

Adam Smith and the Patriotism of Partnership

By Erik W. Matson*

Abstract

This article treats Smith's writings on patriotism and universal benevolence in the final edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* by placing them in some broader contexts. Smith affirmed proper patriotism as virtuous and consistent with the Christian ethic of universal benevolence. Proper patriotism, however, subsists in contrast to two vicious patriotisms: the patriotism of national jealousy and the patriotism of radical reform. Much of what is heralded as serving the common good, Smith argued, does no such thing. The true patriot will not pursue national aggrandizement, but commercial liberalizations, which undercut the interest of factions but serve the good of the nation. Liberalization, however, ought to be undertaken with prudence and moderation, out of respect for the established order. Radicalism, even that which is opposed to real corruptions, Smith argued, can often undercut its own cause. In addition to the two patriotic foils (that is, the patriotism of jealousy and the patriotism of radical reform), it is useful to contrast Smith's patriotism of partnership with a third position, namely the position that is against patriotism altogether. This position is represented by Soame Jenyns.

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1. Between Two Patriotisms

Adam Smith took a four month leave of absence from his duties as Customs Commissioner in Edinburgh in 1788 to work on a sixth edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS). In 1789, he announced to his London publisher Thomas Cadell designs for a "compleat new sixth part containing a practical system of Morality, under the title of 'The Character of Virtue'" (*Correspondence of Adam Smith* – CAS letter 287, p. 320). As part of its treatment of practical morality, the sixth part of the work featured some of Smith's most extensive reflections on the issues of patriotism, cosmopolitanism, and statesmanship. These issues have been treated in recent scholarship (Hont 2005; Hill 2010; Forman-Barzilai 2010; Elazar 2021). Comparatively little effort has been given, however, to placing Smith's analysis in historical and literary context. This article attempts to recover some of this context, to better appreciate Smith's views. Before turning to that context, however, I begin with an explanation of the sort of patriotism that Smith affirmed and espoused.

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Lisa Hill has argued that “Smith did not much like patriotism” (2010, 455). If we look at Smith’s usage of “patriot” and its cognates in the last edition of TMS from 1790, however, we see that of the dozen or so usages, several offer it as a sound, positive virtue (TMS I.ii.4, IV.1.11, VI.ii.2.3, VI.ii.2.12), and a few are neutral (TMS VII.ii.1.28–31). None are negative except when Smith modifies with adjective such as “ferocious” (TMS III.3.43) and “savage” (TMS VI.ii.2.3). That Smith felt the need to employ the modifiers “ferocious” and “savage” indicates his view that such patriotisms were distortions of virtuous or “real” patriotism (TMS VI.ii.2.12).

Rather than saying simply that Smith did not much like patriotism, then, it is more accurate to say that Smith did not much like patriotism of two broad types. The first is the kind of patriotism to which Hill implicitly refers: a jingoist and agonistic patriotism that unduly prioritizes the glory and influence of the nation to the detriment of one’s international neighbors. It is the sort of patriotism Smith associated with the pride and policy of the first British empire. It was the patriotism peddled to parliament by merchants and the directors of trade companies for the sake of economic protections and privileges for domestic market incumbents. This first patriotism can be associated with what Hume famously called “the jealousy of trade” (Hume [1777] 1994; *cf.* Hont 2005). It was this patriotism that Smith referred to in 1790 as “savage,” and he viewed it as deeply unethical (TMS VI.ii.2.3).

The second kind of patriotism is the patriotism of radical reform in opposition to a corrupt regime or ruling faction. This patriotism surfaced in Britain in the 1720s and 1730s in opposition to the perceived corruptions of Walpole’s government (Langford 1989, Chapters 5, 8). It resurfaced in the 1760s with the “Wilkes and Liberty” movement and was continued by London radicals through the American war (Sainsbury 1987); it flowed into the 1790s by way of revolutionary associations such as the London Revolution Society (Alpaugh 2014). It was this patriotism of radical opposition that Samuel Johnson is said to have referred to as “the last refuge of a scoundrel” (Boswell [1791] 1998, 615). It was a variant of this patriotism, as expressed by Richard Price, that Burke attacked so vehemently in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. The patriotism of radical opposition pursues reform agendas from commitment to abstract, allegedly patriotic principles—pursuits that, according to Johnson and Burke, showed bad judgment as to the likely effects on established order and the welfare of fellow citizens.

Between the patriotisms of jealousy and radical opposition, Smith sought in his work, especially in the final edition of TMS, to conceptualize what I will call a patriotism of partnership. The patriotism of partnership relates to what Yiftah Elazar has described as Smith’s “impartial patriotism.” Patriotic sentiments are virtuous for Smith, according to Elazar, “when [they inspire] individuals to overcome selfishness and other subpolity partialities and to promote the greater happiness of all members of the polity” (2021, 331). Patriotism of partnership emphasizes, I propose, two aspects of Smith’s patriotism, consistent with but not emphasized in Elazar’s impartial patriotism.

The first of these is the broad consistency of a virtuous patriotism with the good of other nations. The nation is a large focal social grouping, one that we can serve directly in a meaningful sense. Beyond the nation, our knowledge and power are highly diffuse

and hence ineffective. This, however, does not mean that the good of our nation must come at the cost of another nation, any more than the pursuit of the good of our family need eclipse the good of our neighbors. A virtuous British patriot need not—and should not—oppose the welfare of France. The moral obligations of British patriotism do not conflict with the flourishing of any other nation, except in unusual and special situations. As Smith’s fellow Scot James Wilson maintained, “it may be uncommon, but it is unquestionably just to say, that nations ought to love one another” (quoted in Lawson 1915, 620). This goodwill-to-other-nations aspect highlights the contrast between the patriotism of partnership with the patriotism of jealousy.

The mutual consistency of the good of nations is captured succinctly by Hume’s “prayer,” from his concern for the good of Britain, for the “flourishing commerce of Germany, Spain, Italy, and even France itself” (Hume [1777] 1994, 351). The commercial relationship between nations, Hume understood, can be one of competitive emulation, which spurs innovation, lowers production costs, and raises living standards (Matson 2024; Berdell 1995). These economic perspectives imply that nations can partner—metaphorically, as each promotes the good of its own citizens—in the project of enhancing human life. Similar points come across throughout the *Wealth of Nations* (WN); they are pronounced in the opening chapters of the book, which are replete with language of universalism, cooperation, and mutual benefits (Matson 2023b, 312–4; Young 1997, 49–52). Describing Smith’s works generally, Jeremy Bentham later depicted them as casting a vision of “universal benevolence” in which “the nations are associates and not rivals in the grand social enterprise” (1843, 563).

The second salient aspect of Smith’s patriotism of partnership concerns the partnerships of domestic affairs. In domestic politics, we are to view ourselves as partners with our forebears and contemporary fellow citizens. We should respect the established order we have inherited, and we ought to “religiously observe what, by Cicero, is justly called the divine maxim of Plato, never to use violence to [our] country no more than to [our] parents” (TMS VI.ii.2.16). Smith’s reasoning here relates to the formative, knowledge-transmitting aspects of tradition, the debt we owe to our forebears, the importance of stability and continuity, and the delicacy of liberty. Part of his reasonings also stems from basic liberal sensibilities: it is generally wrong (and usually ineffective) to violently force policy reforms upon others.

The patriotic statesman will move towards liberalizations because those liberalizations, by and large, serve the common good of the patria. Like Josiah Tucker, Smith believed the “able Statesman, and judicious Patriot” distinguishes between “the Interest of the Trader and the Interest of the Kingdom” and steers towards latter (Tucker 1774, 91). But “when he cannot establish the right, he will not disdain to ameliorate the wrong; [and] like Solon, when he cannot establish the best system of laws, he will endeavour to establish the best that the people can bear” (TMS VI.ii.2.16; cf. Clark 2021). The patriotism of partnership, in other words, enjoins one towards the dual and sometimes conflicting presumptions of conservation and liberty (cf. Klein 2012, 255; 2021). In pursuit of reform, as Edmund Burke argued, one must maintain a suitable “reverence for the substance of that system [one wishes to reform]” ([1790] 1999, 254), that is, a suitable reverence for the established polity and formative, cultural traditions. The real patriot must continually vie with both “the obstinacy that rejects all

improvement, and the levity that is fatigued and disgusted with every thing of which it is in possession” (*ibid.*, 274). Smith communicated similar sensibilities.

Smith’s articulation of the patriotism of partnership emerged as a response to contemporary historical developments, and it was part of an ongoing British discourse in the late eighteenth-century about the nature of patriotism generally. An appreciation of the context illuminates more precisely what, exactly, he opposed in the patriotic—and in some cases, anti-patriotic—discourses of his countrymen. The context will more fully unfold Smithian patriotism of partnership.

2. The Patriotism of Radical Opposition, from Walpole to Wilkes

Patriotism, understood as privileging the common good of the patria over that of factional subgroups, had been viewed as an essential virtue since antiquity. Discussions of a distinctive British patriotism, as opposed to local, provincial patriotisms within England and Scotland, came forth in the early decades of the eighteenth century (*cf.* Colley 1992). A recurring question in these discussions: who is entitled to claim the title of patriot?

In the aftermath of 1688, the Whigs understood themselves as revolutionaries. Against the Gallican aspirations and executive overreaches of James II, early Whig historiography maintained, the people took up arms and forcefully resisted authority for the sake of limited government and civil liberty (Pincus 2009). When the Whigs took control of the government, and especially when Robert Walpole became prime minister in 1720, the revolutionary character of the Whigs faded. Establishment Whigs under Walpole downplayed the revolutionary nature of 1688, and they pursued different policy measures than their forerunners. Walpole “maintained peace with France, he sought no further relief for religious Dissenters, and he reversed the progressive taxation schemes implemented after the revolution” (*ibid.*, 17). An opposition faction of Whigs accused the Walpolean establishment of betraying the 1688 constitution, not just by failing to limit the executive, but by using the power of the executive to advance the personal interests of allied establishment players. They joined with Tories like Bolingbroke in criticizing Walpole’s extensive system of patronage and perceived corruptions, along with the growing national debt and the standing army. The true Whiggish cause of 1688 “had been retarded by the Whigs of the post-Revolution era” (Langford 1989, 26). Claiming to rejuvenate the Whig movement and recovering the constitution, the opposition Whigs professed themselves true patriots.

The patriotism of radical opposition did not go unanswered. The Patriot Whigs and their Tory associates (together constituting the main body of “Country” interests) were painted as obstructionists hindering the basic responsibilities of government. Walpole himself launched a propaganda campaign in service of this interpretation. He supported political journalists including William Arnall, James Pitt, and John Henley with subsidies and low-level government appointments in exchange for the service of their pens. These men published defenses of the Walpolean establishment in periodicals such as the *Free Briton* and the *London Journal* (Langford 1989, 47). Arnall penned

a tract in 1735 entitled *Opposition No Proof of Patriotism*. Government under Walpole had not worsened, he argued, nor were citizens in possession of less liberty than they had been previously—claims to the contrary were “Mockery and Partiality” (Arnall 1735, 6). Placemen had long been a part of government; it was impossible, he argued, to imagine government without some special interests and trading for favors. In obstructing the necessary duties of the legislature for the mere sake of opposition, it was the opposition Whigs, in fact, who showed themselves truly unpatriotic. They prioritized unrealistic ideals and self-interest over the admittedly imperfect but nonetheless solid work of governance. “Can there be a more unjust Thing than opposing Measures necessary to the Support and Being of a State? And is not such Opposition destructive of Patriotism” (*ibid.*, 7)?

Adam Smith himself later seemed broadly sympathetic to something like Arnall’s view. In a 1759 letter to Lord Fitzmaurice, he wrote:

I hear there is no faction in parliament, which I am glad of. For tho’ a little faction now and then gives spirit to the nation the continuance of it obstructs all public business and puts it out of the power of [the] best Minister to do much good. Even Sir Robert Walpoles [sic] administration would, I imagine have been better had it not been for the violence of the opposition that was made to him, which in its beginnings had no great foundation (CAS letter 28, p. 28).

This is clearly not an endorsement of Walpole’s rule. Smith would have been aware of his friend Hume’s conclusion in 1742 that Walpole’s “ministry has been more advantageous to his family than to the public, better for this age than for posterity, and more pernicious by bad precedents than by real grievances” (Hume [1742] 1994, 576). Smith surely shared reservations about Walpole’s fixing of elections and reliance on repeated extensions of government credit (*cf.* LJ(B) 270). But at the very least Smith’s letter to Fitzmaurice indicates Smith’s own coalitional spirit and impatience for factious opposition.

After Walpole’s downfall in 1742, Patriot Whigs became more sanguine about reforming elections, reducing the standing army, and reigning in election and appointment corruption. The optimism failed to manifest in policy changes, and the failure was perceived by some as betrayal on the part of supposedly patriot MPs of the true patriot cause. Taking aim at Granville and Bath, Henry Fielding wrote in 1745, “We have now Men among us, who have stiled themselves Patriots, while they have pushed their own Preferment, and the Ruin of their Enemies, at the manifest Hazard of the Ruin of their Country” (Fielding [1745] 1987, 116). The anti-Walpolean patriotism of radical opposition was said to have been unmasked for what it really was or amounted to, namely disguised self-interest (*cf.* Langford 1989, chapter 8).

After the Seven Years war, a patriotism of opposition again came to the fore, this time on the wings of the “Wilkes and Liberty” movement. Dissatisfied with the peace settlement with France brokered by the Bute ministry, Wilkes penned the inflammatory Number 45 in *The North Briton* in which he attacked George III’s speech on the Treaty of Paris. Due in part to his subsequent trial, imprisonment, and exile, Wilkes’ activities became a focal point for London radicalism, popular and philosophical. The policy demands of his radical milieu matched those of the earlier Patriot Whigs to a large extent. The chief demands were annual parliamentary elections, more extensive

representation, election reform, and the exclusion of placemen from the House of Commons.

As in the 1730s in response to the anti-Walpoleans, opposing voices spoke out in condemnation of the supposed patriotism of Wilkes and his followers. One anonymous 1770 pamphlet, published in London, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, bore the title: “A Mirror for the Multitude; or Wilkes and his Abettors no Patriots.” The author defined a patriot as one who supports national peace and tranquility and proceeds in reform efforts with a spirit of prudence and moderation:

The real patriot will use his utmost efforts to support national peace and tranquility; and if mal-administration should at any time come under his notice, though to him detestable, yet he will by fair remonstrance, not seditious scurrility, by candid active scrutiny, not virulent detraction, endeavour to detect such as are concerned therein (Anonymous 1770, 5).

Note here the passing resemblance to Smith’s patriotic man of “public spirit” from the final edition of TMS who “will respect the established powers and privileges even of individuals...Though he should consider some of them as in some measure abusive, he will content himself with moderating what he often cannot annihilate without great violence” (TMS VI.ii.2.16). As to Smith’s views on the Wilkes affair itself, in 1763 he wrote to Hume—whose views are evident in his correspondence (Raynor 1980; Livingston 1983)—of “the ridiculous affair of Wilkes,” “the principal object that occupies the attention of the King, the Parliament, and the Public” (CAS, Appendix E, 414). It seems likely that Smith would have sympathized with his friend Hume’s outlook on the matter.

Supporters of the Wilkes cause aligned themselves too with the fledgling American cause for independence in the 1770s. Wilkes himself supported American independence, thus associating his polemical brand of opposition patriotism with the later American movement for independence. The Society of Gentlemen Supporters of the Bill of Rights, which had formed to support Wilkes upon his expulsion from parliament, vowed to take up the grievances of the Irish and the Americans in 1771. Beyond Wilkes, radicals in support of America—who included among their ranks Richard Price and Joseph Priestly—generally fashioned themselves as true patriots. They styled themselves citizens seeking to reform the corruptions of the establishment at home, while their brethren in America fought for freedom across the Atlantic. Their predecessors in the seventeenth century had fought against executive despotism by countering royal prerogative and the overreach of the religious establishment. But the new opposition Whigs in the 1760s and 1770s believed the balance of the government had been compromised, not formally by the structure of constitution, but by the “pecuniary corruption” of the legislative branch by the executive (Sainsbury 1987, 9), a criticism that harkened back to the Patriot Whigs and Country interests aligned against Walpole.

3. Against Patriotism: Soame Jenyns

To appreciate Smith's patriotism of partnership it is useful to introduce a third foil, in addition to the patriotism of jealousy and that of radical opposition. This foil is the anti-patriotism of establishment MP and placeman Soame Jenyns.

The patriotism of radical opposition in the 1770s elicited the famous quip from Johnson that patriotism itself is but a "refuge of the scoundrel" (quoted in Boswell [1791] 1998, 615). A more elaborate point along the same lines came from Jenyns in his 1776 *View of the Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion*. Ostensibly a religious apologetic, the work aimed to support the established government, in part by mounting a polemical theological argument against patriotism. Jenyns's claim was not simply that patriotism manifesting as radical opposition is unpatriotic, which seems to have been Johnson's basic point. Jenyns went further and claimed that patriotism *per se* is inconsistent with the Christian exhortation to universal benevolence. "Patriotism," Jenyns wrote,

that celebrated virtue so much practised in ancient, and so much more professed in modern times, that virtue, which so long preserved the liberties of Greece, and exalted Rome to the empire of the world: this celebrated virtue, I say, must also be excluded [from the body of Christian virtues]; because it not only falls short of, but directly counteracts, the extensive Benevolence [of Christianity]. A christian is of no country, he is a citizen of the world; and his neighbors and countrymen are the inhabitants of the remotest regions, whenever their distress demand his friendly assistance: Christianity commands us to love mankind, Patriotism to oppress all other countries to advance the imaginary prosperity of our own: Christianity enjoins us to imitate the universal benevolence of our Creator, who pours forth his blessings on every nation on earth... (1776, 50).

The message evoked further controversy as it was paired with a theological defense of the virtues of passive obedience (*ibid.*, 47–8). Christianity, according to Jenyns, has no distinctive political teachings—it is an apolitical religion: Jesus is the "only founder of a religion in the history of mankind, which is totally unconnected with all human policy and government" (*ibid.*, 28). The faithful Christian ought to submit existing authorities, as exhorted by Paul in Romans 12. The American colonists violated that exhortation in attempting to throw off the influence and control of the crown, just as the London radicals violated that exhortation in pushing for radical parliamentary reforms like extended suffrage and more frequent elections.

Smith shared with Jenyns a commitment to the ethic of universal benevolence (TMS VI.ii.2.17–VI.ii.3.4; *cf.* Matson 2023b, 303–4). And he certainly took issue with the patriotisms of radical opposition and jealousy, both of which are targeted in Jenyns's discourse. But Smith disputed that the ethic of universal benevolence, when it is properly understood, requires us to mortify our natural affections for self-care, family, community, and country (Forman-Barzilai 2010). He further disputed that the existence of malicious forms of patriotisms renders all forms of patriotism unvirtuous (TMS VI.ii.2.3–4). Much of what flies under the flag of patriotism in practice is improper. A disordered love of national glory, accompanied by a disdain or disregard for the welfare of the nations, is decidedly unchristian; and agendas of radical "patriotic" reform can be destructive. But proper attention to our economy of knowledge and affections, and the workings of the material economy generally, reveals the consistency

between an ethic of universal benevolence and a virtuous love of country. Smith's arguments on this point were anticipated by early respondents to Jenyns, notably including Smith's classmate from Glasgow Archibald Maclaine, who we will consider at the end of the next section.

4. Do Patriotism and Universal Benevolence Conflict?

The concept of universal benevolence had become the centerpiece in the mid-eighteenth century of both Anglican and moderate Presbyterian moral theology (Ahnert 2014, 37–44). The phrase “universal benevolence” came to be associated with the benevolent theism or “Christian Stoicism” (Sher 2015, 175–86) of those influenced by the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, including George Turnbull, William Wishart, and especially Smith's teacher Francis Hutcheson (see Rivers 2000, 153–247). In claiming that patriotism contradicted the Christian call to universal benevolence, then, Soame Jenyns struck a nerve, and he provoked many responses (Duthille 2012, 34–8).

Many of the responses drew from philosophical debates from earlier in the eighteenth century over the compatibility of self-love and benevolence (Radcliffe 1993). The question of whether the pursuit of the common good of one's nation conflicted with the common good of all nations was set on analogy with the question of whether one's self-love and partial affections conflicted with the good of the community. Answers to Jenyns invoked providential design to support the contention that a proper patriotism serves the Christian calling to universal benevolence, just as a proper self-love serves the common good of one's community.

One genealogy of responses to egoist theories stemmed from Richard Cumberland.¹ Against Hobbes, Cumberland argued for the ultimate harmony of private and public good. We are each a part of the whole, so as we benevolently pursue the common good, we simultaneously further our own happiness. Our greatest happiness is achieved in “the Exercise and inward Sense of universal benevolence” (Cumberland [1672] 2005, 241). Reflection teaches us, however, that the most effective way for each to satisfy his inward duty to universal benevolence is to fulfill concrete, local obligations, beginning with the obligation of self-care.

Shaftesbury developed the perspective further, distinguishing between two “systems” of affections: the “System of the Kind,” which concerns the whole of humankind, and the “Self-System,” which concerns our partial affections. These complementary systems together ensure self-preservation and the propagation of the species. Thus self-love “tis so far from being ill, or blameable in any sense, that it must be acknowledged absolutely necessary to constitute a creature *Good*” (Shaftesbury [1732] 2001, 13). In his attempt to defend Shaftesbury from Mandeville, Hutcheson would paraphrase this point: “Our Reason can indeed discover certain Bounds, within which we may not only act from Self-Love, consistently with the Good of the Whole, but every Mortal's acting thus within these Bounds for his own Good, is absolutely necessary for the Good of the Whole” (Hutcheson [1726] 2008, 122).

¹ On Cumberland and the anti-Hobbesian tradition in general, see Myers (1983).

Hutcheson developed this line of inquiry from Cumberland and Shaftesbury, with insights into moral psychology and observations about knowledge. He described the gravity-like nature of our benevolent affections: our benevolent sentiments towards a person diminish with social distance and decreased familiarity. Our benevolence is strongest towards ourselves (*i. e.*, self-love) followed by our family, friends, community, and country. Hutcheson perceived the hand of providence in this natural orientation. The whole of humankind lies beyond our power and comprehension. Our affections naturally direct our good offices towards those within our sphere of influence (*ibid.*, 149–50); they prompt us to make an effective use of our limited “*Understanding and Power*” (Hutcheson [1742] 2002, 188). Here and elsewhere, Hutcheson framed acting in line with our partial affections as consonant with the ethic of universal benevolence; that framing is important in bridging his ethics, jurisprudence, and political economy (Matson 2023a; Haakonssen 1996, 63–84).

We find similar insights in Bishop Joseph Butler, whose influence on the development of British political economy—not least through the ideas of Butler’s chaplain Josiah Tucker—are often underappreciated (Oslington 2017; Price 2019; Matson 2022). In the twelfth of his *Fifteen Sermons*, “Upon the Love of Our Neighbor,” Butler discussed the following issues: “*who is our neighbour: in what sense are we required to love him as ourselves: the influence such love would have upon our behaviour in life: and lastly, how this commandment comprehends in it all others.*” He affirmed at the outset of the sermon that “perfection of goodness consists in love to the whole universe.” But he followed that affirmation with a consideration of our limited capacities: “we are so much limited” that “the universe should [not be] the object of benevolence to such creatures as we are [that is, humans with limited power and knowledge].” What are the proper objects of our benevolence? “[That] part of mankind, that part of our country, which comes under our immediate notice, acquaintance, and influence” (Butler [1725] 2017, 103–4).

The analyses of Hutcheson and Butler were repeated and developed in various forms by Hume, Kames, Ferguson, Tucker, Smith, and others (see discussions in Radcliffe 1999). But it was their basic point about the connection between, on the one hand, knowledge and effectiveness and, on the other, obligation, that was brought to bear in response to Jenyns. In 1776, for example, an anonymous pamphlet responded to Jenyns with the claim that “patriotism and friendship are species, where love is the genus” (Anonymous 1776, 10). In living out the commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves, we proceed downwards from the overarching ethical obligation of universal benevolence towards patriotism, and from patriotism to friendship. Universal benevolence is not to remain at the level of abstract principle, for it then risks freezing over with the “chilling frost of universal indifference” (Hall 1801, 39); but it ought to manifest through our attention to the particular circumstances in which we find ourselves.

The point was expanded upon in 1777 by Archibald Maclaine, a minister of the Church of Scotland in The Hague. Maclaine matriculated at University of Glasgow in 1739 where he studied moral philosophy and theology with Francis Hutcheson and William Leechman. He overlapped a year with Adam Smith, so they were likely acquaintances. Maclaine published a series of letters to Jenyns disputing various

points of Jenyns's *Internal Evidence*. On the issues of patriotism, he accused Jenyns of promoting a "fanatical quietism" by equating all patriotism and valor with "pride, revenge, and savage ferocity" (Maclaine 1777, 175). There are surely counterfeit patriotisms, Maclaine admitted. But "we should not imagine that there is no genuine coin, because we meet with a multitude of counterfeits" (*ibid.*, 166). In terms reminiscent of his teacher Hutcheson, Maclaine described both friendship and patriotism as "effusions of universal benevolence, directing its exertions and energy to particular objects, in certain determinate circles" (*ibid.*, 182). Patriotism, understood properly as the love of country, is an effective expression of universal benevolence:

[P]atriotism is a branch of universal benevolence, and, instead of opposing, is adapted to promote, at least, in part, its great object. For what is the *object* of universal benevolence, but the *general good* or the *good of the whole*? Now this general good is too extensive an end, to be directly accomplished by the efforts of any man; and it can only be promoted by every person having a hearty affection for the society to which he belongs, and a warm zeal for its welfare. Universal benevolence is a generous sentiment, a noble affection; but its real exertion is beyond the reach of humanity, and it can only become active and useful by its application to *particular* objects. A man would certainly make a ridiculous figure, who, under the pretext of being obliged by christianity to exercise only universal benevolence, should neglect his *country*, and those *smaller societies*, to which alone the useful effects of his zeal can extend (*ibid.*, 185).

He concluded that a real, virtuous patriotism indeed exists and is enjoined by the Christian gospel. Patriotism need not be at the expense of fellow human beings in other places. It should not be equated with jealousy and imperialism (*ibid.*, 183; *cf.* Jenyns 1776, 51)

A sermon preached by Caesar Morgan in 1780 with the title *The Duty of Patriotism Vindicated and Enforced* carried the same message. "The religion of the Father of all knows no distinctions of countries or climates...universal benevolence is its governing principle" (Morgan 1780, 3). But the imperative to further the good of humankind does not tell us to renounce love of country, family, and self. To the contrary, our affections seem to have been providentially appointed to guide us towards the areas in life where we have the most effectiveness:

Therefore, by the wise regulation of the Author of nature, self-love acts with an almost irresistible influence, and in a manner compels us to obey it. The instinctive force of love of kindred, love of country, and universal benevolence, is feebler in proportion to their respective distances from self-love (*ibid.*, 4; *cf.* Hutcheson [1726] 2008, 149–50).

John Cartwright advanced the same argument in 1784 in a work reviewing Jenyns *Internal Evidence* and his later *Thoughts on Parliament*.

It seems natural and just to conclude, that our family, our parish, our country, are the immediate spheres in which, by the limitation of our faculties and the boundedness of our powers, Providence has required us to perform in an especial manner the duties of Christianity; for where else shall we find the neighbour whom we can benefit by our services, unless every man were a Newton, a Locke, or a Howard, to spread science, reason, and benevolence through all regions to open literary intercourse? ...The honest ploughman, who, in his own family and within his own parish, contributes with a truly Christian heart...he is as much a citizen of his own country, as the minister of state (Cartwright 1784, 7).

Smith's writings on patriotism in 1790 neatly fit into this line of discourse. He of course criticized moralists who would reduce virtue to benevolence, arguing that such a conception asks too much of human nature and even violates that natural order of things. To focus on universal benevolence is to insufficiently appreciate the properness and function of the partial affections, including the love of self. Universal benevolence is a sublime ideal, but it should not be the focal point of our practical ethics (*cf.* Forman-Barzilai 2010, 122; Matson 2023b). "To man is allotted a much humbler department [than the care of the great system of the universe]...the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, his country" (TMS VI.ii.3.6, 237). But that point, properly understood, is really an elaboration of how we can effectively serve the good of the whole, or how the Christian ethic of universal benevolence actually ought to manifest. "The love of our country seems not to be derived from the love of mankind," Smith wrote. We love our country "for its own sake, and independently of any such considerations." Reflection teaches us, however, that the love of our country—a true patriotism—in fact serves the good of mankind:

That wisdom which contrived the system of human affections, as well as that of every other part of nature, seems to have judged that the interest of the great society of mankind would be best promoted by directing the principal attention of each individual to that particular portion of it, which was most within the sphere of both his abilities and of his understanding (TMS VI.ii.2.4).

As the pursuit of honest industry and the drive to better our condition yield widespread mutual benefits, so does the honest pursuit of the good of our country further, on the whole, what a universally benevolent beholder approves of (*cf.* Matson 2023b).

Smith's argument very clearly parallels the earlier arguments of Maclaine, Morgan, and Cartwright; and, at least in the case of Maclaine, it is very likely that they drew inspiration from the same source—the writings of Francis Hutcheson. Smith, however, did not directly define virtue in terms as overtly theological as did these others. Should this alter our interpretation of his position? My view is that it should not, and for two reasons. First, it is true that Smith develops his ethical system with universal aspirations. It does not appear to rely on any dogmatic theological presuppositions. That does not mean, however, that his ethics are inconsistent with the Christian call to universal benevolence, and he in fact describes the rules of morality that we discover through the use of our natural moral faculties as "the Laws of the Deity" (TMS III.5). Second, even if Smith's many invocations of providence are disingenuous or simply window dressing, his ethical framework still resembles the benevolent theism of Francis Hutcheson and Archibald Maclaine—the right corresponds to that which an impartial spectator approve of, but any given impartial spectator's approval has authority in the final analysis only insofar as it corresponds to the approval of the highest impartial spectator, who can only be imagined to approve of that which serves the good of humankind. This general formulation can be sustained even if one does not affirm the actual existence of God (Klein, Matson, and Doran 2018; Matson 2021; *cf.* Brown 1994, 74; Evensky 1987, 452; Haakonssen 1981, 56).

5. The Patriotism of Partnership Versus the Patriotism of Jealousy

One key to substantiating a virtuous patriotism of partnership, the key to bringing it down from ethical principle into practice, so to speak, is the science of political economy. It is here that Smith made some of his own great contributions to the patriotism discourse. He demonstrated that the sorts of policies often advertised as serving the good of the nation do no such thing. He recognized that much of what flies under the heading of “patriotism” is precisely what Soame Jenyns identified: the practice of “oppress[ing] all other countries to advance the imaginary prosperity of our own” (Jenyns 1776, 50). The patriotism of jealousy engenders mutual loss. A proper appreciation of the true source of the wealth of nations, however, illuminates mutual benefits and the prospect of the patriotism of partnership.

Smith demonstrated the fundamentally unproductive nature of jealousy-inspired commercial policy. The jealousy of trade—the “malignant jealousy and envy” with which we view the success of our international neighbors (TMS VI.ii.2.3)—is unpatriotic in its promotion of backwards economic policy. But it is also unpatriotic in a more classical sense in that it was the product of the interests and activities of a select group of merchants and traders: it privileged the interest of incumbent shopkeepers over the interest of the country. Smith showed that many British commercial policies were the product of a kind of factious state capture, and he surely sympathized with Pitt’s complaint in 1785, after a failed attempt to liberalize trade with Ireland, of “the evils of a nation dominated by shopkeepers” (quoted in Evans 2013, 142).

Smith’s arguments on this topic are many, but here is a small sample. He argued against Britain’s monopolization of trade with her American colonies on the grounds that it promoted overdependence, resource misallocation, and commercial fragility—the connection between Britain and the colonies became like a swollen vein or artery, the inevitable bursting of which would lead to social “convulsions, apoplexy, or death” (WN IV.vii.c.43). He decried large, state-sponsored trading companies—especially the East India Company—as “nuisances in every respect; always more or less inconvenient to the countries in which they are established and destructive to those which have the misfortune to fall under their government” (WN IV.vii.c.108). He dismissed focuses on trade balances as wrongheaded accounting humbug advanced by “pretended doctors” who, in many cases, stood to materially benefit from the regulations and trade barriers they proposed. In addition to diminishing national opulence, “balance of trade” rhetoric and protectionism stoked national animosities and mercantile jealousy, corrupting potential friendships into hostilities: “Being neighbors, they are necessarily enemies, and the wealth and power of each becomes, upon that account, more formidable to the other; and what would increase the advantage of national friendship [trade], serves only to inflame the violence of national animosity” (WN IV.ii.c.13). These policies all served not just to “beggar” competitors (WN IV.iii.c.9) in Smith’s opinion, but harmed British citizens generally.

Running throughout these points in 1776 was the implicit message that the citizen and statesman truly concerned with the good of his country—the true patriot—should recognize the partiality and corruptions of the mercantile system and strive towards the liberal system of free trade. The same point about patriotism was made explicitly

by Josiah Tucker across his writings, many of which Smith had in his library (Mizuta 2000). In an essay called “The Case of Going to War,” Tucker railed against the “patriotic zeal” of those “clamouring for War” (1774, 83). He associated war interest with “the Jealousy of Trade,” which he diagnosed as a “Spell” or species of “Witchcraft” perpetrated by interested factions. “The Interest of general Trade arises from general Industry; and, therefore can only be promoted by the Arts of Peace.” But war provides certain opportunities for incumbent employers, defense contractors, speculators, and politicians (*ibid.*, 91). Tucker’s main argument “in one word”: “the Interest of the Trader, and the Interest of the Kingdom, are two very distinct Things; because the one may, and often doth, get rich by that Course of Trade, which would bring Ruin and Desolation on the other” (*ibid.*, 95). The “able Statesman, and judicious Patriot” will distinguish between the two and promote the former through the arts of peace and the encouragement of industry (*ibid.*, 44).

Tucker worried that his attempt “to promote a mutual Trade to mutual Benefit,” which clearly ran against the interest of some of the incumbent interests, would be “unintelligible to [citizens’] Comprehension” and not advanced (*ibid.*, 97), and Smith of course shared that apprehension: “The common people of England, however, [are] so jealous of their liberty, but... never rightly understanding wherein it consists” (WN I.x.c.59). Even among those who recognized the potential dangers of patriotism, basic economic misunderstandings persisted.

To cite one example of economic misunderstanding: In 1781, John Prince delivered an address to the Antigallican Society called *True Christian Patriotism*. Citing Jenyns (1776), Prince agreed that patriotism cannot be a Christian virtue if it is defined as “that passion for national glory, which incited the ancient Romans to trample upon the natural rights of mankind, in order to exalt and aggrandize themselves.” But patriotism is a Christian virtue so long as we promote the good of our country by “fair, just, and reasonable means, in our respective stations” (Prince 1781, 8). The Christian is in fact alone suited to true patriotism and true public spirit in that he is commanded to an “enlarged spirit of Evangelical benevolence” (*ibid.*, 9). He continued with a familiar argument: “While therefore we imitate the philanthropy of our Lord, who took *human nature* upon himself... like him, we may, compatibly with this unbounded love for the whole race of mankind, entertain a partial preference for the community in which PROVIDENCE hath cast our lot” (*ibid.*, 10). All of this notwithstanding, the end of the address show marks of Prince descending into a “jealousy of trade” logic:

You [members of the Antigallican Society] have devoted yourselves to your country, which includes in it your brethren and companions, and every other beloved relation: to defend and maintain your religion against the wiles and attacks of Popery: You have engaged yourselves to encourage the honest industry of your own countrymen, and to prefer *their* manufactures and workmanship, in spite of the tyranny of fashion, to Gallic fopperies: You have not enriched foreigners, and starved your own country’s artificers: You have served your country in a way that must render your patriotism and loyalty unsuspected (*ibid.*, 24).

He concluded his train of reasoning by remarking that consumption of French goods amounts to a misapplication of “the wealth of the nation... to enrich our enemies and impoverish ourselves” (*ibid.*, 26).

We see Smith attempting to correct such perspective in his comments on patriotism in TMS VI, and to do so he linked to his economic analysis in WN:

France and England may each of them have some reason to dread the increase of the naval and military power of the other; but for either of them to envy the internal happiness and prosperity of the other, the cultivation of its lands, the advancement of its manufactures, the increase of its commerce, the security and number of its ports and harbours, its proficiency in all the liberal arts and sciences, is surely beneath the dignity of two such great nations. These are real improvements of the world we live in. Mankind are benefited, human nature is ennobled by them. In such improvements each nation ought, not only to endeavour itself to excel, but from the love of mankind, to promote, instead of obstructing the excellence of its neighbours. These are all proper objects of national emulation, not of national prejudice or envy (TMS VI.ii.2.3).

Smith argued that patriotism is indeed an important social virtue; that it is not to be equated with national aggrandizement and the jealousy of trade; and that it is not inconsistent with the prosperity of our neighbors. In fact, through a process of emulation and robust international competition (*cf.* Hume [1777] 1994, 119), nations can further the prosperity of their own country and of their partner's, advancing "that universal opulence which extends itself to the lowest ranks of people" (WN I.i.10). Smith of course recognized that credible commitment to peace and trade on the part of neighboring nations is impossible to secure indefinitely, so the nation ought to preserve its boundaries and provide for its national defense to ensure the protection of peace and freedom for its citizens. Smith had no Pollyannaish illusions about perpetual peace, and he well understood the political allures of war, empire, debt, and faction (Paganelli and Schumacher 2019). Nonetheless, the true patriot should promote liberalizations, not simply from a commitment to abstract principle, but from commitment to enhancing the good of his fellow citizens.

6. The Patriotism of Partnership Versus the Patriotism of Radical Opposition

Smith's diagnosis of the perversities of the mercantile system in WN in 1776, as well as his support of abolishing the slave trade and releasing the American colonies, resonated with the aims of British radicals. In the 1790s his work was to resonate with various groups of French radicals and reformers, although he may have been more cited than read (*cf.* Whatmore 2002). Writing in 1789—perhaps even as late as the fall of 1789—Smith thus had reason to qualify his appeal to the mutual benefits of free commerce with considerations of statecraft, political stability, and the pragmatics of reform.

Richard Price's *Discourse on the Love of our Country*, delivered to the London Revolution Society in November 1789, treated the issue of patriotism and universal benevolence raised by Soame Jenyns. As Smith would argue in 1790, true patriotism is to be distinguished from a false patriotism, and true patriotism is consistent with the "Universal Benevolence" of Christianity. Price elaborated the same Hutchesonian lines of argument, against Jenyns, put forth by Maclaine and then Smith:

We are so constituted that our affections are more drawn to some among mankind than to others, in proportion to their degrees of nearness to us, and our power of being useful to them. It is obvious that this is a circumstance in the constitution of our natures which proves the wisdom and goodness of our Maker, for had our affections been determined alike to all our fellow-creatures human life would have been a scene of embarrassment and distraction. Our regards, according to the order of nature, begin with ourselves, and every man is charged primarily with the care of himself. Next come our families, and benefactors, and friends, and after them our country. We can do little for the interest of mankind at large. To this interest, however, all other interests are subordinate (Price 1991, 180).

Price pushed further, however, in charging each person with an obligation to promote “general justice” and to regard the rights of other countries. These rights for Price included various civil liberties and the right to political self-determination—rights associated with the ideas of “Milton, Locke, Sidney, Hoadley, *etc.* [in England]. . . Montesquieu, Fenelon, Turgot, *etc.* in France” (Price [1789] 1991, 182). It is here that Price’s radicalism seeped in. A true patriotism, according to Price, consists in patriotic devotion to a political order consistent with general justice, truth, virtue, and liberty, also according to Price. Hence, a true love country, a true patriotism is not to be found amongst blind adherents to tradition but only amongst those committed to the natural rights of man. Burke would speak of Price’s “political gospel” (Burke [1790] 1999, 100), which Burke believed sacrificed a true love of country for commitment to principle. Price seems guilty of Burke’s charge: “What is now the love of his country in a Spaniard, a Turk, or a Russian? Can it be considered as anything better than a passion for slavery, or a blind attachment to a spot where he enjoys no rights and is disposed as if he was a beast” (Price [1789] 1991, 179)? Price, it should be noted, exhorted the patriot to obey existing civil government, which he described as “an institution for human prudence”; he also extolled the virtues of the British monarch and hedged against those who read him as fomenting revolution (*ibid.*, 184–6). But his concluding enthusiasm for the events unfolding in 1789 in France—and the fact that his *Discourse* was initially delivered as an address to the London Revolution Society—show his support for radical revolution in the name of liberty.

As has been briefly highlighted above from his correspondence, Smith thought little of activity of the self-styled patriots during the reign of Walpole; he considered the Wilkes affair “ridiculous.” Of Richard Price, Smith wrote: “I have always considered him as a factious citizen, a most superficial Philosopher and by no means an able calculator” (CASletter 251, p. 290). It is possible that Smith could have written his comments on patriotism with Price in mind, as the editors of the Glasgow variorum edition of his work contend (TMS, 229, n2). Smith announced to Cadell in March 1789 his plans to send the manuscript of the final edition of TMS by summer of that year. According to Dugald Stewart, however, it was not until December 1789 that Cadell had the manuscript in hand, so Smith could have taken some days to reflect on Price’s November address to the Revolution Society, although the timing seems too tight (Raphael and Macfie 1982, 43). But regardless, his comments on statesmanship and reform speak against the patriotism of radical opposition.

“Amidst the turbulence and disorder and faction, a certain spirit of system is apt to mix itself with that public spirit which is founded upon the love of humanity, upon a real fellow-feeling with the inconveniences and distresses to which some of our fellow

citizens may be exposed,” Smith wrote (TMS VI.ii.2.15). Affirming the properness of reform for the love of humanity, Smith nonetheless criticized radical reform efforts as utopian and tending towards delusion: “The leaders of the discontented party... propose... to new-model the constitution, and to alter, in some of its most essential parts”; “the great body of the party are commonly intoxicated with the imaginary beauty” (*ibid.*). One problem Smith hints at is the Humean point that radicalism potentially destroys the authority necessary to sustain liberty (TMS VI.ii.2.17; *cf.* Livingston 1983). Another problem is that radical reform often attempts “by requiring too much frequently obtain nothing; and those inconveniences and distresses which, with a little moderation, might in a great measure have been removed and relieved, are left altogether without the hope of remedy” (TMS VI.ii.2.15).

7. Universal Benevolence and the Patriotism of Partnership

After distinguishing the “man of public spirit” and the “man of system,” Smith placed his chapter “Of universal benevolence.” That chapter tapped into the discourse concerning the consistency of patriotism and universal benevolence. Smith’s 1790 additions to TMS clarified the proper bounds of patriotism, and in so doing advanced what I am calling a patriotism of partnership. The true patriot is to move towards liberalization, for that truly serves the common good of the country. Liberalization renders mutual patriotisms consistent. What is good for the people of Britain is, on the whole, what is good for the people of France. In moving towards liberalizations, however, both in economics and on other political and even constitutional matters, the patriot ought to pursue moderation for reasons epistemic, practical, and ethical. On the issue of epistemics, forming a new constitution is a highly fraught matter, and political authority is delicate. One should take care before shaking “that system of government under which the subjects... have enjoyed, perhaps, peace, security, and even glory, during the course of several centuries” (TMS VI.ii.2.15). Practically, again, radical reform attempts, Smith claimed, often do not achieve much and sometimes do harm. Finally, on the ethical front, it is wrong to impose a new arrangement upon one’s fellow citizens as if they were “pieces upon a chess-board” with “no other principle of motion besides that which the hand impresses upon them.” Smith’s patriotism, both on the issues of free trade and moderate, conservative reform, can thus fairly be described as a patriotism of partnership, a patriotism by which citizens and nations cooperate towards the common good of humankind.

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