Patriotism is an ideal that makes many thoughtful people uncomfortable. They find it difficult to label themselves as “patriots” because they are uncomfortable with the rituals and symbols of national loyalty and because they worry that national loyalty implies indifference or hostility to people of other nations. Since they condemn national chauvinism and are disturbed by the associations between patriotism, militarism, and blind allegiance, they shun the word “patriot.”

At the same time, such people do not want to be considered disloyal. They may attach great value to many of their country’s political practices and traditions, and they may even carry out the duties of citizenship conscientiously. They do not see themselves as unpatriotic and certainly do not want to be seen as traitors.

Yet, the language of patriotism and loyalty seems to force them into a difficult choice. To say that one is not patriotic suggests that one lacks the loyalty that is appropriate to citizens. It is not surprising, then, that the ideas of nonpatriotic citizens are often viewed with suspicion, for their lack of patriotism seems to imply that they possess neither loyalty nor a basic concern for the well-being of the nation. Hence, their views on national conduct and policy are suspect.

It appears, then, that one must either accept patriotism in spite of its undesirable features, or place oneself in the role of an outsider, whose claims about the national welfare have an uncertain status. The result for many is a chronic form of discomfort and a hope that the subject of patriotism can be kept out of political discussions.

In this paper, I want to defend a conception of patriotism that thoughtful, morally conscientious people can be comfortable with. Like Alasdair MacIntyre, I will be trying to provide an affirmative answer to the question “Is Patriotism a Virtue?”¹ Unlike MacIntyre, however, I have great sympathy with those who think (or fear) that patriotism is a

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¹ “Is Patriotism a Virtue?” is the title of Alasdair MacIntyre’s Lindley Lecture, University of Kansas, Philosophy Department, 1984.

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vice, and I shall begin by considering some antipatriotic arguments that were forcefully stated by the great Russian novelist and thinker, Leo Tolstoy. In response to Tolstoy, I will describe a conception of patriotism that does not possess the evil features that he thinks are a necessary part of patriotism. I call the conception I defend “moderate patriotism.” After showing that this form of patriotism escapes Tolstoy’s attack, I will turn to MacIntyre’s vigorous criticisms of this view and will try to show that his objections do not succeed in discrediting it.

IS PATRIOTISM A VIRTUE?

It is no surprise that the established authorities of all nations encourage patriotism and support the view that it is a virtue. Spokesmen for a nation want to encourage devotion to it so that they can appeal to patriotic motives in bringing about compliance with the law and encouraging citizen support for government policies. In making this point, I do not mean to encourage cynicism or suggest that patriotism is not a virtue. Even for those not accustomed to seeing themselves as patriotic, the idea that patriotism is a vice is somewhat shocking. Since for most of us, our “country” includes not just its politics but its language, culture, familiar history, natural beauties, customs, literature, folk heroes, and personal histories, it is not surprising that most people feel some degree of love for their country. In this sense, even politically alienated people may have patriotic sentiments.

Patriotism, however, is not just love for one’s country and its traditions. MacIntyre rightly stresses that patriotism involves loyalty and a preference for the well-being of one’s own country over others. The problem is whether it is a virtue to have warm feelings toward some aspects of one’s country. Rather, the question is, Can it be a virtue to feel loyalty toward one’s country and to be willing to promote its well-being, even if that can only be done at the cost of diminishing the well-being of other countries?

In two essays, entitled “Patriotism” and “Patriotism, or Peace?” Tolstoy answered this question with a vehement no. One of Tolstoy’s primary reasons for rejecting patriotism is that it is linked to war. As he writes, “The root of war . . . [is] the exclusive desire for the well-being of one’s own people; it is patriotism. Therefore, to destroy war, destroy patriotism” (pp. 106–7). Earlier, he describes war as “the inevitable consequence of patriotism” (p. 104).

Now, one might think that Tolstoy is overstating his point here, claiming that patriotism inevitably leads to war. While acknowledging

2. Leo Tolstoy’s arguments appear in “Patriotism,” and “Patriotism, or Peace?” both of which are reprinted in Tolstoy’s Writings on Civil Disobedience and Non-Violence (New York: New American Library, 1968; New York: Bergman, 1967); page references in the text are to the New American Library edition.

3. Leonard Doob describes the psychological associations between one’s country and positive features of one’s environment in Patriotism and Nationalism (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1964), chap. 2.
that there is an association between patriotic fervor and warfare, one might think that this does not show the connection to be inevitable. But if one grants his definition of patriotism as exclusive concern for the well-being of one's own nation, then I think that Tolstoy is only minimally guilty of overstatement. If one cares only for one's own nation and if—as seems plausible—one's nation could profit from things of value possessed by other nations, then if possible, one's nation should engage in any activities necessary to obtain the desired goods. Since we can suppose that other nations will not voluntarily give up their valued possessions, then warfare becomes the inevitable policy choice for those who can expect victory.

I assume, as Tolstoy does, that war is an undesirable state, involving, as it does, large-scale killing and injury to soldiers and frequently civilians as well. If war is an evil and if patriotism is the root cause of war, then patriotism is an evil. As Tolstoy asks rhetorically, "How can this patriotism, whence come human sufferings incalculable both physical and moral, be necessary, and be a virtue?" (p. 109).

In a second argument, Tolstoy condemns patriotism as both "stupid and immoral." It is stupid, he writes, "because if every country were to consider itself superior to others, it is evident that all but one would be in error; and [it is] immoral because it leads all who possess it to aim at benefiting their own country or nation at the expense of every other" (p. 75).

Tolstoy's point about the stupidity of patriotism is on target. Self-proclaimed patriarchs frequently talk about the superiority of their nation to all other nations. Myths of being "number one," "divinely chosen," "a special people" are the common fare of patriotic remarks. Yet, the mere multiplicity of nations implies that most patriots must be wrong when they make such remarks.

The immorality of patriotism resides in its according special status to the well-being of some people. This, Tolstoy thinks, flies in the face of both the Golden Rule and the principle of moral equality. Again, he asks rhetorically, "how can patriotism be a virtue . . . when it requires . . . an ideal exactly opposite to that of our religion and morality—an admission, not of the equality and fraternity of all men, but of the dominance of one country or nation over all others?" (p. 75). Morality, as Tolstoy suggests, requires that we take seriously the interests of all people, not simply those of our own nation's citizens. Yet patriotism, he says, involves an exclusive interest in members of one national group. It gives no moral weight to the interests of others. Hence, from his point of view, patriotism is totally opposed to the fundamental ideals of morality.

PATRIOTISM WITHIN THE LIMITS OF MORALITY

In spite of the power of Tolstoy's arguments, there is an obvious reply to them. While it would be unfair to suggest that his description of patriotism is his own creation or that it is a caricature, one could object that the extreme conception he describes is not the only form of patriotism.
Indeed, all his arguments hinge on a single word—"exclusive." The extreme patriots that Tolstoy describes have an exclusive concern for their country. They care only about its well-being and not at all about the well-being of other peoples. They perceive only the virtues of their own country and not those of other countries. They think that morality applies only within their country, that only their own fellow citizens are persons with moral standing, that citizens of other countries fall outside the moral umbrella.

This exclusive concern for one's own country, however, is not a necessary part of patriotism. Even Tolstoy, in a different passage, describes patriotism as "the preference for one's own country or nation above the country or nation of anyone else." This definition permits (as the earlier one did not permit) patriots to feel some concern for those who are not their fellow countrymen. One can have a preference for one's own country, a greater love for it, and a greater concern for its well-being without going so far as to think that morality ceases to apply at the border. If patriotism involves this sort of preference and leads people to do good things on behalf of their country but always within the limits of what is morally permissible, then patriotism would have none of the dreadful implications that Tolstoy attributes to it.

There seems, therefore, to be an easy way out of the dilemmas we face in evaluating patriotism. We need not say categorically either that patriotism is a virtue or that it is a vice. Rather, we can hold that patriotism is a virtue so long as the actions it encourages are not themselves immoral. So long as devotion and loyalty to one's country do not lead to immoral actions, then patriotism can be quite laudable. When concern for their own country blinds people to the legitimate needs and interests of other nations, then patriotism becomes a vice.

That a morally acceptable form of patriotism is possible can be seen by comparing patriotism to love or family loyalty. People may (and, one hopes, typically do) have a special interest and concern for their parents, spouses, and children. They really do care more about those "near and dear" than about strangers. Yet, so long as this concern is not an exclusive concern, there is nothing the matter with it. That is, so long as family loyalty does not violate the rights of nonmembers of one's family, then actions inspired by family loyalty or love are perfectly permissible and may reveal important virtues in a person.

Tolstoy is correct to criticize that kind of patriotic loyalty that puts the nation before all else. Patriotism is exactly like other forms of loyalty. My loyalty to my family may lead me to strive for its well-being in many laudable ways and so may be counted as a virtue. Nonetheless, I may not do anything on behalf of my family's well-being. I may not legitimately kill my child's competitor for a school prize or threaten a neighbor whose house we would like to own. When one engages in immoral actions in order to promote one's own family's well-being, then family devotion is excessive and is no virtue. It remains a virtue so long as it is constrained by other moral principles.
Tolstoy is mistaken, then, in his total condemnation of patriotism. The proper answer to the question, Is patriotism a virtue? is that the moral value of patriotism depends on the circumstances in which patriotism is exhibited and the actions that it motivates. When patriotism is in the service of valuable ends and is limited to morally legitimate means of attaining them, then it is a virtue. When patriotism leads to support of immoral ends or immoral means to achieve otherwise legitimate ends, then it is a vice.

The moderate patriotic view appears to provide both a reply to Tolstoy and a simple solution to our original questions about the status of patriotism. Moreover, it accords with moral common sense. Most people who think of themselves as patriots want to distinguish their attitude from jingoism and chauvinism. They shy away from adopting the attitude of "My country, right or wrong." They sense that patriotism can be carried too far and that moral constraints do apply to actions taken on behalf of one's country.

**MacIntyre's Attack on Moderate Patriotism**

In spite of the appeal of this conception of patriotism, MacIntyre rejects it and devotes most of "Is Patriotism a Virtue?" to criticizing it. Unlike Tolstoy, however, he rejects it because it is too weak a form of patriotism and too subservient to the demands of universal morality. MacIntyre appears to defend the extreme form of patriotism that Tolstoy and the moderate patriot both reject.

Like Tolstoy, MacIntyre begins by noting the tension between morality and patriotism, although he describes it as a conflict between two different conceptions of morality rather than a conflict between patriotism and morality as such. While a universalist conception of morality requires a certain detachment from one's own position, patriotism is a version of a particularist morality. It emphasizes personal bonds and the moral significance of membership in a particular group. From the point of view of the patriot, universalists (including moderate patriots who support impersonal constraints on loyalty) are insufficiently attentive to the importance of personal bonds and loyalties. From the universalist perspective, patriots are too restrictive in their application of moral principles and ideals, too concerned about persons and groups to whom they are directly related.

The conflict could be resolved, MacIntyre notes, if patriotism were regarded as "nothing more than a perfectly proper devotion to one's own nation which must never be allowed to violate the constraints set by the impersonal moral standpoint." He goes on to say that it is this form of patriotism that is "professed by certain liberal moralists who are often indignant when it is suggested by their critics that they are not patriotic" (p. 6).

Since I have argued that the moderate patriotism that MacIntyre attributes to "liberal moralists" is the correct view, I want to look at the specific criticisms he raises in order to show that none of them succeeds
in damaging the moderate patriotic view. Since my discussion is entirely critical, I would like to preface it by crediting MacIntyre with having written a rich and challenging treatment of an important, somewhat neglected subject.

MACINTYRE'S ARGUMENTS

MacIntyre begins his criticism by expressing sympathy with the charge that moderate patriots are not genuinely patriotic. He writes, "Patriotism thus limited in its scope appears to be emasculated, and it does so because in some of the most important situations of actual social life either the patriotic standpoint comes into serious conflict with the standpoint of a genuinely impersonal morality or it amounts to no more than a set of practically empty slogans" (p. 6).

The point here seems to be that if moderate patriotism always makes loyalty subservient to universal morality, then it is empty. Whether expressions of patriotism are genuine or merely slogans is revealed only in situations of conflict. Genuine patriotism, according to MacIntyre, requires loyalty to one's country in just those conflict situations in which universal morality (and thus moderate patriotism) would counsel backing away from devotion to one's country. To illustrate his point, MacIntyre gives examples of two types of conflict.

CONFLICT OVER RESOURCES

The first type of conflict arises from the scarcity of resources that might be necessary for the life of a national community. At its most extreme, the very survival of a nation might be at stake. In such conflict situations, MacIntyre writes, "the standpoint of impersonal morality requires an allocation of goods such that each individual person counts for one and no more than one, while the patriotic standpoint requires that I strive to further the interests of my community and you strive to further those of yours." He goes on to say that when survival or other "large interests" are at stake, "patriotism entails a willingness to go to war on one's community's behalf" (p. 6).

The force of MacIntyre's argument derives from the sense he conveys of the unavoidability of conflict. Only one national community can survive, while the other will perish. Moderate patriots would be precluded by their universalist morality from standing by their own country because they cannot count their own country more than the other. Extreme patriots, on the other hand, would make an unequivocal choice for their own country in this setting, showing that they and they alone are genuinely loyal. According to MacIntyre, the moderate position shows itself to be mere words, an empty expression of patriotism that evaporates in the heat of the tragic conflicts that occur in the real world.

There is a certain power to MacIntyre's argument, but I think that it dissipates when we consider his example more carefully. How would extreme and moderate patriots behave in this situation? Extreme patriots
would see that there was a serious conflict between the interests of their own country and those of another. In thinking about what actions to take, they would consider only the interests of their own country as having value and would unhesitatingly pursue them by any means. Since their morality requires loyalty only to their own community, they would not count the destruction of the other community and its members as serious losses.

Moderate patriots would act quite differently. Because they do consider the value of persons in the opposing community, they would examine the conflict to see if there is any way of accommodating the needs of both communities. They would evaluate the legitimacy of the claims made by both sides, and if the moral weight of the opposing side's claims is greater, they might well urge a sacrifice by their own community. Because they count the well-being of both sides, they would strive to discover or devise a just accommodation.

Suppose that no just accommodation of both sides' legitimate interests is possible. What if the choice is between the death of one community or the other? What would moderate patriots do? Would their commitment to universal morality mean that they would be indifferent to which community survives? Would it lead them to urge collective suicide by their own community? Would they be willing to fight for their community, though it had no greater moral claim than the opposition?

In this extreme situation, many actions are possible, but universal morality would not require moderate patriots to abandon or betray their own communities. Morality does not require that people be indifferent to which community survives, since their deepest emotional ties are to one group. This would be like expecting a person to be indifferent to whether it is his own family that is killed in an auto accident or some family of strangers.

Likewise, morality would not require group suicide in such a case. That degree of sacrifice and altruism goes beyond what we think is required by morality. So, if indifference and altruism are unreasonable to require in this setting, then a regretful entry into the struggle for survival could not be criticized, and it is hard to see why moderate patriots would be forced to reject or condemn this option. The fact that the defense of their own community would be undertaken with deep regret points to the moral superiority of their position. In contrast, extreme patriots, as MacIntyre describes their view, need not care in the least about the well-being of members of the opposing community. The choice to fight for survival would be made with ease and need not be preceded by any search for alternatives.

In response to MacIntyre's argument, then, we can note two things. First, in the heat of struggle, the moderate patriot is not forced to renounce his community or sacrifice its existence. He can defend it as well as the extreme patriot. Second, in dealing with serious conflict, the extreme patriot betrays a high level of callousness and disregard for the legitimate
rights and interests of those in the competing group. The moderate position leads to the appropriate responses: a search for compromise and reconciliation, a sense of regret when conflict is unavoidable and either/or choices must be made. Nothing in this case serves to discredit the moderate patriotic view.

Before leaving this argument, it is worth noting that MacIntyre's sense that loyalty and universal morality are incompatible appears to rest on an oversimplified view of the kind of impartiality required by universal morality. While it is true that some advocates of universal morality (like Tolstoy) seem to think that universal morality rules out special ties to any particular individuals, this is not a necessary feature of universal morality. Commonsense morality certainly permits and encourages local loyalties and even frowns on extreme detachment or total impartiality.

While there are deep problems to be worked out, it would appear that the impartiality of universal morality can consistently allow for special obligations and various forms of particularist commitments. Thus, to take a simple example, while the Ten Commandments may be understood as being impartially addressed to everyone (to every "Thou"), they nonetheless contain the rule "Honor thy mother and father." This rule clearly commands that each person accord special treatment to specific individuals. Hence, as a model of a moral code, the Ten Commandments contains a mix of partiality and impartiality. The requirement that we be "partial" to our parents applies impartially to all persons.

In a similar way, a universal morality may well contain special duties that people have to advance the interests of their own countries, duties that could be expressed in a commandment to "honor thy country." Hence, there is no inconsistency in being committed to universal moral principles that both sanction special obligations to one's country and impose constraints on the actions one may take in pursuit of one's country's well-being. This mixture of universalism and particularism is both coherent and appears to be embodied in ordinary moral thought.

COMPETING CONCEPTIONS OF THE GOOD LIFE

The second type of conflict MacIntyre describes involves competing conceptions of the good life. He raises the problem in the context of a


problem faced by empires in their dealings with "barbarian border peoples." He writes:

A variety of such peoples—Scottish Gaels, Iroquois Indians, Bedouin—have regarded raiding the territory of their traditional enemies... as an essential constituent of the good life; whereas the settled urban or agricultural communities which provided the target for their depredations have regarded the subjugation of such peoples and their reeducation into peaceful pursuits as one of their central responsibilities. And on such issues once again the impersonal moral standpoint and that of patriotism cannot be reconciled. For the impersonal moral standpoint, understood as the philosophical protagonists of modern liberalism have understood it, requires neutrality not only between rival and competing interests, but also between rival and competing sets of beliefs about the best way for human beings to live. [P. 7]

This passage suggests two different criticisms. The first argues again that moderate patriotism is empty, since it requires sacrificing one's own community's way of life if objective moral assessment shows it to be in the wrong. The second would show that the ideal of liberal neutrality associated with moderate patriotism precludes it from yielding any opinion at all about conflicts between ways of life.7

According to the first argument, moderate patriots are again shown to lack genuine loyalty because they are committed to sacrifice an "essential constituent of the good life" of their community if pursuit of that good conflicts with impersonal moral standards. This willingness to sacrifice the good of the community betrays an indifference that is incompatible with genuine patriotism.

This is a misleading description, however. Moderate patriots would see that the practice of "raiding the territory" of traditional enemies is incompatible with respect for the humanity of members of the enemy communities. If these enemies are themselves engaged in such raiding, then counterraids may be justified by self-defense. But if other communities do not seek out conflict, then the necessity of raiding is called into question. Raiding as an exercise of community virtues is not legitimate. One's community may feel that the personal valor shown in such raids or the martial skills exhibited are the highest achievements, but these goods must not be purchased at the cost of innocent lives. Moderate patriots would see this and would favor ending the raids. This need not show indifference to their community, however. Unlike outsiders, moderate patriots would realize the genuine value of the martial skills and virtues,

7. MacIntyre's identification of moral impartiality with liberalism is somewhat misleading. In Tolstoy's case, e.g., his moral universalism is grounded in Christianity. He condemns patriotism for its "incompatibility... with the very lowest demands of morality in a Christian society" (Tolstoy, p. 108).
and they would regret the loss of the goods associated with that way of life. Unlike outsiders, they might work to foster the development of other practices that preserve some of the community’s traditional values. They would not be indifferent to the community’s losses, even though they think it necessary that the community pay this price.

The crucial point here is that being an “essential constituent” of some conception of the good life does not exempt a practice or activity from moral evaluation and criticism. If it did, we would be unable to condemn the actions of religious zealots who devote their lives to wiping out heathens. We would be unable to condemn slavery because the niceties of Southern plantation life required it. We would be unable to condemn Nazism because its conception of the good life required genocide and conquest to bring about “racial” dominance.

MacIntyre’s argument seems to imply an extreme form of ethical permissiveness.8 While moderate patriotism applies the constraints of morality to the pursuit of a community’s well-being, MacIntyre’s view exempts community practices from moral judgment.

NEUTRALITY AND MORAL SKEPTICISM

This brings me to the second interpretation of MacIntyre’s argument. He might be arguing that moderate patriots are themselves unable to judge practices like territorial raids. The reason is that moderate patriotism is linked to a larger theory of liberal universalism and that this form of liberalism is committed to “neutrality . . . between rival and competing sets of beliefs about the best way for human beings to live” (p. 7). Liberal universalism, on this view, claims to be able to judge community practices from the standpoint of impersonal morality. In fact, however, it provides no basis for condemning the territorial raiders and their way of life because it is committed to neutrality about ideals. Liberals, on this argument, are reduced to skepticism and indecision about the value of the raiders’ form of life, while MacIntyre’s (extreme) patriot will have no difficulty making a choice about whom to support.

If this is MacIntyre’s point, it misrepresents the position of the moderate patriot by failing to distinguish various senses of “neutrality.” On the face of it, it is clear that liberalism is a normative political philosophy, so it cannot be committed to complete value neutrality. We need to ask what forms of “neutrality” liberal universalism is (or is not) committed to.

First, moderate patriots are committed to neutrality in the sense that they are committed to making impartial judgments of the issues over which communities are in conflict. Likewise, they are committed to applying

8. One might describe MacIntyre’s view as relativistic, since it resists the imposition of external standards on the practices of particular communities. On the other hand, it could be argued that his view makes sense only on the supposition that there is an absolute value involved in a community’s pursuing its own conception of the good life.
universal moral principles to the actions of their own country as well as to others. As I have already argued, these forms of neutrality do not imply indifference to one's own country. Nor do they rule out the possibility of people having special obligations to their own country. Second, liberals have often claimed that their view is neutral in that it neither implies nor presupposes substantive ideals about the best way to live. As a political philosophy, this translates into defenses of free speech, even speech that is known or thought to be false, and freedom of religion, even of religions that are thought to be false. Liberals oppose using the state to determine which of competing ideals of life is best. Moreover, they think that people committed to very different ideals could come to see that this sort of neutral state is the best form of political arrangement.

This neutrality, however, must not be confused with ethical skepticism, relativism, or indifference. It is not total neutrality, and thus it permits liberals to condemn the territorial raiders' activities, not on the ground that martial virtues are bad but because the exercise of them in this situation conflicts with the rights of other persons. If killing members of other communities is the only way for the raiders to live the good life as they see it, then their way of life will be condemned by the liberal.

A central tenet of liberal political thought is that the protection of certain "civil" or "primary" goods is the central function of the state. Thus, as Locke argued in his Letter concerning Toleration, although religious ideals may be the highest ones within a person's life, protection of people's "life, liberty, health, and . . . possession[s]" takes priority in the political realm. Similarly, in A Theory of Justice, Rawls argues that primary goods like liberty and wealth should be protected and that specific personal ideals should not be given special preference by social institutions.

The justification for the priority of primary goods over ideals is admittedly a central and a difficult problem for liberal political theory. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that liberal thought involves this priority. At this level, liberal morality is far from neutral in its evaluation of various


10. For an example of an antiliberal critique that seems to rest on such confusions, see Allan Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987). Bloom draws no distinctions between relativism, pluralism, skepticism, and nihilism. Nor does he distinguish personal judgments from political ones.


conceptions of the good life. Neutrality with respect to ideals does not imply neutrality with respect to evaluations of particular actions or practices.\textsuperscript{14}

Much of the liberal view developed in connection with religious conflict and church-state separation remains a paradigm of liberal politics.\textsuperscript{15} What is crucial to our purposes is to see that, while liberalism is committed to governmental neutrality about which religion is best, this does not preclude liberals either from personally believing that one particular religion is best or from working to advance a particular religion through nonpolitical means. Nor, finally, does it preclude one from condemning the use of violence to promote religious ideals. Violent promotion of religious ideals is forbidden because it involves severe deprivations of primary goods, those goods whose protection is one of the central functions of government.

This last case is, of course, exactly parallel to the problem of the territorial raiders, whose ideals, according to MacIntyre, can only thrive at the cost of unprovoked assault on the lives and well-being of persons who are not members of the tribe. Liberals can favor the prohibition of this practice without judging the tribe's ideals to be without value, though they must, of course, judge that the "cost" of following these ideals is too high.

In thinking about liberalism, it is important to distinguish the liberal political perspective from the variety of theoretical elaborations and defenses of liberalism. Liberals have defended their views in a variety of ways, some of which claim to be based on neutral, value-free principles of rationality, some on "thin" theories of value that make only minimal value assumptions, and others of which derive from substantive conceptions about the good life.\textsuperscript{16} While MacIntyre's comments point to the need for articulating and defending the liberal perspective, it is not clear that he reveals any fundamental deficiencies in it. Liberal universalism does provide a plausible basis, rooted in both history and theory, for limiting the ways in which people pursue their conception of the good life.

In short, whichever interpretation we make of MacIntyre's point about conflict over ideals, his argument fails. He does not establish either the disloyalty of moderate patriots or their inability to make judgments and decisions. Moderate patriots need not be either indifferent to their own community's way of life or incapable of evaluating conflicts between ways of life. Finally, while I have defended liberalism from MacIntyre's attacks, the moderate patriotic attitude need not be derived from a liberal


\textsuperscript{15} Compare Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," p. 249.

\textsuperscript{16} Mill exemplifies the third approach, while aspects of the first and second can be found in Rawls. Locke seems to appeal to a "thin" theory of the good, as well as to special premises about the nature of religion and government.
political philosophy. It could be based on substantive moral or religious ideals or on historically based beliefs about the nature of governments and nations.

LIBERAL DETACHMENT VERSUS COMMUNITY IMMERSION

Moderate patriots distinguish between patriotism and morality and seek to subject patriotism to moral constraints. MacIntyre, however, rejects the view that morality and patriotism can be distinguished in this way. As he writes, “What we have here are two rival and incompatible moralities, each of which is viewed from within by its adherents as morality-as-such” (p. 11). Proponents of universal morality assume that we can detach ourselves from our particular community and evaluate its practices, just as we evaluate the practices of any community. MacIntyre denies that this is possible. He believes that our understanding of morality is itself so deeply entwined with our relationship to a particular community that no such detachment can be achieved.

MacIntyre does not claim to prove this view, but he finds it attractive and presents it sympathetically. While not denying the existence of what he calls “lonely moral heroism,” he asserts that “it is in general only within a community that individuals become capable of morality, are sustained in their morality, and are constituted as moral agents. . . . And once we recognize that typically moral agency and continuing moral capacity are engendered and sustained in essential ways by particular institutionalized social ties in particular social groups, it will be difficult to counterpoise allegiance to a particular society and allegiance to morality in the way in which the protagonists of liberal morality do” (p. 10).

Drawing on this communitarian conception of morality, MacIntyre develops his argument for the impossibility of detachment and the necessity of patriotism’s being a virtue. He writes,

If first . . . I can only apprehend the rules of morality in the version in which they are incarnated in some specific community; and if secondly . . . the justification of morality must be in terms of particular goods enjoyed within the life of particular communities; and if thirdly . . . I am characteristically brought into being and maintained as a moral agent only through the . . . moral sustenance afforded by my community, then it is clear that . . . my allegiance to the community and what it requires of me—even to the point of requiring me to die to sustain its life—could not meaningfully be contrasted with . . . what morality required of me.17 [Pp. 10–11]

If this argument is correct, then the kind of moral reflection moderate patriots appeal to is either totally impossible or exists only as an atypical and aberrant version of normal moral reflection.

But how plausible is this argument? I will limit my comments to the first premise, which says that we can only understand the rules of morality “in the version” in which they are “incarnated in some specific community.” This is a crucial premise, since it identifies a person’s understanding of morality with his understanding of the morality of his community. It is this identification that makes the contrast between community morality and morality as such impossible.

There is clearly some truth in what MacIntyre says. Typically, people do derive their understanding of what is worthwhile and what is right from the culture of the communities in which they grow up. In this sense, individual moral understanding derives from and is dependent on community values. If we think of a community’s morality as a set of highly specific judgments and take moral development to be the internalization of precisely those judgments, then MacIntyre’s conclusion follows. Morality just is what the community says, and no detached moral judgment of the community’s values is possible.

Typically, however, the morality of a community is not simply a collection of particular judgments. Rather, in addition to specific judgments, it contains an open-ended set of general values, principles, ideals, and paradigms of proper behavior. The morality that a person acquires from his community will, therefore, contain large elements of vagueness, ambiguity, and indeterminacy. There will be no rigid set of judgments which simply is the community morality. Hence, different notions of morality and of the requirements of loyalty may grow out of the same social soil and may make possible the sort of flexibility of moral thought that permits individuals to contrast their community’s acts and policies with the requirements of morality as such.

This point emerges most clearly, perhaps, when we see that community moralities are themselves likely to contain inconsistent and competing elements that generate conflict. Virtually every community, for example, encourages some degree of loyalty to the group as a whole. Yet, loyalty to one’s own family is also likely to be encouraged, as is loyalty to one’s friends. In most circumstances, people do not find it difficult to be loyal to all these groups, but sometimes the claims of one group will conflict with those of the other, and the community morality may not provide any way of resolving the conflict.

The idea of “morality as such” may emerge from just such situations, since individuals would feel the pull of these competing claims but would be unable to identify any one of them with what morality requires. The more abstract notion of morality as such would be generated by the inability of the community morality to issue a verdict, combined with the

18. For a nice description by a novelist of a moral insight that seems to come from outside a person’s community, see John Barth, The Tidewater Tales (New York: Putnam’s, 1987), pp. 231–32.

individual's sense that there is a right answer to his moral quandary. The idea of morality as such could emerge as a distinct (even if idealized version of) the community morality. Once this degree of independence and abstraction is reached, there is nothing to prevent the sort of reflection MacIntyre seeks to call into question.

This leads me to a final point about MacIntyre's argument. Even if his communitarian conception of morality were correct and even if the process of moral development insured that group loyalty would emerge as a central virtue, no conclusion would follow about the importance of patriotism. The group to which our primary loyalty would be owed would be the group from which we had obtained our moral understanding. This need not be the community as a whole or any political unit, however. It could be one's family, one's town, one's religion. The nation need not be the source of morality or the primary beneficiary of our loyalty.

Indeed, if we think about patriotism historically and reflect on the relative novelty of national loyalties, it is clear that the forging of nations has involved a huge effort to overcome the pull of diverse local attachments. Patriotism has had to compete with familial, tribal, racial, religious, and regional identities. Moreover, in its efforts to overcome these narrower forms of attachment, proponents of national loyalty have laid the basis for supranational attachments by drawing attention to the arbitrariness and parochialism of various forms of localism. The arguments for national patriotism have themselves often contained the seeds of internationalism and universal morality.20

THE WILLINGNESS TO DIE FOR ONE'S COUNTRY

In his final argument against moderate patriotism, MacIntyre concedes that liberal critics are correct in thinking that “patriotism is a morally dangerous phenomenon” (p. 15). It is morally dangerous because it leads to placing the good of one's nation above the good of human beings in general.

 Nonetheless, he says, liberalism and moderate patriotism are subject to an equal and opposite sort of danger. Political liberalism portrays the relation of citizens within a state as deriving from relations of reciprocal self-interest and impersonal morality. Yet, in situations of conflict within a country and in situations of wartime, it is impossible to base allegiance on this combination of motivations. Reciprocal self-interest and universal morality may be too weak to sustain the state and its policies, leading MacIntyre to suggest that a state might not be able to survive if “the bonds of patriotism” were dissolved.

MacIntyre writes:

Every political community . . . requires standing armed forces for its minimal security. Of the members of these armed forces it must

require both that they be prepared to sacrifice their lives for the sake of the community’s security and that their willingness to do so be not contingent upon their own individual evaluation of the rightness or wrongness of their country’s cause on some specific issue, measured by some standard that is neutral and impartial. . . . [T]hat is to say, good soldiers may not be liberals. . . . So the political survival of any polity in which liberal morality had secured large-scale allegiance would depend upon there still being enough young men and women who rejected that liberal morality. And in this sense liberal morality tends toward the dissolution of social bonds. [Pp. 17–18]

There are a number of powerful and disturbing points suggested by this argument. First, there is the suggestion that moderate patriotism may be self-defeating. If it is widely believed by the citizens of a country, that country is less likely to survive. Second, if survival requires large numbers of unquestioning patriots, then moderate patriots are in fact social parasites, unwilling to support their country unquestioningly, but accepting the benefits of unquestioning obedience by others. Indeed, the moderate patriot may well be in the unenviable position that Sidgwick described in connection with utilitarianism—believing that his own view was true but also believing that it would be better if most people did not accept it.21

Is moderate patriotism dangerous and unattractive for these reasons? I think not. First, an important assumption of MacIntyre’s is that willingness to defend one’s country cannot be motivated by moral reasons. Unquestioning obedience to one’s own country is, he thinks, necessary. There is an air of realism about MacIntyre’s psychological claim that morality is a weak motivator that must be supplemented by blind patriotism. Yet it is doubtful that his view is shared by national leaders, who always go to great lengths to show that their country’s cause is morally just. They do not rely solely on appeals to blind patriotism. Instead, they always describe themselves as being on the side of good, while opponents are always portrayed as evil. Perhaps it is not so realistic to minimize the power of moral motivation.

Beyond this factual question, however, is the key question of the desirability of encouraging blind patriotic loyalty of the sort MacIntyre describes. In deciding this, perhaps we need to assess the consequences of promoting extreme versus moderate patriotism. Are we more threatened by the possibility that too many moderate patriots will weaken the social fabric, that a good society will be defeated because too few of its members are willing to give it uncritical support? Or are we more threatened by

21. In Henry Sidgwick’s words, “a Utilitarian may reasonably desire . . . that some of his conclusions should be rejected by mankind generally; or even that the vulgar should keep aloof from his system as a whole, in so far as . . . it [is] likely to lead to bad results in their hands” (The Methods of Ethics, 7th ed. [New York: Dover, 1966], p. 490, bk. 4, chap. 5, sec. 9); original edition, 1907.
the possibility that evil deeds will be done because of excessive allegiance to particular national communities?

While there is no definitive way to answer these questions, there is reason to believe that some of the more dreadful policies of recent wars have been motivated by too much patriotism and too little morality. I have in mind the bombing of cities in Britain, Germany, and Japan, the use of atomic weapons at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the extreme com-
munitarian, pseudo-biological nationalism of Nazism, and the indiscrimi-
rate killings promoted by various terrorist groups who care only about their own members. Many commentators have also noted the difficulty of controlling nuclear weapons in a context in which national sovereignty is given such primacy. These are among the dangers associated with unconstrained patriotism, and they provide reasons for wanting to subject patriotic impulses to the constrains of universal morality.

Moderate patriots would be willing to risk the dissolution that worries MacIntyre because they are more worried about excessive patriotism. Moreover, they are committed to the value of moral agents reflecting on the causes for which they are willing not only to risk their own lives but also to take the lives of others. As long as moderate patriots are open about their views and do not exploit the unquestioning obedience of others, they cannot be charged with deceit or parasitism.

Moderate patriots in fact look forward to a time when governments will have to work even harder to justify their desire to risk the lives of their countrymen and take the lives of citizens of other countries. National survival may require military service by some, and military service may require relatively automatic assent in battle. Neither of these, however, requires citizens to abstain from independent moral thought or to commit themselves uncritically to the goals and policies of their country.

CONCLUSION

Both Tolstoy and MacIntyre argue as if extreme patriotism were the only possible form of patriotism. In spite of the vast differences between them, they both reinforce the idea that one must choose between chau-
vinism and disloyalty. I have argued that this is a mistake, and I have defended the moderate patriotic attitude as one that makes compatible the demands of national loyalty and the requirements of universal morality. In this sense, I have defended the view that it is possible for patriotism to be a virtue.

Nothing I have said, however, implies that citizens of all nations ought to be patriots. Whether people ought to be patriotic depends on the qualities of their particular nations and governments. If nations lack the qualities that make them merit loyalty and devotion, then patriotism with respect to them is an inappropriate attitude. A morally constrained version of patriotism is both limited in the range of actions that it requires citizens to support and conditional on the nature of the nation to which loyalty is directed. In this paper, I have dealt only with the limits of
patriotic demands. A full treatment of patriotism would have to describe the conditions that nations must meet to be suitable objects of patriotic loyalty.

Some may think that a patriotism that is so bounded by limits and conditions cannot count as genuine loyalty. The alternative, however, is a form of patriotism that is so free of moral limits and conditions that it requires automatic assent to even the vilest evils, so long as they are done in the name of the nation. To insist that patriotism must take this extreme form in order to be genuine is to undermine the claim that patriotism is a worthwhile ideal for morally conscientious people to adopt.