JOHN KLEINIG, SIMON KELLER, AND IGOR PRIMORATZ

THE ETHICS OF PATRIOTISM

A DEBATE

WILEY Blackwell

The Ethics of Patriotism

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Introduction

1 Patriotism and Morality

Are you patriotic? Should you be patriotic? Should you encourage others to be patriotic? These questions provoke conflicting reactions among different people. For some, patriotism is unquestionably a high moral virtue, and to call a person a patriot – better still, a *true* patriot – is the greatest of compliments. For others, patriotism is an object of suspicion, derided as ignorant and feared as warlike. Any attempt to explain the morality of patriotism encounters several deeply contested problems, both theoretical and practical. The morality of patriotism is intimately connected with controversies concerning such topics as character and motivation, human nature, citizenship, the role of the state, political identity and obligation, and the basic structure of morality.

Disagreements about patriotism rest partly upon disagreements about how humans think and behave and about the reality of the conditions we face in the actual world. There is much to be learned about patriotism through empirical studies in history, psychology, sociology, and political science. But the question of whether we *should* be patriotic is an ethical question, requiring philosophical investigation. To evaluate patriotism, we need to achieve a better understanding of the concept of patriotism, so that we know what we are talking about; we need to discriminate between different possible kinds of patriotism; and we need to decide whether patriotism is a moral virtue or vice and whether it is morally required, morally optional, or morally prohibited. We need to decide

The Ethics of Patriotism: A Debate, First Edition. John Kleinig, Simon Keller and Igor Primoratz.

what kinds of people we should want to be and in what kind of world we should want to live.

The ethical issues raised by patriotism are varied and far-reaching. Patriotism has ethically significant consequences: patriotism, or a lack of it, can explain why people support and fight in a war, why an election is won or lost, why people perform acts of generosity and self-sacrifice, and why a state has one character rather than another. Whether or not a person is patriotic can reveal much about her character: it can help determine her values, her patterns of loyalty, and her self-conception. Considerations of patriotism arise frequently in debates about politics and public policy: patriotic and antipatriotic sentiments influence debates about state boundaries, for example, and about education policy, immigration policy, language policy, and foreign policy.

The debate about the ethics of patriotism is linked to some thorny puzzles in moral and political theory. The debate brings into sharp relief some foundational disagreements between liberals, communitarians, and others about the nature of justice and the relationship between the state and the individual. It is also a site at which liberals of different stripes uncover and play out their disagreements: disagreements, for example, over whether liberal principles hold between or only within states, whether liberalism must lead to cosmopolitanism, and whether liberal principles apply to personal as well as institutional actions.

Patriotism also offers a difficult case for views about the moral significance of special relationships. Does it really matter, morally, that someone is my parent, my child, my friend, or my compatriot? Is the perspective of morality essentially impartial? How can we justify special concern for our friends and family members – and does this justification extend to special concern for our countries? If we can give an ethical defense of patriotism, must we also defend nationalism? Is there an ethically relevant difference between patriotism and racism? All of these questions are tougher than first appearances suggest, and how we answer them reveals our views about our moral duties to each other, about what it means to be a moral agent, and about what things in life are ultimately of value.

2 Our Debate about Patriotism

This book presents a conversation between defenders of three different views about the ethics of patriotism. Each of the three authors of the book – that is "us": Kleinig, Keller, and Primoratz – has developed a view about patriotism over several years, in several different publications (some relevant earlier work is Keller 2005, 2007a, chap. 3 and 4, 2007b, 2007c, 2013; Kleinig 2008; Primoratz 2000, 2002, 2006, 2009). Kleinig is an advocate of patriotism, believing that there is a central, characteristic form of patriotism that is ethically defensible

and desirable. Keller is an opponent of patriotism, arguing that patriotism by its nature is unattractive and dangerous. Primoratz defends a moderate position, arguing that some forms of patriotism are morally impermissible, one form of patriotism is unobjectionable though not positively good, and one form of patriotism is good and sometimes morally required.

The goal of the book is to explain our different views in accessible and self-contained forms and then to see how they fare under criticism. The book begins with three longer essays, in which each of us in turn states his basic case. Then, we each give a reply to the other two authors, and we each have a brief piece in conclusion.

We want the book to serve as a helpful introduction to the debate about patriotism, identifying and testing the major positions and issues in the debate. But we also intend to take the debate forward. By exposing ourselves to sustained criticism from other perspectives, we each settle upon more developed and nuanced versions of our own views and of our complaints about others. The book also, we hope, demonstrates the importance of the debate about patriotism, showing that patriotism should be a central concern in moral and political philosophy. The topic of the ethics of patriotism brings together many different concerns that arise in other debates within philosophy, but it also raises its own distinctive set of questions and puzzles.

The remainder of this introduction sets up and summarizes our debate about patriotism. It gives an overview of the main positions and questions in the debate, and along the way, it explains how each of us fits in.

3 Defining Patriotism

Perhaps the most frustrating feature of everyday arguments about patriotism is that it is difficult to know whether everyone is talking about the same thing. When you offer an opinion about patriotism, the response you meet is often of the form, "Well, if that's what you mean by 'patriotism' then I agree, but of course there are lots of other things that 'patriotism' could mean." If you criticize patriotism, you may get the response, "Right, but you're talking about jingoistic patriotism; for me, real patriotism is about caring for the people around you." If you defend patriotism, you may be told, "Right, but you're really just talking about being a good citizen; in the real world, patriotism means more than that – patriotic people will fight for their country even when it is in the wrong." The same move is often made in the philosophical literature. It is common to find philosophers accusing each other of talking about only one kind of patriotism, or of failing to talk about *genuine* patriotism.[1]

It can be tempting, as a result, to think that the debate over patriotism is just a debate about how to use words. Everyone agrees that we should be good

citizens and look after each other and care about our own countries, you might say, and everyone agrees that we should not be warlike or racist and should not seek to dominate others. So, you might conclude, the important questions are settled, and the only question remaining is whether we take our shared view to be an endorsement or a rejection of *patriotism*. There is something to this complaint. Debates about what does and does not count as *patriotism* or as *genuine patriotism* can be tiresome. Yet, there is much more to the debate than simply a dispute over how to use a word.

First, and less importantly, debates over how to use a word are often more substantial than they seem. When we argue about what truly counts as *democracy*, for example, or as *freedom* or *equality* or *evil* or *courage*, we often do more than simply offer competing suggestions about how to speak. We may offer different strategies for making more precise a vague but shared value, or we may offer different conceptions of a shared concept – in one way or another, we may play out substantial moral disagreements. The same, arguably, is sometimes true about disagreements over how to use the term "patriotism." In the background, perhaps, is a shared but elusive sense of what relationship should hold between the individual and the state, and by offering different claims about the true meaning of "patriotism," we offer competing ideals of that relationship. Or perhaps we have a shared but vague sense of how a person of a certain kind characteristically thinks and behaves, and in offering different definitions of "patriotism," we make competing attempts to capture the mindset of that kind of person. If that is what is going on when we offer competing stories about the meaning of "patriotism," then we do more than just argue about how to apply a word.

Second, and more importantly, even when definitional issues are avoided, extensive substantive disagreement over the ethics of patriotism remains. As it turns out, there are certain ways of thinking about and acting toward a country that are well defined and widely recognized and whose ethical status is clearly at issue in the debate over patriotism – certainly in the debate that takes place in this book. Even where adversaries in the debate offer different stories about the nature of patriotism, there is enough common ground to allow them to engage in well-founded and unambiguous ethical argument.

The three of us, in our contributions in this book, do not agree on any straightforward definition of patriotism, and we in fact offer different views about how such a definition would look and whether it is attainable or needed. Nevertheless, we share broad agreement about what we are talking about when we talk about patriotism. There are three crucial defining features of patriotism that we all accept, and that provide more than enough ground for our substantive disagreements to be engaged.

To begin with, we all agree that patriotism is a species of love or loyalty and that the object of patriotism – the entity to which the patriot's love and loyalty

are directed – is a country. The patriot loves her country, or is loyal to her country. This point of agreement has several consequences. We agree that patriotism is different from nationalism, because the object of nationalism is not a country but rather a nation – a people united by shared ethnic and historical ties. We do not draw a moralized distinction between patriotism and nationalism; we do not say, as some do, that nationalism is by definition bad and patriotism is by definition good (see, e.g., Orwell 1953). We do not think that you can be a *patriot* of a mere city or region or of a religion or an ideology; you can be a patriot only of a country. And we agree that patriotic commitment need not involve commitment to a particular government or its policies. The patriot can be loyal to a country but not its government; to that extent, a patriot can be a dissident.

The second crucial point on which we agree is that if you are a patriot, then you have a special concern for your own country, meaning that you favor your country over other countries. Further, we agree that the patriot's special concern for country must involve a preparedness to act. Under the right circumstances, the patriot will do things for her country that she would not do for other countries.

Special patriotic concern for country, we agree, is usually expressed as a concern for the country's interests, so that the patriot is committed to the country's defense, health, and prosperity. This is the kind of special concern involved in "worldly patriotism," as Primoratz calls it. But patriotic special concern can take other forms and in particular can be a concern with the country's moral performance. The patriot may be concerned to see her country develop just laws, policies, and institutions and to see it act rightly on the international stage, without having the same concern for the moral performance of other countries. This concern underlies "ethical patriotism": the kind of patriotism that Primoratz finds desirable.

The third point on which we all agree is that patriotism involves, by its nature, identification with your country, and identification of a fairly significant kind. If you are a patriot, then you see your country as *yours*, and you take your relationship with your country to *matter*. You cannot be an Australian patriot, for example, unless you see yourself as an Australian, in a sense that makes your connection with Australia an important part of who you really are. Each of the three of us has his own way of describing patriotic identification with country, but the crucial shared claim is that patriotism makes demands on a person's self-conception and her view of her own character.

Our agreement on these three crucial features of patriotism is enough to generate several ethical questions on which we take different stands. Is a country something that merits or rightfully demands loyalty? Is it morally acceptable to care more about your own country than about other countries? Is identification with country sensible? Is it permitted? Is it mistaken?

Beyond our agreement over these three crucial elements of patriotism, we disagree at several points about what else patriotism involves. Kleinig delves most deeply into the mode of identification with country that patriotism can (or should) involve, emphasizing the valuing of a relationship with a country; a patriot, says Kleinig, values her relationship with her country for its own sake. Keller defends a relatively restrictive characterization of patriotism, arguing that patriotism always includes, in addition to the features listed earlier, a sense that the country is, in some specified respect, a good country, worthy of serious loyalty. Primoratz gives a relatively permissive definition of patriotism – as involving love of country, identification with country, and a special concern for country – and focuses most of his discussion on distinguishing between different kinds of patriotism. It is important to note, by the way, that each of us has arguments for his story about the nature of patriotism. We do not simply offer different stipulations.

How a philosopher defines patriotism, and indeed whether she defines patriotism and how she thinks an investigation into the nature of patriotism should proceed, can depend on what kind of view about the ethics of patriotism she wants to defend. Sometimes, an ethical argument about patriotism needs a complete definition of patriotism to get started, but not always.

Kleinig's main task is to show that one central though modest form of patriotism is virtuous; he does not claim that patriotism is virtuous in all its manifestations. His defense of patriotism consists largely in showing that there is a kind of patriotism that is an instance of a more general virtuous form of loyalty. As a result, his strategy for characterizing patriotism is to describe it by analogy with certain other kinds of loyalty, and his argument does not require him to offer an all-purpose definition of patriotism. If he can show that this kind of loyalty is virtuous, and that it qualifies as a kind of patriotism, then he succeeds. Whether there are other kinds of patriotism, and what else exactly counts as a kind of patriotism, is not so important.

Keller wants to make a more sweeping claim about patriotism, arguing that patriotism as such is unattractive and dangerous. He takes himself, then, to be talking about patriotism in all its forms. Yet even his argument does not require him to give a full and final definition of patriotism. He sees patriotism as a complex psychological phenomenon, like love or happiness, difficult to define completely. But, he says, there are certain features that are present in all forms of patriotism and that together are enough to show that patriotism leads to an ugly and dangerous form of self-deception. So, he says, patriotism in all its forms tends to be ugly and dangerous – whatever else might be true of it.

Of the three of us, Primoratz is the only one who seeks to offer necessary and sufficient conditions for patriotism. This, again, is appropriate, given his argument. Primoratz aims to give an ethical overview of patriotism. His strategy is

to draw ethically salient boundaries between different kinds of patriotism, so as to divide patriotism into its morally prohibited, morally neutral, and morally obligatory forms. It is more important for Primoratz, then, that he is able to draw all forms of patriotism within his taxonomy and that he is able to distinguish clearly between attitudes to country that do and do not deserve the name "patriotic."

4 Views about the Ethics of Patriotism

The debate about how to define patriotism takes some time and effort to negotiate, but it is possible, eventually, to move on and to engage in more straightforwardly ethical enquiry. A patriot, on any plausible definition, is a person who displays certain ways of thinking and acting. Patriotism, then, is a feature of persons and a feature of personal character. From an ethical point of view, there are two sorts of evaluation that can be made of an aspect of character. We can evaluate an aspect of character using *virtue-oriented* categories, asking whether it is good or bad and whether it is a virtue or a vice. Or, we can evaluate an aspect of character using *deontological* categories, asking whether it is morally required, morally optional, or morally forbidden.

When we evaluate patriotism using virtue-oriented categories, we ask whether it is a virtue, a vice, or something in between. Looking at (a given kind of) patriotism, we ask such questions as whether it is an attractive or unattractive feature of character, how it fits with various other traits of character, and whether a person who displays it tends to make her society better or worse. Our focus is on the question of what kinds of people we should be.

When we evaluate patriotism using deontological categories, in contrast, we talk about moral duties, permissions, and prohibitions; we ask whether patriotism is morally required, morally optional, or morally forbidden. The deontological mode of evaluation leads us toward questions about what can legitimately be demanded of a person. We ask such questions as whether the citizen has an obligation to be patriotic, whether patriotism invades anybody's rights, and whether requiring or forbidding patriotism invades the individual's autonomy.

The virtue-oriented categories cut across the deontological categories, making available several different possible views about the moral status of patriotism. We may agree that patriotism is a virtue but disagree about whether or not it is a morally required virtue; perhaps it is good to be patriotic, but not compulsory. We may agree that patriotism is a vice but disagree about whether it is morally forbidden; perhaps it is one of those vices that you are morally allowed to display, even though it would be better if you didn't. Patriotism may even, conceivably, be a morally required vice; we might decide that patriotism is a necessary evil.

The major positions and arguments in the literature on patriotism can be helpfully understood through the lens of the distinction between virtue-oriented and deontological assessments of patriotism.

The most prominent argument for patriotism, and one that sets the background for many other contributions to the debate, is a virtue-oriented argument, offered by Alasdair MacIntyre. MacIntyre says that patriotism is one of the "loyalty-exhibiting virtues": it is virtuous because it incorporates genuine self-understanding, involves a recognition of the importance of community ties, and contributes to moral knowledge and moral motivation (MacIntyre 1984, 4). If MacIntyre is right, then it follows that patriotism is a central virtue, important for the moral health of both the individual and the state. But it does not follow, necessarily, that patriotism is morally compulsory; MacIntyre is more interested in showing that patriotism is desirable than in showing that it is a matter of duty. The claim that patriotism has strong constitutive links with good moral character is taken up by other authors and represents one major position in the debate. Often, it is pressed as part of an argument against liberalism. Paradigmatically, a liberal believes that the basic perspective of morality is impartial, concerned equally with the rights and interests of all humans. If patriotism is a virtue, runs the argument against liberalism, then the perspective of morality is in fact found in our deeply partial connections with our own communities and countries (see, e.g., Oldenquist 1982; Rorty 1997).

A different virtue-oriented argument is offered by several authors who reject patriotism. Their strategy is to link patriotism with recognized vices, such as small-mindedness, gullibility, stupidity, and self-aggrandizement. In his eighteenth-century essay on national pride, J.G. Zimmermann says that "the love of one's country, however extoled, is, in many cases, no more than the love of an ass for its stall" (1771, 137). More recently, George Kateb offers a stinging attack on the character of the patriot, charging, among other things, that patriotism "is not only disguised self-worship, not only eager self-abjection, not only voluntary self-exploitation; above all it is idolatry" (Kateb 2000, 923). The upshot of this position is not that patriotism is morally prohibited, necessarily – perhaps, there is no moral rule against stupidity – but rather that patriotism is a vice: that people are better without it.

Deontological approaches to the ethics of patriotism mark out further major positions in the debate. Several authors argue that we are morally obligated to be patriotic because we have certain moral obligations to our countries. On one story, patriotic obligations are owed by the individual to the country in response to the goods the country provides: goods such as security, identity, and education (see, e.g., Viroli 1995, 9). On another story, patriotic obligations hold first not between the individual and the country, but rather between individuals; patriotic obligations are said to arise as part of the moral relationship between citizens engaged in the collective project of living together within a state (see,

e.g., Mason 1997; Stilz 2009). The defense of patriotism seen in these arguments differs in both goal and strategy from the virtue-oriented defense seen in MacIntyre and his followers. Sometimes, though not always, the argument is presented as a robustly liberal defense of patriotism, giving an argument for patriotic partiality within an essentially impartial picture of individual rights and duties.

The deontological approach also yields a distinctive stance in opposition to patriotism, found among authors who say that patriotism is morally forbidden. The most common arguments for this view trade on the alleged arbitrariness of patriotism. When the patriot favors her own country and compatriots, runs the suggestion, she discriminates between people based merely on where they come from, and where a person comes from makes no difference to his moral status or to what treatment he deserves. In its strongest form, the accusation is that patriotism is no better than racism.[2]

Finally, and again following the deontological approach to the ethics of patriotism, there is a view on which much patriotism is morally forbidden, but there is a form of patriotism that is not, because it is consistent with liberal morality. The defenders of this view include Marcia Baron, in her response to MacIntyre, and Stephen Nathanson, in his book on patriotism, and their stated goal is to find a way between the communitarian endorsement of patriotism and the liberal rejection of patriotism (Baron 2002; Nathanson 1993). They say that patriotism in its morally defensible form is less extreme than MacIntyre's communitarian patriotism; their own preferred forms of patriotism are variously called "moderate patriotism," "liberal patriotism," "cosmopolitan patriotism," and – with a wink – "emasculated patriotism."[3] The defenders of these more moderate forms of patriotism make two claims in the first instance: that the more moderate forms of patriotism are genuinely forms of *patriotism* and that they are morally unobjectionable even from a robustly liberal perspective. Some philosophers, including Baron and Nathanson, go on to claim more for their moderate forms of patriotism, saying that the patriotism they defend is not just permissible but virtuous, and even – in Nathanson's case – morally required (Nathanson 1993, 42–44, 65–66, 71).

Each of the views about patriotism offered in this volume goes beyond the established positions in the literature, and each, to some extent, incorporates elements of both the deontological and virtue-oriented approaches to the ethics of patriotism.

Kleinig sets out to identify a virtuous form of patriotism and then to show that patriotism of this virtuous form is, at least under some circumstances, obligatory. Kleinig argues that a person's connection with her country can be crucial for her political identity and that the value of identity with country depends upon and requires the performance of certain patriotic obligations to country. The country, Kleinig says, represents a social contract between citizens,

and by acting well within that contract, citizens are able to make available to each other the possibility of living good human lives of particular distinctive kinds: Australian lives, American lives, and so on.

Keller's initial goal is to show that patriotism is a vice, and his argument, accordingly, is in the first instance concerned with the psychology of patriotism. Keller tries to show that patriotism is linked with the vices of willful ignorance and self-deception. He goes on to argue that patriotism also has bad consequences, especially for political judgment and the quality of political debate, and he claims that there is good reason to think that we can have healthy and thriving states even without a patriotic citizenry.

Primoratz begins by using deontological categories to evaluate patriotism. He says that there are common forms of patriotism that are much too strong and therefore morally unacceptable, because they fail the test of liberal morality. Primoratz agrees that there is a more moderate form of patriotism – the kind captured by Baron and Nathanson – that is morally unproblematic, though he doubts that there is anything positively good about it. In addition, though, Primoratz thinks that there is a further kind of patriotism – *ethical patriotism*, expressed as a "lively sense of collective responsibility" – that is virtuous and can be morally required. Much of Primoratz's argument concerns his description of ethical patriotism and his story about the circumstances under which it can be a moral duty.

5 The Main Issues in the Debate about Patriotism

We have discussed the question of how patriotism is to be defined, and we have listed the main views about the ethics of patriotism. How are we to choose between these views? Here are some of the questions that philosophers address in trying to settle on the correct ethical account of patriotism, each of which is taken up at some point in the debate that follows.

What duties does the citizen have to the state, and must she be patriotic to fulfill them? Philosophical anarchists believe that the citizen has no special obligation to her own country (see, e.g., Simmons 1979). Others argue that a citizen does have special duties to her country, perhaps out of gratitude, perhaps because she participates with others in the project of building a just state, perhaps because the state acts in her name, or perhaps because she can more effectively influence her own state than others. In this book, Primoratz says that under some conditions, the citizen has quite demanding duties to her country and that she counts as an ethical patriot if she fulfills them. Keller and Kleinig both respond not by denying that those duties exist, but by trying to show that whether or not a citizen meets them has nothing much to do with whether she is patriotic.