out of the Glorious Revolution, which established the conditions of a free constitution to which loyalty was owed. This newfound sentiment of national loyalty was astutely described by Anthony Ashley Cooper, the third earl of Shaftesbury and a pupil of John Locke. In his *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711), he described love of country as devotion to a free constitution. “Of all human affections,” he wrote, “the noblest and most becoming human nature, is that of love to one’s country.” This marked the difference between a people “enjoying the happiness of a real constitution and polity by which they are free and dependent” and a mere multitude held together by force.[51] The grandson of the founder of the Whig Party, Shaftesbury regarded the Revolution Settlement as a social contract where ideas of balanced government, religious liberty, and the rights of Englishmen would form the basis for Whig supremacy in the following century. The people’s loyalty, he continued, was not to the land or the soil but to the constitution insofar as it enlarged and confirmed the sphere of human liberty.

Shaftesbury’s patriotic sentiment was challenged by critics who saw Robert Walpole—the first modern prime minister—and the “big wigs” as plotting a nascent tyranny. The concept of patriotism was originally associated with the English “country” party, which claimed to represent the interests of the entire country against the machinations of the court.[52] Although Walpole’s era was welcomed

as an age of peace and stability after a century of almost continuous religious conflict—it came to be known as the new Augustan age—it also generated deep undercurrents of resentment at what some saw as the usurpation of parliamentary power by a corrupt ministerial elite. In the eighteenth century, “corruption” had a technical meaning not unlike what would later be called “patronage”: it meant the employment of lesser officers of the state to secure their loyalty to their patrons. The label of patriot also fell into discredit. It came to mean someone who feigns devotion to his or her country but whose actions are false or hypocritical. The negative sense of patriotism arose largely due to its oppositional meaning. As Thomas Macaulay would later write about the Walpole administration, by 1744 “the name ‘patriot’ had become a word of derision.”[53]

It was the Tory polemicist Henry Saint John, later Viscount Bolingbroke, who gave the term *patriot* its modern political currency. Bolingbroke is chiefly remembered today—if at all—as the butt of Edmund Burke’s jibe, “Who now reads Bolingbroke? Who ever read him through?,” although it was clear that Burke had read him carefully.[54] In both “On the Spirit of Patriotism” (1736) and “The Idea of a Patriot King” (1738), Bolingbroke described a patriot as someone who supports the national interest, not the particular interests of the court or the administration. A healthy political order will be without parties, but under a corrupt system, it is up to the patriot to stand in virtuous opposition to the king and his ministers. To be a patriot in Bolingbroke’s sense was to be above party, to speak for the nation, a view that received its canonical expression in George Washington’s “Farewell Address.”

Bolingbroke put forward an idealized image of a Machiavellian prince as something like the father of his country.[55] His idea of the patriot king was meant to stand in explicit contrast to the pervasive corruption under George II. The central feature of the patriot king was that he was above faction. “To espouse no party, but to govern like the common father of his people, is so essential to the character of a Patriot King, that he who does otherwise forfeits his title.”[56] For the true patriot, then, the spirit of party or faction is the great evil to

be avoided. “The true image of a free people,” Bolingbroke wrote, “is that of a patriarchal family, where the head and all the members are united by one common interest, and animated by one common spirit.”[57] For Bolingbroke, parties are to politics what sects are to religion: sources of conflict and dissension. To ensure the nation’s liberty, then, a monarch must act in a national spirit rather the spirit of party. Once a monarch rules in the name of a faction, he becomes a tyrant and his government is a conspiracy. The true patriot will know how to use parties to his or her advantage. “He may favor one party and discourage another upon occasions wherein the state of his kingdom makes such a temporary measure necessary but he will espouse none, much less will he proscribe any.”[58]

Bolingbroke helped to legitimize the idea of a loyal opposition, a party that stands for king and country even if it is opposed to the current administration. It was through this language of patriotic opposition that the concept of patriotism entered American political discourse in the years before the revolution. As Gordon Wood has noted, Americans read and borrowed promiscuously from virtually every English writer, Whig and Tory alike.[59] To be a patriot in the American setting meant to oppose British authority, not only the king but also the parliament and the entire apparatus of British imperial rule. The revolution divided Americans between “patriots,” who supported an independent republic, and “loyalists” or Tories, who defended the mother country and the English constitution.

The founding generation vigorously debated whether the new republic should imitate the British model of balanced government, giving institutional voice to distinct classes and interests, or whether the nation should embrace a more democratic vision of popular control. The British model was favored by John Adams, who saw the American experience largely as a continuation, albeit in purified form, of the English constitutional tradition of a mixed government that represents society’s different socioeconomic orders. This form originated in Rome, with its distinction between patricians and plebeians, and was emulated in the British model with its divisions between the king, the lords, and the commons. What Adams and

others failed to see (or chose to ignore) was that the mixed constitution was little more than an oligarchy in disguise. The nobles or “gentlemen” stood midway between the king and the commons, giving them the greater share of power and influence.[60]

Not all patriots saw the revolution as restoring traditional English liberties under a balanced constitution. Modern republicanism, in contrast to the model of the mixed government, bases its assertion of the people’s sovereignty on the doctrine of human equality—that all are endowed with the same rights. For the more radical republicans, like Jefferson and Tom Paine, the American revolution was more than a restoration of a previous constitutional forms. It represented a first in human history. America would be a republic, a term borrowed from Roman political vocabulary, but something hitherto unimagined: a democratic republic based on the philosophy of John Locke. Our founding document, the Declaration of Independence, embraced such Lockean ideas as the laws of nature, “unalienable rights,” government by consent, and the right of revolution. Locke, once celebrated as the champion of individual liberty, the right of property, and limited government, has recently been anathematized for founding a regime based on hedonism, materialism, and an ethic of heedless individualism. Yet for all of his contested legacy, Locke is still America’s philosopher king. Even those who rail against his influence implicitly admit it.[61]

Jefferson and Paine simply adapted Locke’s philosophy of rights to American circumstances. Yet for all their similarities, they interpreted these circumstances differently. In his great public letter to Henry Lee, written near the end of his life, Jefferson described the Declaration as an attempt “to place before mankind the common sense of the subject” and “to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion.” By “the common sense of the subject,” Jefferson said he meant the Whig sentiments that favored independence from Britain. The Declaration, in his view, did nothing more than “harmonize” the sentiments of the day as expressed in letters, pamphlets, and “the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, etc.”[62]

Paine, by contrast, tended to view the revolution not as something specifically American but as a world-historical event in which government, for the first time, was based on the theory of human rights. The American revolution, in his view, was the first step in a series of world revolutions. “The independence of America,” he wrote in *The Rights of Man,* “was accompanied by a Revolution in the principles and practice of Governments. . . . Government founded on a moral theory, . . . on the indefeasible hereditary Rights of Man, is now revolving from west to east.”[63]

The challenge facing the young republic was how to maintain a sense of patriotism once independence had been won. If patriotism was connected to the cause of the revolution, what was the need for it once the republic had been secured? And what kind of republic would it be? The framing of the Constitution put this debate in sharp relief. The Anti-Federalists, so named because they opposed the new Constitution, remained loyal to the ideal of small-state republicanism sanctified by the classical tradition of Xenophon, Aristotle, and Cicero and extolled by the English Commonwealthmen like Harrington and Sidney. On this account, republics were possible only in small territories with relatively homogenous populations. Small territories were necessary for self-government. In a large state, the center of government must necessarily be distant from the people it is supposed to represent, and thus impossible to hold accountable to its electors. At the same time, it was assumed that any people who were to govern themselves must be relatively homogenous in their manners, habits, and customs. A republic is not only a set of institutions; it represents an ethos, a shared way of life, that is possible only among people with common moral habits and dispositions. A national government would end up imposing crudely uniform rules on peoples with very different local characters.

The Anti-Federalists drew much of their ammunition from the older Whig tradition that regarded a small republic of yeoman farmers as the bedrock of political independence. Their hero was Jefferson, the great advocate of small-state republicanism. The Anti-Federalists were much stronger egalitarians than their Federalist

rivals, who valued a diversity of factions and interests. Large states produce *luxury,* a term that for much of the eighteenth century was synonymous with venality and corruption. Only small states were likely to maintain a society without extremes of wealth, influence, or education, one that produced the kind of moderation—some would call it mediocrity—necessary for a simple, sturdy, and virtuous people. To the Anti-Federalists, the republic was as much a school of citizenship as a plan for government.[64]

The Federalists, as I will develop more fully later, did not so much draw on an older tradition as create a new one. Anyone tempted to view the *Federalist Papers* simply as a set of newspaper editorials intended to justify the new Constitution (which, of course, they were) seriously underestimates the work. In these papers, the Federalists set out a conceptual innovation as revolutionary as anything ever attempted in the history of political ideas.[65] When the Federalists used the term *republic,* taken from the Roman *res publica* or public thing, they were both self-consciously reviving an ancient concept and endowing it with an entirely new meaning. The common wisdom of the age, expressed by Montesquieu, was that republics belonged entirely to the past. They were simply inapplicable to modern conditions, and any attempt to bring them back to life, as the English tried to do during the Interregnum, could only bring disaster. With the exception of small, rustic outposts like Switzerland, modern states were held to be monarchical. The Federalists argued otherwise. They sought to use this ancient political form, revived by the English commonwealth tradition, to create a new constitutional republic or, as we would call it today, a liberal democracy.

The Federalists' novel proposal for a large extended republic (which the Anti-Federalists considered a contradiction in terms) envisioned diverse factions and interests competing within representative institutions designed to create checks and balances on power. This was a new theory of statehood that referred to no previous model. The Federalists' vision was as much an aspiration as a description, since there was not yet any existing reality to which their ideas fully conformed. At the same time, they did not create a

new constitutional order out of thin air. They transformed the meaning of existing terms in order to address problems that their predecessors had failed to solve. This idea of a republic extensive enough to represent the interests of the diverse factions found in large states, but without the disadvantages of concentrating power in the hands of a distant ruler, was a first in the history of political theory. It has rightly been called the "Madisonian Moment."[66]

The Federalists realized that a new kind of republic would require a new kind of patriotism. It could no longer be the stern, self-sacrificing devotion that the older civic republicanism upheld, or a Roman attachment to land and soil. It would have to be more in keeping with a society based on individualism, enlightenment, self-interest, and commerce, as well as on such universal principles as equality and the rights of man. The specifically American form of patriotism required a unique combination of particularism—loyalty to the Constitution and the republic—and universalism, that is, commitment to equality and rights. How to square this circle?

No one understood this dilemma better than Alexander Hamilton, who argued that America was the first nation to be founded not on history or loyalty to tradition, but on an idea or principle, the idea of self-government. America was an experiment that would test, possibly for all time, the viability of republican government. We find this thesis boldly stated in the first paragraph of the first *Federalist Paper:*

> It has been frequently remarked that it seems to have been reserved to the people of this country, by their conduct and example, to decide the important question, whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.[67]

At the core of American patriotism, then, is this idea of reflection and choice. American patriotism has a rational and deliberative component that cannot be reduced to a morality of custom and tradition (as Alasdair MacIntyre has argued). Reflection and choice are not just on display at moments of high constitutional decision-

making, but are day-to-day aspects of the patriotic disposition. It is this disposition that has given American patriotism, at its best, a uniquely critical and self-questioning character. America may be the only country where the question “what is it to be an American?” is a continual topic of discussion. To question America is not to be un-American, but part of being an American. What is American history but a series of debates over the meaning of our national identity? Such a dialogue is, to my knowledge, nonexistent in any other country. The debates between Federalists and Anti-Federalists, Whigs and Jacksonians, Lincoln and Douglas, Wilsonian internationalists and “America First” isolationists, and today’s multiculturalists and Trumpean nationalists, all testify to the contested and to some degree unfinished quality that gives American patriotism its distinctive shape and vibrancy.

CHAPTER THREE

Patriotism, Ancient and Modern

In the late summer of 480 BCE, a Persian expeditionary force led by the great king Xerxes—or Ahasuerus as he is known in the Hebrew Book of Esther—invaded the Greek mainland in order to avenge the loss that he had suffered ten years before in the battle of Marathon. A confederation of Greek forces decided to stand their ground at a mountain pass called Thermopylae—literally the Hot Gates—that gave them some strategic benefits. From there, under the command of Leonidas, the Greeks could fight to advantage and hope to ward off a Persian army that Herodotus, in the *History,* fantastically numbered at over five million.[1]

The defense of the pass at Thermopylae by the Spartan Three Hundred is one of the watershed moments of Western history.[2] The question that has always puzzled historians is why they did it. What led the Spartans to stand their ground in the face of overwhelming odds and certain death? Why not retreat and live to fight another day? Herodotus tells us that this question was hotly debated among the Greek troops who made up the resistance. Not everyone was in favor of staying, and Leonidas, the Spartan commander, then made up his mind to send home all but the Spartans. Herodotus even interrupts his narrative to add a personal comment: “I believe that Leonidas thought this over and wanted to store up the glory for the Spartiates alone.”[3] It is here that Herodotus records two of the most famous sayings of his book. When the Spartans are told that the sun will be darkened by the number of Persian arrows, one of them

replies: “Good, then we will fight in the shade.”[4] And when the fighting is finally over and the few remaining defenders are overrun, Herodotus tells the reader of an inscription placed at the site of the battle: “Go tell the Spartans, stranger passing by / that here obedient to their laws, we lie.”[5]

In fact, Herodotus tells us why the Spartans chose to fight, in a conversation between Xerxes and an exiled Spartan king named Demaratus. A few days before the battle, Xerxes summons Demaratus to his tent and asks him what manner of men are these Spartans. After asking for permission to speak freely, Demaratus tells the great king that the Spartans will never submit to Persian rule because they have been toughened by a combination of poverty, which is native to Greece, and the laws that they themselves have created. Xerxes, understandably, seems perplexed as to what would inspire an army of a few hundred to stand up to his massive force. Demaratus answers with one of the most memorable speeches in the *History:*

> So it is with the Lacedaemonians: fighting singly, they are no worse than any other people; together, they are the most gallant men on earth. For they are free—but not altogether so. They have the despot over them Law, and they fear him much more than your men fear you. At least they do whatever he [the Law] bids them do; and he bids them always the same thing: not to flee from fight before any multitude of men whatever but to stand firm in their ranks and either conquer or die.[6]

The example of Leonidas and the Spartans has always been Exhibit A of ancient patriotism, of a people who thought of themselves as soldiers and nothing else, prepared to face death rather than suffer dishonor before their law. It is the despotism of the law that they feared most, especially the shame they would feel at failing to do their duty. Spartans were taught from birth to value order, discipline, love of country, and courage in battle. They also were barely literate and single-mindedly devoted to military training. How did Spartans develop their unique reputation?

“GO TELL THE SPARTANS”

The main source from which we know anything about Sparta is the first-century Greek biographer Plutarch, whose *Parallel Lives* provides the most comprehensive account we have of Sparta and its legendary founder, Lycurgus.[7] Lycurgus was to Sparta what Moses was to the Jews or George Washington to America. He was the genius who created the Spartan constitution and way of life. And yet, as Plutarch admits in the opening sentence of his "Life of Lycurgus," not a single aspect of the lawgiver's life is free of dispute. Plutarch's account includes not only his best judgment of what actually occurred, but also what was thought to have happened. As he put it elsewhere, he was not writing history but writing lives.[8]

The first and most important aspect of Lycurgus's statecraft was his emphasis on the education of Spartan citizens. During a period of "voluntary exile," we are told, Lycurgus traveled widely around the Aegean and possibly beyond, examining the constitutions of different cities and kingdoms to learn what would be most beneficial to his homeland. While in Crete, he befriended the philosopher Thales, whom he persuaded to return with him to Sparta. From Thales he learned the importance of music—poetry, odes, war chants—as a means of instilling obedience and common purpose. "Now Thales passed as a lyric poet and screened himself behind this art," Plutarch writes, "but in reality he did the work of one of the mightiest lawgivers."[9] He was in crucial respects Lycurgus's forerunner, making education serve the ends of what was "high and noble." Likewise, when visiting Ionia on the coast of modern-day Turkey, Lycurgus came across the works of Homer, which he then had copied and compiled to take back to Sparta. In his view, these works offered much more than pleasure and enjoyment: they were a treasure trove of lessons concerning statecraft. "For these epics already had a certain faint reputation among the Greeks and a few were in possession of certain portions of them . . . but Lycurgus was the very first to make them really known."[10]

Only after Lycurgus was recalled to Sparta was he able to initiate the institutional reforms that would make Sparta a model for centuries to come. One of his most controversial measures was to

institute a regime of economic equality. He divided the country into thirty thousand equal shares so that each citizen could live on an equal footing with all others. Gold and silver currency were abolished, severely limiting trade and putting an end to luxury and superfluous commodities. On top of this, common mess halls were established where everyone ate the same rough foods, most famously the Spartan black broth. Citizens were carefully monitored to make sure they didn't exempt themselves.[11]

Lycurgus also encouraged a degree of sexual equality as a means of advancing a common spirit. Girls were encouraged to participate in athletic competitions to toughen their bodies and prepare for the rigors of childbirth. To encourage marriage, young men and women were required to appear naked at certain public festivals, and those who remained bachelors could be legally disenfranchised.[12] These ceremonies, Plutarch assures the reader, were completely chaste and no one saw anything shameful in public nudity.[13] Even after marriage, men and women continued to live apart in barracks, meeting in secret to satisfy their conjugal duties. Offspring of these marriages were rigorously examined as future citizens, and those found to be weak or malformed were quietly euthanized on the grounds that they could not be of later advantage either to themselves or the city. Children were not allowed underwear after the age of twelve, and they were encouraged to steal their food so that they could develop cunning, stealth, and other qualities needed in war. There is a famous story of a Spartan boy who stole a fox from a neighboring camp and hid it under his tunic. When asked why he was away from camp, the boy allowed his entrails to be eaten out rather than reveal the theft. Such was the Spartan way.[14]

Lycurgus recognized from the beginning that Spartan institutions required a distinctive character to maintain them. "The matter of education" he regarded as "the greatest and noblest task of the law-giver," and at the core of this education was the cultivation of good judgment.[15] Judgment was developed not through the study of theoretical subjects like logic and philosophy, but from learning about

actual human conduct. Spartan education was eminently practical, aimed at shaping citizens rather than philosophers. Philosophy, which might have led citizens to question the wisdom of their laws, was outlawed. The result was inevitably a certain narrowing of taste and vision:

> This was the reason why [Lycurgus] did not permit them to live abroad at their pleasure and wander in strange lands, assuming foreign habits and imitating the lives of people who were without training and lived under different forms of government. . . . For along with strange people, strange doctrines must come in; and novel doctrines bring novel decisions, from which there must arise many feelings and resolution which destroy the harmony of the existing political order. Therefore he thought it more necessary to keep bad manners and customs from invading and filling the city than it was to keep out infectious diseases.[16]

Plutarch tells us that the city Lycurgus established lasted for over five hundred years, with strict observance of its laws. All in all, not a bad run.

THE SPARTAN LEGACY

That the Spartan legacy is overlooked today is largely due to the preeminence of its great rival, Athens. While Athens was the home of democracy, the birthplace of Socrates and Plato, the home of Pericles, the Acropolis, and the great theatrical productions of Euripides and Sophocles, the only thing to remind a traveler of ancient Sparta is a giant statue of Leonidas. But throughout the ancient world and into the early modern era, Sparta remained the model for patriotic devotion. The Romanized Greek historian Polybius praised the Spartan character for its courage, self-discipline, and moderation.[17] Machiavelli admired Sparta for the longevity of its laws and Montaigne lauded it for its system of education. In early America, Samuel Adams spoke, somewhat incongruously, of creating a “Christian Sparta” in the New World, and Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* remained one of the most widely read books throughout the colonial period.[18]

Yet no one in the early modern period did more to revive the spirit of Sparta than the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Rousseau idealized Sparta for its virtually complete subordination of the individual to the common good, a development that has no parallel in ancient or modern history. Sparta for Rousseau represented a golden age in which modern distinctions between private and public life, self-interest and patriotic duty, the elite and ordinary citizens, were completely unknown. The Spartan was a citizen and nothing else, and in this whole-hearted identification with the city Rousseau imagined he saw a more coherent, fully integrated, and morally praiseworthy life than what he observed in his own time, eighteenth-century Europe.

Most important for Rousseau was the military character of Spartan patriotism, which required from its citizens extreme courage and self-renunciation. Rousseau brought this to life in a story from Plutarch that he told at the outset of his great educational treatise *Emile; or, On Education:*

> A Spartan woman had five sons in the army and was awaiting news of the battle. A Helot arrives; trembling she asks him for news. “Your five sons were killed.” “Base slave, did I ask you that?” “We won the victory.” The mother runs to the temple and gives thanks to the gods. This is the female citizen.[19]

It is not clear whether Rousseau believed that people like the Spartan mother actually existed, much less whether such extreme self-sacrifice could be reproduced in a totally different moral and political climate. He did believe it was necessary to hold up these models of almost superhuman virtue, more as marvels to be wondered at than as a blueprint for political reform, for comparison to a modern age he considered irredeemably corrupt. “Public instruction,” he wrote, “no longer exists and can no longer exist because where there is no longer fatherland, there can no longer be citizens. The two words, *fatherland* and *citizen,* should be effaced from modern languages.”[20]

Rousseau accepted Plutarch’s description of the single legislative founder but went even further. In the *Social Contract,* he depicted the lawgiver as a person of “superior intelligence” who believes himself capable of changing human nature. These founders are not to be

confused with ordinary statesmen. They enacted entire systems of laws and institutions that later politicians helped preserve and sustain. The great legislators of history—in addition to Lycurgus, Rousseau names Moses and Numa—were all nation-builders. They brought about the virtually complete transformation of "each individual who by himself is a perfect and solitary whole into part of a larger whole from which that individual would, as it were, receive his life and his being."[21] This transformation, Rousseau believed, cannot be achieved by force alone. The great legislators must first create the moral climate that prepares people to receive their innovations. "Since the Lawgiver can use neither force nor reasoning," Rousseau wrote, "he must of necessity have recourse to an authority of a different order, which might be able to rally without violence and to persuade without convincing."[22] The lawgiver neither argues nor coerces, but is a law unto himself. As Judith Shklar wrote, "Everything is done by the force of personality."[23]

Rousseau was convinced that the patriotic spirit is the polar opposite of the cosmopolitan ethic of Christianity. In the final chapter of the *Social Contract,* which caused the book to be burned in Geneva, he contrasted the worldly and political spirit of the ancient "civil religions" with Christianity's apolitical cosmopolitanism. By dividing human loyalties between two domains, Christianity helped bring about the demise of the ancient republics, which were based on a simple and unwavering devotion to the good of the state. Rather than a source of unity, Christianity became a source of conflict, and religion came to be dominated by priests who used it to advance their own interests. "We are told," Rousseau wrote, "that a people of true Christians would form the most perfect society imaginable. I see only one major difficulty with this supposition; which is that a society of true Christians would no longer be a society of men."[24]

In Rousseau's view, Christianity makes people unfit for political life because it makes them gullible to every mountebank and fraud who comes along. He tries to imagine what a Christian army would look like. "Citizens march to battle without hesitation; not one of them

thinks of fleeing," he admitted, but "they do their duty without passion for victory, they know better how to die than to win."[25] "Onward Christian soldiers"—the old spiritual notwithstanding—is a contradiction in terms. Pit such an army against a Rome or Sparta and the Christians will be crushed or allowed to survive only because of their enemies' contempt for them. Rousseau's most damning indictment of the "Christian republic," however, was that its focus on the afterlife encouraged passivity in the present life: "Christianity preaches nothing but servitude and dependence. Its spirit is too favorable to tyranny for tyranny not always to profit from it. True Christians were made to be slaves; they know it and are hardly moved by it; this brief life has too little value in their eyes."[26]

Rousseau did more than any other modern political philosopher to associate patriotism with Sparta. But some of the most thoughtful minds of his age had already begun to see Sparta as an anachronism. Its almost inhuman spirit of self-renunciation was at odds with large modern states based on the free flow of goods and ideas. The question raised by some of the best minds of the era—Montesquieu, Adam Smith, the *Federalist* authors—was whether the idea of patriotism could be retrofitted for the requirements of the modern age. I want to consider each of these authors in turn.

PATRIOTISM FOR THE MODERN AGE

One of the first and most powerful attacks on the Spartan model of patriotism came from Charles-Louis de Secondat, baron de la Brède et de Montesquieu, who was active in the early eighteenth century. Montesquieu has been called the founder of modern social science. Emile Durkheim said it, Raymond Aron repeated it, and their judgment has not been seriously disputed.[27] Even more importantly, Montesquieu introduced the language out of which modern liberalism would be constructed. By drawing attention to the centrality of individual liberty, he emphasized the vast historical differences between the ancient republics extolled by Plutarch and the modern commercial societies he saw emerging in England and, later, the United States. The new conception of liberty underlying these states,

he noted, was not the classical idea of liberty as freedom to do what the law commands, but a modern conception of freedom to act under the security of the law. A free regime based on separation of powers and the principle of representation will create an ever-widening sphere of private liberty for citizens to live as they like and say what they think.

"There are three kinds of government" was Montesquieu's intentionally anodyne introductory sentence to his theory of regime types in *Spirit of the Laws* (1748).[28] Of the three major constitutional forms discussed in that book—monarchies, republics, and despotisms—Montesquieu paid special attention to republics. He regarded the animating spirit of the republic as *virtue,* a term he defined as love of homeland and love of equality.[29] This is the self-sacrificing political virtue that led the citizens of Greece and Rome to prefer their country to their private interests, even their own souls. The extreme self-renunciation this type of virtue required led Montesquieu—like Rousseau after him—to stress the important role of education in a republic.

Montesquieu's description of the ancient republic has led many readers to assume he was holding it up as a model for the present to emulate. It could be easy to come to this conclusion. He presented an unforgettable account of the ancient republic as egalitarian and virtuous, writing at one point: "The political men of Greece who lived under popular government recognized no force to sustain it other than virtue. Those of today speak to us only of manufacturing, finance, wealth, and even luxury."[30] And yet despite his praise of the republic, there is a simple reason why Montesquieu did not embrace this model. "The age of the republic has passed," Louis Althusser has written. "Republics only last in small states. Our era is that of medium and large empires."[31]

Montesquieu introduced into his regime typology a new sense of history, showing that what is applicable or possible in one era may not be possible in another. Every age is defined by an individual *esprit* that distinguishes it from all others. The spirit of a nation—its language, culture, geography, and history—gives each people an

inescapable historical identity. Montesquieu quietly but emphatically rejected the effort to recreate the ancient republic in the modern world. What happened in the past stays in the past. The republic belongs to a low and somewhat primitive level of historical development, which may have had admirable features in its time but is simply inappropriate for the large, complex commercial states of the modern world. What the ancients embraced as virtue would today be regarded as intolerable oppression.[32]

Montesquieu's treatment of Spartan virtue conveys a sense of awe and wonder for its sheer power of self-denial. Persons bound together in love of the common good must be united by the same tastes, the same desires, and the same hopes. The citizens of Sparta, like those of all military republics, typically treated commercial professions as "unworthy of a free man." They employed legions of slaves—the helots—to attend to the economic necessities of life. It was only under a condition of corruption that craftsmen would be given citizenship. A harmony of interests can prevail only where people share in the same frugality, and where common perspectives are shaped by roughly similar circumstances. In such societies, there will also be substantial oversight of private life. "The laws of Minos, Lycurgus, and Plato," Montesquieu wrote, "assume that all citizens pay a singular attention to each other. This cannot be promised in the confusion, oversights, and extensive business of a numerous people."[33]

While Montesquieu appeared to praise the virtue of the ancient republic, he also offered a veiled critique. "Virtue in a republic," he wrote, "is a very simple thing: it is love of the republic; it is a feeling and not a result of knowledge."[34] The reduction of virtue to a feeling that can be experienced by "the lowest man in the state" suggests that patriotism is far from a lofty disposition. At the same time, he regarded Lycurgus, the founder of the Spartan state, as a "genius" who succeeded partly because he so radically transformed human nature. By banishing private wealth, the arts, commerce, and money, Lycurgus contributed to the "greatness and glory" of Sparta. Montesquieu even goes so far as to compare him to William Penn,

stating that although Penn was a Quaker whose goal was peace, both were alike in “their ascendancy over free men, in the prejudices they have vanquished, and in the passions they have subdued.”[35]

Montesquieu was awed by the scope of Spartan legislation, but he considered it completely inappropriate to modern times. The virtue of extreme self-renunciation led to a harshness and cruelty that, in Herodotus’s phrase, made the Spartans fear the despotism of their own laws more than the Persians feared the great king. In a later passage, Montesquieu even compared Spartan patriotism to life in a monastic order. “Why do monks so love their order?” he asked. “Their love comes from the same thing that makes their order intolerable to them. Their rule deprives them of everything upon which ordinary passions rest; what remains, therefore, is the passion for the very rule that afflicts them.”[36]

Montesquieu attacked the classical model of patriotism as deficient in *humanité* or what he thought of as the proper standards of civilized behavior. The ethic of humanity was most fully alive in England, where commerce had produced a moral revolution. “The spirit of commerce,” he wrote, “brings with it the spirit of frugality, economy, moderation, work, wisdom, tranquility, order, and rule. Thus, as long as this spirit continues to exist, the wealth it produces has no bad effect.” Commerce would exercise a pacifying, humanizing effect on previously fierce and warlike peoples. It would make people less harsh and more receptive to one another. Montesquieu expressed this thesis about the civilizing effects of commerce as a general law of social development. “Commerce cures destructive prejudices and it is an *almost general rule* that everywhere there are gentle mores there is commerce and that everywhere there is commerce there are gentle mores.”[37]

That commerce produces a new sense of humanity is, for Montesquieu, “the law of peoples.” Humanity is the modern substitute for virtue or, more accurately, it is a new definition of virtue. It is expressed in terms like “sympathy” or “compassion” that lead people to seek peace and avoid conflict. Montesquieu saw this new ethic as facilitated by trade: people engaged in trade with one

another do not go to war with each other. “Two nations that trade with one another,” he wrote, “become reciprocally dependent; if one has an interest in buying the other has an interest in selling, and all unions are founded on mutual needs.”[38] People who are frequently forced into one another’s company develop habits of tolerance and an enlargement of their moral horizons that lead to peaceful relations. They are much less likely to be motivated by an ethic of glory and therefore less likely to seek salvation in reckless acts of war and glory-seeking.

Montesquieu regarded the transition from the feudal warrior ethic to the modern commercial ethic as a marker of progress even as he noted a coarsening of taste in the new “bourgeois” societies. Commerce may cure the passions of their destructive power, but it does not elevate their sensibilities. “Their poets,” he complained about commercial nations, “would more often have an original bluntness than a certain delicacy of taste.” One might see the effect of commerce most clearly, he argued, in making governments more moderate, especially in England, where the spirit of commerce has made the deepest inroads. This has contributed to England’s reputation as a nation of shopkeepers. “Other nations have made commercial interests give way to political interests,” Montesquieu noted, but “England has always made political interests give way to the interests of commerce.” This is not to say that commerce is benign in all respects. Montesquieu lamented a certain sameness and uniformity among commercial peoples. In a line that resonates today, he observed that “commerce is a kind of lottery and each one is seduced by the hope of a lucky number.”[39]

This enlarged sense of enlightened patriotism would be more fully developed by Montesquieu’s Scottish contemporary, Adam Smith. Smith is, of course, best remembered as the author of *The Wealth of Nations* and its argument for free-enterprise economics. As the founder of what could be called liberal capitalism, Smith bears a special relation to the American regime. *The Wealth of Nations* was published the same year as the Declaration of Independence and connections between the two works have been frequently noted.

Yet Smith is interesting today less for his discoveries in economics—there were relatively few—than for his role in legitimizing modern commercial society. He helped shape the modern liberal tradition not only by elaborating the principles of free markets—what he called "the system of natural liberty"—but also by describing the moral and psychological principles on which that system rested.[40]

Smith's moral psychology is set out most famously in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), where he turned his attention to the role of sympathy or "approbation" as the wellspring of our moral judgments. The cause of any act, he believed, is the sentiment or passion that motivates it, and this motive can never be entirely separated from the question of what kind of actions are worthy of esteem. Contrary to the widely held view that he originated the rational self-interest model of human behavior, Smith's fundamental moral concern was how we are seen by others. We always find ourselves in complex webs of moral interdependency not unlike the webs of economic interdependency created by trade. It is the desire to be thought well of—to gain the approval and respect of others—that determines our judgments of good and bad. In addition, Smith believed that there was within each person a desire to be esteemed by the impartial spectator, or "the man within his breast." It is this dual desire, to be held worthy of esteem not only from without but also from within, that is the source of our conception of virtue.[41]

Part 6 of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* contains a long discussion of patriotism as a form of benevolence or gratitude. "The state or sovereignty in which we have been born and educated, and under the protection of which we continue to live," Smith wrote, "is in ordinary cases, the greatest society upon whose happiness or misery, our good or bad conduct can have much influence. It is accordingly, by nature, most strongly recommended to us."[42] It is natural, he continued, that we feel a debt of gratitude to the country in which we have been reared and educated. We take a natural pride in "the prosperity and glory" of our country and are mortified by its shortcomings. This is why "we are disposed to view with the most partial admiration" the accomplishments of our fellow citizens "and to

rank them (sometimes most unjustly) above those of all other nations."[43]

It might seem that Smith regarded the world as inevitably divided into fierce national rivalries. Our natural preference for our own nation makes us view "with the most malignant jealousy and envy, the prosperity and aggrandizement" of our neighbors. As a result, "the mean principle of national prejudice is often founded upon the noble one of the love of our own country." Yet he went on to draw a very different conclusion by contrasting two forms of patriotism, which he calls "savage" and "humane":

> The sentence with which the elder Cato is said to have concluded every speech which he made in the senate, whatever might be the subject, *"It is my opinion likewise that Carthage ought to be destroyed,"* was the natural expression of the savage patriotism of a strong but coarse mind, enraged almost to madness against a foreign nation from which his own had suffered so much. The more humane sentence with which Scipio Nasica is said to have concluded all his speeches, *"It is my opinion likewise that Carthage ought not to be destroyed,"* was the liberal expression of a more enlarged and enlightened mind, who felt no aversion to the prosperity even of an old enemy, when reduced to a state which could no longer be formidable to Rome.[44]

Smith hoped that in a world brought closer together by ties of economic interdependency, the fierce rivalries that had once led to mutual suspicion and war would slowly wither away. Cooperation would give nations a reason to favor the wealth and prosperity of their neighbors. "These are all real improvements of the world we live in," Smith wrote. "In such improvements each nation ought, not only to endeavor to excel, but from the love of mankind, to promote, instead of obstructing the excellence of its neighbors."[45] That is Smith's theory of a humane and enlightened patriotism in a nutshell.

This theory of patriotism offered further dividends as well. Classical patriotism, like that imagined in Rousseau's *Social Contract,* presupposed tightly knit communities in which the individual will and the general will are virtually merged. Smith, by contrast, assumed modern complex societies in which inequality and social differentiation are the norm. In "ordinary cases," he wrote,

patriotism involves two different principles: first, “a certain respect or reverence” for the existing constitution; and second, an “earnest desire” to improve the lot of our fellow citizens.[46] But what happens, he asked, in times of public discord, when a change of constitutional principles seems merited? Is it the patriot’s duty to opt for preservation or change? “In such cases,” he wrote, “it often requires, perhaps, the highest effort of political wisdom to determine when a real patriot ought to support and endeavor to re-establish the authority of the old system, and when he ought to give way to the more daring, but often dangerous spirit of innovation.”[47]

Smith considered two possibilities. The first is the legislator animated by “the spirit of system.” This has become a familiar type in the modern world, the reformer who, through rationalism or idealism, seeks to impose a premeditated plan on the complex and messy business of political life. This kind of statecraft is often a recipe for tyranny. Such people may begin by identifying an actual evil but become so intoxicated with their remedies that they cannot bear to depart even an iota from their plans of perfection. They imagine that changes in society are as easy to accomplish as moving pieces on a chessboard, forgetting that “in the great chess-board of human society, every single piece has a principle of motion of its own.”[48] Over time, many of these political fixers become “the dupes of their own sophistry.” Fearing to disappoint their followers and refusing any compromise, they often end by accomplishing nothing. Smith does not deny that some “general, even systematical, idea of the perfection of policy and law” is necessary to guide the art of statecraft, but rejects the idea that such ideas can provide a detailed roadmap for reform. Living in the age of so-called enlightened despotism, Smith found the worst of these “political speculators” to be those sovereign princes who forget the “divine maxim” that princes are made to serve the state and not the state to serve the prince.

The second alternative—Smith’s ideal of the true patriot—is the political leader whose public spirit is softened by feelings of “humanity and benevolence.” By these terms, Smith meant an

acceptance of human imperfection and recognition of the restraints imposed by reality. When the leader cannot achieve the best, he or she should settle for the best possible. Smith was a firm believer that the perfect is the enemy of the good. This means refusing to succumb to the allure of extreme measures as means of forcing political change:

> He will content himself with moderating what he often cannot annihilate without great violence. When he cannot conquer the rooted prejudices of the people by reason and persuasion, he will not attempt to subdue them by force but will religiously observe what, by Cicero is called the divine maxim of Plato, never to use violence to his country no more than to his parents. He will accommodate, as well as he can, his public arrangements to the confirmed habits and prejudices of his people.[49]

Smith's case for a humane and benevolent patriotism found expression in the American experience. I have already cited the opening lines of the *Federalist Papers* to the effect that the American Constitution was the first in history to be the product of reflection and choice. The American framers were well aware of previous efforts in constitutional innovation. The *Federalist* is replete with references to Lycurgus, Solon, Romulus, Numa, and the ancient republics that they founded.[50] The difference between these and the American founders turned on the element of popular consent to which they submitted their proposals.

THE MADISONIAN MOMENT

Leaving Independence Hall after having helped draft the new constitution, Benjamin Franklin is said to have been accosted by a Mrs. Powell of Philadelphia. "Well, Doctor," she asked, "what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?" Franklin replied, "A republic, madam, if you can keep it."[51]

The ratification of the Constitution by popular consent stands as the defining moment in the history of modern republican government. The three authors of the *Federalist Papers* took the pseudonym "Publius" in recognition of the savior of the ancient Roman republic, but this connection already points to a much sharper difference

between the American and Roman republics.[52] The ancient founders had largely imposed their constitutions from above, which partly explains the extraordinary measures they had to undertake to ensure common opinions, moral habits, and equality among citizens. Their authority, as Rousseau understood, derived from endowing themselves with a semi-divine status that elevated them far above their fellow citizens. The American founders, by contrast, submitted their constitutional project for popular ratification. It is this element of popular consent—"reflection and choice"—that stands as the basis of a uniquely American form of republican patriotism.

The *Federalist* authors realized that history and theory were against them. The conventional wisdom, repeated by both Montesquieu and Rousseau, was that republics were possible only in small territories with homogeneous populations. The Constitution's opponents repeatedly cited the *Spirit of the Laws* to argue that the vast territory imagined by the framers would inevitably slide into monarchy or even despotism.[53] It followed that the *Federalist*'s first order of business was to undermine the credibility of the small-scale republic. "It is impossible to read the history of the petty republics of Greece and Italy," Hamilton wrote, "without feeling sensations of horrors and disgust at the distractions with which they were continually agitated and at the rapid succession of revolutions by which they were kept in a state of perpetual vibration between the extremes of tyranny and anarchy. If they exhibit occasional calms, these only serve as short-lived contrasts to the furious storms that are to succeed."[54]

This passage could be read as casting doubt on the possibility of any republican form of government. If this were so, Hamilton admitted, "the enlightened friends to liberty would have been obliged to abandon the cause of that species of government as indefensible." Yet he wanted to argue that it is not republican government as such but the classical theory of republicanism that is at fault. Showing himself a true heir of the Enlightenment, he praised the "great improvement" that the "science of government" had brought in modern times. He went on to provide a list of recent

discoveries including the separation of powers into “distinct departments” of government, the principle of representation, and “the enlargement of the orbit within which such systems are to revolve.”[55]

If Hamilton’s opening *Federalist* papers threw down the gauntlet to the theory of classical republicanism, it remained for Madison to close the deal. In the famous *Federalist* 10, Madison argued for the extended republic as an alternative to the participatory republic of the ancient world. He announced at the outset his intention “to break and control the violence of faction.” Faction had been the shoal on which previous experiments in republican government had gone aground. His first step was, then, to define carefully what he meant by faction, which he did with an analytical clarity that a modern political scientist could only envy. “By a faction,” he wrote, “I understand a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or a minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.”[56]

One of the *Federalist*’s most perceptive modern readers, Martin Diamond, has called attention to the twofold character of Madison’s definition.[57] First, the animating impulse of faction derives not from reason, but from some low and presumably suspect impulse of passion and interest. Second, factions are by definition opposed to the interests of others and to the common good. Far from suggesting that the *Federalist* authors were concerned only with the limited, if necessary, ends of protecting person and property—as they sometimes seem to be—this passage shows that they were animated by a robust sense of justice and the common good (“the permanent and aggregate interests of the community”). The question was how to protect republican government from the violence of faction.

Madison suggested two methods for dealing with the problem. The first would be to eliminate the freedom that leads to faction, which he rejects as a cure worse than the disease. The second method would be to attempt to give all citizens, through a rigorous

system of education and management, the same passions and interests. This he rejects as “impracticable” given the diversity of human tastes and inclinations. “As long as the reason of man continues fallible and he is at liberty to exercise it,” he wrote, “different opinions will be formed.” These opinions in turn form the bases of different factions. The most durable source of faction, he noted, remained “the diversity in the faculties of men from which the rights of property originate.”[58]

It follows that the “latent causes of faction” are “sown in the nature of man.” This diversity of human faculties is responsible not only for different kinds of property. In addition, “a zeal for different opinions concerning religion, concerning government, and many other points of speculation as of practice; an attachment to different leaders ambitiously contending for pre-eminence and power; or to persons of other descriptions whose fortunes have been interesting to the human passions have, in turn, divided mankind into parties, inflamed them with mutual animosity, and rendered them much more disposed to vex and oppress each other than to co-operate for their common good.” It remains, then, the “principal task of modern legislation” to manage this diversity and regulate the “various and interfering interests.”[59]

Madison’s use of the term “interest” was a distinctively eighteenth-century trope that remains with us.[60] The language of interests is today often associated with the science of economics, but for Madison, as for nearly all his contemporaries, it referred to a much wider range of human aspirations, anything one may have a desire to do or get. The language of interest was intended to mark a contrast with the ancient warrior ethic of glory and passion. An interest was a deliberate, rational calculation of advantage. Interests can be weighed and quantified; passions cannot. Madison’s juxtaposition of interest and passion was designed to distinguish deliberative activities associated with commerce and trade from glory-seeking or passionate activities like war and conquest. His aim was to reduce factions to interests and interests to “interest groups.”

He is the true founder of the famous group theory of politics that is so central to contemporary political science.[61]

The purpose of reducing politics to the management of interests was not only to create a new form of governance, but also to instill a new model of human character, one that values flexibility over rigidity, prudence over dogma, and discussion over conflict. It is a distinctively liberal or "bourgeois" ethos in which people with heterogeneous and conflicting interests can be motivated to deal fairly and cooperate freely with one another through bargaining, persuasion, and compromise. Only by deflecting politics away from a warrior model of winner-take-all toward one emphasizing competition and fair dealing would it be possible to dampen the flames of fanaticism and moral zealotry that had bedeviled earlier regimes. The moral ethos of the *Federalist* is that of a commercial society, where interests dominate and politics becomes the business of protecting the different forms of commercial enterprise and private property.

Madison's various answers to the problem of faction are the *Federalist*'s best-known features. His first and most famous answer is simple: extend the scope or "orbit" of the republic and you neutralize faction. Factions are dangerous only in small republics, where they can turn into permanent majorities that can tyrannize over the minority. They then become lightning rods for the continual class struggle that led the ancient republics to oscillate (in Hamilton's phrase) between anarchy and tyranny. It is a unique discovery of modern political science, Madison argues, to seek not to abolish factions but to manage them from afar by multiplying their number and thus reducing their power to do mischief. The proliferation of factions renders them harmless. Rather than trying to control the opinions, passions, and interests of citizens, the statesman should focus on managing the background conditions that make them possible. This is part of Madison's science of indirect government.

Madison's counterintuitive proposal was that the larger the number of factions, the less power each has to do any lasting damage:

> The smaller the society, the fewer probably will be the distinct parties and interests composing it; the fewer the distinct parties and interests, the more frequently will a majority be found of the same party [and] the more easily will they concert and execute their plans of oppression. Extend the sphere and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength and to act in unison with each other.[62]

Madison concluded *Federalist* 10 with the optimistic statement that "we behold a republican remedy for the diseases most incident to republican government," but he had yet to explain how this plan for an extended orbit of government could still be considered a republic.[63]

THE REPRESENTATIVE REPUBLIC

If control of faction was the Federalists' first answer to the problem of modern republican government, their ideas on representation were the second. Representation forms the core of American republicanism. A representative republic is what we fought for, and while the concept of representation may seem obvious and natural to us today, it was one of the most contentious topics surrounding the Constitutional Convention.[64]

It was widely agreed that the people would participate in government primarily by choosing their representatives. But how and under what conditions? Under the British model of the mixed constitution, only Parliament was deemed truly representative. The other two branches of government—the monarchy and the House of Lords—were based on the principle of heredity. European writers seemed to find this more than sufficient. "The British constitution was to Montesquieu what Homer had been to the didactic writers on epic poetry," Madison wrote. "This great political critic appears to have viewed the constitution of England as the standard, or to use his own expression, as the mirror of political liberty." But the American Constitution would not simply duplicate the British model. Even if the people could not participate directly in decision-making,

representation would be “the pivot” around which the entire government turned.[65]

The novelty of the American Constitution was that *every* branch of government would be representative. America would be a representative republic in which all offices derived their authority from the principle of election. But this left entirely open the question of who could serve as a representative and how representatives were to be chosen. Should representatives be drawn from the same social class, with the same social interests, as their constituents, or from an aristocracy of talent and intellect? Were they to be bound to the wishes and desires of their constituents, or could they decide by their own judgment what was right, not merely for their constituents but for the country?

Fully cognizant of these debates, Madison went on to give his definition of the representative republic its canonical expression:

> We may define a republic to be, or at least may bestow that name on, a government which derives all its powers *directly or indirectly* from the great body of the people and is administered by persons holding their offices during pleasure a limited period or during good behavior. It is *essential* to such a government that it be derived from the great body of society, not from an inconsiderable proportion or a favored class.[66]

Clearly recognizing the novelty of his definition—especially the claim that the powers of government are derived “*directly or indirectly*” from the people—Madison went on to specify his meaning. First, he insisted that popular government does not mean popular participation in government. Quite the opposite: it means “the total exclusion of the people in their collective capacity” from decision-making.[67] Here was truly a first. How had *republic,* a term that originally specified a species of popular government, been redefined to mean a government that effectively removed the people from political deliberation? The *Federalist*’s answer was that citizens will have a say in government, but only indirectly, through the selection of their representatives.

Second, and equally controversial, the purpose of representation was intended not merely to mirror the desires of the electorate—to

give the people what they want—but to “refine” popular passions, opinions, and interests. Popular election was understood as a kind of crucible that would “refine and enlarge the public view” in the way that smelting extracts metal from an ore. Madison and Hamilton were both keenly aware that this definition of a republic was vulnerable to the accusation of creating a new representative aristocracy. What would prevent the representatives from becoming a class of their own, with interests distinct from the people they were elected to represent? The new constitutional plan contained several preventative measures. The number of representatives would be both large and spread across a wide range of elective institutions precisely to prevent the creation of a new class of electors. Furthermore, elections, at least to the House of Representatives, would be for two years only, keeping representatives on a fairly short leash and responsive to the needs of their constituents. But just as important was the new spirit of patriotism the Federalists sought to create.

The *Federalist* authors were keenly aware that they were establishing a new kind of republic that would keep the body of citizens at a remove from the levers of political power. Their goal was to dampen popular political passions. Such a republic would not require citizens to participate in direct self-government as their ancient counterparts did. The “great body of the people” would participate in government infrequently and indirectly, mainly through institutions like elections and jury duty. American patriotism would be filtered through representative institutions that would temper patriotic zeal by directing it toward the defense of individual liberty, where this meant the freedom to pursue private undertakings, especially commercial initiatives. The framers sought to lessen the occasions for intense, public-spirited engagement in political life by leavening it with generous appeals to self-interest and the rights of property. They had in mind a nation of farmers, merchants, and craftspeople rather than a Spartan vision of citizen-soldiers. It would be a thoroughly “bourgeois” republic.

Republican patriotism would henceforth be expressed not in the complete subordination of the individual to the good of the state, as

in the case of Sparta, or in the rare moments of public-spirited heroism exemplified by Washington and the revolutionary generation. It would rather consist of maintaining a jealous watch on government and its representatives for indications of any encroaching tyranny. Madison warned that “power is of an encroaching nature” and that a free people must be perpetually alert to its misuse. A representative republic cannot do without constant vigilance. He hoped to avoid tyranny by carefully separating powers—executive, legislative, judicial—into distinct spheres. “Will it be sufficient,” he asked, “to mark with precision the boundaries of these departments . . . and to trust to these parchment barriers against the encroaching spirit of power?”[68]

He answered his own question with a firm negative. Institutions alone cannot do the work of sustaining liberty. The revolutionary generation was alive to the dangers of hereditary monarchs and a hereditary assembly, and had no intention of letting down its guard when dealing with their own elected officials. The *Federalist* authors argued that there is no reason to believe a representative republic will be any more trustworthy in its use of power than a monarchy or an aristocracy. This is especially true of the legislature, which on account of its size and “an intrepid confidence in its own strength” the *Federalist* believed to pose the greatest challenge to liberty. “It is against all the enterprising ambition of this department that the people ought to indulge all their jealousy and exhaust all their precautions.”[69] A vigilant and patriotic people remain the best guardians of their own liberty.

The *Federalist* authors hoped that the principle of representation might mitigate dangerous popular passions. Representation is what distinguishes a republic from a democracy, a linguistic point on which Madison insisted. The ancient cities were democracies, based on “a small number of citizens who assemble and administer the government in person.” Yet however valuable or ennobling direct political participation may have been, the ancient self-governing city-states were “spectacles of turbulence and contention” that proved “as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.”

“Sparta, Athens, Rome, and Carthage were all republics,” Hamilton wrote, “yet they were as often engaged in wars, offensive and defensive, as the neighboring monarchies of the same times.” Madison, no fan of the virtues of democratic deliberation, was deeply skeptical of “the wisdom of the crowd.” As he would memorably put it in one of the best lines from the entire work: “Had every Athenian citizen been a Socrates, every Athenian assembly would still have been a mob.”[70]

Republican patriotism would be best exemplified in the people’s choice of representatives. According to Hamilton, society is naturally divided into merchants, mechanics, and landowners. On his account, the mechanics and manufacturers are most likely to turn to the wealthy merchant as “their natural patron and friend,” while the wealthy landowners will be the most reliable patrons of the landed interests. The natural arbiters, and the ones likely to best provide for the public interest, are the members of the “learned professions”—lawyers and other professionals—who, precisely because they have “no distinct interest in society,” will gain the confidence of all. The learned class, those possessing some form of liberal education, will hold the balance between the landed gentry and the merchant and manufacturing classes. “Will not the man of the learned profession,” Hamilton asked, “who will feel a neutrality to the rivalships between the different branches of industry, be likely to prove an impartial arbiter between them, ready to promote either, so far as it shall appear to him conducive to the general interests of the society?”[71]

Hamilton’s reference to an “impartial arbiter” recalls Adam Smith’s conception of the “impartial spectator” in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. A person seeking public office should possess an enlarged imaginative sympathy in order to feel the “dispositions and inclinations” of people very different from him- or herself, and be capable of entering into the feelings and sentiments of fellow citizens. Doing so requires a breadth of intelligence and imagination not available to people who either work the land or are dependent on the vagaries of the marketplace. To be sure, Hamilton did not rely solely on the good intentions of the representatives, but also sought

to bind them as closely as possible to the judgment of their constituents. “This dependence and the necessity of being bound by the laws to which he gives his assent,” Hamilton wrote, “are the true, and they are the strong chords of sympathy between the representative and the constituent.”[72] Patriotism is best displayed by those capable of broad moral sympathy with their fellow citizens.

CONSTITUTIONAL FAITH

At the core of the *Federalist Papers,* then, is a new kind of patriotism attuned to the needs of a modern representative republic. This patriotism may occasionally demand acts of heroic self-sacrifice—think of the signers of the Declaration, who pledged “our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor” to the cause of independence—but it must more often be attuned to the everyday needs of maintaining constitutional liberties like the rule of law, the separation of powers, and due process. It will be expressed as a form of reverence or what Sanford Levinson calls “constitutional faith.”[73] Levinson uses this phrase to denote Americans’ (in his view regrettable) veneration for their Constitution, a reverence that is unparalleled in any other modern democracy. The quasi-religious faith, sometimes called a civil religion, that Americans invest in their constitutional tradition makes American patriotism unique.

American constitutional faith is derived in part from the fact that the Constitution is a written document. Today, most countries have written constitutions, but in the eighteenth century it was an anomaly. None of the ancient republics—Sparta, Athens, Rome—had a written constitution, and Great Britain, the model for so many of our ideas about separation of powers and limited government, famously traced its origins to an “ancient constitution” that existed time out of mind.[74] But is the source of this constitutional veneration somehow written into the Constitution itself, or does it derive from extra-constitutional sources? The question has befuddled virtually every student of American history, for the Constitution provides no clues to how its authors wished their descendants to interpret the text. It is hermeneutically silent.

Indeed, our veneration of the American Constitution draws on an attitude that long predates the Constitution itself. We Americans bring to our constitutional tradition the Puritan sense of being a people of the book, a people who take words and texts more seriously than other peoples do. Ours is a uniquely textualist tradition.

To be sure, the idea of a constitutional faith stands in open tension with other aspects of the *Federalist Papers* that presented the American founding as an "experiment" or an opportunity to discover whether government can be founded on reflection and choice. The *Federalist* authors were proud that the American republic broke with previous experience and tradition. "Is it not the glory of the people of America," Madison wrote in *Federalist* 14, "that whilst they have paid a decent regard to the opinions of former times and other nations, they have not suffered a blind veneration for antiquity [and] for custom?" Americans revere the past but are not bound by it. We are not a nation of hidebound conservatives who follow tradition for its own sake. What has been made can be remade. This was clearly Thomas Jefferson's view when he wrote that the lifespan of any constitution should not extend more than a generation (nineteen years in his calculation). The past has no right to bind the future. Each generation should be required to submit (or resubmit) the Constitution to the people for ratification. "No society can make a perpetual constitution or even a perpetual law," he wrote to Madison.[75]

Yet the *Federalist* authors had reason to resist Jefferson's call for permanent revolution. Repeated constitutional innovation tends to weaken people's attachments to their laws. Even the reform of a bad law, as Aristotle recognized, may have the unintended consequence of making people lawless.[76] The framers clearly recognized this when they made amending the Constitution, while not impossible, at least extremely difficult. This has worried many jurists and politicians on both the left and the right who would prefer a more fluid document. While Democrats tend to endorse the idea of a "living constitution"—the belief that the Constitution must be adaptive to

ever-changing social needs and circumstances—Republicans, who endorse the doctrine of constitutional "originalism," routinely advance new proposals to amend the Constitution according to their current agendas (including a balanced budget amendment, an English-first amendment, and the repeal of the Fourteenth Amendment). Not counting the first ten amendments—the Bill of Rights—which are now considered virtually part of the original Constitution, there have been only seventeen amendments added to the Constitution over 230 years, an incredibly small number compared to other countries with written constitutions.

The *Federalist* authors hoped that protecting the Constitution from frequent changes would instill an attitude of veneration—Levinson's constitutional faith—that would set the Constitution above partisanship and establish it as the basis for American national identity. The Declaration of Independence, with its language of universal rights, and the Constitution, with its language of federalism and self-government, are to America what the Torah and Talmud are to the Jewish tradition: the founding documents around which an entire way of life has been built. In Abraham Lincoln's image drawn from Proverbs 25:11, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver." The Declaration was compared to the golden apple, and the Constitution to the filigreed frame that surrounds it. "The picture was made not to conceal, or destroy the apple; but to adorn and preserve it," Lincoln wrote. "The picture was made for the apple—not the apple for the picture."[77] The framers hoped to endow the Constitution with the same spirit of veneration that a scholar might bring to the study of the Bible, or works by Plato or Shakespeare, viewing it not as an expression of hierarchy and domination, but as the central text of a high civilization that future generations would gratefully inherit and feel responsible for passing down intact.

The Federalists understood that patriotism had to be based on more than reason alone. It required faith and respect, a sense of constitutional reverence.[78] In *Federalist* 49, Madison argued that veneration for law and tradition is necessary to ensure political

stability, but this argument in turn rested on a deeper philosophical claim about the limits of human reason. He cited David Hume's adage that all government rests on opinion.[79] By opinion, Hume did not mean the kind of information gleaned by polling data or focus groups, but the steady body of sentiments, habits, and customs that gives society a sense of permanence. These opinions acquire force only when they have the weight of tradition behind them.

Madison's appeal to opinion as the first principle of government drew not only on Hume, but on the whole tradition of Scottish "moral sense" philosophy as it was transmitted to America through the influence of Thomas Reid and Francis Hutcheson.[80] By emphasizing the primacy of the moral sense, the Scots presented an alternative to the stern rationalism of their French Enlightenment counterparts. Their focus was on the pre-rational sentiments, feelings, and habits —something like Adam Smith's conception of sympathy—that provide the ground for our moral beliefs. Madison's appeal to opinion was thus intended to restrain the role of reason in public life. "The reason of man," he wrote, "like man himself, is timid and cautious, when left alone and acquires firmness and confidence in proportion to the number with which it is associated." In a nation of philosophers, the weight of tradition might be unnecessary because reverence for the laws could be replaced by "enlightened reason," but an enlightened population is as little to be expected as "the philosophical race of kings wished for by Plato." Given the weakness and fallibility of human reason, Madison concluded, "the most rational government will not find it a superfluous advantage to have the prejudices of the community on its side." Here he is very close to adopting, or anticipating, the language of Burke.[81]

American patriotism—like it or not—is a form of civic faith, or what Abraham Lincoln, the best reader of our constitutional tradition, called the "political religion of the nation." It combines elements of both reason and reverence, self-reflection and respect for tradition, or as I will argue later, both logos and ethos. For Lincoln, the Declaration of Independence and Constitution were sacred texts, and Washington and Jefferson were like the Hebrew prophets who

led their people out of the house of bondage and into the Promised Land. Lincoln combined the prophetic ideal of return that he had inherited from the Puritans with a faith in progress and the future that he had taken from the Enlightenment.

Nowhere did Lincoln give more poignant expression to this view than in his 1838 address to the Young Men's Lyceum in Springfield, Illinois, titled "On the Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions." How is it possible, he asked, to remain committed to sustaining political institutions after their founding has passed from living memory? What would induce later generations to revere what earlier generations have created? His answer, which not everyone liked, was to turn the Constitution and rule of law into a kind of political theology:

> Let reverence for the laws, be breathed by every American mother, to the lisping babe that prattles on her lap—let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; let it be written in Primmers, spelling books, and in almanacs; let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the *political religion* of the nation; and let the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the grave and the gay, of all sexes and tongues, and colors and conditions, sacrifice unceasingly upon its altars.[82]

This remarkable passage—an extravagant display of rhetorical overkill—constitutes Lincoln's answer to the problem of political forgetfulness ("the silent artillery of time"). The idea of a political theology based around certain nonsectarian rituals and symbols—the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, the Pledge of Allegiance, the presidential oath of office, the flag—has the makings and performs the function of an American civil religion. This concept of a civil religion was revived in a classic article from 1967 by the sociologist Robert Bellah titled "Civil Religion in America." By a civil religion, Bellah meant not any specific denominational faith, but a collection of public practices institutionalized in our public life: "The words and acts of the founding fathers, especially the first few presidents, shaped the form and tone of the civil religion as it has been maintained ever since."[83]

“The God of the civil religion,” Bellah continued, “is actively interested and involved in history, with a special concern for America. Here the analogy has much less to do with natural law than with ancient Israel: the equation of America with Israel in the idea of an ‘American Israel’ is not infrequent.”[84] American patriotism has drawn selectively from different aspects of religious tradition without endorsing any specific religious sect. So far were the American framers from embracing any particular religion that they explicitly prohibited the establishment of a “religious test” as a qualification for political office. From the outset, America presented the singular paradox of a nation made up overwhelmingly of Christians, but not intended to be a Christian nation.

Lincoln’s civil religion, I will argue later, was never the creed of a dominant ethnicity or religious group. It was based on the promise of equality, inclusivity, and tolerance. Nowhere is this creed more beautifully expressed than in George Washington’s reassurance to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, Rhode Island, that the governing principle of the new Constitution was not merely toleration or indulgence but respect for rights. “For happily,” Washington wrote, “the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.” From this, Washington tendered a blessing: “May the children of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants—while everyone shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree and there shall be none to make him afraid.”[85]

No one has ever improved on this conception of America.

CHAPTER FOUR

Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism

MODERN patriotism must contend with two alternatives that were largely unknown or at least marginal to the ancient world: nationalism and cosmopolitanism. To understand patriotism rightly, we must first understand what it is not—which means we must distinguish it from these two competing sensibilities. It may be best to consider patriotism in Aristotelian terms along a continuum of excess and deficiency. Aristotle argued that every virtue—every excellence of heart and mind—could be understood as a mean between two contending vices. I want to consider nationalism and cosmopolitanism as the two extremes—the pathologies, as it were—to which patriotism is prone.

Nationalism is an excess of patriotism that holds an absolute attachment to one's own way of life—one's country, one's cause, one's state—as unconditionally good and superior to others. This is the kind of loyalty expressed in such simple and often brutal sentiments as "my country, right or wrong" or, as appeared on bumper stickers in the 1960s, "America, love it or leave it." Nationalism may begin as a simple and uncontroversial demand to have one's culture or way of life be strong and respected, but it almost inevitably turns into an ideology of resentment that feeds on anger and grievance. Even though nationalism is often confused with patriotism, the two are quite different. There is nothing inherently exclusionary or triumphalist about patriotism. It expresses a human need to belong, for service, and for love of one's own.

At the other end of the spectrum, cosmopolitanism exhibits a deficiency of patriotism. Contemporary cosmopolitanism is a feature of

the age of globalization, which is turning us all into “citizens of the world” living in open societies with increasingly porous borders. While this trend is in large part driven by commerce and international trade, it resonates with humanitarian sentiment. Modern humanitarianism, a legacy of the Enlightenment, holds that each person, regardless of race, ethnicity, or national origin, is entitled to equal moral respect. This idea, based on a core value of universal human dignity, is in many respects a noble ideal. The belief in the priority of human dignity receives official recognition in documents like the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is the intuition that underscores much of the recent literature on international justice.[1] The European Union has been, at least until recently, the model of this new post-national form of political organization. What form the European Union aims to embody is not altogether clear. It is not exactly a republic but neither is it an empire. It might better be called post-constitutional.

These are the two dispositions with which patriotism must contend.

THE NATIONAL IDEA

“Nationalism is a doctrine invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century,” reads the deliberately provocative opening sentence of Elie Kedourie’s *Nationalism*.[2] Kedourie had an insider’s knowledge of what can happen when nationalism takes hold: as an Iraqi Jew from Baghdad, he had been forced out of the country where his ancestors had lived for generations by the rising tide of Arab nationalism after World War II. Contradicting other historians, who claimed to trace the roots of nationalism back to Roman, Greek, and even Hebrew sources, Kedourie claimed that it was no older than the final years of the decaying Holy Roman Empire. Far from being a permanent feature of normal politics, Kedourie claimed, it was a new development and one of the most disruptive in modern history.

Nationalism was a product of the modern “historical consciousness” that grew as a reaction to the universalizing project of the Enlightenment and French Revolution. In opposition to the philosophy of the Enlightenment, which tended to view human nature as uniform across time and space, the Historical School emphasized the uniqueness of individual nations and peoples, arguing that culture, not nature, shaped human behavior. Rather than positing natural rights that all human

beings held in common, members of the Historical School considered norms of justice to be specific to their own time and place. According to this view, it might be possible to speak of the rights of the English, but not the rights of humankind. The appeal to universal principles, it was argued, prevented men and women from fully identifying with the social order to which they were attached. Nationalism was created specifically to counter the destabilizing effects of the Enlightenment by finding a way to make us feel "at home" in the world.

One of the most astute students of the nationalist mentality, Isaiah Berlin, has divided it into three distinct stages or moments.[3] The first phase, associated with the philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder in the late eighteenth century, maintained that human beings naturally form stable groups, that each group's way of life differs from that of others, and that the characteristics of the individuals who compose each group will be shaped by the history, customs, traditions, and especially language of the groups to which they belong. Herder was fascinated with the problem of cultural identity and especially how language shapes a people's character. The thesis that language is not simply instrumental or strategic but actually constitutive of how people see the world was and remains crucial to the nationalist mentality.[4]

According to Herder's organic theory of nationalism, each culture represents a unique expression of human potentialities in its own time and place. Herder studied Hebrew, Persian, and Indian poetry and mythology, either in the original or in translation, in an effort to discover what it is like to think and feel as a Hebrew, a Persian, or an Indian. He was equally enchanted by the poetry of Ossian and the Teutonic myths of his German ancestors. He was a kind of "Orientalist" before that term was coined. On his account, a German will resemble another German in thought, feeling, and behavior more closely than an Italian or a Greek. Of course, there will be exceptions to the national stereotype, but the differences between peoples remain obvious and deep-rooted.

This was nationalism in its most benign form. There is surely nothing insidious in the recognition of distinct national characters, and as Berlin argued, Herder was one of the early proponents of cultural pluralism, the view that there are many valid ways of expressing our common humanity.[5] As Leopold von Ranke, another member of the German Historical School, put it, each nation is equally close to God (*unmittelbar*

zu Gott), meaning that there is no one measure for being human and no nation can claim inherent superiority over any other. The danger came only later, when philosophers of history began to regard the *Geist* or spirit of each people as a phase in the progressive development of a "world spirit." It was a natural consequence of this idea that at any given time, one nation represented the age's highest expression of culture or civilization. From this distinction between higher and lower civilizations, nationalism takes a more menacing turn. The language of Manifest Destiny, the White Man's Burden, and *la mission civilisatrice*—all of which have been offered as justifications for colonial or other interventions to expand a national interest—are merely the expressions of this transformation. When civilizations begin to be ranked, cultural pluralism morphs into cultural nationalism.

The second phase of nationalism occurred when cultural pluralism led to the demand for a state. This development seems almost inevitable. Nationalism is ultimately a theory of self-expression or self-determination, the belief that each people has a right to live in self-governing communities that follow their own laws and unique patterns of life. This conjunction of the nation and state—creating that characteristically modern hybrid, the "nation-state"—was one of the most fateful developments of modern history. The nation-state is an arrangement in which the dominant ethnic group gets to set the terms of communal self-government. The nation ceased to be seen as a body of persons who over time acquired certain common manners and habits, and instead became the sole source of sovereignty and authority from which everything else derives. Nationalism grew to be associated with the project of replacing our diverse human characteristics with a single overriding national identity that has been purged of all other natural and cultural differences. Despite efforts to imagine forms of "liberal nationalism" that could accommodate diverse inheritances, the consistent thread has been to create a single national identity as the unwavering locus of our loyalties and obligations.[6]

The demand for a nation-state was given its most vivid expression in Johann Gottlieb Fichte's *Addresses to the German Nation*.[7] At the time he delivered these lectures, in Berlin in 1807 and 1808, there was no organized German state. His lectures were an exercise in nation-building. "I speak just for Germans, just about Germans," he told the

audience in his inaugural lecture.[8] His task was the "Germanization" of the German people, the creation of a *Volk* with its own national identity. Fichte began with the relatively benign view that each people represents a unique *Volksgeist* consisting of its cultural, linguistic, and geographic character—but he combined this with the revolutionary demand that each nation must take on its own political identity in the form of a state. He passionately called for all Germans to unite under one political banner. To be without a state was to be without rights, since rights were conferred by membership in a state. By uniting the nation with the idea of the state as the supreme locus of sovereignty, Fichte can truly be said to have invented nationalism.

Three passages illustrate how German intellectuals of the early nineteenth century considered a unified nation-state a precondition for German self-respect. In an early work, *The German Constitution* (1802), Hegel compared Germany's condition to that of the divided Italian city-states so deplored by Machiavelli and called for a modern-day Theseus—the legendary founder of Athens—to put the German house in order. "This Theseus," Hegel wrote, "would have to have the magnanimity to grant the people he would have had to fashion out of dispersed units a share in matters that affected everyone."[9] Some seventy years later, Bismarck would grant Hegel's wish.

Heinrich Heine referred to the German *misère*—revealingly using a French term to describe a German condition—in comparing its feudal backwardness to the relatively advanced states of England and France. In the introduction to his poem *Germany, A Winter Tale* (1844), Heine—the most cosmopolitan German of his generation—tells of his hope that all of Europe (and more) would one day be united under a single German state:

> The people of Alsace and Lorraine will join Germany again if we complete what the French have begun, if we surpass them in deed as we have already done in thought; if we rise to the occasion and follow that thought to its ultimate conclusions . . . if we become God's redeemers; if we restore dignity to the impoverished people who have been disinherited of their happiness. . . . Yes, and then not only Alsace and Lorraine but the whole of France, the whole of Europe, the whole world will pass to us—the whole world will become German! It is of this mission and of this universal dominion on the part of Germany that I often dream when I wander beneath the oak trees. This is *my* patriotism.[10]

Even Karl Marx, who excoriated nationalism as an ideology for "beer-quaffing philistines," still lamented the lack of a German state, if only because he considered it a precondition for a proletarian revolution. "We have shared in the restorations of modern nations," he complained, "without ever having shared in their revolutions."[11]

Yet the demand for a nation-state was not nationalism's final stage of development. This occurred when the demand for a state was accompanied, as it inevitably was, by the belief that the goals and purposes of one state necessarily conflict with those of others. Each nation hails the goodness of its own values, if only because they are its own, and there is no higher court of appeal than national identity. Hegel, who encouraged a profound respect for history as the one true teacher of good and evil, saw building up the strength of one's nation as preparation for the "great game" of politics. If each nation is the absolute judge and arbiter of its own destiny, it follows that politics between nations is inescapable conflict in which power alone determines the winners and losers. Power politics will in turn require a warrior ethics guided exclusively by national self-interest. Nationalism is Machiavellianism come of age.

The third and final characteristic of nationalism, then, is a built-in aggression: a belief that nations and states are not only unique and different from one another, but also locked in a permanent state of mistrust and animosity. This is a reworking of the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza's principle of *omnis determinatio est negatio,* or what Hegel called "the labor of the negative."[12] We are what we are or become what we are only through negation or rejection of alternatives. Every assertion is based on a rejection or repudiation. As a principle of logic, this makes perfect sense. It is a reminder of the law of formal identity, that each thing is what it is and not something else. As a political rule, however, it is a recipe for conflict and endless war. It leads each people to view itself not only as different from all others, but also as standing in a relation of existential opposition to and animosity toward others.

The most potent expression of this nationalist attitude was given by the German legal philosopher Carl Schmitt, in a short and incendiary book called *The Concept of the Political* written in 1932.[13] Schmitt based his views on Thomas Hobbes's conception that the natural state of

mankind is “a war of all against all,” in which the overriding fact of life is the threat of violent death. Schmitt saw war, and the constant preparation for it, as the inescapable condition of political life. Where Hobbes failed, according to Schmitt, was in believing that a social pact or covenant could create a sovereign that could end war and establish the condition for civil society. For Schmitt, Hobbes’s solution could not paper over the inescapable fact that the fundamental political distinction is that between friend and enemy, between those who are with us and those who are against us. Rather than end war, the social contract merely intensifies it. Friend and enemy are the inescapable categories through which we experience what Schmitt calls *das Politische*. “The political,” he writes, “is the most intense and extreme antagonism that becomes much more political the closer it approaches the most extreme point, that of the friend-enemy grouping.”[14]

Although a man of the extreme right, Schmitt brought an almost Marxian sensibility to his use of terms like “rights,” “humanity,” and “democracy” as ideological placeholders in the struggle for power. “All political concepts, images, and terms,” he writes, “have a polemical meaning.”[15] Words are weapons, and discourse is war by other means. Schmitt taught his readers to think of even the most inclusive political terms as creating distinctions of inclusion and exclusion, us and them. The attempt to abolish distinctions, he argued, would simply create new hierarchies of power: “Above all the polemical character determines the use of the word.”[16] All humanitarian appeals to concepts of free trade or international law are attempts to evade the fundamental fact of conflict and the need for a politics of group solidarity, to stand with others on our side. Writing shortly after World War I, he regarded the League of Nations and Woodrow Wilson’s vision of a “war to end all wars” as simply an invitation to continual warfare. For Schmitt, only partisanship and war are real; consensus and peace are phony. The politics of the future will be determined by those who have the courage to recognize this fact and act on it.

Schmitt’s view is, to be sure, rooted in an important truth: the world is a dangerous place. But like Machiavelli and Hobbes, he takes the extreme situation—war and the mobilization for war—and accepts it as normal. An extreme situation is one where a society’s independence, perhaps its very survival, is at stake. For Schmitt, every situation poses

an existential threat that forces one to choose between friends and enemies. The politics of extreme nationalism turns the assertion of national identity into an unremitting struggle for dominance.

Politics, on this account, is an endless power struggle guided exclusively by national interest. And yet a politics of unremitting war and preparation for war would be self-defeating even on Schmitt's own terms. Why would the struggle between friend and enemy remain exclusively between states? Would not competition and group conflict become a feature of domestic politics? Why should the logic of bitter rivalry and partisanship not cut all the way down into our domestic affairs as fellow citizens—ethnic and cultural minorities of all kinds—become stigmatized as traitors and enemies? Schmitt's argument points not only to wars between states, but also to endless civil wars and violent conflicts between rival groups on all scales; and in fact ethno-nationalism, often with a distinct anti-Semitic and racist tone, has reemerged throughout the West. The result of such a logic of conflict would ironically be the negation of politics: the destruction of the regime as the locus of national identity.

NATIONALISM AND PATRIOTISM

The pugnacious tone of Schmitt's nationalism differs markedly from the patriotic spirit. Nationalism is exclusionary. It does not just celebrate uniqueness but turns it into a principle of difference and opposition. Patriotism draws on an entirely different emotional register. "Patriotism," French president Emmanuel Macron said on the hundredth anniversary of Armistice Day, "is exactly the opposite of nationalism," a point repeated by Harvard historian Jill Lepore.[17] The historian should know better. Nationalism is not patriotism's exact opposite but a deformation of the patriotic spirit. Patriotism is closer to civic piety—a form of civic bonding over a life in common—than nationalist self-assertion. Piety is, to be sure, a term that is often misunderstood. It implies an acceptance—by no means an uncritical or complacent one—of the form of life into which one has been born. It once meant a kind of natural reverence for the sources of one's being. Consider Wordsworth's famous couplet, "And I could wish my days to be / Bound each to each by natural piety."[18]

This distinction between nationalism and patriotism was captured brilliantly in a series of essays by George Orwell. Writing at the outset of World War II, Orwell's patriotism was being vividly driven home by extraordinary events. "As I write," he said in the opening sentence of his essay "The Lion and the Unicorn," "highly civilized human beings are flying overhead, trying to kill me."[19] The struggle between England and Germany forced him to confront a simple question: which side was he on? For the first time in a career that had included a stint as a member of the British imperial police in Burma, working as a casual laborer in Paris, and fighting on the loyalist side in the Spanish Civil War, Orwell had to confront the fact that he was at heart an English patriot. But what did patriotism mean, and how did it differ from the nationalism then dominating Germany?

For Orwell, nationalism means "the habit of identifying oneself with a single nation or other unit, placing it beyond good and evil and recognizing no other duty than that of advancing its interests." Patriotism, however, is "devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people."[20] Nationalism cannot be separated from the desire for power, especially the desire to acquire power and prestige for one's own nation at the expense of others. It is at bottom an ideology of grievance and resentment. "A nationalist," Orwell wrote, "is one who thinks solely, or mainly, in terms of competitive prestige . . . his thoughts always turn on victories, defeats, triumphs and humiliations."[21]

Patriotism, by contrast, is a peculiarly conservative disposition—though Orwell did not use that term—devoted to the enjoyment of what one has rather than an aspiration to what one hopes to get or regret over what one doesn't have. There is an insular, even defensive tone to patriotism that is opposed to all ideologies of power and conquest. Not surprisingly, Orwell associated nationalism with certain "Big Ideas"—Communism, Zionism, Pacifism, Nazism, "Americanism"—anything beginning with an upper-case letter and ending with an "ism," all of which strive to erase the diverse particularities of everyday life. Patriotism is identified by lower-case qualities and virtues. It is associated with the love of liberty, where this means "the liberty to have a home of your own, to do what you like in your spare time, to choose your own amusements instead of having them chosen for you from

above."[22] Among the qualities Orwell admired were the essential gentleness and "decency" of English life, its manners and habits, its indifference to the arts, its pub culture, bad food, and the quintessential English love of gardening ("we are a nation of flower lovers").[23]

No current work displays the difference between nationalism and patriotism more vividly than Yoram Hazony's *The Virtue of Nationalism*.[24] Hazony traces the nationalist impulse back to the Hebrew Bible, which, he argues, put forward an argument for free and independent peoples against the dreams of universal empire and empire builders. The biblical story of the Tower of Babel was only the most vivid warning against the hubris of attempting to create a single state with a common language (Genesis 11:1–9). "The confusion of tongues" was God's way of telling us that we were meant not to live as part of a vast herd but in independent communities united around a shared history, language, and religion. So far so good. In Hazony's telling, the Bible presents the idea of a free nation-state as an alternative to the despotically ruled empires of Egypt and Babylonia, which promised peace and civilization under the rule of a universal monarch. Later monarchs, from Alexander to Augustus to the Holy Roman Empire, to Napoleon, all aspired to the same thing.

The modern nation-states, by contrast, were the outcome of the "Protestant Construction" of the new international order created by the Peace of Westphalia treaties (1648). These treaties formally put an end to the wars of religion set off by the Protestant Reformation and announced that henceforth each state would be responsible for the protection of its own people and its right to the religion of its choice. This Protestant ideal institutionalized the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* —whose land, his religion—which gave the sovereign of each state the right to determine the religion of the state. While in no ways intending to endorse a policy of religious toleration, this principle for the first time gave legal recognition to the fact of religious pluralism, if not within states, at least between them. It is this construction that has flourished, with occasional hiccups, until quite recently.

Hazony sees the deepest challenge to the nation-state arising from the liberal impulse, which he traces to John Locke, and the belief that there is a single right political order, liberal democracy, that must be enforced even against the wishes of national populations. Liberal

democracy grew up within the national state, but its doctrine of human rights tends to recognize no national boundaries. The League of Nations, the United Nations, the European Union, even the United States—which began as an attempt to create “a more perfect union” out of a diverse collection of independent states—are simply the successors of the universal empires of the past, and they rule with the same arrogance and high-handedness. The post–World War II liberal consensus, according to Hazony, is a vast left-wing conspiracy to stigmatize nationalism as the source of racism and genocide, and to denounce as “politically incorrect” all those who would resist the hegemony of Western liberalism. Hazony defends the new nationalisms in Hungary, Poland, Israel, Brazil, post-Brexit Britain, and Trump’s America as a return to the older Westphalian (and biblical) vision of different peoples living according to their own laws and manners. “We will not be enamored with what every nation does with this freedom,” he cheerfully concludes. “But in tolerating the ways of other nations, we will be released from the old imperialist hatred of the different and diverse.”[25]

Hazony’s division of the world into nation-states and empires is seductive but highly misleading. Today’s nation-states are generally congeries of religious, ethnic, and racial minorities. Territories are rarely divided along strict ethnic or cultural lines, and pluralism is an inescapable fact of modern political life. What, then, to do with people who don’t (or won’t) fit into the dominant national idea? The idea that Germany is for Germans, Israel for Jews, and America for Americans is based on a deliberate exclusion of peoples—often ethnic and religious minorities—who do not conform to the national prototype. This tendency came to a head after World War I with the breakup of the Ottoman, Russian, and Austro-Hungarian empires. Millions of people suddenly found themselves dispossessed and excluded from the states and empires of which they had formerly been members, simply because they did not share the approved ethnic, religious, or linguistic identities. This especially affected minority communities—Jews, Muslims, Roma—that found themselves stateless under new regimes, each of which declared a right to “national self-determination,” but only for its ethnic majority.[26]

Modern nation-states are not the homogenous units of ethnic and cultural purity envisaged by nationalists. They are the result of long

processes of immigration, expulsion, and migration generally created by war and conquest. The borders between states are subject to continual struggle and negotiation. What to do with the stateless, the dispossessed, the migrant, those without passports who find themselves quarantined in detention centers and refugee camps, often for years or even decades at a time? The nationalist answer seems to be "try somewhere else." If you are a Tutsi in Rwanda, a Muslim in Kosovo, a Rohingya in Myanmar, a Uighur in China, or a Palestinian in Israel, you are just out of luck. A doctrine of strict nationalism is intended to render us mute in the face of often deliberately imposed cruelties.

Hazony's rosy picture of nationalism as liberating us from the tyranny of liberal internationalism is at best a half-truth. Because nationalism is a doctrine of inclusion and exclusion, it is only a matter of time before considerations meant to apply to foreign nationals are used to stigmatize domestic "others" deemed to be subversive or undesirable. U.S. representative Steve King from Iowa, a self-described "American nationalist," gave pitch-perfect expression to this view when he asked disingenuously, "When did the language of white supremacy become offensive?" America, on his account, is a national community in which the whites—no longer a majority—should set the terms for all the others. To be sure, some nationalists, including some of those attending the National Conservatism Conference, have denounced this kind of racist rhetoric, but ethnic and racial tribalism are so baked into the nationalist DNA that they cannot be magically expunged by wishing them away. Nationalists like King, Hazony, and others newly converted to the cause may truly think they are innocently celebrating national traditions, but their views are invariably based on a logic of exclusion, of dividing the world into the irreconcilable alternatives of "us" and "them." Theirs is a world grown small and ugly.

THE COSMOPOLITAN IDEAL

At the other end of the continuum, the deficiency of patriotism involves a kind of transpolitical cosmopolitanism. The cosmopolitan idea runs deep in the Western tradition. It was very much present in Plato's *Apology of Socrates,* where the first political philosopher was accused of treason for not believing in the city's gods and for corrupting the young. The philosophical tradition as a whole stands counter to the spirit of

particularism. It claims that the principles of justice must be conceived as impartial, atemporal, and universal, standing at a remove from the local conditions of which they are a part. Plato may have doubted whether the ideal city (*kallipolis*) described in the *Republic* could ever be realized in practice, but this did not dampen his belief that without universal standards or criteria of justice, philosophy could only rationalize existing institutions and practices.

Ancient cosmopolitanism, as we have seen, was given its canonical expression by the Stoics in the first and second centuries of the Common Era. Their doctrine of "world citizenship" came of age at a time when Rome exerted world hegemony and its universal empire was seen as having replaced smaller, more parochial political units like the free city-state. According to the Stoic doctrine of *oikeiosis,* human societies are structured in concentric circles, beginning with the family, extending to one's community and country, and finally including the whole of humanity. Among the Stoics, a debate arose about the locus of one's moral obligations, whether to those closest to us or to humanity as a whole. Cicero, a primary source of this debate, argued that "the fellowship among mankind . . . was established by the gods" and when this is denied, "kindness, liberality, goodness, and justice are utterly destroyed."[27] The Stoics were a small philosophical sect who never dreamed that their austere teachings about moral autonomy and independence could become a recipe for humanity as a whole, much less that they could create a new kind of political identity. For this to take place, Stoicism needed to be augmented by another, far more powerful force for cosmopolitanism.

Stoic universalism received a massive boost from Christianity, which sought to replace duty to family, tribe, and city with a message of universal brotherhood. Christianity marked the end of the *res publica* that had previously been supported by the gods of the communal hearth. The early Christians were not Rome's most patriotic citizens, precisely because they put faith in the heavenly City of God above loyalty to the earthly city of Rome. Saint Augustine, the most effective propagandist for early Christianity, wrote the *City of God* precisely to absolve Christianity from the charge of complicity with the sack of Rome in 410. No one has ever described this transformation better than the French classicist and anthropologist Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges in his

seminal study *The Ancient City,* from 1864. “Christianity introduced other new ideas,” Fustel wrote. “It was not the domestic religion of any family, the national religion of any city or of any race. It belonged neither to a caste nor to a corporation. From its first appearance, it called to itself the whole human race. Christ said to his disciples, ‘Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.’ . . . The spirit of propagandism replaced the law of exclusion.”[28]

No period of history has done more to establish the idea of world citizenship than the eighteenth-century Enlightenment.[29] The Enlightenment was an attempt to bring the heavenly city down to earth, to establish in the here-and-now a new world order brought about by international trade and perpetual peace. In France especially, the cosmopolitan idea took on fantastic proportions. In 1713, the Abbé de Saint-Pierre began publishing a plan for perpetual peace titled *Projet pour render la paix perpetuelle en Europe* (A project for settling an everlasting peace in Europe), and Fougeret de Monbron popularized the word “cosmopolite” with his book *Le Cosmopolite ou le citoyen du monde* (The cosmopolitan, or The citizen of the world; 1750). The Abbé Fenelon—author of *Les aventures de Télémaque, fils d’Ulysse* (The adventures of Telemachus, son of Ulysses; 1699) —expressed his hope for a universal Christian republic when he wrote, “I love my family more than myself; I love my country more than my family; but I love the universe more than my country.”[30]

The most powerful advocate of this new world order, however, was another German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. Kant stressed that our moral duties and obligations respect neither national boundaries nor parochial attachments such as race, class, or ethnicity. In this view, we owe no greater moral obligations to fellow citizens than to any other humans on the planet. “Nothing,” he wrote in the opening sentence of the *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (1785), “can possibly be conceived in the world, or even out of it, as good without qualification except a good will.”[31] The Kantian moral law—what he calls a Categorical Imperative—is not a divine command but a law that wells up from within ourselves, obedience to which makes us free. The formula for the moral law demands only one thing: treat humanity, whether yourself or others, always as an end and never as a means. The Kantian emphasis on universality—that a moral law is one that can hold for all

human beings, however situated—stressed that we are all members of a "kingdom of ends" where every individual, however humble, odd, or eccentric, is due equal moral value and respect simply by virtue of having reason and humanity. Humanity as such is worthy of virtually limitless esteem and respect, or what Kant calls *dignity*.

It is not immediately obvious that Kant's theory of moral duty would bring forth political fruit. He presents morality as something binding on individuals, not on collective bodies like states. Yet he could not entirely separate his theory of morality from politics. It is not sufficient for a government to provide peace, property, and security—the whole domain of civil rights—for its own citizens. Kant had an unprecedented awareness that what goes on within the domestic politics of one state is crucially tied to the domestic affairs of its neighbors. It followed that an enlightened government would both want and need to keep a vigilant watch over human rights not only within its borders but in all quarters of the globe. Since rights at home are continually threatened by war or the potential for it, the first order of government must be to secure the conditions for peaceful cooperation between states, which means ensuring that human rights are respected all over the world. In Kant one finds, perhaps for the first time in history, that international politics are given priority over domestic politics.

How then is this new cosmopolitan dimension of rights to be secured? Kant believed that facilitating trade and commerce among states was the best way of securing peaceful relations. He followed the path forged by Montesquieu, Adam Smith, and David Hume in advocating commerce as the key to peace. The pacifying effects of commerce—*doux commerce,* it was called—would dampen the nationalist, religious, and other vainglorious enthusiasms that had once led to war. But Kant was not willing to rely solely on the "hidden hand" of self-interest and economics to secure this goal. He lived—or believed he lived—in an age of Enlightenment, when at last mankind was becoming better disposed to the teachings of philosophy and the rights of man.

"Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity," Kant wrote in "What Is Enlightenment?" "The motto of enlightenment is therefore: *Sapere aude!* Have the courage to use your own understanding."[32] Henceforth, we would hasten the progress of enlightenment by direct appeal to reason. The watchword of this new

age was “critique”—his three major treatises all had this word in the title—suggesting that all ideas, institutions, and traditions would be submitted to the power of rational criticism. What cannot stand up to critique does not deserve to exist. In the future, we will achieve by means of criticism and rational planning what in the past had been accomplished only piecemeal and haphazardly, always with the danger of moral backsliding. Kant is the original source of what would later be called progressivism.

Achieving his dream of an enlightened age, Kant believed, required not just a republican form of government that respects its own citizens’ rights and liberties, but also an international league of republics designed to secure international peace. The idea for a cosmopolitan ethic of humanity, Kant hoped, would eventually be realized in a confederation of republics overseen by international law. Early modern philosophers like Hobbes and Locke were wrong in attributing sovereignty to the nation-state; for Kant, the state is a mere developmental stage along the historical path to a world republic of states organized around the idea of peace. Only in a league of republics would Isaiah’s dream of peace among the nations finally be realized and would individuals treat one another as ends and not as means. Kant’s plans for an international league of states came to fruition over a century later in Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points, a statement on achieving world peace elaborated after World War I, and then the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was unveiled at the 1948 inauguration of the United Nations.[33]

Kant’s belief in the peaceful nature of republican government was based on a combination of blindness and optimism. It was blind to the historical record of republics that were anything but peaceful. “Have republics in practice been less addicted to war than monarchies?” Alexander Hamilton asked. “Has commerce hitherto done anything more than change the objects of war?”[34] No doubt, Kant was thinking of the modern commercial republic, where trade serves as a surrogate for war. “The spirit of commerce,” he wrote, “sooner or later takes hold of every people and it cannot exist side by side with war.”[35] Kant believed that all past wars were due to autocratic governments that put their own interests before those of their subjects, but that increased commerce and communication among peoples would lead to peace. This was the

hope behind the “democratic peace literature” in vogue a generation ago, whose proponents argued that democracies do not go to war against each other because their interests are better served by peace and security.[36]

But in fact, the record has been spotty at best. Closer acquaintance between peoples has not necessarily increased their affection for one another. Most of the military conflicts of the twentieth century would have been impossible had not the populations on all sides enthusiastically supported going to war. This became especially clear during World War I, when the socialist workers sided with their own countries at the expense of proletarian internationalism. Kant and those who followed him dramatically underestimated the pull of nationalism as a vital force in every nation’s politics.

THE GOOD EUROPEAN

Neither of the two dispositions described earlier—the nationalist or the cosmopolitan—captures the specificity of patriotism or its sense of piety, duty, love, and reverence. If the nationalist’s distinction between friend and enemy tends to reduce politics to war, Kantian cosmopolitanism tends to confuse politics with morality. Kant and his present-day followers like John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas would transcend the sovereign state and replace it with international rules of justice and courts of law. The Kantian approach is a textbook case of what Bernard Williams has called “political moralism”: the view that politics is simply applied moral theory.[37] This approach to politics takes the ethicist’s question—what is the right thing for me to do?—and assumes that it can be applied to nations and states. The clearest example of such reasoning appears in the appendix to Kant’s *Perpetual Peace:* “A true system of politics,” he wrote, “cannot therefore take a single step without first paying tribute to morality. The rights of man must be held sacred, however great a sacrifice the ruling power may have to make. There can be no half measures here. . . . For all politics must bend the knee before right, although politics may hope in return to arrive, however slowly, at a stage of lasting brilliance.”[38]

Kant’s desire to transcend the state with an international forum of jurists is naïve and anti-political. If, as Hobbes wrote, “covenants without the sword are but words,” who will enforce these norms of international

justice? The cosmopolitan idea of global justice envisions a world without states and without national boundaries—a world, in short, without politics. Yet the national state remains the best guarantor of international justice. It was the United States, not the European Union, that ended the slaughter in Kosovo in the 1990s. International bodies like the United Nations have been notoriously ineffective at curbing or restraining aggressive behavior. International courts like that at The Hague are often quick to condemn but slow to act in bringing criminals to justice, and they may do so in selective and self-serving ways. Cosmopolitans may feel themselves attached to such global causes as Greenpeace, Amnesty International, or Doctors Without Borders, but never to anything as parochial as one's own country. When the United States or any other nation fails to live up to the impossibly high moral standards that such groups set for themselves, the result is an often morbidly self-hating disillusionment that can lead to nihilistic fits of rage and contempt.[39]

The question is to what degree cosmopolitanism is compatible with any form of patriotism. Does it require the abolition of the state or the creation of a world government? Even Kant admitted that a world state would be a "soulless despotism."[40] To speak of world citizenship seems to imply, even require, a state. How can there be a citizen, even in the most metaphorical sense, without one? It is worth remembering that during the twentieth century—perhaps the most violent in world history—we experienced the passing away of another kind of cosmopolitanism that promised the "withering away of the state."[41] Marxian communism similarly regarded classes, ethnicities, nationalism, and the like as destined to be replaced by a universal classless society. That experiment in cosmopolitanism, needless to say, did not create a brotherhood of all mankind but some of the worst instances of totalitarianism and genocide of that or any other century. To the objection that the excesses of Stalin and his successors do not disprove the Marxian ideal of justice ("from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs"), I would reply that it goes against the principles of Marxism to seek the ideal apart from the historical reality. History is the final arbiter for Marx, and it is un-Marxian to separate its idealism of ends from its Machiavellian means.

Too often, of course, the new cosmopolitanism is not cosmopolitan at all but a specifically culture-bound idea expressing the values of one part—maybe a very small part—of Westernized humanity. There is nothing more parochial than a European (or an American) singing the praises of cosmopolitanism. It seems to run counter to the virtually universal experience of humankind that regards human identity as shaped by families, religious affiliations, communities, and other groupings. The supposed citizen of the world is far too often aloof and detached, staring down on human affairs as if from a star. From this elevated perspective, how could the passions that excite our loyalties not seem petty? Our feelings for global humanity, however sincere, are based on an abstraction and thus are difficult to translate into meaningful action. Although its defenders often present it as something heroic, cosmopolitanism lacks passion and intensity. It is a joyless disposition.

The ethic of the cosmopolitan citizen—someone who attempts to embody the common features of humanity and not any individual nation, tribe, or state—can be summarized by the term *cool*. Cool is above all an aesthetic pose, expressed in dress, cuisine, language, and shopping. It is a stance of detached irony, a withholding of emotional commitment. While cool originally grew out of the African American experience—think of Miles Davis's album *Birth of the Cool*—it has increasingly become mainstream. According to Joel Dinerstein, the most comprehensive historian of American cool, the term became synonymous with a set of post–World War II codes, characterized by "nonchalant attitudes instead of eager obedience, subversive slang instead of polished eloquence, sly symbolic gestures (suggesting unstated beliefs) instead of blind patriotism, emotional detachment instead of phony affability."[42] Unlike the "hot" ideologies of communism and fascism that valued total commitments, cool was distinctly non-ideological. "'Playing it cool,'" Dinerstein writes, "was a vernacular phrase picked up from jazz slang that came to represent a new emotional mode and style: *the aestheticizing of detachment.*"[43]

The epitome of American cool is Rick Blaine, Humphrey Bogart's character in *Casablanca,* directed by Michael Curtiz. At the beginning of the film we learn that Rick was once a committed partisan; he ran guns to Ethiopia and fought for the loyalists in Spain, but has since dropped out and now runs the most popular gin joint in the cosmopolitan city of

Casablanca (Rick's Café Americain). Here Louis Renault, the corrupt prefect of police, warns him not to interfere with the efforts of the Germans to detain Victor Laszlo, a famous anti-Nazi agitator. To recoup losses from his roulette wheel, Rick bets Louis ten thousand francs that Laszlo will escape. Rick's coolness is expressed in his response to interrogation by a Nazi officer, Major Strasser:

> Strasser: Do you mind if I ask you a few questions, unofficially of course.
> Rick: Make it official if you like.
> Strasser: What is your nationality?
> Rick: I'm a drunkard.
> Renault: And that makes Rick a citizen of the world.[44]

By the film's end, of course, we discover that Rick has always been a romantic and idealist at heart. His coolness has been a pose to disguise the pain he has suffered because he believes he was jilted by Ilsa. It is only when he learns that Ilsa had been secretly married to Laszlo—whose unflinching moral rectitude is the very embodiment of nerdy uncool—that he discovers his old self and helps the couple escape. Rick reveals himself to be the patriot we have always known him to be. After Laszlo and Ilsa are safely on board a plane headed for Lisbon, Renault says, "Well, Rick, you're not only a sentimentalist, but you've become a patriot."[45]

Cool, to be clear, is not a term of moral approval. It does not describe a morally good person, although this is not excluded, either. Coolness is, in a sense, "beyond good and evil." It pertains to a style of studied carelessness and nonchalance that conceals excellence and skill, what the Italians call *sprezzatura*.[46] *Cool* has an unmistakably urban vibe, designating hipness and an indifference to conventional norms, with a slightly outlaw flavor. This was epitomized by the character of Ice in *West Side Story,* who tells his fellow Jets, "Just play it cool, boy, real cool." It is difficult to be cool in the countryside or the suburbs. The Beats were cool; the Southern Agrarians were not. Cool has become a pervasive category affecting our judgments on music, dress, manners, and, increasingly, politics. The cool politician—if that is not an oxymoron—must express caring and compassion, but must not seem *too* caring and compassionate. The Dalai Lama might be considered cool, but not Mother Teresa. Cool must appear natural, authentic, growing out of "lived experience."

Let me suggest the following chart as a way of gauging the coolness of some of our public figures:

Cool	Uncool
Alexander Hamilton	George Washington
Thomas Jefferson	John Adams
John Quincy Adams	Andrew Jackson
Frederick Douglass	Abraham Lincoln
Theodore Roosevelt	Woodrow Wilson
Franklin Roosevelt	Herbert Hoover
John F. Kennedy	Richard Nixon
Ronald Reagan	Michael Dukakis
Bill Clinton	George H. W. Bush
John McCain	Mitt Romney
Barack Obama	Donald Trump

In our era, cool has increasingly become a bourgeois ideal for fashion and other upscale consumer goods. A new term, *coolhunting,* was invented by marketing agencies to denote the search for people who spot trends and fashions before others do. “The executives of a coolhunting agency,” one analyst has written, “gain their power by brokering this transaction between the glistening language of cool and the mundane language of the befuddled and uncool client.”[47] Coolhunting is explicitly connected to a late capitalist world of consumerism, shopping, and entertainment that remains ruthlessly divided between the cool and the rest. “Coolhunters,” the same analyst continues, “are explicit about the inability of the uncool to function in the elevated and exclusive realms of the cool.”[48] It is perhaps no coincidence that the coolest television show of the early 2000s, *Sex and the City,* helped popularize a cocktail named—you guessed it—the cosmopolitan.

The model of the cosmopolitan citizen is often drawn from the contemporary European experiment, where the European Union is taken to have created a new type of “transnational” citizenship.[49] But the nature of the European Union remains systematically ambiguous. It is not exactly a democracy because democracy, as we know it, has taken

form only in the modern nation-state, nor is it an empire that aspires to submit all nations to a single sovereign. What form this transnational or "post-modern" state will take is anybody's guess. At the core of the European experiment is a desire to transcend the national state as the basic unit of political legitimacy. The ideal seems to be a state without borders, citizens, or passports, consisting only of individuals possessed of rights and organized around a common currency. National sovereignty, it is alleged, belongs to a benighted past even if people continue to root ferociously for their national sports teams and debate arcane topics in their national languages. The model for the new Europe is not yet a super-state, more a loose confederation of states, something like the United States under the Articles of Confederation—which is to say a headless body.

This development was brilliantly predicted by Friedrich Nietzsche, who near the end of the nineteenth century described the emergence of a new phenomenon, the "good European," as someone beyond nationality or even politics:

> The Europeans are becoming more similar to each other; they become more and more detached from the conditions in which races originate that are tied to some climate or class; they become increasingly independent of any *determinate* milieu that would like to inscribe itself for centuries in body and soul with the same demands. Thus an essentially supra-national and nomadic type of man is gradually coming up, a type that possesses, physiologically speaking, a maximum of the art and power of adaptation as its typical distinction.[50]

Nietzsche's description of a restless individualism, adaptive to changing environments with no ties to place, has certainly come to pass in the contemporary European world, with its common currency, open borders, and increasingly stateless existence. Though fiercely critical of the rising tide of nationalism among his fellow Germans, Nietzsche remained equally skeptical of modern cosmopolitanism, which he associated with the decay of spirit and taste. Cosmopolitanism in his day meant mass society ruled by a mass culture, that is to say, a world of citizens who gain their culture entirely from mass circulation newspapers and magazines. Today, of course, Nietzsche's fears about the degradation of culture would readily apply to other media, like television, the internet, Facebook, and the like, which have given the illusion of choice but have simply walled people into self-reinforcing silos of

opinion. Nietz-sche associated true cosmopolitanism with the individual's powers of judgment and discernment. Only individuals, not nations, can engage in the search for truth, and this search unites individuals of goodwill belonging to different nations.

Nietzsche's vision for Europe was closer to an older, more aristocratic cosmopolitanism characterized by political diversity but rooted in particular nation-states with their distinct and healthily competing traditions. This perspective of *l'Europe des patries,* a Europe of the fatherlands, articulated by Charles De Gaulle, was apt to look askance on a union of states made possible only by certain economic, scientific, and technological developments. The new cosmopolitanism, with its indifference to all traditions, especially religion, not only represents a soft version of the Marxian dream of a world in which politics has withered away, but also recalls Max Weber's fear of a world governed by narrow-minded technocrats, a world of "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart."[51]

De Gaulle was the last European statesman of note to grasp the cultural and historical significance of a European Union as something other than a trading partnership. He was completely uninterested in the Coal and Steel Community, an organization created after World War II to regulate the coal and steel production of six European countries: instead he invoked a common literary heritage as the basis for a future European civilization. In his book *Heroes,* Paul Johnson tells a story that is deeply revealing of De Gaulle's vision of a Europe of fatherlands. "For me," De Gaulle reflected at a press conference, "the materialism of Brussels is uninteresting. '*Pour moi, l'Europe c'est l'Europe de Dante, de Goethe, et de Chateaubriand.*' I interjected: '*Et de Shakespeare, mon générale.*' He darted at me a look of intense hatred, then paused, reflected, and gave a classic demonstration of his monumental shoulder shrug, adding: '*Oui, Shakespeare aussi.*'"[52]

De Gaulle was the quintessential French patriot. He understood his country, its virtues and its foibles, as no one else did. He was the last great embodiment of his nation, even if he took a less than charitable attitude toward his fellow citizens. When asked after his retirement what the French would do without him, he cited Proverbs: "They will return to their vomit."[53] He was a constitutional patriot who understood the importance of national sovereignty even if this meant committing acts of

almost unpardonable ingratitude toward the English, who had not only saved his life but also given him a platform from which to save his country. De Gaulle in 1940, Pierre Manent has written, "was the scrupulous and intransigent trustee of all the marks of French sovereignty because these marks were all that remained of France's treasure. His intransigency necessarily flowed from his, and France's, powerlessness."[54] Most important of all, he understood the importance of shared symbols of nationhood as essential for France's survival. He was almost a perfect example of the conservative patriot in power, someone who reveled in the politics of grandeur while never abandoning his acceptance of the modern constitutional order. He embodied the contradictions of being both deeply conservative and a practicing Catholic on the one hand and, on the other hand, remaining devoted to the republic and the principles of 1789.

"THE OPIUM OF THE INTELLECTUALS"

Nationalism and cosmopolitanism both tend to obscure the virtue of patriotism. Each contains at best a part of the truth. The nationalist is correct to see that politics involves the particular: particular states, particular nations, particular peoples and traditions. For the nationalist, the particular—*this* people, *this* culture, *this* state—stands for something higher, more noble, than the cosmopolitan idea. We enter the world as members of a family, in a neighborhood, in a state, in some part of the country. These attachments are not extraneous to our identities; we are composites of these particularities. Everything great derives from something rooted and particular. The demand that we give up these identities and assume a new cosmopolitan identity would be the same as asking us to stop speaking our native language and embrace Esperanto. As Robert Pinsky once asked, who is the Shakespeare of Esperanto?[55]

There is truth also on the cosmopolitan side. Are we condemned by the accident of birth to live by the traditions of the nation in which we happen to be born? Doesn't this deny what is highest in us: our capacity to determine for ourselves how we will live and who we will be? Choice is at the core of human dignity. We experience our moral worth through our ability to choose how we will speak and act, how we will live, with whom, and under what conditions. The cosmopolitan ethic allows us to

stand imaginatively outside our particular situation and see ourselves from the standpoint of a disinterested spectator. Only through such critical distance can we judge ourselves and our society. To gain any moral purchase, we must view our own self and culture as we would view anyone else—neutrally, objectively, disinterestedly. This is the morality of cosmopolitanism.

Yet even at its best, cosmopolitanism is indifferent to the actual ties of loyalty and affection that bind people to home and country. Today's cosmopolitan elite seem to care little for their fellow citizens, especially if they come from such culturally benighted areas of the country as Appalachia or the Deep South. It is precisely this cultural elite, nestled in the fashionable neighborhoods of Brooklyn, San Francisco, and Cambridge, who have taken it on themselves to set the cultural rules for everyone else. This has in turn created a backlash of populist resentment that has brought us not a more democratic politics, but demagogues and strongmen promising to restore order by reversing the ship of state. This possibility was presciently depicted in Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*—turned into a Netflix miniseries—based on a counterfactual history in which Charles Lindbergh becomes president in 1940 on a platform of "America First" and develops close relations with Nazi Germany.

Richard Rorty imagined a similar scenario when he worried about the future of progressive politics in an age of economic retrenchment. In *Achieving Our Country,* published in 1998, Rorty suggested that policies of free trade, favored by the right, and open borders, favored by the left, can only hurt the American working class. The danger comes when unionized workers and the marginally employed come to believe that the established political parties have been the agents of their jobs' disappearance. "At that point, something will crack," Rorty wrote. "The nonsuburban electorate will decide that the system has failed and start looking around for a strongman to vote for—someone willing to assure them that, once he is elected, the smug bureaucrats, tricky lawyers, overpaid bond salesmen, and postmodernist professors will no longer be calling the shots."[56] The rise of nationalist strongmen in countries from Hungary, Brazil, and Israel to Russia and the United States shows just how prescient Rorty's observations were.

Indeed, what Rorty predicted over twenty years ago has largely come to pass today. In *The Once and Future Liberal,* Mark Lilla explains how the fracturing of American society has been caused by the abdication of the elites.[57] The business elites have bought into a ruthless libertarianism that denies any responsibilities to the less well off. The academic and intellectual elites—who bear the brunt of Lilla's analysis—growing out of the social protest movements of the 1960s have fostered the new identity politics that valorizes the triad of race, class, and gender over any sense of a collective "we." New academic fields focusing on ethnic and gender studies expressed an admirable attempt to give voice to previously under-represented minority groups but ended up hollowing out the mainstream of American studies. Our older consensual narrative, with its efforts to create "a more perfect union," ended up as a cacophony of different voices each vying for legitimacy. The irony, as Lilla points out, is that the Reagan right and the multicultural left have become mirror images of one another, leaving the American working class—the backbone of traditional New Deal liberalism—out in the cold. It only took a populist strongman like Donald Trump with his own brand of nationalist politics to fill the void left by these two alternatives.

Two kinds of explanations have been offered for the rise of the new nationalism. One has focused on the economic consequences of global trade and open markets, which have left the middle and working classes financially insecure and helped to fan the flames of nativist resentment. A generation of neo-liberal policies bent on shredding the social safety net and privatizing all aspects of civil society has created the fertile soil out of which the nationalist backlash has emerged. The other explanation is political and has shown how the rise of the administrative state has left ordinary citizens feeling voiceless and estranged from their governing institutions and national traditions.

Neither of these captures the power of culture and resentment as key factors in the reaction to cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism is not so much a set of institutions—although it is embodied in transnational organizations like the European Union, World Trade Organization, North American Free Trade Agreement, and Kyoto Climate Accord—as it is a mind-set, a posture, that breeds attitudes of entitlement and resentment. Not surprisingly, this sensibility is embodied in the new meritocratic class found mainly in urban coastal centers and among the college-educated

elites, especially those with advanced degrees. Unlike previous elites whose titles to rule were based on the accident of birth, the meritocracy claims that their privileges are due entirely to their superior talents and abilities. The meritocracy, like every ruling class, has created new hierarchies of winners and losers, rewarding those with skills, degrees, and credentials at the expense of fellow citizens who have been shamefully left behind.[58]

Is this new meritocracy solely responsible for the resurgence of nationalism? Things are not so simple, but the answer is at least partly yes. What we see today is a backlash of resentment against global elites, the mobile classes, who seem bent on telling others what to think, what to eat, and how to live. Cosmopolitanism and nationalism are in fact doppelgängers, mirror images of one another that tend to magnify each other's worst aspects. Nationalism fosters a fierce insularity that denies universal values of any sort. Cosmopolitanism uproots people from the local arrangements that most find worthy of reverence, and that give life meaning and wholeness. It lacks a sense of attachment to the particular. It forgets that we only learn to care about others by first learning to care for those who are closest to us. Attachment to one's family, language, country, traditions, and way of life is a natural and a very human moral sentiment and not something to run away from. The cosmopolitan ideal seems to leave little room for a sense of awe or for the sacred. This has led, paradoxically, not to a widening and enhancing but a narrowing of our expectations. It has stimulated interests and curiosities—for tourism, shopping, and fun—without a thoughtful consideration of what makes life coherent and whole. Cosmopolitanism has become the new civil religion of the intelligentsia—in Raymond Aron's words, "the opium of the intellectuals."[59]

CHAPTER FIVE

Enlightened Patriotism

"As a nation," Joseph Cropsey wrote, "we are rather given to asking what we are, what we stand for, what our goals are."[1] It is surprising that this is so, given that after more than two centuries, the meaning of our national existence should have become clear. How long does it take? Germans tend not to be vexed by what it means to be German, or Japanese what it means to be Japanese. Yet this uncertainty is actually not so surprising. American patriotism requires more than a common ancestry rooted in a common place. It requires reflection on the principles to which our loyalty is given. Our national oath asks us to pledge allegiance to the flag and "to the republic for which it stands." But what does the republic stand for? This question moves American patriotism into the vexed domain of political theory. What distinguishes American patriotism from that of Germany or Japan is that America is a creedal nation based on an idea. It is not sufficient in America to express loyalty to a tradition or to the "fatherland." One must be loyal to the set of ideas on which our traditions are based. In our country, theory and practice have been mixed together from the beginning.

American patriotism, like America itself, is exceptional. Ours is not an ethnic patriotism, born of fantasies of blood and soil, but a patriotism of ideas. In this crucial respect, America is the first truly modern nation, a nation founded on the principles of modern philosophy, not simply on history and tradition. Our founding

document, the Declaration of Independence, is dedicated to the proposition that all men (in updated language, all persons) are created equal. The principle of equality is the cornerstone that upholds the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. From this it follows that all legitimate government is based on the consent of the governed, and that when government fails to protect our rights, it may be overturned and begun anew. These principles are said to hold true not for Americans alone but for all human beings, always and everywhere. Far from suggesting a traditional form of customary morality, American patriotism requires commitment to the highest, most universal moral principles, including truth itself.

AMERICA AS A CONSTITUTIONAL REGIME

A republic or, what we might call it today, a constitutional democracy, is a particular kind of regime. The word *regime* is an ancient one whose modern usage has drifted far from its original meaning. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a regime as "a government, especially an authoritarian one." Other definitions suggest "a system or an ordered way of doing things," such as a detention center or a "tax regime." The word also has a medical meaning as in a program for restoring health, such as a low-fat or low-carb regime or regimen. *Caporegime* designates the head of an organized crime family. The term always has a slightly ominous meaning and is generally applied to governments or programs we dislike. The term *regime change* came into prominence during the Iraq War to describe the overthrow of a dictatorial power.

The word *regime* is an English translation of the Greek *politeia,* a cognate of the words *polis* (city) and *polites* (citizen). The term *politeia* was given its most famous expression in the title of Plato's most famous book, the *Republic*. Today we think of a republic as a system of representative government with periodic elections and competitive political parties. From this point of view, Plato's *Republic,* which advocated governance by a class of philosopher-kings, is possibly the most anti-republican book ever written. But Plato never wrote a book called *Republic.* His title was *Politeia. Res publica* was

the title of Cicero's Latin translation of Plato's work, and the book has retained that title ever since. For Plato, the term *politeia* intended to convey both a system of government and the way of life of a political community. It was the "first cause"—in philosophy, the first and most fundamental actor in a chain of catalysts—responsible for shaping the hearts, minds, and even souls of its citizens.[2]

The ancient regime of the city-state involved much more than the arrangement of offices or the distribution of powers. It was a tutelary community responsible for shaping what a people are and what they look up to, their gods and heroes, and what they deem most worthy of respect. In an aristocracy, the ideal character type is a person of old money—the gentleman. In an oligarchy it is the wealthy merchant or business owner. In a democracy it is the worker. Everything must somehow justify itself by one of these standards. Alexis de Tocqueville captured something of this ancient sense of the term when he titled a book *The Old Regime and the French Revolution* (1856). The term *ancien régime* suggested not only the laws and institutions, but also the customs, habits, and manners that made up the entire way of life of pre-revolutionary France. What was true of France was equally true of the English constitution, which writers like Edmund Burke associated with customs and practices that existed time out of mind.[3]

Regime analysis—established by Aristotle, handed down to Polybius, and then modified in various ways by Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and the *Federalist* authors—was the original form of political science. Every great political philosopher offered his own regime typology that described how many types of regimes existed, what caused them to come about, and why they declined and passed away. Our language for this kind of regime analysis has become sadly impoverished. Except for students of international relations, who sometimes distinguish among "democratic," "authoritarian," and "totalitarian" regimes, the focus on regimes and regime types is no longer in season.[4] Yet without an adequate understanding of the regime, we cannot properly understand terms like *citizen, citizenship,* and *loyalty*. In particular we can no longer

understand what distinguishes a constitutional regime—a “polity” in Aristotle’s sense of the word—with its own distinctive way of life. The regime gives us a standard by which to separate important from unimportant things.

The idea of a constitutional republic has been nurtured only under distinctive circumstances. The Greek polis, the Roman republic, the British balanced constitution, the free city-states of fifteenth-century Italy, and the representative democracies of the modern world are the only places where free government has taken root. In the modern world, constitutionalism is largely a legacy of the Anglo-American tradition—what Churchill called the “English-speaking peoples”—and the places that have been touched by it. Starting with early declarations such as the Magna Carta, the writ of habeas corpus, and the Toleration Act, and continuing to the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and the *Federalist Papers,* a consensus has slowly developed regarding the fundamentals of constitutional government, which remains an endangered species among political forms. It has had little or no purchase in the vast autocracies of China, Russia, and Iran and has achieved only limited success in Latin America, where the tradition of populist authoritarianism remains powerful.

A constitutional polity differs from all others in two respects. First, a constitution has come to suggest a legal document with a set of enumerated rights and powers, representing the fundamental law from which all other laws derive. The constitution supersedes the authority of all other laws and serves as the standard by which these laws are deemed valid. Second, a constitutional government separates the function of the state from that of society. Unlike the classical *politeia,* which sought to shape the entire character of its citizen body by instilling high-minded ideals of nobility and virtue, modern constitutional governments leave the business of inculcating virtues to individual initiative. A sense of patriotism is not force-fed from above but is, hopefully, nurtured from below, by civil associations, schools, and service academies.

Modern constitutions depart not only from the oligarchic model of mixed government based on the representation of the great estates

of the realm, but also from the model of classical republicanism. For the classical republicans, *freedom* meant the right to participate in the public life of one's community. The Greeks and Romans thought they were free because they obeyed no master other than themselves. According to Hannah Arendt, one of the chief contemporary advocates of this view, "political freedom, generally speaking, means the right 'to be a participator in government,' or it means nothing."[5] Yet the appeal to a classical republican past, as even Arendt acknowledged, is based on a nostalgic longing for a lost "revolutionary spirit" no longer applicable to modern conditions.

Modern republicanism, we have seen, is based on indirect government, where citizens participate mainly through the selection of their representatives and where the representatives are in turn controlled through frequent elections and a system of separation of powers. As both Montesquieu and the *Federalist* authors argued, the people may be able to judge or select their representatives, but it is the representatives' job to refine, enlarge, and enlighten the citizenry. Constitutional regimes are those in which personal freedom—the freedom to pursue happiness as we see fit—is ensured by impersonal law, not by the collective participation of the citizenry.[6]

Constitutions in this modern sense are fundamentally devices for controlling power. The modern constitutional republic is unique in embodying an idea of self-restraint in the name of freedom. It is based on a distinction between private and public, between civil society and the state, between individuals acting as private persons and citizens acting as members of the body politic. This culture of separation—attacked by some, celebrated by others—is the key to modern constitutional government.[7] Constitutional government is necessarily limited government. It deliberately restricts itself to certain public functions, ruling out the governance of such areas as religion, art, science, and morality. Politics is politics. It is not about telling people how to live their lives, what or how to worship, or what philosophy to adopt. But the decision to self-limit is itself a political decision. It is not written in stone or inscribed in the laws of nature. The distinction between the political and the nonpolitical is not

historically fixed. It has varied across time and place, particularly with regard to religious practice and belief. The point for constitutional government is not where the line is drawn, but that it be drawn somewhere. This regime of constitutional self-restraint—like Odysseus having himself bound at the mast—is the highest form of statecraft.[8]

LINCOLN'S PATRIOTISM OF PRINCIPLE

What do people take pride in? To what do they owe allegiance? Many Americans, if asked, will say they take pride in their Constitution and their constitutional tradition. This pride in a text or a textual tradition forms the core of American patriotism. From the Puritans on, Americans have been a people of the book, and our patriotism has always had a textual dimension. As with any text, however, the meaning of the Constitution is not self-evident. We argue about it, and this argument—our self-questioning character—is a core aspect of American patriotism. This is what makes ours a uniquely enlightened patriotism. This is the true meaning of American exceptionalism.

No one has captured the meaning of enlightened patriotism more beautifully than Abraham Lincoln, who gave American constitutional democracy its highest and most articulate expression. In his speeches and writings, Lincoln put forward a vision of American identity that brings out the principled basis of patriotism. Consider some passages:

> He [Henry Clay] loved his country partly because it was his own country, but mainly because it was a free country.
>
> No man is good enough to govern another man, *without that other man's consent.* I say this is the leading principle—the sheet anchor of American republicanism.
>
> The principles of Jefferson are the definitions and axioms of a free society.

> I have never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence.[9]

In these brief statements, we see three features of Lincoln's patriotism that distinguish it from all others.

First, Lincoln's patriotism is *egalitarian,* and this egalitarianism derives from his reading of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration—especially its affirmation that all people are created equal—provided not only the basis for his opposition to slavery, but also the principled foundation for what it means to be an American. Equality is the moral foundation of Lincoln's idea of self-government. It underlies his vision of America as a nation of free men and women, where no one governs another without that other's consent. The principle of self-government is true not because it is ours but because it is "absolutely and eternally right."

Lincoln made equality the centerpiece of his difference with Stephen A. Douglas. Douglas hoped to turn the slavery issue into a test of his doctrine of popular sovereignty. According to this theory, it was the right of the people of each state or territory in their collective capacity—as free white people—to determine for themselves (and for themselves alone) whether to permit or to forbid slavery. Douglas declared himself "indifferent" to whether slavery was voted up or down, so long as the question was decided by a democratic majority. It would be the supreme test of the general will. By removing slavery from federal jurisdiction and handing it over to the states and territories, Douglas claimed to be providing a democratic mechanism for resolving the slavery issue. But a mechanism is not a principle, and Lincoln saw the doctrine of popular sovereignty as a poor substitute for the principle of self-government.

For Lincoln, equality comes before democracy. It is what makes democracy possible. He regarded the Union not as resting on the direct expression of the popular will—an American version of Rousseau's *Social Contract*—but on an "ancient faith" in the principle that all people are created equal. A slave-holding republic, one that did not respect the rights and dignity of each individual, was a contradiction in terms. Lincoln expressed his view almost as a

political catechism. “As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy.”[10] The difference between Douglas’s popular sovereignty and Lincoln’s idea of self-government could not be stated more strongly. The one professes not to care whether slavery is voted up or down, while the other maintains that “there can be no moral right in connection with one man’s making a slave of another.”[11]

Second, Lincolnian patriotism is *aspirational.* It is not simply an unreflective attachment to America as it then existed, but is connected to the vision of America that Lincoln hoped to achieve. This is evident in Lincoln’s comment about Henry Clay, that his love of America stemmed from its being a free country, not simply that it was his own. A core part of Lincoln’s patriotism is that it is devotion to an idea or to what we stand for as a people. This aspirational quality of patriotism is connected to an idea of individual self-development and perfection. For Lincoln, only the full development and exercise of our human faculties make citizens capable of self-government.

A central part of Lincoln’s perfectionism was the role of work, self-help, and upward mobility. Unlike the self-abnegating patriotism of the ancient world, American patriotism is resolutely individualist. Lincoln reserved his praise for accomplishments that celebrated the individual over the collective, and private achievements over public glory. He admired a land where all people could “make themselves,” where a poor boy could become the president of the United States, and where there were no artificial obstacles to self-improvement.

Lincoln’s most sustained argument regarding the prospects for moral self-improvement came in a speech to the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society in Milwaukee in 1859.[12] Here he praised the system of free labor for providing the clearest avenue to moral and economic independence. Unlike the socialists on the left and pro-slavery advocates on the right, who saw labor and capital as locked in unremitting struggle, Lincoln told his audience that this view is false to the American experience:

> The prudent, penniless beginner in the world, labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land, for himself; then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him. This, say its advocates, is *free* labor—the just and generous, and prosperous system, which opens the way for all—gives hope to all, and energy, and progress, and improvement of conditions to all.[13]

Lincoln's image of self-improvement is far nobler than a crude celebration of economic success and survival of the fittest. He valued material success not as an end in itself but as a vehicle to moral autonomy and independence. His earliest policies favored the Whig doctrine of "internal improvements," by which he meant not just roads and canals—what today would be called "infrastructure"—but also moral self-improvement. He viewed the American system of free labor through the lenses of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,* Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe,* and of course the first and still greatest American self-help story, Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography.* These works provided the theological and ethical context through which he viewed American free labor.

The perfectionist aspect of Lincoln's patriotism also accounts for its cautiously progressive character. He was not a progressive in the sense that he believed history was governed by a unitary direction—Progress with a capital "P"—moving mankind toward an inevitable triumph of the national spirit. Progress was for Lincoln always a matter of fits and starts, trial and error, and it was invariably subject to backsliding and future revision. He realized that the principle of equality could not have been intended as an empirical proposition, given the widespread toleration of slavery and other practices of hierarchy and domination. Rather it was proposed as an ideal, a moral aspiration that could underscore future devotion to the American regime. The American framers, he wrote,

> meant to declare the *right* [of equality] so that the *enforcement* of it might follow as fast as circumstances should permit. They meant to set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all and revered by all, constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere.[14]

This extraordinary passage vividly illustrates Lincoln's belief in the progressive character of American patriotism. Verbs like "labored for," "approximated," "spreading and deepening," and "augmenting" suggest that a true patriotism is something to which we aspire. It does not allow complacency or self-satisfaction with what we are but, to the contrary, entails a lively awareness of our present imperfections and our failures to live up to what we might yet become. Lincoln always stressed human weakness and fallibility, a sense of modesty and restraint. He did not demonize those with whom he disagreed. "They are just what we would be in their situation," he said of Southern slave owners.[15] Rather than engage in a politics of friend and enemy, he showed an extraordinary capacity to empathize even with those whose principles he opposed.

Lincoln recognized that moral improvement would not be accomplished without heroism and struggle. This meant subordinating our immediate interests to the larger cause of freedom. "It is for this the struggle should be maintained," he told the members of an Ohio regiment. "The nation is worth fighting for, to secure such an inestimable jewel."[16] In a stirring letter, he expressed his gratitude to the Workingmen of Manchester, England, for supporting the Northern cause even at the cost of great hardship to themselves. "It has been often and studiously represented," he wrote, "that the attempt to overthrow this government, which was built upon the foundation of human rights, and to substitute for it one which should rest exclusively on slavery, was likely to obtain favor in Europe." But the workers had resisted the pull of self-interest, which favored the support of Southern cotton. "I cannot but regard your decisive utterance upon the question as an instance of sublime Christian heroism which has not been surpassed in any age or in any country."[17]

Finally, Lincolnian patriotism is *inclusive.* It is not the exclusive property of one people or one race, to be hoarded and jealously conserved. His writings continually emphasized the open character of the American republic, in contrast to the nativists and nationalists of his period. Lincoln's American republic is not defined by religion,

race, or ethnic identity, but by the principles embodied in the Declaration of Independence. Lincoln offered an enlarged reading of the Declaration, applying its language to a broader segment of mankind than did the North Americans of British descent who were already here in 1776. The American republic, in Lincoln's view, was the first nation built on the goal of awakening people everywhere to their right to free government. In an extraordinary statement of moral universalism in his speech on the Mexican War, Lincoln claimed that "any people, anywhere, being inclined to rise up, and shake off the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better" have the right to do so. "This is a most valuable—a most sacred right," he concludes, "a right, which we hope and believe, is to liberate the world."[18]

Lincoln's enlarged republicanism took the immediate form of opposition to the nativist and anti-immigrant policies of the American Party or Know-Nothings—the Trumpists of his era. For the anti-immigrant fervor that swept over America at mid-century he had nothing but contempt. "Our progress in degeneracy," he wrote to Joshua Speed, "appears to me to be pretty rapid."[19] Rather than acquiesce in the exclusion of not only blacks but also foreigners and Catholics from the principles of the Declaration, Lincoln claimed he would rather emigrate to some country, perhaps Russia, "where they make no pretense of loving liberty" and "where despotism can be taken pure, without the base alloy of hypocrisy."[20]

Lincoln's inclusive conception of America further revealed itself in his treatment of recent immigrants, many of whom had sought refuge from a wave of political repression in Europe after Germany's failed revolution in 1848. In Chicago he noted that the fraction of Americans who could trace their bloodline back directly to the founding generation was growing smaller over time. But rather than deplore this fact, Lincoln welcomed those of recent ancestry to the table. What makes a citizen is not direct genealogical descent from that race of "iron men" but adherence to the principles for which they contended. The principle of equality, "the father of all moral principle," is "the electric cord" that unites all "liberty-loving men."[21]

We hear the same language in Lincoln's speech to a group of German immigrants in Cincinnati. He esteemed the Germans and other foreigners, he said, no better or worse than any other people. Yet he added that it is important to remove obstacles or "weights" to their enjoyment of the rights of citizenship. "It is not my nature, when I see a people borne down by the weight of their shackles—the oppression of tyranny—to make their life more bitter by heaping upon them greater burdens; but rather would I do all in my power to raise the yoke, than to add anything that would tend to crush them."[22] The language of lifting weights and burdens from the shoulders of those who are suffering clearly connects back to the Puritan notion of a "calling" and a quest for salvation from the burdens of original sin. But for Lincoln, the original political sin is inequality, and the mission of the American republic is release from that fallen state.

PATRIOTISM AS ETHOS

Patriotism is a species of loyalty, and loyalty, I suggested earlier, is the first virtue of social institutions. Without it, our collective life could not last one day. Care and loyalty are of a piece: loyalty is an affirmation of what we care about, and our cares are not momentary whims or desires but a structure of loyalties. Our cares make our lives more than a series of disconnected events, and provide a sense of wholeness and meaning. What we care about defines the kind of person we are, or wish to be.

In an essay titled "Obligation, Loyalty, Exile," Judith Shklar distinguished loyalty from both obligation and fidelity. Obligations fall under what Max Weber called "legal-rational" forms of authority. They describe rule-governed conduct and refer specifically to laws and large-scale bureaucratic institutions like corporations and government agencies. Fidelity, by contrast, is a personal commitment, a private relation to particular individuals. Marriage demands fidelity, while institutions like the state impose obligations. Obligations generally come from above, while fidelity is an internal choice. Loyalty, however, represents a different category of

commitment altogether. “What distinguishes loyalty,” Shklar wrote, “is that it is deeply affective and not primarily rational. . . . If obligation is rule driven, loyalty is motivated by the entire personality of the agent.”[23] Loyalties go deeper than obligations and further than fidelity. Causes, political parties, ethnic groups, and nations demand loyalty. Obligations are duties we must obey whether we wish to or not. Loyalty is “a commitment that is affective in character and generated by a great deal more of our personality than calculation or moral reasoning. It is all of one that tends to be loyal.”[24]

Patriotism is a form of what I have called constitutional loyalty. It is not simply loyalty to the people of the United States, but also loyalty to a particular constitutional form that we call liberal democracy or constitutional democracy. A change of constitution—not just a change of administrations—would require a change of loyalty. A fascist or communist America would no longer be the regime established by the Constitution and therefore would no longer serve as the basis of citizen loyalty. A fascist America would not only require institutional changes from the top—power concentrated in a *duce* like Mussolini or *führer* like Hitler—but also changes from below. The qualities admired in a fascist regime—order, discipline, hierarchy, and authority—are not those admired in a liberal democracy: freedom, equality, rights, and consent. A fascist America is not inconceivable. It would be the same country, but a different America.

The constitutional loyalty I have described may sound like what the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas has called constitutional patriotism (*Verfassungspatriotismus*).[25] This is a specifically German phenomenon that arose in response to the hypernationalism that had produced the Third Reich and the Holocaust. Constitutional patriotism, Habermas hoped, might form the basis of a postwar German national identity focused on loyalty to the basic law (*Grundgesetz*) of the German Federal Republic. Patriotism would be associated no longer with militaristic doctrines of “blood and soil” but with the defense of rights and legal procedures. This new patriotism would take the form of loyalty not to the fatherland but to the “public

sphere," where citizens engage in offering public reasons for their political preferences.

Habermas's conception of constitutional patriotism expresses an admirable desire to come to terms with the German past while also recognizing that people care deeply about national honor. He wants to distance patriotism from the tortured history of German nationalism, but it is not clear that patriotism can survive when it is so completely shorn of the culture that makes it possible. Habermas makes commitment to legal formalities and procedures the basis of political legitimacy. But such a thin theory of patriotism lacks the affective connotations of pride, service, and loyalty that bind together members of a nation and make them citizens. Patriotism is more than devotion to a set of constitutional procedures. It requires affection for a way of life—for the mix of moral and religious practices, habits, customs, and sentiments that makes a people who they are. Patriotism without ethos is an empty shell. It is a kind of patriotism that only a constitutional lawyer could love.

My idea of an ethos patriotism is based not just on dedication to principle, but also on loyalty to the republic. An ethos is a manner of both thinking and feeling. And the idea that patriotism is not just a matter of the head but also of the heart suggests that it is deeply ingrained in our moral sentiments and dispositions. It is what Tocqueville called a "habit of the heart."[26] Tocqueville's appeal to the heart clearly drew on the work of an earlier French philosopher, Blaise Pascal, who believed that knowing is a matter of both reason and faith. Reason alone is not enough. Our deepest beliefs and commitments cannot be rationally demonstrated; they are prior to reason and held as a matter of faith. This is not to say that they are religious faiths, but they grow out of certain pre-rational or pre-theoretical commitments that cannot be fully articulated. "The heart has its reasons that reason does not know," Pascal wrote in his *Pensées* (1670).[27]

Loyalty to ethos suggests more than devotion to principle.[28] An ethos provides the moral horizon within which we live and act. It is the character-based habits and dispositions that constitute a

society's way of life, everything from our perceptions, feelings, and beliefs to our cuisine, body language, posture, and accent. The ethos of a person or a community designates those characteristics or habits that define a settled manner of behavior. If I say that "Rebecca is generous" or "John is miserly," I am referring to relatively fixed character traits that are the product of upbringing and habituation. Over time, these become features of our personalities, by which I mean they are not simply a bundle of whims and desires, but a stable structure of character traits that define us. Actions that proceed from an ethos are not biologically implanted at birth but the product of training, habit, and education, and they make us what we are.

The ethos of a society embodies those traits of character that are normative for the community. Those human beings who best embody the admired traits and characteristics are deemed best fit to occupy positions of public trust. By regarding certain character traits as admirable or worthy of emulation, every regime implicitly designates some specific human type—whether the aristocrat, the priest, the warrior, the entrepreneur, or the common person—as superior. The ethos describes the character or tone of a regime, what it finds worthy of admiration, what it looks up to. This is not only a question of what kinds of persons and personality traits are deemed desirable, but what kinds of actions and polices are worthy of respect. American men and women fighting a war to put an end to slavery, establishing a Marshall Plan to help our impoverished allies, volunteering in our military services, and teaching in some our neediest communities—these all speak to what is best in American patriotism.

Patriotism, in short, requires not only an understanding and appreciation for a set of abstract ideas, but also their embodiment in a particular history and tradition. Logos and ethos, principle and habit, are two sides of the same coin. To ask which comes first—the principles that govern a regime or the moral habits that sustain it—is to pose a false question. Both are essential elements of an enlightened patriotism. To love one's country well is to love its founding principles but also the way of life in which those principles

are embodied. I may feel an affinity for France's language, its food, its countryside, and its culture, but I cannot love France the way a French person does. I can never feel the way a French woman feels when she hears the Marseillaise. In another scene from *Casablanca,* Yvonne, who has been consorting with a German officer, joins in singing the "Marseillaise," drowning out the other Germans who are gathered around the piano singing "Die Wacht am Rhein." Her tears show that she has rediscovered her identification with Free France.

The ethos of a people—its national character—is determined in a variety of ways. It can be shaped by material factors such as climate and geography, as Montesquieu famously argued; by economic technology and "modes of production," as Marx believed; or by its laws and institutions, as Tocqueville proposed. When he studied the American regime in *Democracy in America,* Tocqueville started first with the formal political institutions enumerated in our Constitution (the separation of powers, the division between state and federal authority, and so on), but then went on to look at such informal practices as American manners and morals, our tendency to form small civic associations, our religious life, and our peculiar defensiveness and tendency toward bombastic moralism. This last quality led Tocqueville to complain that there was "nothing more irritating in the habits of life than this irritable patriotism of the Americans."[29]

The idea of ethos patriotism runs into an evident difficulty. Doesn't loyalty to one country or way of life contradict the principles of equality and moral inclusiveness that are also essential to American patriotism? How can I regard all persons as equal if my loyalties are to my country alone? Where is the line between what we owe our fellow citizens and what we owe to fellow human beings who may be suffering? Some version of this question is at the core of our current debates about border security and immigration. Are we at bottom a nation of immigrants who welcome the stranger—"your huddled masses yearning to breathe free"—or do we require a border wall to protect our national sovereignty? How broadly or narrowly do we define our regime? Where do we draw the line? If we

define ourselves too broadly, we risk losing our ethos; if we define ourselves too narrowly, we risk losing our humanity.

The fear is that ethos patriotism leads to an insular vision of fortress America, an embattled island in a sea of moral and political chaos. This is not irrational. The world is a dangerous place, and no amount of wishful thinking will change that. Nevertheless, loyalty to country does not require me to be indifferent, much less hostile, to the needs of others. It is not like the unyielding mafia code of *omertà*. Loyalty to country less resembles loyalty to a team—if my team wins, the other must lose—than it does family loyalty. Loyalty to family does not require me to think that my family is better than all others. What would such a claim even amount to? I may love my family best, but this does not require me to despise others. It does, however, require me to give some moral preference to my family. My preference for my child, my wish to see him get into a good school, have a satisfying career, prosper, and succeed, is not some immoral desire to see him win at all costs, much less a wish that others should fail. I would rather be failing in my duty as a parent if I were to regard his interests behind some artificial veil of ignorance. At the same time, I would equally fail if I did not try to instill in him some conception of fair play and justice.

What is true of loyalty to family is true of loyalty to states. Partiality for my own country need not mean indifference or hostility to others. Except in war, we rarely find ourselves locked in a zero-sum game where what's good for one is bad for the other. There is nothing shameful in attending to the interests of American workers and farmers first. We look after others better when we first look after our own. Every state is to some degree a welfare state, and its first obligation is to attend to the welfare of its own citizens. Hillel's famous dictum, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me," is a statement not only of individual responsibility but also of social obligation, one that puts fellow citizens at the top of our list of priorities. This is not a recipe for isolationism or economic protectionism. The well-being of our own country, like the well-being of our neighborhood, depends on the well-being of the people around us. No person is an island—and neither, really, is any

country. Adam Smith argued that the best hope for securing our own well-being is to encourage the wealth and freedom of those around us. The peace and prosperity of Mexico and Canada are more likely to enhance our freedom and security than diminish them.

Once again, the fear is that ethos patriotism will lead to an over-inflated love of country. It will make us overlook unflattering facts about ourselves and act on illusions rather than hard moral truths. Patriotism, we are told, inevitably becomes "bad faith." But this is to mistake a distorted conception of patriotism for its essence. Patriotism can be self-critical. Consider the belated recognition of war heroes who had been overlooked due to their race, but were then awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor decades after their actions. What does this demonstrate, other than an enlarged conception of who belongs in the American family?

Patriotism requires us not only to take justified pride in our country's accomplishments, but also to feel justified moral shame at its shortcomings. I may regret injustices committed by other nations (and other families), but I do not feel shamed by them. Why is it that so many Americans feel a sense of righteous anger when confronted with acts of racial injustice if not because it violates some deep feeling of what we are as a people? We are not shamed about things to which we have no emotional connection. Pride and shame are the two sides of loyalty, and patriotism is inconceivable without them. As Senator Cory Booker of New Jersey remarked in an interview with the *New York Times* editorial board, "if this country hasn't broken your heart, then you don't love her enough."[30]

What Americans take pride in is the character of our regime, our constitutional existence, which is inseparable from our history. Any true and effective patriotism has its foundation in a people's collective memory, in what we think of ourselves and in the story we tell. "Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?" are the final words of Lin-Manuel Miranda's Broadway musical *Hamilton.* How we tell our own story provides the ground of a common national memory, in how we come not only to understand but also to feel our lives together. It is in recollection of a shared history—the locus of a

collective destiny, of common misfortunes and triumphs—that the bonds of a nation and a people are forged. Symbols and rituals are as important as concepts and principles. In fact the two require one another. Symbols without principles are empty; principles without symbols are blind. “We need symbols to stand in for God and country,” Eric Felten writes, “to make our devotion to them as tangible as is our love for the people we see.”[31] These symbols, like the flag or saying the Pledge of Allegiance, may simply be ceremonial affirmations that over time become routine, but routines, such as standing when the ark containing the Torah is opened, are crucial reminders of something of incomparable worth and dignity.

“HERE YOU HAVE MISHPOCHEH”

No discussion of patriotism would be complete without some passing reference to Edmund Burke. Burke understood that patriotism is rooted in the love of the particular. “To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon,” he wrote in a famous passage, “is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love of country and to mankind.”[32] There has been considerable debate over just what Burke meant by “little platoon.” The phrase has been used, especially in conservative circles, to attack “big government” and “regulation.” Burke used the image to indicate the birthplace of moral education. Almost two hundred pages later, he identified the family as the first and most important of the little platoons that would secure the social bonds of sympathy, civility, and patriotism:

> We begin our public affections in our families. No cold relation is a zealous citizen. We pass on to our neighborhoods, and our habitual provincial connections. These are inns and resting-places. Such divisions of our country as have been formed by habit, and not by a sudden jerk of authority, were so many little images of the great country in which the heart found something which it could fill. The love to the whole is not extinguished by this subordinate partiality.[33]

The striking feature of this passage, in contrast to the way Burke is often read, is that he does not rule out the love of humanity as a

legitimate aim or moral aspiration. He is not like Joseph de Maistre, a godfather of later European nationalism and even fascism, who in an almost equally famous passage declared: “In my lifetime I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc. thanks to Montesquieu, I even know that one can be a Persian. But as for man, I declare that I have never in my life met him; if he exists, he is unknown to me.”[34] Unlike Maistre, Burke did not embrace the local in order to negate the universal. The “little platoon” was a point of departure, not a destination; it was the first step by which we climb the ladder of humanity. Yet Burke was not altogether clear about what he meant by this passage of ascent. Does it suggest an embrace of humanity and humanitarian goals not so distant from the position of his nemesis Richard Price (against whom the *Reflections* was written)? Or does it extend only as far as concern for neighboring kingdoms like France, when they suffer a derangement of their traditional orders? The latter is the more likely reading. The danger comes from those who, having ascended to the top of the ladder, proceed to kick it away.[35]

Patriotism, then, is a species of love or appreciation. But love of what? How can one feel love or gratitude to millions of people whom one cannot know? The love that patriotism entails is best described as loyalty, and we can be loyal only to something particular. Loyalty to family, friends, teams, causes, even to institutions, is ordinarily taken to be a virtue. Why should loyalty to country be any different? It does not require me to treat my country as superior to others. I can be loyal to friends and family without thinking that they are better than other people. In some respects they may be worse, but this does not diminish them in my eyes. Loyalty is more akin to gratitude. We are grateful to particular people and groups for making us who we are. Our loyalties define our identities and give us character. We cannot have nonspecific loyalties lest we become like the social scientist who said he wanted to get married but to no one in particular.

This issue was at the core of the acrimonious debate between Gershom Scholem and Hannah Arendt over the publication of her

book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.[36] In covering the trial for the *New Yorker,* Arendt had subjected the Israeli tribunal and even the testimony of eyewitnesses to withering criticism, questioning the very legitimacy of the proceedings. Scholem regarded her detachment as a betrayal, expressed at a time when the wounds of the Holocaust (which he preferred to call the "Catastrophe") were still fresh. Under the circumstances, he asked, would it not have been proper to show a little moral sympathy for people operating under such dire circumstances? Scholem accused Arendt of lacking *Ahavat Yisrael,* a proper love for her own people, the Jewish people. "In you, dear Hannah, as in so many intellectuals who come from the German Left, I find little trace of this," he wrote. "In circumstances such as these, would there not have been a place for what I can only describe with that modest German word—*Herzenstakt* [tact of the heart]?"[37]

Arendt loftily replied that she could not love an abstraction like a people, only individual persons. "I have never in my life 'loved' any people or collective, neither the German people, nor the French, nor the American, nor the working class or anything of that sort. I indeed love 'only' my friends and the only kind of love I know of and believe in is the love of persons." Furthermore, she argued, as a Jew herself ("one of the indisputable factual data of my life"), she regarded love of the Jewish people as "something rather suspect." "I cannot love myself or anything I know which is part and parcel of my own person."[38]

This is absurd. There is in this statement more than a residue of Arendt's fascination with Augustine and his intense hatred of the flesh and everything connected to it. Augustine taught that all sin comes from love of the body, which we must transcend if we are to become worthy of God's grace. Why is it wrong to love oneself and those most closely related to us? It can be so only if one believes that love must somehow be wholly self-denying and must rise above the "factual data" of one's own history and identity. Yet the Bible commands "love your neighbor *as yourself,*" suggesting that a healthy self-love is at the bottom of the ethical command to love

others (Leviticus 19:9–18; Mark 12:30–31). We cannot learn to love others unless we first know how to love ourselves and those closest to us. No one believes that love for one's people is like a personal friendship or love for a parent or spouse. Love of one's people means having proper gratitude for who we are and what we have become.

The love to which I think Scholem is referring, and to which Arendt seems peculiarly tone deaf, is best conveyed by the Yiddish term *Mishpocheh.* Mishpocheh means family, but more than immediate family members. It includes extended relations, fellow citizens, and others from the same country. Mishpocheh may not even be personal acquaintances, but we know them when we see them—by their dress and habits, by their voice and inflection, by their body language, and by a whole host of subtle and not-so-subtle clues. Such people are not necessarily intimates, but they are not entirely strangers. We are inclined to extend to them a level of trust that we do not extend to others. Our sense of what it means to be a people with an identity and a history is inseparable from this concept. I am reminded of a joke told by Leo Rosten in his immortal *The Joys of Yiddish*. The Chase Manhattan Bank used to use for its advertising slogan "You have a friend at Chase Manhattan," to which the Bank of Israel responded: "But here you have Mishpocheh."[39]

CONFLICTING LOYALTIES

The theme of patriotism is invariably connected with the problem of conflicting loyalties. Our loyalties are never one-dimensional. As creatures with multiple identities, we are bound to have multiple allegiances—the condition that underlies Horace Kallen's and Michael Walzer's conception of America as a land of multiple identities. Unless we have only one friend, our loyalties to our friends will almost inevitably conflict; these loyalties may be at odds with our loyalties to family; and our loyalties to family may conflict with our loyalties to country. How is one to decide which takes priority? Does love of country trump all other loyalties? Or do the obligations of personal friendship trump patriotism, as E. M. Forster argued? Is

there some metric or standard by which we can compare these loyalties? It might be best to start with some examples.

One example often invoked by philosophers comes from Jean-Paul Sartre's *Existentialism Is a Humanism*.[40] He tells the story of a former student living in France in 1940 who came to him with a dilemma. The young man was torn between joining the Free French forces in London or staying home with his ailing mother, who was grieving over the death of another son who had recently been killed in the German invasion. He realizes that if he stays at home, his actions will have real, tangible effects for his mother, but if he leaves for England, he may never reach his destination, he could be assigned a meaningless desk job, or his sacrifice may ultimately be for naught. Is it preferable to act for the benefit of one single individual, or for a larger collective like a community or a state? Is his first duty to family or to the resistance?

Sartre's point is that there are some situations—we could call them tragic—where our duties simply conflict, and no recourse to moral rules will help. If the man leaves home to join the resistance, he will fail in his duty to his mother; if he stays home to care for his mother, he will fail in his duty to his country. In either case, he must disappoint one side or the other. The point is that both are right. Either choice—defend your country, help your parents—could be turned into a universal law, but it is not evident that one is morally superior to the other. What to do? Sartre's rather disappointing response is that there is no one right thing to do, that duties are in conflict and no moral theory can provide the right answer. One must simply choose and accept responsibility for one's choice. This is what existentialism teaches.

Sartre has created a perplexing ethical dilemma, but his way of posing the problem is false. On his view, the young man resolves his dilemma through a radical act of choice, either remaining at home to help his mother or joining the resistance in its struggle against his country's enemies. But Sartre does not consider that the choices we make are never simply free acts of the will. They are never simply about what to do, but also about what sort of persons we wish to be.

Our choices express our character, and this is not something we have created entirely by ourselves. It emerges out of the entire background of moral conditions that have made us who we are. As Heraclitus put it, “a man’s ethos is his destiny.”

A clearer example of what I mean comes from Francis Ford Coppola’s *Godfather* film trilogy. At the end of *Godfather II,* there is a flashback scene where the Corleone family is gathered around the dining room table in anticipation of a surprise birthday party for the family patriarch. It is shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and the conversation turns to the surge of military enlistments that followed. “They’re saps,” says Sonny, the family’s heir apparent, “because they risk their lives for strangers.” When Michael, the younger brother, then attending Dartmouth College, protests that they risk their lives for their country, Sonny snaps, “Your country ain’t your blood. You remember that.” After Michael reveals that he had enlisted in the Marines earlier that day, Sonny furiously berates him—“Did you go to college to get stupid?”—for risking his life for anybody not in the family.[41]

The two other brothers each react according to their character. Tom Hagen, Michael’s half-brother and the family lawyer, regards the matter as a purely transactional arrangement. The attack, he says, should have been expected after the oil embargo. He tells Michael that his father pulled a lot of strings to get him a deferment. Fredo, clueless as usual, offers his hand in congratulations. Only Sonny represents the ancient ethic that holds the family—ties of blood and kin—as the highest form of obligation. According to this ethical view, what one takes pride in is what most immediately touches one’s family and sense of family honor. This ethic would make immediate sense in the world of Sophocles’ *Antigone.* At the end of the scene, we see the family united in celebration of Don Vito’s birthday, but Michael remains alone. What is he thinking? I suggest that he is reflecting on the tension between his identities as a member of the Corleone family and as a first-generation American citizen. Which will have the greater pull—the ties of blood and family, or the ties of national identity? As a young man, Michael opts for country, but as

the saga plays out, we learn that the ties of clan and family ultimately prove stronger. The story reveals the person Michael has been all along, only he did not know it.[42]

These two examples pit family loyalty against patriotic loyalty. The third example I want to consider measures patriotism against religious loyalty. This conflict has deep roots in the Western tradition. The early Christians were well aware of the tension between love of the earthly city and of the heavenly city. Jesus's solution, that one should give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's (Mark 12:17), sounds good in theory but does not tell us exactly what is owed to either. The stories of martyrs like Rabbi Akiva and Sir Thomas More provide vivid examples of the conflict between religious duties and the demands of state. Both Machiavelli and Rousseau warned that one could not be both a good Christian and a good citizen. Patriotic duties are to one exclusive people, while Christian duties are duties to all human beings simply because of their humanity. In more recent times, the accusation of "dual loyalty" was raised against John Kennedy, a Catholic, when he ran for president in 1960, and again against Joseph Lieberman, a Jew, when he was the vice-presidential nominee in 2000.

The case I want to consider comes from Philip Roth's short story "Defender of the Faith."[43] In this work, set in the final months of World War II, a decorated combat veteran, Sergeant Nathan Marx, has been redeployed from the European theater and assigned to a training base in rural Missouri. Shortly after he arrives, he is approached by a young trainee, Sheldon Grossbart—a fellow Jew from the Bronx—who asks for an intervention on behalf of the three Jewish soldiers in the company. There is a weekly cleaning of the barracks scheduled for Friday nights, Grossbart explains, when the three of them should be attending sabbath services, but they don't want to be seen as slackers. Marx is uncomfortable with the request for an exemption, but he reluctantly intervenes on their behalf. When he attends the service himself, he sees that only one of the three recruits, Mickey Halpern, has any sense of the occasion. The others are talking and laughing during the rabbi's sermon. Moreover, Marx's

benevolence opens the door for further requests. The situation comes to a head when Grossbart persuades Marx to let the three of them attend a belated Passover Seder at the home of one of their relatives in Saint Louis, but Marx later discovers that they had all gone to dinner at a Chinese restaurant.

The denouement of the story occurs when the troops are ready to receive their assignments. Against his better judgment, Marx has revealed to Grossbart that he is being deployed to the Pacific, but later finds out that Grossbart has used his influence with another superior to get himself a non-combat assignment in New Jersey, claiming that he needs to be near his ailing father. Realizing that he has been manipulated, Marx intervenes and has Grossbart reassigned to a combat zone. When Grossbart discovers the change of orders, he angrily confronts Marx, calling him an anti-Semite. "You owe me an explanation," Grossbart demands, to which Marx replies, "Sheldon, you're the one who owes explanations."

> He scowled. "To *you?*"
>
> "To me, I think so—yes. Mostly to Fishbein and Halpern."
>
> "That's right, twist things around. I owe nobody nothing, I've done all I could do for them. Now I think I've got the right to watch out for myself."
>
> "For each other we have to learn to watch out, Sheldon. You told me yourself."
>
> "You call this watching out for me—what you did?"
>
> "No. For all of us."[44]

"*You'll* be alright," are Marx's last words before he turns away.

"Defender of the Faith" was one of Roth's most controversial stories. Many readers attacked him for invoking an anti-Semitic stereotype. Roth defended the story as presenting a universal problem, played out in one particular religious context. "The story," he wrote, "is about one man who uses his own religion, and another's uncertain conscience, for selfish ends; but mostly it is about this other man, the narrator, Marx, who, because of the complexities of being a member of his religion, is involved in a taxing, if perhaps mistaken, conflict of loyalties."[45]

The story asks who is “the defender of the faith” and what faith is being defended. Should Marx have stood by a fellow Jew, or did he do the right thing in giving no special preference to a co-religionist and even intervening to make sure he was assigned to a combat zone? Marx says he did it “for all of us.” But who is the “us”—fellow Jews? Americans? The faith for which Marx acts, I suggest, is faith in America, or in the belief that no one’s religion should lead to either special burdens or special exemptions. He is an old-fashioned patriot. In his refusal to let Grossbart use his religion to avoid combat, he affirms his faith in the value of equality. This is the force of Marx’s “all of us.” In the end, Marx is the true defender of the faith. His faith in America, even above religious ties, demonstrates the kind of constitutional faith that was the core of Roth’s patriotism—and is the core of mine.[46]

These examples are all instances of what lawyers call “hard cases,” and like all such cases they are fortunately the exception and not the rule. There is an old legal maxim that hard cases make bad law. It is dangerous to generalize from the extreme example to try to make a rule that covers normal circumstances. Such examples may be useful for purposes of clarification but less so as a guide for moral practice. In ordinary life we are rarely called on to choose family over country or country over faith. The good news, then, is that such conflicts are not the stuff of ordinary moral experience. The bad news is that there is no algorithm for determining the outcome when such conflicts do arise, as they inevitably will. Should the conscientious objector honor his faith that says not to kill, or honor his country that demands his service?

This dilemma was addressed by Lincoln at the height of the Civil War when he replied to Eliza P. Gurney, a Quaker who visited him in the White House in September 1862 to discuss the dilemma faced by the Friends, who supported Emancipation but were opposed to war. Lincoln seems to have been deeply touched by the meeting with Gurney. She had not come to hector the president, but to pray with him for divine guidance. In a moving letter written almost two years later, Lincoln expressed sympathy with their dilemma: “Your people

—the Friends—have had, and are having, a very great trial. On principle and faith, opposed to both war and oppression, they can only practically oppose oppression by war. In this hard dilemma, some have chosen one horn and some the other." While he recognized the conflict of loyalties between the demands of faith and duty to country, he refrained from interjecting himself in this dilemma. "For those appealing to me on conscientious grounds," he wrote, "I have done, and shall do, the best I could and can, in my own conscience, under my oath to the law."[47] Even Lincoln, the commander-in-chief, could not entirely find a way out of this dilemma.

RESISTANCE AND RESPONSIBILITY

When is patriotism not enough? I am not writing here of a conflict of loyalties where two courses of action might be equally legitimate. I am instead asking when is resistance to one's country morally required, and can resistance be squared with patriotism? We sometimes hear the slogan "My country, right or wrong," but we must be careful how we understand it. When is it ever right to do wrong? The phrase, uttered originally by the naval officer Stephen Decatur as part of an after-dinner toast, is most famously associated with Carl Schurz, a Union general who fought in the Civil War and was later a U.S. senator from Missouri. Originally a refugee from Germany after the failed revolution of 1848, Schurz was attacked on the Senate floor for being insufficiently patriotic. "My country right or wrong," he replied, "if right, to be kept right; if wrong to be set right."[48] The question Schurz's comment raises is how to correct one's country when it is in the wrong.

The idea of civil disobedience goes back to ancient Greece. Socrates, as I mentioned, was tried and found guilty of corrupting the young and of not believing in the gods of the city. His denial of the charge, but also more importantly his proud refusal to submit to what he believed was an unjust law, has become a timeless model for the citizen's right to resist.[49] Yet even while he resisted the laws, Socrates was willing to submit to their authority. In the *Crito,* he gives

a number of reasons for his refusal to let his friend Crito help him escape and avoid a death sentence. He speaks of the law's role in shaping his character and in providing for the community's stability and happiness:

> Are you so wise that you have been unaware that fatherland is something more honorable than mother and father and all the other forebears, and more venerable and more holy. . . . And that this is just and that you are not to give way or retreat from your station, but that in war and in court and everywhere, you must do whatever the city and fatherland bid, or else persuade it what the just is by nature?[50]

In choosing to remain and drink the hemlock, Socrates showed what it was to die a philosopher's death. His acceptance of the jury's verdict has turned him into a martyr for the cause of free speech, comparable to Jesus, Galileo, Sir Thomas More, and Baruch Spinoza.

More than any other country, America has made the right of resistance intrinsic to patriotism. Our country began with an act of resistance to the authority of the British Crown, and the right of rebellion is enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. Yet Jefferson invoked this right cautiously. "Prudence, indeed," he wrote, "will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes."[51] The act of resistance, much less rebellion against the government, is not to be undertaken lightly. In language we have seen before, he acknowledged that habit and custom will discourage most people from invoking this right on every trifling occasion. "All experience hath shewn," he continued, "that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed." His advice to future advocates of civil resistance seems to be to approach with caution.

The tradition of dissent has not always followed Jefferson's warning. Our most famous case for dissent, Henry David Thoreau's "Civil Disobedience" (1849), defended the individual's right to withdraw support from government when the government's actions violate the conscience. For Thoreau, this line was crossed in the

American war with Mexico and the annexation of Texas, which he saw as little more than a land grab. Refusing to pay taxes to support an unjust war, Thoreau was arrested and spent a single night in prison—not exactly the stuff of which heroes are made, but enough to give him a new understanding of the individual's relation to government. Written just over a decade before the Civil War, "Civil Disobedience" suggested that the individual can withdraw his support from the state as easily as a state can withdraw its support from the Union. No one, Thoreau argued, is bound to particular acts of government unless one wholeheartedly consents to them, not just through public acts like voting or paying taxes but also internally, through the inner voice of conscience. To give support for policies that do not attain this standard of inner agreement is to risk hypocrisy, that is, the loss of moral integrity. Thoreau's goal was not so much to effect some change of policy or law but to prevent the individual's complicity in evil. Thoreau took his minor act of defiance as basis for principled opposition. "The only obligation which I have a right to assume," he declared defiantly, "is to do at any time what I think right."[52]

Americans take justifiable pride that "Civil Disobedience" has had worldwide resonance, touching everything from Gandhi's opposition to British imperial rule in India to Martin Luther King Jr.'s opposition to segregation in the South. Yet the appeal to conscience can be a slippery slope. It is in the nature of conscience to admit of no public standards for verification. "Let your conscience be your guide" may be sound moral advice, but it is a notoriously unstable basis for political decision making. Conscience invariably speaks to different people in different ways. The politics of conscience in America has inspired everything from the abolition movement to opposition to the Vietnam War to the Kentucky county clerk who refused to issue licenses for gay marriages. How do we know when appeals to conscience are sincere expressions of a person's deeply held moral and religious beliefs, and when they are just a mask for bigotry and self-interest? One person's voice of conscience may be another's hypocrisy. The elevation of conscience as a principle of civil

resistance may provide a momentary moral high for its advocates, but it makes shared political life impossible.

A better alternative to Thoreau's conscience politics is Jefferson's appeal to prudence. The Declaration begins not with an appeal to the rights of conscience, but with "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind." Opinion and prudence are its guiding principles—as is evident from the word "Declaration" in the document's title. "Declaration" can mean two things. The first and more obvious is that it announces some factual condition, in this case our separation from Great Britain; the second is the explanation of the action that brought that condition into being. The Declaration contains both the performative utterance of declaring independence and, as importantly, the reasons that will give that act legitimacy in the eyes of the world. The text is not only declaratory but explanatory. Accordingly, the Declaration was addressed not simply to the king or the parliament or even to other Americans, but to "a candid world" that might judge for itself.

Jefferson based the colonists' right of rebellion on his faith in the supremacy of reason in politics. The reason to which the Declaration appealed was practical or prudential reason, the kind of knowledge suitable in assemblies, courts of law, and other fora where judgment can be exercised. Prudential knowledge is, above all, a form of know-how, an expertise that is principled but cannot be precisely formulated in rules and axioms. It is knowing the right thing to do given the situation: when boldness is required and when moderation is the appropriate response; when we find ourselves in a moral crisis and when it is simply politics as usual. Prudence is a worldly wisdom that can be gained only through practice and experience. Prudence may indeed dictate, but it requires us to give public reasons for our actions and not just assurances of good intentions and a pure heart. It means knowing how to operate within existing constraints, but also how to improvise and expand on the limits of the possible.

Patriotic resistance at its best—the kind shown in Martin Luther King Jr.'s strategy of non-violent resistance—is the highest expression of political responsibility. It rejects moral grandstanding and is closer to Socrates's willingness to oppose an unjust law but

also submit himself to its authority. Thoreau, when he claimed to speak not as a citizen but "absolutely and as a private man," put himself outside the political community. His appeals were not so much political judgments but laws of the heart. He speaks for personal integrity, not political responsibility. His moral absolutism is totally at odds with the ethic of responsibility displayed by our greatest civil dissenters, including figures like Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony, Rosa Parks, and the Hollywood Ten, and more recently by the peaceful demonstrations protesting the murder of George Floyd.

"An unjust law is no law at all," Thomas Aquinas wrote, in words that were repeated in Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." "A law that degrades human personality is unjust," King wrote.[53] Those engaged in non-violent protest against unjust laws were prepared to accept the judgment of the law as the price of civil disobedience. They did not challenge their country because it failed to live up to their own standards of private rectitude, but because its actions were not consistent with its own best traditions and aspirations. This is patriotism of a very high order.

The difference between conscience and judgment was best developed in the classic essay "Politics as a Vocation" by the great German sociologist Max Weber.[54] Weber distinguished between two types of political ethics, "the ethic of absolute ends" and "the ethic of responsibility." By an ethic of absolute ends, Weber meant something like Thoreau's conscience politics. It is an ethic of pure intentions, of clarity, simplicity, and transparency. Its central aspect is a belief in the absolute moral rightness of its cause. Kant, the paradigmatic believer in the ethic of conscience, approvingly quoted the Roman adage *fiat iustitia, pereat mundus:* let the world perish, so long as justice prevails.[55] On this account, we should act according to justice no matter what the consequences. Among the heroes of this ethic, Weber counted Jesus, Saint Francis of Assisi, the Christian pacifists, as well as the revolutionary socialists of his own time, who put the purity of their causes before the interests of their country. "The believer in an ethic of ultimate ends," Weber wrote,

“feels ‘responsible’ only for seeing to it that the flame of pure intentions is not squelched.”[56]

An ethic of responsibility, by contrast, meant to Weber an ethic of prudence and judgment rather than conviction and commitment. One is answerable for the consequences of one’s actions, and the ends do not justify the means. This is an ethic attuned to the facts of human fallibility and the imperfection of human knowledge. It is an ethic of service rather than rebellion. It resists the moral self-righteousness that embraces such slogans as “protest is the highest form of patriotism” and that sees virtue in continual resistance. Its heroes are what might be called institutional patriots, those who accept the responsibilities of public life and the inevitable compromises that politics requires. An ethic of responsibility, rather than betting on all or nothing, asks how much or how little. Responsible patriots are concerned instead with the best way of preserving institutions and handing them down intact as, in the words of Burke, “an inheritance from our forefathers” to those who are yet “to be born.”[57]

Weber frequently presented his ethic of absolute ends and ethic of responsibility as irreconcilable moral viewpoints, and he saw no way of determining which alternative one should adopt. But these two poles are more often connected than separated. Weber’s famous essay ends by praising the person who can look reality in the face, accept responsibility for the consequences of action, and still act with a sense of integrity. “It is immensely moving when a *mature* man—no matter whether old or young in years—is aware of a responsibility for the consequences of his conduct and really feels such responsibility with heart and soul. He then acts by following an ethic of responsibility and somewhere he reaches the point where he says: ‘Here I stand; I can do no other.’”[58] Only a person capable of combining judgment and the need for responsibility with a commitment to moral principle can be said to have a “calling for politics.”

It is this combination of an ethic of absolute ends and an ethic of responsibility, of principle and prudence, that marks the spirit of

patriotic dissent. It captures what is best in the examples of resistance to tradition and authority set for us by Socrates, Jefferson, and Martin Luther King Jr. It is what speaks best to the American tradition of civil disobedience.

CHAPTER SIX

Reclaiming Patriotism

WHO speaks for patriotism today? Who can speak for it?

American patriotism, I have tried to argue, imposes special demands on its citizens. Ours is a peculiarly principled patriotism grounded in certain higher truths—such as the commitment to equality, the protection of individual rights, and the aspiration to freedom—contained in our most precious founding documents. These principles are not, strictly speaking, "ours" but belong to all peoples, at all times, anywhere. They are the property of humanity. But American patriotism is not defined exclusively by these commitments. It is also rooted in our history and collective memory, in the stories we tell about ourselves as a people. It is a matter not only of logos, but also of ethos. These stories tell us who we are and where we have come from, as well as who we want to be and what we aspire to. This is not to say that patriotism is a myth, but it is the collective expression of what we imagine ourselves to be. It is embedded in what Benedict Anderson has called an "imagined community"—the sense of collective identity that makes a people.[1]

Patriotism must be reclaimed today not only from its enemies but also, just as importantly, from its overzealous friends. Those on the left have largely ignored patriotism, when they have not been openly contemptuous of it. Patriotism, they argue correctly, is tied to the experience of the modern national state. But they go on to argue, utterly incorrectly, that the model of the national state is becoming obsolete. This illusion has been no doubt abetted by the emergence

of the European Union as a kind of post-national state, seen by some as a model for global governance. But the form this new post-national state would take has never been clear. One day, perhaps, it may become something like a “United States of Europe,” but I doubt it. From the outset, Europe was torn between, on one hand, highly idealistic, even utopian dreams of an almost limitless democracy with open borders and seamless migration, and, on the other, a heavy-handed bureaucratic reality in which, as the socialist theorist Saint-Simon might say, “the government of persons” seems to have been replaced “by the administration of things.”[2] But the fascination with a new transnational form of government, uncritically welcomed by elements of the American left, represented a kind of vacation from history—a vacation that was abruptly reversed on the morning of September 11, 2001, when the issues of war, terrorism, and national security were once again put front and center.

More recently, of course, these utopian aspirations for a new world order are being systematically dismantled by the resurgence of nationalism in Europe, Russia, India, Asia, the United States, and post-Brexit Britain. Orbán’s Hungary, Bolsonaro’s Brazil, Modi’s India, Putin’s Russia, and Trump’s America are only the most obvious standard bearers of resurgent nationalisms. The new illiberal democracies and the strongmen who run them have effectively co-opted the language of patriotism and put it to work for their own causes. These nationalist movements have learned an important lesson: to defeat an enemy, you have to take a page from their book. The nationalist right has learned to speak the language of the multicultural left. If minorities have a right to identity politics, why shouldn’t white men, Christian evangelicals, incels, and other groups that see themselves as politically and culturally disenfranchised?

White nationalism is only the most recent (and most toxic) form of this grievance politics. For those on the left, it is not enough to denounce nationalist demagoguery. They must also endorse the language of patriotism as inseparable from a decent democracy. Is this possible any longer? For many of those on the new age left, any acknowledgement of patriotism seems the first step on the slippery

slope to xenophobia and racism. After a generation of multiculturalist efforts to discredit the “we”—the common core of our national identity—all that remains is the language of victimization, a mirror image of the nationalist grievance and resentment politics it professes to despise. Whether the left is capable of learning this lesson remains very much in question.

But if patriotism must be rehabilitated for the left, it must also be recaptured from the right. These are patriotism’s excessive friends. For them, love of country is utterly unproblematic and not the contested virtue it has always been taken to be. They too often use patriotism as a wall to divide the ins from the outs. Many of them see themselves at war with relativism, multiculturalism, and identity politics, which they believe poses an existential threat to the American national character. The language of fear, invasion, and impurity remains a staple of this rhetoric. Whatever sins the advocates of multiculturalism and its various offshoots have committed, they are not enemies of the state. We were at war in Germany, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq. We are not at war with other American citizens. This language of culture war—a staple of Fox News and other vehicles of the right—has turned patriotism into a game of capture the flag, where each side feigns outrage at the other’s moral idiocies. Patriotism is not something that can be force-fed to people, much less beaten into them. It is a matter of respect for a tradition, which can be acquired only through immersion in the best that our history, literature, and political theory has to teach us. Patriotism is not about prideful self-assertion; it must always be coupled with modesty and humility if we are to live up to our highest aspirations. To love our country well, we must learn to love it moderately.

Patriotism—the kind of patriotism for which I have argued—is not about imposing litmus tests for who is in and who is out. I have come to believe it must be taught. Patriots are not born; they are made. This is why the most serious students of patriotism have always regarded its teaching as inseparable from the cultivation of character and judgment. But where are such teachers to be found today, and—to ask the question posed brilliantly by Karl Marx—who will educate

the educator? In our current environment, as always, the best teachers are old books. Patriotism can be taught only through a long and deep engagement with the founding texts of our political tradition. Although much of our political life seems distinctively unintellectual if not anti-intellectual, American patriotism has always been part of a textual tradition that goes back to the Puritans and includes works like Locke's *Second Treatise of Government,* Montesquieu's *The Spirit of the Laws,* the *Federalist Papers,* Franklin's *Autobiography,* Tocqueville's *Democracy in America,* Frederick Douglass's autobiography, and Lincoln's great speeches and letters.

Several features of American identity, taken together, can form the basis of a patriotism in which we can take reasonable pride. This is not to say that our identity is infinitely malleable. It is circumscribed by our regime—the constitutional existence that has shaped our national character. This regime has been by and large a liberal one, in the older philosophic sense of a community based on limited government, rule of law, constitutional checks and balances, and an appreciation for individual freedom and initiative. To be sure, this definition of liberalism may not differ in content from the definition of conservatism. I would argue that a conservative today is someone who seeks to maintain what was best in the older liberal tradition and prevent it from succumbing to its most dangerous tendencies.

American patriotism, I have argued, is unique in its self-questioning character. To be an American means to participate in a great centuries-long debate over what it means to be an American. Our founding documents are only the opening premises of an argument that has been modified and developed over subsequent generations of thought and practice. American patriotism is like a great symphony with many different parts and sections, or perhaps more like a jazz standard played by a great musician like Bill Evans or Miles Davis. These virtuosos may improvise endlessly, depart from the score in ways that may be unintelligible to the ordinary listener, but they inevitably return to the basic melody. Among the themes that constitute our national symphony, I would include the following.

Equality

The promise of equality is the cornerstone of the American experience. Our founding document begins with the recognition that all men are created equal—a term that is now interpreted more expansively than in the eighteenth century—and this has been the defining premise of our national existence ever since. There has, to be sure, been much debate over equality's meaning. Does it apply only to our possession of certain formal rights to life, liberty, property, and so on, or does it guarantee some standard of material well-being, like a guaranteed minimal income, health care, and education? There is no algorithm for determining how much equality or what kind of equality is compatible with a decent society. The standard will clearly depend on our degree of affluence and economic development, as well as our sense of the rights and responsibilities of government. But equality should remain our lodestar, our true north.

It is often argued that the pursuit of equality is at odds with another cherished American principle, the exercise of liberty—or that freedom and equality are goals in a zero-sum game, where the more you have of one, the less you have of the other. Tocqueville clearly believed this. He thought the "passion" for equality would eventually overwhelm the desire for liberty. "Not that people whose social state is democratic naturally despise liberty, they have an instinctive taste for it," he wrote. "But liberty is not the principal and constant object of their desire. What they love with a love that is eternal is equality. . . . Nothing could satisfy them without equality and, rather than lose it, they would perish."[3]

Writing during the Jackson administration—the first to embrace a robust egalitarianism, at least for white males—Tocqueville may have had cause for worry, but this is still, I believe, the wrong way of posing the problem. Equality and liberty are not so much at loggerheads as they are mutually supportive aspects of our national life. Equality, as both Jefferson and Lincoln understood, is the first premise for the exercise of our basic freedoms. The kind of equality that Tocqueville cared most about was neither equality of opportunity

(favored today by Republicans) nor equality of result (favored by Democrats), but a recognition of common human dignity. Ours is a regime that values the equal moral dignity of every human being, however humble, and this should be something of inestimable value for every American.

Rule of Law

"All lawful things are somehow just," Aristotle wrote.[4] He understood that law could not provide perfect justice—hence the qualifier "somehow"—but that without law, there would be no room for justice at all. More than any other quality, the rule of law permits social stability and a sense of fairness. Law prevents, within limits, the abuse of power both from above and from below. It creates an environment of stable expectations in which citizens can safely and securely pursue their ambitions. America has been from the outset a rule-of-law regime. With the exception of the Civil War, our constitutional tradition has provided for order and stability that can be found only where the law is respected.

Our system of law derives in part from the common law tradition that we inherited from Great Britain, especially in the importance we assign to custom and precedent. Our legal code based on the Constitution has been elaborated over the course of our national existence by our most prominent lawyers, judges, and legislators. Americans can justly take pride that their legal system has survived intact for well over two centuries and today may yet stand as a bulwark against a resurgent populism.

Limited Government

Ours is a constitutional democracy, which means it is a form of limited government. This distinguishes it from the classical *politeia,* which was in principle all-encompassing. The ancient politeia was a tutelary community. There was no aspect of life, however intimate, that was not at least in principle subject to supervision and control. The ancient republic, as Montesquieu noted, was a kind of tutelary

despotism where citizens became servants of a common purpose and all submitted to common instruction.

Constitutional government, by contrast, imposes on itself a distinction between the public and the private, between citizens as members of the state and individuals as members of civil society. This separation of state and society remains one of the most precious achievements of modern liberal democracies. It creates a zone of freedom where individuals can pursue their own lives without supervision or surveillance. This achievement cannot be taken lightly. The self-restraint of modern constitutional government is a heavy burden. The Constitution not only restrains the role of the people through the institutions of representation and election; it also restrains the legislators through the separation of powers. The effort to bind the hands of the state—the Ulysses at the mast problem—has proved the most recalcitrant problem facing any constitutional democracy.

Pluralism and Respect for Diversity

By setting limits to what government can do, we create a robust sphere of private freedoms—civil society—in which men and women may pursue their activities, alone or together, without fear of surveillance by either the government or their neighbors. Limited government recognizes the need for a considerable degree of reasonable pluralism within the community. By "reasonable pluralism" I mean what James Madison meant: that any society of any size will consist of different groups, interests, and factions that jostle and compete for power and influence. Only a society that contains room for this kind of pluralism can guarantee the mutual restraint necessary for freedom. Politics is the business of balancing and adjudicating between competing interests so that none gets so powerful that it can oppress the others.

This reasonable pluralism is not only an inevitable feature of the American moral landscape; it is a desirable one, too. We should not merely tolerate diversity—we should actively embrace it. We are a nation of immigrants. This is not just a fact but also a value that adds

to the meaning and richness of our national experience. Allan Bloom enjoyed telling the story that when Franklin Roosevelt addressed a meeting of the Daughters of the American Revolution—the most conservative, if not reactionary, American organization of the era—he greeted them as “fellow immigrants” as a reminder that unless you are a native American, no matter how long we’ve been here, our families came from somewhere else.[5]

Diversity has regrettably become one of the great shibboleths of contemporary moral propaganda. In some quarters, especially colleges and universities, it seems to be the only standard worth considering. The university where I teach now has a dean of diversity, supported by an army of diversity enforcers. Every new appointment must be vetted for how much the candidate contributes to the university’s diversity profile. The bar is set higher for some and lower for others, contributing to an atmosphere of hypocrisy and mendacity. There is no doubt that Yale is an infinitely better place for its admission of female, Jewish, African American, and Asian students—but to be told that “diversity is excellence” is either bureaucratic cant or bad logic. Everything is what it is and not something else. Diversity is diversity and excellence is excellence. Diversity may contribute to excellence or it may not, but to claim that the two are identical is simply wrong. As a friend of mine once said, diversity has come to mean “look different, think alike.”

Rightly understood, diversity is a cherished American value. We celebrate our diverse origins and points of view and believe that all have contributed in some way to making us what we are. But diversity has come to be identified almost exclusively with racial and ethnic difference. These are important components of diversity, but they are not the whole story. We differ not only in race but also in religion, political perspective, physical and athletic prowess, age and experience, intellectual excellence, moral capacity, geography and culture, and creative and artistic potential, to say nothing of class and economic development. These are all indices of human difference that we should consider as crucial aspects of the American family.

Culture and the Arts

A common complaint made from both the right and the left is that America has produced a cultural wasteland or, in some of the more extreme formulations, *is* a cultural wasteland. Two German philosophers, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, deplored the "culture industry" of Hollywood as a form of ideological thought control. They may have been the first to indict an American icon like Donald Duck for teaching the futility of resistance to the conditions of modern capitalist society.[6] On the conservative side, Patrick Deneen believes that liberal democracy has declared war on culture. The antidote to this "anti-culture" is said to be a return to small communities, sometimes called the "Benedict Option": a voluntary withdrawal into traditional forms of rural and patriarchal life.[7] The one considers modern culture nothing more than "mass deception" designed to ensure docility, while the other views it as having created a world of mass standardization and uniformity.

Both of these opinions are so tone-deaf to American culture as to beggar description. America's culture of the arts and sciences is perhaps our greatest asset, apart from constitution and law. Our cultural life testifies to a vibrancy of civil society and the wisdom of allowing art, music, literature, and science to develop autonomously, outside the scope of political supervision. American colleges and universities, once little more than seminaries for the elite, are today the source of cutting-edge scholarship in virtually every discipline and their doors are open to an increasingly larger number of students from all walks of life. American literature, which Tocqueville found virtually non-existent on his arrival, was nurtured into its own, full-fledged art form by a host of luminaries, from Hawthorne, Melville, and Dickinson to Updike, Bellow, Morrison, and Roth. Our Nobel Prize winners in every field of endeavor have made not only America but the world a better and safer place. Jazz, blues, R&B, rock, and hip-hop have taken elements of the African American experience and turned them into something of worldwide wonder and appreciation. Hollywood films by directors like John Ford,

Woody Allen, and Martin Scorsese have produced cultural jewels of imagination and intelligence. The list is nearly endless.

Invention and Discovery

In 1859, Lincoln gave a "Lecture on Discoveries and Inventions" in which he predicted that America would be the land where the scientific Enlightenment came to fruition. In celebrating the Enlightenment's ideal of scientific discovery as the key to human progress, he particularly noted the connection between scientific and technological innovation and economic development. By adding the profit motive ("the fuel of interest") to the habit of innovation ("the fire of genius"), America could enrich itself while contributing to mankind's collective well-being.[8]

These predictions have largely come true. America has been a land of unprecedented scientific and technological revolution. From Benjamin Franklin and Robert Fulton to Samuel Morse and Thomas Edison to Bill Gates and Steve Jobs, our scientists and inventors show the American imagination at its best. Not that these developments have been without cost. They have forced us to confront the moral dangers of genetic engineering, the hazards of nuclear waste, and threats to individual privacy from the internet. Yet as Ronald Reagan used to say when he was the pitchman for General Electric, "progress is our most important product." American patriotism is aspirational, and the cultivation of our scientific and technological imagination remains the best guarantor of human progress.

Economic Development and Opportunity

America has been a capitalist democracy ever since the year when, by happy coincidence, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and the Declaration of Independence were published within a few months of each other. From the outset, the protection of property has been one of the central aims of government. Yet the protection of private property does not entail a system of unfettered laissez-faire. The framers were not libertarians. They thought deeply about justice and

the common good, and they did not believe that the market and market incentives were the sole determinants of human behavior or that wealth was the single promoter of human happiness. The market is an instrument for the generation of wealth and the distribution of goods and services. It is not the answer to every social problem.

Capitalism's critics have always viewed it as a system of heartless exploitation, but it has brought greater affluence to more people worldwide than any other economic system. To be sure, capitalism needs to be tempered by concerns for economic fairness and social justice. Yet the free flow of capital has always been an indicator of upward mobility. The dangers of an emergent oligarchy, much in the news of late, are not to be taken lightly. But the alternative to markets is a cure worse than the disease. Socialism builds in inefficiency and corruption. The waste of resources grows worse over time, eventually resulting in a system of pervasive dishonesty and distrust.

The downside of capitalism is that when insufficiently regulated, it creates both massive inequality and financial instability. The solution is not to abandon markets, but to make them work better for all Americans. The emergence of an entrepreneurial middle class at liberty to pursue its economic aims has created immense wealth that has improved the lives of billions. Americans have always preferred inequality in affluence to equality in poverty.

Individualism

American patriotism is special, if not unique, for recognizing the value of the individual and of individual achievement. We do not insist on the subordination of the individual to the state or to the collective will of society. We celebrate people for their individual contributions to society. Our heroes certainly include famous political leaders and military commanders, but more often we celebrate scientists, artists, and entrepreneurs who contribute to our individual and material well-being.

Individualism landed in America with the Pilgrims. The Puritan theology pictured the individual standing alone before God. Benjamin Franklin secularized this vision by showing how, through initiative and hard work, we can make something of ourselves, leave the world a better place, and get rich in the process. This was the Puritan idea of a calling without the Puritan sense of guilt. This eminently worldly conception of the individual was deepened by Emerson, Thoreau, and the Transcendentalist movement, which taught a rebellious non-conformity, a libertarianism that kept society at arm's length, and a call to each individual to develop our true selves, or what Emerson called our individual "genius." This expressive individualism found its later voice in the poetry of Walt Whitman—America's first poet of genius—and heirs like Woody Guthrie, Jack Kerouac, Alan Ginsberg, and Bob Dylan. Whitman was America's first bohemian. With his open shirt and big floppy hat, he defined our image of how a poet sounds and looks. He has also been called the greatest poet of democracy. "If you are American," Harold Bloom wrote in his introduction to *Leaves of Grass,* "then Walt Whitman is your imaginative father and mother, even if, like myself, you have never composed a line of verse."[9]

America is the land where individualism remains strong and celebrated, yet we are all too familiar with its pathologies. Tocqueville feared that a culture of individualism would erode our capacities for civic life by turning us back on ourselves, producing a nation of loners. "Individualism," he wrote, "is a reflective and tranquil sentiment that disposes each citizen to cut himself off from the mass of his fellow men and withdraw into the circle of family and friends."[10] More recent social scientists have borne this out, charting a marked decline in American involvement in clubs, leagues, and civic associations. This anomie is no doubt the deeper cause of the alienation from civic life that is responsible both for our apathy and loneliness and for the sporadic outbreaks of violent rage that have so shaken our bonds of public trust.[11]

Few would argue, I hope, that the answer to these problems is to turn away from our ethos of individualism. The answer is that

individualism, like any good, needs to be tempered by other aspects of our national creed, those that emphasize faith, service, and loyalty. Some form of required national service would greatly improve our current moral environment, where people want to contribute but may not know how.[12] This service could include everything from military service to teaching in a public school, working in a national park, or helping out in an underserved community. Public service would give each citizen a sense that "we are in this together" and reinvigorate our national faith. It would encourage a sense of equality without imposing an ideology of egalitarianism.

Faith and Hope

We are, as I have emphasized throughout, a people of the book. Our reverence for beginnings is a legacy of the Puritans, who saw themselves as building a new Jerusalem in the wilderness. Our regard for our national founding is rare among modern nations. We speak reverentially about the Founding Fathers (usually capitalized) and celebrate them in books, plays, and songs. Loyalty is a form of gratitude to those who have helped us become what we are. Gratitude is a natural human sentiment. When it is expressed to parents and family, it takes the form of love; when expressed to country, it is patriotism.

Loyalty and faith are inseparable from religion, yet are not quite the same thing. A people are judged by their gods and heroes, by what they look up to. American patriotism is a constitutional faith rooted deeply in our very human need for hope. Hope and faith are inextricably bound together. "Religion," Tocqueville wrote, "is . . . nothing other than a particular form of hope, as natural to the human heart as hope itself."[13] This is not something we can do without. "Hope," Alan Mittleman has argued, "is a civic virtue in a democratic age."[14] Like loyalty, it is an excellence of character without which our institutions and way of life would lose their reason for being and collapse. "Hope is a good thing, maybe the best of things," Andy Dufresne writes to his friend Red in the Stephen King story "Rita

Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption." "And no good thing ever dies."[15]

Our constitutional faith is a form of hope, a religion based not in revelation or belief in providence but in the whole complex of rituals, symbols, and practices that have established our identity over time. It is this constitutional faith that sustained Lincoln's belief that despite slavery and war, American democracy remains "the last best hope of earth."[16] It is, furthermore, a faith that does not belong to any one faction or sect but is eminently democratic. Anyone who shares hope for America and faith in America may participate. But this hope and this faith are very different from the hope and faith of a believing Christian or Jew or Muslim. Faith and hope in America are not based on divine promises.

Exceptionalism

Finally, American patriotism is exceptional. The idea of exceptionalism may be the most controversial aspect of American political identity. "Only in America" we often hear people say in mock wonder, indicating some sense of the exceptional. In what way, though, is America unique, and does this belief necessarily lead to a triumphalist assertion that America is somehow better than all other nations? My sense is no. America is exceptional in the sense that Seymour Martin Lipset had in mind when he called it "the first new nation."[17]

Lipset meant that America was the first, and perhaps still the only, nation founded on a creed. We are a creedal people. The American creed, summed up in such ideas as equality, liberty, individuality, and pluralism, formed the basis for what later became known as the philosophy of liberalism or classical liberalism. Other nations—England, France, even Germany—have had liberal traditions, but only America was conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. This could never be said of the nations of the Old World.

A belief in American exceptionalism by no means provides a blank check to export democracy, to rule other peoples, or to convert

them to our way of life. It is the very opposite of the neo-conservative policy of bringing regime change to nations whose governments we don't like. Exceptionalism is rooted in the biblical idea of chosenness, and chosenness without humility can lead only to blasphemy and hubris. This sense of exceptionalism was understood better by our Puritan ancestors than by their successors. They saw themselves on an "errand in the wilderness," tasked with creating a "city on a hill," not as the spearheads of Manifest Destiny or as making the world safe for democracy.

American exceptionalism has never lost its aspirational quality. It is a quality expressed by one of our great national poets, Bruce Springsteen, in his anthem "Land of Hope and Dreams":

> This train carries saints and sinners
> This train carries losers and winners
> This train carries whores and gamblers
> This train carries lost souls
> I said, this train dreams will not be thwarted
> This train faith will be rewarded
> This train hear the steel wheels singin'
> This train bells of freedom ringin'

There is no good idea that cannot be abused, and this is especially true of patriotism, which seems to bring out both the best and the worst in people. If critics on the left have routinely disparaged any display of patriotism as an announcement of xenophobia and nationalistic chauvinism, bullies on the right have been quick to depict any questioning of America as somehow un-American and unpatriotic.

America is, I believe, the only country where words like "Americanization" and "un-American" are in common use. To the best of my knowledge, no other European language has corresponding words. But if patriotism misused can be harsh and punitive, when rightly expressed, it can also be elevating and ennobling. American patriotism at its best does not rely on indoctrination but on teaching and supporting the virtues of civility, respect for law, respect for others, responsibility, honor, courage, loyalty, and leadership—all virtues worth having and keeping.

Notes

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