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## Patriotism and Character: Some Aristotelian Observations

Noell Birondo

Wichita State University

[noell.birondo@wichita.edu](mailto:noell.birondo@wichita.edu)

**Abstract:** This chapter defends an Aristotelian account of patriotism that differs from, and improves upon, the ‘extreme’ account of Aristotelian patriotism defended by Alasdair MacIntyre in a famous lecture. The virtue of patriotism is modeled on Aristotle’s account of the virtue of friendship; and the resulting account of patriotism falls between MacIntyre’s extreme patriotism and Marcia Baron’s moderate patriotism. The chapter illustrates how this plausible Aristotelian account of patriotism can avoid the dilemma that Baron has pressed against MacIntyre’s extreme account. It also illustrates why the virtue of patriotism cannot coexist with willful forms of ignorance. In its discussion of patriotism and ignorance the chapter draws on a recent study (2018) of the especially strong connection in the United States between patriotism and poverty.

**Keywords:**

Aristotle; Patriotism; Friendship; Love; Eudaimonia; Virtue Ethics; Character; Ignorance; Poverty; Alasdair MacIntyre; Marcia Baron; C. S. Lewis; G. H. von Wright; Francesco Duina; Charles W. Mills; Igor Primoratz; Internal Validation; Christianity; Vietnam; Courage

## 1. Introduction

C. S. Lewis chose as the epigraph for his widely read book, *The Four Loves*, a line from the early modern poet John Donne: “That our affections kill us not, nor dye.”<sup>1</sup> A life without affections, positive or negative, would be impoverished. But our positive affections, these various forms of love, can be especially dangerous. Our loves can seem beyond suspicion precisely because they *are* forms of love. The four loves in Lewis’s view are Affection, Friendship, Eros, and Charity in the Christian sense (*agapê, caritas*). Today it might seem odd to think of friendship as a form of love, but the idea has been around for some time: Lewis makes intermittent reference to the ancient Greeks in general, and to Aristotle in particular. Friendship, as a form of love, also has its dangers. These different ideas will be helpful in what follows, since this chapter considers the idea that patriotism – thought of as a devotion to one’s country analogous to Aristotle’s conception of friendship – might be an excellent trait of character, a virtue of character.

The chapter considers this question by revisiting the criticisms originally launched by Marcia Baron (1989; reprinted in Primoratz 2002) against the defiant and even ‘extreme’ account of patriotism famously articulated by Alasdair MacIntyre in a lecture in which he seemingly defends a conception of patriotism as a moral virtue (1984; reprinted in Primoratz 2002). Regarding the relationship between MacIntyre’s own views and the position presented in the lecture, Igor Primoratz wryly observes that, “anyone familiar with MacIntyre’s book *After Virtue* will take his profession of neutrality with a grain of salt, and will interpret the argument of the lecture as a defence of patriotism” (Primoratz 2008, p. 209). The Aristotelian account of patriotism discussed in this chapter differs from MacIntyre’s view of patriotism. Indeed, it

provides a plausible and nuanced alternative to the very different accounts of patriotism defended by MacIntyre and Baron. But the alternative conception of patriotism defended in this chapter does not fall neatly into any of the five categories provided by Primoratz (2008) in his mapping of the philosophical terrain surrounding the issue of patriotism. The Aristotelian position articulated here falls between MacIntyre's extreme patriotism and Baron's moderate patriotism, a seemingly uncharted area in Primoratz's cartography. To be sure, the account of patriotism defended in this chapter bears a resemblance to the 'ethical' patriotism advanced by Primoratz himself. But it differs in at least two ways. First, Primoratz invokes the idea that patriotism might be a moral duty, and that idea is absent from the Aristotelian account presented here. In addition, some moral philosophers have found it "hard to find love of country" in Primoratz's account of ethical patriotism (Baron and Rogers 2018, p. 15), and that will certainly not be a problem for the Aristotelian account of patriotism presented here. The chapter argues that patriotism can plausibly, though qualifiedly, be defended as a virtue by stressing patriotism's similarities to another loyalty-exhibiting trait about which Aristotle has quite a bit to say in his most mature work on ethics: the virtue of friendship.

How can patriotism amount to a morally virtuous trait of character instead of a morally problematic trait of character given the obvious dangers involved in patriotic affection? The discussion here will assume, along with other plausible discussions, that patriotism involves a special affection for one's own country, a sense of personal identification with the country, a special concern for the well being of the country, and a willingness to sacrifice, at least to some extent, to promote the country's good (Nathanson 1993, ch. 3; cf. Baron and Rogers 2018).

Patriotism might similarly be directed at a smaller political unit or a community.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. “Extreme Aristotelian Patriotism” distinguishes between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ validations of the virtues of character and rehearses MacIntyre’s ‘extreme’ view of patriotism in the lecture mentioned earlier. “Moderate Patriotism and Baron’s Dilemma” considers Baron’s original criticisms of MacIntyre and her alternative ‘moderate’ account of patriotism; it also introduces the dilemma Baron has pressed against MacIntyre’s Aristotelian account of patriotism. “Aristotelian Friendship and Baron’s Dilemma” explains why Aristotle’s account of perfect friendship does not fall prey to Baron’s dilemma. “The Virtue of Patriotism” develops an account of Aristotelian patriotism modeled on Aristotle’s account of perfect friendship (thus avoiding Baron’s dilemma) and illustrates why the virtue of patriotism cannot coexist with willful forms of ignorance. The account is Aristotelian in the sense just mentioned, even though it is not one defended by Aristotle himself (cf. e.g. Kraut 2017, pp. 294–295). Before getting to the virtue of patriotism, something needs to be said about how one might go about validating, in general, the claim that some particular trait of character is a virtuous trait of character, rather than a morally problematic trait of character or a morally unremarkable one.

## 2. Extreme Aristotelian Patriotism

A philosophical validation of some particular trait of character as a genuine virtue of character can be either ‘internal’ or ‘external.’ An external validation of the virtues of character attempts to demonstrate that possession of the virtues is necessary in order to secure some good, or to avoid some harm, where the good in question, or the harm, is recognizable as such independently of the particular evaluative outlook provided by possession of the virtues themselves (Birondo

2015b, 2017). The validation will thus rely on resources that are ‘external’ to the particular evaluative outlook to be validated. By contrast, an internal validation of the virtues would be one according to which the good unattainable without the virtues, or the harm unavoidable without them, is only recognizable as such from ‘within’ the evaluative outlook provided by possession the virtues themselves (cf. McDowell 1980, 1998; Nussbaum 1995; Hursthouse 1999, 2004; Russell 2009; Birondo 2015b, 2017).

By way of illustration, consider the idea that certain traits of character might amount to virtues of character because they serve a useful *corrective* function (von Wright 1963; Foot 1978; MacIntyre 1981, ch. 12; cf. MacIntyre 1999). According to an external validation of virtues, the harm to be avoided is recognizable as such independently of the specific evaluative outlook provided by the virtues themselves. The virtue of courage, for instance, corrects for the harm of fleeing in battle, the virtue of temperance (or moderation) corrects for the harm of having an extramarital affair, and so on. The canonical statement of the view that the goodness of the virtues resides in their being corrective, in that sense, comes from G. H. von Wright (1963). In remarking on the goodness of the virtues von Wright says that their goodness lie in the fact “that they protect us from harm and *not* that they supply us with some good.” In this passage von Wright says explicitly, in contrast to the ancient Greek context, that when “we call courage, temperance, generosity, or justice virtues, we are using the word ‘virtue’ *very* differently from that meaning of *areté*, which refers to an excellence of its kind” (von Wright 1963, p. 137). One might indeed wonder whether von Wright’s claim about the contemporary usage of the word ‘virtue’ is correct; but in any case, the line of thought below applies to von Wright’s explicit thesis that the goodness of the virtues resides in their being corrective.

The central case needed to illustrate von Wright's thesis here is the case of courage. According to von Wright's, the virtue of courage corrects for the damaging effects of a particular passion, fear. Thus he writes about a man confronting danger:

Fear can paralyse a man so that he becomes unable to do anything to meet the danger. Or it makes him run away panic-stricken. Fear may thus be a *bad thing* due to its influence on a man's conduct. He who has conquered fear has learnt not to let fear, should he feel it, do him harm. He has learnt not to let fear paralyse him, not to get panic-stricken, not to lose his head because of fear, but to act coolly when facing the danger. In short: he has learnt not to let fear obscure his judgment as to what is the right course of action for him. When he has learnt this, he has learnt courage. (von Wright 1963, p. 147–148)

The point that von Wright makes about the corrective nature of courage can of course be generalized, so that the goodness of any particular virtue is that it corrects for the allegedly damaging effects of a particular passion. Thus, von Wright summarizes his view by saying that, in general, the virtuous person always lets his action "be guided by a dispassionate judgment as to which is the right thing for him to do" (von Wright 1963, p. 149). According to von Wright's account, then, the goodness of the virtues is accounted for by their being corrective, by their neutralizing the allegedly harmful influence of particular passions. The corrective function in each case is thought to validate the status of certain traits of character as virtues. But why, one might ask, should such influences be taken to constitute a kind of harm? Why would running away panic-stricken, or acting on a passionate judgment, not be precisely the thing to do, depending on the situation? More generally: Why is the notion of *correction* supposed to be at

home here? (For criticism of the idea that this corrective thesis can provide an extra-ethical validation of the virtues, see Birondo 2015b, 2017; Gottlieb 2009.) What alternative is there to an ‘external’ validation of the virtues?

The harm to be avoided by courage might be thought, by contrast, to be the ‘internal’ harm of cowardice, something that can be recognized *as* a harm (an ethical harm) only from within the evaluative outlook provided by the virtues of character themselves. But this would apparently make the corrective thesis trivial, lacking in any real philosophical substance. The difficulty here obviously lies in explaining how an internal validation could ever amount to a genuine validation, something more than mere theoretical bootstrapping. The problem arises because an internal validation restricts itself to resources available only from within the evaluative outlook whose credentials are under scrutiny. Would this type of ‘internal’ validation necessarily involve an illegitimate kind of argumentative circularity? It would not.

Some headway can be made on this general issue by considering MacIntyre’s defense of patriotism. According to MacIntyre, patriotism comprises two main elements. First, patriotism belongs to a class of loyalty-exhibiting virtues (along with friendship, for instance), but patriotism does not amount to a *mindless* devotion to one’s country that “has no regard at all for the characteristics of that particular nation” (MacIntyre 1984, p. 4). The patriot should be able to cite various merits and achievements of her country that provide reasons for her loyalty to it. Second, the country to which the patriot confers her loyalty must be *her* country: The reasons for *me* to be loyal to *my* country are not reasons for *anyone* to be loyal to it. Moreover, the gratitude that patriots feel toward their countries can be “no more than *partially* supporting reasons, just because what is valued is valued precisely as the merits of *my* country... or as the benefits

received by *me* from *my* country...” What this means is that the particularity of such patriotic loyalty is “essential and ineliminable” (MacIntyre 1984, p. 5).

In contrast to the version of patriotism embraced by what he calls “the morality of liberalism,” MacIntyre emphasizes the historically situated community that allows someone to apprehend the rules of morality at all (MacIntyre 1984, p. 10). He maintains that a genuine form of patriotism can only plausibly be defended by reference to this community-bound morality. This is because patriotism “requires me to regard such contingent social facts as where I was born and what government ruled over that place at that time... as *deciding for me* the question of what virtuous action is,” adding that this is true “at least insofar as it is the virtue of patriotism which is in question” (MacIntyre 1984, p. 5, my emphasis). Indeed, MacIntyre insists 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 or counterposed to what morality required of me. Detached from my community, I will be apt to lose my hold upon all genuine standards of judgment. Loyalty to that community... is on this view a prerequisite for morality. So patriotism and those loyalties cognate to it are not just virtues but central virtues. (MacIntyre 1984, p. 11)

Because of its intimate connection with the community in which someone learns to apprehend moral standards at all, MacIntyre believes that it is only this ‘morality of patriotism’ that can coherently defend patriotism as a virtue. By contrast, the morality of liberalism can only defend a version of what MacIntyre considers ‘emasculated’ patriotism: a version of patriotism constrained by impartial morality.



### 3. Moderate Patriotism and Baron's Dilemma

Two questions naturally emerge about MacIntyre's account of patriotism. First, does patriotism actually emerge from MacIntyre's account as an exemplary trait of character, as a virtue?

Second, can the morality of liberalism plausibly defend patriotism without draining it of substantive content? The answers to those two questions, according to Marcia Baron, are "No" and "Yes."

Consider Baron's answer to the question whether liberalism can offer its own plausible and substantive defense of patriotism. Baron's strategy is to enlist two separate levels at which impartiality might be invoked. At the first level, special attachments of the loyalty-exhibiting type do *not* require impartiality. Exhibiting a special loyalty to one's own country, family, or friends, remains perfectly morally acceptable. One is justified in advancing their interests ahead of the interests of some country to which one does not belong, or ahead of the interests of total strangers. But this is only because, at a second, more abstract level, such special attachments can indeed be justified from the impartial and impersonal perspective of liberal morality. Hence Baron says that patriotism could "be recognized as a virtue by a moral theory which emphasizes impartiality and impersonality, as long as that theory doesn't require impartiality and impersonality at level one" (Baron 1989, p. 277; cf. Baron and Rogers 2018). Baron argues that this two-level account does not drain her conception of patriotism of substantive content. But it does leave her account 'emasculated,' in MacIntyre's sense, since the patriot's loyalty remains constrained by liberal morality: the partiality exhibited on level one must be certified as morally permissible by the 'liberalism' of level two. How damaging is this to Baron's account?

The question turns us to Baron's main criticism of MacIntyre. For Baron insists that patriotism, unconstrained by impartiality, looks downright vicious. While MacIntyre insists that a patriot have reasons for her loyalty, so that her loyalty is not mindless, Baron maintains that, "In another respect it is mindless." For it is, in her view, overly partial: "On any matters which concern her country, the question for MacIntyre's patriot will be 'What is best for my country?'. Considerations about the effect on other countries, or on individuals, are ignored" (Baron 1989, p. 279; cf. Nathanson 1993, p. 79-84). Now the criticism invoked here might, as Baron realizes, strike someone as unfair. Perhaps MacIntyre could allow that loyalty to one's country only amounts to *a* reason (not necessarily decisive) for supporting it. Other considerations (for instance about the rights of foreigners) might outweigh the reasons of patriotism. Baron anticipates this response but nevertheless rejects it (cf. Oldenquist 1982; Nathanson 1993, pp. 109–110). She does so because she thinks that the only way of weighing the interests of my country against the interests of people outside of it is by appealing to an 'external' standpoint, one that transcends the particularity and contingency of my own community. This would have to be, Baron thinks, the standpoint of impartial and impersonal morality. She therefore issues what we might call *Baron's dilemma*:

Either [1] patriotism isn't a virtue, because it doesn't allow the patriot to take into account... considerations other than those of his community's interests, *or* [2] it allows this and in so doing recognizes it to be right to adopt an 'external' standpoint, and to try to judge impersonally and impartially. (Baron 1989, p. 282)

Baron therefore concludes that avoiding ‘emasculated’ patriotism is impossible, unless one abandons the very idea – as she thinks MacIntyre’s account ultimately does – that patriotism is a virtue. In the remainder of this chapter I want to highlight the ways in which an Aristotelian account of friendship escapes Baron’s dilemma, and therefore offers a model for an account of patriotism that would constitute a plausible and nuanced Aristotelian alternative.

#### 4. Aristotelian Friendship and Baron’s Dilemma

In his most mature work on ethics, the *Nicomachean Ethics* (hereafter *NE*), Aristotle devotes significant space to articulating his conception of perfect friendship (Books VIII-IX). He does so because he thinks friendship contributes to the best and most worthwhile type of human life – what he calls ‘*eudaimonia*,’ usually translated as ‘happiness’ or ‘flourishing’ – friendship being a virtue or implying virtue (in Greek: *esti gar aretê tis ê met’ aretês*: *NE* 1155a4). Perfect friendships differ from friendships secured for mutual advantage or mutual pleasure, since the best type of friendship, on his view, stems from a mutual recognition of moral goodness. While it is sometimes thought that character-based friendships are only available to those who attain perfect virtue, there are strong textual reasons for thinking that this best type of friendship can also exist between people of imperfect or unequal virtue (cf. Cooper 1980). First, Aristotle discusses under this class of friendships cases in which the friendship is based on an epistemological mistake: someone might discover that her friend does not in fact possess the good character that she thought he had (*NE* 1165b13). Second, as John Cooper has argued, this type of friendship can exist in cases in which a virtuous person clear-sightedly recognizes that her friend is only good in some respects, just as she might recognize that someone is a

pleasurable drinking companion, but not a pleasurable tennis partner (Cooper 1980, pp. 305–308). Third, when Aristotle discusses friendships that are unequal in virtue, he recognizes that a friendship might be dissolved by the eventual maturation of only one partner’s character, apparently suggesting that both partners in a character-based friendship might initially be considerably less than fully virtuous (*NE* 1162b6-13). Perfect virtue is therefore not a requirement of a character-based friendship.

Friendships based on a mutual recognition of moral goodness also exhibit certain characteristics. Time spent together will build trust. This time together will benefit each partner in the friendship. And they will derive pleasure from their association. But the most important aspect of character-based friendships, for this discussion, is that each partner exhibits the attitude of wishing well (*eunoia*) for her friend. When someone exhibits this attitude, she wishes good things for her friend, trying to bring them about where she is able. And she does these things for her friend’s own sake (*NE* 1157b32-34, 1166a3-5), not for some ulterior reason. Aristotle says that the two friends must be “mutually recognized as bearing goodwill and wishing well to each other for one of the aforesaid reasons”, where the “aforesaid reasons” are the friend’s being, to one degree or another, advantageous, pleasant, or good (*NE* 1156a3-5). Cooper helpfully glosses this passage by saying that “a character-friend wishes his friend to prosper because he recognizes his good character and thinks it is fitting for those who are morally good to prosper” (Cooper 1980, 311). Notice that, aside from social contingencies like the amount of time spent together, this recognition of someone’s good character is *the* basis for wishing a friend well and wanting to do well by her. So without this recognitional basis, one friend’s wishing well to the other might eventually evaporate. This account does seem to explain the allegiance that someone might feel toward her friends. And since the number of friends that she can have is obviously limited, it

also explains her special devotion to them as opposed to anyone, even if the others are similarly (or even more fully) virtuous. Does this account of friendship fall victim to Baron's dilemma?

On the first horn of that dilemma, friendship so construed will not amount to a virtue at all, since, according to Baron's line of thinking, a virtuous person would not be able to take into account considerations other than those of her friend's interests. But while a virtuous person will wish her friend well and try to promote her friend's interests, what she is prepared to do in order to promote such interests is obviously constrained both by her own character and, given the account above, by the character of her friend. After all, those are the two main ingredients that constituted their mutual attraction in the first place. Consider how this might happen with respect to each of these elements.

First, what a morally good person is prepared to do for her friend is notably constrained by, for instance, her sense of justice. This sense of justice would explain certain acts of partiality (for instance, helping a friend in need rather than a stranger). But it would also constrain that partiality, in order to avoid, say, acts of nepotism. Hiring my friend over a more qualified candidate rather obviously enacts an injustice, even though it promotes my friend's interests according to a crude understanding of what those interests amount to. Other Aristotelian virtues (for instance temperance and courage) also operate as constraints on the actions that a virtuous person will do in the name of promoting her friend's interests. This way of interpreting Aristotle's account of friendship means that my character-based friendship with someone emerges as a virtue only to the extent that I possess the other virtues of character that prevent my loyalty from amounting to a disposition merely to maximize my friend's interests (again, according to a crude understanding of what those interests amount to; cf. Foot 1985).

Second, the goodness of my friend's character might genuinely begin to deteriorate. After his divorce he might come to be more cynical, increasingly misogynistic, and certainly less generous and forgiving. I may therefore stop enjoying the goodness that I once saw in him, since it no longer seems to exist. In that case, my willingness to promote his interests (by my lights) hinges on whether I think his downward spiral is hopeless, or, alternatively, whether he is just weathering some rough flying. But there is clearly a point of no return. This explains why Aristotle says that "what is evil neither can be loved nor should," and that one's friends might become "incurable in their wickedness." But that if they *are* capable of being "reformed," then "one should rather come to the assistance of their character" (*NE* 1165b15-21). Not that it would be in any way strange or unnatural (*atopon*) for someone to break off a friendship of this sort: "for it was not to a friend of this sort that he was a friend; when his friend has changed, therefore, and he is unable to save him, he gives him up" (*NE* 1165b21-23). Hence Lewis must be mistaken when he claims that: "Friendship (as the ancients saw) can be a school of virtue; but also (as they did not see) a school of vice" (Lewis 1988 [1960], p. 80). It seems that Aristotle, at least, certainly did recognize this. What all of this demonstrates is that, on Aristotle's account, both one's own character and the character of one's friend constrain one's wishing well to that friend. They also therefore constrain one's loyalty to that friend. Hence a virtuous person's *eunoia* is not, as Baron's line of thinking seems to suggest, like the love of the Christian God: It is not unbounded.

On the second horn of Baron's dilemma, friendship emerges as a virtue only if it takes into account, as the above conception of friendship clearly does, considerations other than those of the friend's interests. But it can do so, Baron suggests, only by recognizing that it is "right to adopt an 'external' standpoint, and to try to judge impersonally and impartially" (Baron 1989, p.

282). Has the Aristotelian conception of friendship somehow enlisted the standpoint of what MacIntyre excoriates as the morality of liberalism? Has it enlisted a standpoint ‘external’ to the evaluative outlook provided by the virtues themselves, replete as those virtues are, in certain ways, with particularity? It has not.

What justice requires of me with respect to this specific friendship, remains something that I can determine only from the perspective of the character I actually have, or from the advice of someone whom *I* trust to be more discerning than I am of the requirements of friendship and justice. In either case, the specifics of the relationship will be indispensable; and the extent to which I embody the intellectual virtue of ‘practical wisdom’ (*phronêsis*) will be crucial.<sup>2</sup> No attempt has been made to determine what my friendship requires by reference to some good that the friendship allows me to attain, or some harm that it allows me to avoid, which is recognizable as such independently of the perspective afforded to me by the specifics of this very friendship and of the virtuous dispositions that are its basis. The good unattainable without friendship here is *eudaimonia*; and *eudaimonia* is rational activity in accordance with virtue (*NE* 1098a16-19). Hence the good that is unattainable without friendship is a life of virtuous activity, something that is not recognizable *as* a good (of course) independently of the particular evaluative outlook provided by the virtues. Nevertheless, such friendships do not require me to regard the social contingencies that shape my friendships as “*deciding for me*” the question of what virtuous action is (as MacIntyre says about community). This account of friendship can therefore avoid *both* over-partiality *and* the ‘external’ standpoint of the morality of liberalism. Character-based friendship emerges as a virtue of character when underwritten by other virtuous aspects of the two friends’ characters. In this way, an Aristotelian account of friendship can escape Baron’s dilemma.

## 5. The Virtue of Patriotism

This suggests that Aristotle's conception of friendship can serve as a model for a plausible account of the virtue of patriotism. However, it should be emphasized that the suggestion here is *not* that patriotism is a form of friendship. To be sure, Aristotle's own discussion of friendship tries to stretch the traditional Greek concept of friendship (*philia*) to cover relationships between citizens and rulers, by analogy with his already strained attempt, in keeping with contemporary Greek usage, to use that one concept to cover relationships between family members (*NE* VIII.10-11). In a modern nation-state, however, someone's patriotic affection for her country remains, in the vast majority of cases, unrecognized by her country. Nor can we plausibly pin down a sense in which her country wishes well specifically *for her*, for her own sake, and so on. Therefore, in a modern nation-state patriotism cannot ultimately be any form of Aristotelian friendship, since the affection would not be reciprocal, as Aristotle's account of friendship requires. (In the case of a smaller political unit or community, the analogy with Aristotelian character-based friendship would be stronger.) Despite that point of disanalogy, patriotism emerges as a virtue when exhibited by a virtuous person towards a country or community that is also morally good. In this and in other respects, the virtue of patriotism parallels Aristotle's conception of friendship.

First, the patriotic person, like the virtuous friend, wishes well for the object of her loyalty. As in friendship, the other virtuous aspects of her character constrain such well wishing and its manifestation in actions supportive of its object. Since someone's country will of course be good only in certain respects, her own good character serves to temper the enthusiasm with



which she supports her country when it engages in morally dubious actions or policies, possibly indeed culminating in a sense of shame (Baron and Rogers 2018, p. 11–13). Hence there is no reason to suspect, as Baron does about MacIntyre’s patriot, that the virtuous person’s wishing well for her country can only take into account the interests of her country and its inhabitants, as opposed to the interests of those outside her country. Such a blinkered perspective runs contrary to the virtuous perspective that, we are supposing, she fully possesses. Indeed, it may be that an appropriately patriotic action considers the interests of one’s fellow citizens and the international community over a merely crude understanding of the interests of one’s own country, or anyway of the interests of its current rulers. For example, beginning in 2013, the U.S. citizen Edward Snowden released thousands of classified documents exposing the massive surveillance operations of U.S. intelligence agencies, even on U.S. citizens, claiming that, “My sole motive is to inform the public as to that which is done in their name and that which is done against them” (*The Guardian*, 9 June 2013). In such a case (and bracketing further developments) the object of one’s patriotic loyalty can indeed be thought to be one’s country, bolstered or underwritten especially by the merits of its traditions and legislative ideals, rather than by the ideals and interests of the country’s current rulers, or by a crude understanding of the country’s current interests (cf. Rorty 1998). According to an ‘internal’ conception of the virtues, what counts as a merely crude understanding of the country’s interests must be assessed, here as elsewhere, only *from* a substantive evaluative outlook. Hence a good question remains about whether patriotism falls short of being a virtue in someone whose other aspects of character fail adequately to constrain her loyalty to (and her wishing well for) her country. In that case her patriotism falls *well* short of being a virtue.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the extent to which patriotism remains a virtue in any

particular person hinges, for this very reason, on the extent to which she possesses other relevant virtues. Quickness is no virtue in a blind horse (Foot 1978).

Second, patriotism seems also to be constrained by the moral goodness of the object of one's loyalty. I can of course remain loyal to my country in spite of its moral shortcomings, just as I can remain loyal to my friend in spite of the moral failings in her. But there are limits. The limits might not extend to severe injustices committed against people outside one's country. They might not extend to severe injustices inflicted against one's fellow citizens, or against oneself, injustices that betray the thought that living well (*eu zên*) is the reason for the state's existence (Aristotle, *Politics* 1280b39). In his popular discussion of the four loves, Lewis makes an observation in the nearby vicinity. He says that when rulers are "wicked" they may "by propaganda encourage a demoniac condition of our sentiments in order to secure our acquiescence in their wickedness. If they are good, they could do the opposite. That is one reason why we private persons should keep a wary eye on the health or disease of our own love for our country" (Lewis 1988 [1960], p. 23). Of course determining the appropriate limits of one's loyalty (or the health or disease of one's love for country) will again require the possession and exercise of practical wisdom (*phronêsis*), since no appeal has been made, here or elsewhere, to Baron's 'external' standpoint. But the virtuous person still cannot, and should not, remain loyal to what is evil (*NE* 1165b15). Patriotism is no virtue in an incurably unjust state.

This last point differs from the point made in the first horn of Baron's dilemma. There the point was that any patriotism unconstrained by an 'external' standpoint is no virtue. Here the point is the opposite. Precisely because ethical considerations constrain the workings of patriotism (for instance, about the goodness of the object of one's loyalty), patriotism is, in many cases, very far from being a virtue; but the considerations in question need not appeal to anything

external to the virtuous person's properly formed evaluative outlook. Someone's loyalty to her country might be largely or exclusively based on the perceived merits of its apparent military invincibility. But it might be that an honest history of the uses of that military power, a history of which she might be only culpably ignorant, reveals that her loyalty to country, exhibited on that basis, shows a grave defect of character. In that case her patriotism falls well short of being a virtue. It will perhaps be useful to elaborate upon this point with more detailed examples.

In order to do so, the remainder of this section considers the connections between patriotism and poverty in the United States, as recounted by sociologist Francesco Duina in his helpful book, *Broke and Patriotic: Why Poor Americans Love Their Country* (Duina 2018). Duina characterizes patriotism as "an intense love of [one's] country" (Duina 2018, p. 3), but also as "a sense of pride in one's country." That is, patriotism includes a sense of pride that, on Duina's view, "contains elements of approval, recognition of the goodness and possibly greatness of one's country, and beliefs in the superiority or higher standing of one's country relative to others" (Duina 2018, p. 16; on the different senses of what 'higher standing' might mean here, cf. Braun 2017). Duina defines 'poor' individuals as those who belong to the most economically disadvantaged class in society (Duina 2018, p. 2). He notes that around forty-seven million Americans (15%) live below the poverty line, and that in 2012 UNICEF reported the U.S. to have "the second-highest rate of child poverty among the world's developed countries" (Duina 2018, p. 6). In spite of these high levels of poverty, Duina observed that America's poor "are more patriotic than the poor in almost all other advanced countries in the world, even though the latter are in many ways better off," for instance in terms of social services (Duina 2018, p. 2). How do these patriotic Americans reconcile their patriotic affections, their love and pride for their country, with their own poverty?

The reasons are sometimes shaky. Among the reasons for their patriotic affection toward the United States, Duina observed the following as common among America's poor: a desire to rationalize their unfortunate situation by celebrating American society, and various forms of ignorance, for instance about U.S. military history and the relative quality of life in the U.S. in comparison to other developed countries (Duina 2018, p. 41–42). Salient examples here come from what Duina's respondents generally perceived to be United States' exceptional generosity, its willingness to intervene in service to others, and its commitment to due process of law. On the topic of generosity, one of the respondents, Denzel, said that "the United States does a lot of things that are good for Ethiopian kids. ... What other country is trying to help Ethiopians? ... You don't see commercials on TV where Germany is trying to help Ethiopians; you don't see China on TV where they're trying to help Ethiopians; you don't see that" (Duina 2018, p. 58). Such faith in the objectivity of U.S. media outlets, obviously regrettable, would delight today's purveyors of disinformation.

On the U.S. as a global savior, the comments of one Vietnam War veteran are especially noteworthy. Jeff in Billings, Montana, observed that "while I was over there, you know, I seen a lot of stuff that wasn't right, but for the most part I just felt that we needed to be over there." Duina writes:

"You felt that way?" He replied with conviction: "Yeah, because those people couldn't defend themselves. ... It's like when we fought in Korea, you know." This made me wonder what he would say about America's defeat in Vietnam, so I interjected, "Korea, well Korea we, in the end, we cut in half, but the Vietnam War, the communists, didn't they in the end run over the whole country? Jeff's reply surprised me and was

emblematic of many of the conversations I had, which were for the most part quite coherent but occasionally veered into significant confusion or factual inaccuracies:

“Yeah, they tried to. But they didn’t. There’s still a separation.” (Duina 2018, p. 61)

Duina’s book is full of such examples: forms of ignorance that should be deeply saddening to those of us from the U.S. who are fortunate enough to be better off and better informed than some of the respondents here. To be sure, some of their mistaken beliefs are traceable to the generally regrettable state of public education in the U.S. (like other countries around the world) – for instance the beliefs that Japan is a communist country, that Canada is like a dictatorship, and that citizens can have their tongues cut out in Germany for criticizing the government (Duina 2018, ch. 4).

But some of these beliefs cannot be explained in that way. Some of the ignorance involved here is culpable ignorance (at least in part), because it demonstrates a willfulness that is predicated on a need not to know and a motivation not to learn. Such willful forms of ignorance are obviously not restricted to one socio-economic class (Mills 2007). Nevertheless, an example from Duina’s study illustrating the *active* element in such ignorance is worth quoting at length. Duina relates this exchange as follows:

When talking to Hubert and his girlfriend, Katie, in reply to my suggestion that in European countries and Canada the poor get more benefits from the government and they are, therefore, able to do more, Katie flatly rejected the ideas by saying, “No, I don’t believe it, I don’t believe it!” “You don’t believe it?” I replied. “No,” exclaimed Hubert, and then added that there “they worship the president and all that. Here you have the

freedom of speech.” I could have pushed back a bit more but decided instead to switch angles: “Yeah, yeah, okay. But if they give you more benefits, I mean...” Katie stood her ground: “I don’t believe it,” while Hubert interjected, “Probably not. America is number one. Everybody wanna come here.” (Duina 2018, p. 73)

This example illustrates something essential about the ignorance involved here: that the patriotism of the U.S. poor often reflects a difficult and even heart-rending form of hope, a continuing belief in one of the only things left for economically destitute citizens to believe in. As one of the respondents put it, to stop believing in the U.S. would be to stop believing in herself. There is something similar that shows up in Lewis’s discussion. He observes that although patriotism based on national fictions is regrettable in some ways, “who can condemn what clearly makes many people, at many important moments, behave so much better than they would have done without its help?” (Lewis 1988 [1960], p. 25). Such patriotism is not entirely bad. But as Lewis hints but does not ultimately say, patriotism based on willful and deep-seated ignorance about the actual merits of one’s country will fall well short of being a virtue, because it remains sadly disconnected from the reality of what one’s country has become, or what it has always in fact been (see e.g. Mendoza 2016). What this line of thinking most importantly shows is that the virtue of patriotism cannot coexist with an epistemology of ignorance (Mills 2007; Polhaus 2012; Fricker 2016).

For this reason, possession of the virtue of patriotism will motivate its possessor to seek honest histories, and accurate contemporary accounts, of the actual practices and policies of her country. Lewis remarks on something similar in the case of the Christian church: that affection for the church can be used “to justify the most abominable actions,” a “terrible” subject that

would require a separate book. He elaborates: “If ever the book which I am not going to write is written it must be the full confession by Christendom of Christendom’s specific contribution to the sum of human cruelty and treachery. Large areas of ‘the World’ will not hear us until we have publicly disowned much of our past. Why should they?” (Lewis 1988 [1960], p. 30). The same can be said of many countries that exist today, such as the U.S. and other Western democracies. Large areas of world will not hear anything the U.S. has to say until it has publicly disowned much of its past, as well as its current attempts to justify the most abominable actions (cf. e.g. Zea 1992 [1957], ch. 8). Why should they?

## 6. Summary and Future Directions

Despite these different cases of patriotism gone awry, the aim of this chapter has been to articulate a conception of patriotism as a virtue, a conception that makes no appeal to an ‘external’ standpoint. This account of patriotism proceeds only from within the evaluative outlook provided by possession of the other virtues of character. It relies on substantive conceptions of justice, courage, temperance, and so on. But the account that emerges is far from trivial. It articulates substantive constraints on patriotism from two sources: the moral character of the patriot and the moral goodness of the object of her loyalty. This approach therefore offers a plausible alternative to the ‘extreme’ and ‘moderate’ positions discussed previously, and perhaps also to the other positions that constitute the recent terrain surrounding the topic of patriotism. Future work on Aristotelian patriotism would do well to consider the idea that patriotism remains a ‘burdened’ virtue for many contemporary patriots, that is, a virtuous trait of character that, under current conditions of social oppression, tends to hamper, rather than to

enhance, the overall flourishing of the patriot's life (Tessman 2005). As for the approach defended here, patriotic activity just is what, with respect to the state, a good human life ultimately is, at least when such activity is done by a virtuous person towards a country or community that is also morally good. That combination is less common than generally thought, but it is also something that continues to be well worth our trying to achieve.

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<sup>1</sup> The idea here is not to uphold Lewis’s discussion of love as exemplary – certainly not the “clubman’s crassness” about women and homosexuality which, as Bernard Williams rightly says in a 1962 book review, “make for painful reading” (2014, p. 25) – but rather to emphasize that friendship has long been recognized as a form of love. Lewis’s views on friendship and patriotism will appear elsewhere in this chapter, mainly for purposes of illustration; Lewis does not connect friendship with patriotism, which he discusses in separate chapters, while this chapter highlights a connection between them. In this and other ways, this chapter substantially develops the paper upon which it is based, Birondo (2015a).

<sup>2</sup> This conception of friendship and the attendant conception of patriotism will thus remain sufficiently undiluted to avoid the charge of being insubstantial or “watery.” See Nussbaum 2013, ch. 8; the allusion is to Aristotle’s *Politics*, 1262b15-23.

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<sup>3</sup> The word ‘patriotism’ can be used exclusively to denote the virtuous trait of character that avoids both excessive and deficient loyalty to one’s country or also to denote a disposition that involves excessive loyalty to one’s country. The broader sense seems appropriate here, in spite of the Aristotelian context, because it seems to accord better with normal usage. Since I do indeed take it as obvious that wishing well for one’s country and its projects need not be excessive, this conception of patriotism can answer the objections that patriotism involves a disposition toward ‘bad faith’ (Keller 2005) and that patriotism is ethically analogous to racism (Gomberg 1990; cf. Primoratz 2008, p. 221).