

THE LAST REFUGE OF THE SCOUNDREL

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Patriotism is a form of loyalty. The range of loyalty is from patriotism to friendship. Liberals were often accused of having no sense of loyalty. They usually tend to deny the charge — even while refusing to take a loyalty oath. Even the liberal philosopher Sir Karl Popper has claimed (*Open Society*, i, ch. 10), that liberals can be better patriots than others. I find this line of defense erroneous and morally wrong. I find it much nicer, much more honest, to join Martin Buber in his taking Jeremiah as a model because when he felt that capitulation to the enemy is morally justified he recommended just that. Buber, fearful of the effects of patriotism, opposed the foundation of a Jewish state and proposed, instead, a program for a bi-national state. Diverse commentators called him a defeatist and at the time (1947) he was accused of anti-patriotism and capitulation. While he denied the specific charge of having recommended capitulation, he cavalierly dismissed the principle that makes the survival of one's nation the supreme cause. This principle is, of course, the principle of patriotism.

Let me go further than that. When an appeal is made for patriotism, for any loyalty, it is because reasonable arguments have been tried and failed. This is so because loyalty at times when it is supportable by other considerations is simply redundant and is thus usually not evoked. Logically, the

question is not, do we ever have to be loyal, but rather, is loyalty a sufficient force to impose obligation on us.

The logic of loyalty is thus the same as the logic of sexual morality. When in his *Marriage and Morals* Bertrand Russell argued that there is no sex morality he stressed that he did not claim that conduct in matters sexual is not subject to morality. Rather, he said, the normal rules, such as the ones requiring not to maltreat or hurt one's neighbor, should suffice. Opponents to Russell could argue against his specific recommendations, e.g. in favor of premarital sex, and he would no doubt welcome such debates. But the more severe critics of Russell were those who claimed that there are rules of conduct specifically pertaining to sex which do not derive their validity from other rules. This, I think, Russell did not welcome. Indeed, his very anti-authoritarian stance, his very claim for the autonomy of ethics, for the responsibility of the moral agent to himself, seemed to him to imply that there is only one ethical code applied to all cases.

What does it matter, one might ask, what does it matter at all, let alone arouse so much hostility, whether we say sex-morality is general morality applied to a specific case or whether we say it is a specific morality? This is, I feel, the crucial question, and it applies equally to loyalty as to sex. What does it matter if I am loyal to my friend out of obligation to a friend or out of obligation to keep my promises to him to act in friendship? For those who do not see the difference, Dr. Johnson's aphorism about patriotism being the last refuge of the scoundrel must read as a statement about the scoundrel, not about patriotism.

The reason, as I have hinted, for not seeing loyalty — to spouse, friend, or tribe — as a special category, is the claim that the burden of responsibility lies in the individual, that *better a responsible individual who errs than a dependent one who is told to do the right thing and does it*. This is, I think, the statement contested by those who demand loyalty: they require precisely the abdication of one's own judgment in

preference for that of the tradition and the group. As long as individual and collective judgments do not diverge there is little significance to the foundation of the judgment; when judgments diverge, we may appeal to the dependence on the group. When divergence is expected, dependence on the group is advocated and inculcated.

Russell tells us that his bitterest moments were those when he faced public enthusiasm in the streets and in the squares as soon as World War I was declared. This was the price he paid for the mechanism of dependence that was built in him or into him which put pressure on him – a pressure he refused to succumb to and so keenly felt: he felt lonely and rejected and miserable. He felt, in brief, that his sense of loyalty was not followed. In a sense we can say he was a real patriot: he thought that the war was bad for his country and so he opposed it. This is why people like Karl Popper and Adlai Stevenson would view him as a patriot. But this view is an error: bad for his country as declaring the war was, once the war was started, the patriotic thing, the good of the country, was to whip up the enthusiasm of the public and try to win it. Russell, like Jeremiah and Buber, felt that morality was above patriotism.

We see here that once we remove loyalty – to spouse, friend, or tribe – it is most likely that the decisions based on it would be reversed. It is indeed hard (but possible) to conceive of cases morally neutral but for the injunction of loyalty: loyalty usually demands sacrifices, and sacrifices for no good cause are immoral. Hence, either loyalty is entailed by our usual code, or it is immoral, except for very marginal cases.

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