

Adam Smith on Impartial Patriotism

Yiftah Elazar 

Abstract: Scholars have emphasized Adam Smith’s critique of the dangers of patriotism, but have not paid close attention to its potential value. This article recovers from Smith’s work an attractive model of patriotism without nationalism. The potential value of patriotism lies in inspiring individuals to realize an ideal of impartial beneficence, which consists in overcoming selfishness and other subpolity partialities and in promoting the greater happiness of all fellow citizens. Smith defends virtuous patriotism against strong cosmopolitanism by arguing that a global division of labor, which directs individuals to benefit their compatriots, more effectively serves the interests of humanity than directly trying to promote global happiness. This article illuminates aspects of Smith’s work that contrast with the “invisible hand” argument and favor the conscious pursuit of public interest in some contexts. It contributes to recent discussions of patriotism a distinctive way of understanding its relation to impartiality.

1. Introduction

The ugly face of patriotism, an emotional attachment to one’s country and compatriots, periodically shows itself in expressions of xenophobia and jingoism and in measures to suppress political dissent. Liberal-minded writers have generally responded to the vices of patriotism in one of two ways: by rejecting it outright,¹ or by arguing that some form of it—moderate,

Yiftah Elazar is assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Mount Scopus, Jerusalem, 9190501, Israel (yiftah.elazar@mail.huji.ac.il).

I am grateful to Sam Fleischacker, Ryan Hanley, Geneviève Rousselière, Rania Salem, Michelle Schwarze, and the editor and anonymous referees at the *Review of Politics* for their helpful comments on drafts of the paper. Research was supported by grant 1970/16 from the Israel Science Foundation.

¹Paul Gomberg, “Patriotism Is Like Racism,” *Ethics* 101, no. 1 (1990): 144–50; George Kateb, “Is Patriotism a Mistake?,” *Social Research* 67, no. 4 (2000): 901–24; Leo Tolstoy, “On Patriotism,” in *Writings on Civil Disobedience and Nonviolence* (Philadelphia: New Society, 1987), 51–123; Simon Keller, “Patriotism as Bad Faith,” *Ethics* 115, no. 3 (2005): 563–92; David McCabe, “Patriotic Gore, Again,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 35, no. 2 (1997): 203–23.

constructive, constitutional, etc.—is consistent with the values of liberal democracy.² If we go down the second path and wish to defend some form of liberal-minded patriotism, eighteenth-century political thought offers fascinating resources for contemporary political theorists. In the eighteenth century, writers on patriotism maintained the classical commitment to shared political institutions without submerging it in the language of nationalism that was to emerge after the French Revolution.³ Some eighteenth-century political writers, such as Shaftesbury, Immanuel Kant, Richard Price, and Johann Gottfried Herder, also make a conscious effort to enlighten the classical idea of patriotism, distance it from the Roman legacy of glorifying war and conquest, and persuade lovers of their country that their duty lies in promoting peace, prosperity, and social reform.⁴

This article focuses on the work of the moral philosopher and political economist Adam Smith, and recovers from it a sophisticated and attractive model of patriotism without nationalism.⁵ I will not be arguing for adopting this

²Stephen Nathanson, "In Defense of 'Moderate Patriotism,'" *Ethics* 99, no. 3 (1989): 535–52; Robert T. Schatz, Ervin Staub, and Howard Lavine, "On the Varieties of National Attachment: Blind versus Constructive Patriotism," *Political Psychology* 20, no. 1 (1999): 151–74; Jürgen Habermas, "Citizenship and National Identity," in *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 491–515; Jan-Werner Müller, *Constitutional Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

³Mary Dietz, "Patriotism," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. Terence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 177–93; Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

⁴Shaftesbury, *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times*, ed. Douglas den Uyl (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2001), 3:88–95; Immanuel Kant, "On the Common Saying: 'This May Be True in Theory, but It Does Not Apply in Practice,'" in *Political Writings*, ed. H. B. Nisbet and H. S. Reiss, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 74; Richard Price, "A Discourse on the Love of Our Country," in *Political Writings*, ed. D. O. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 176–96; Johann Gottfried Herder, "Do We Still Have the Fatherland of the Ancients?," in *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, trans. Ioannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2004).

⁵I have used the following abbreviations for Smith's works, using the Glasgow edition's citation system and adding page numbers.

TMS: *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1982).

WN: *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R. H. Campbell, A. S. Skinner, and W. B. Todd (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1981).

EPS: *Essays on Philosophical Subjects*, ed. W. P. D. Wightman and J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1982).

LJA and LJB: "Report of 1762–3" and "Report dated 1766," respectively, in *Lectures on Jurisprudence*, ed. R. L. Meek, D. D. Raphael, and P. G. Stein (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1982).

model and for becoming Smithian patriots. My intention is rather to add Smith's voice to a philosophical conversation on what patriotism should look like for it to be normatively attractive.

The Smithian model draws a helpful distinction between the sentiment of love of country or patriotism, a form of partiality for one's country and compatriots,⁶ and the virtues ideally inspired by it: public spirit, the "preference of public to private interest,"⁷ and beneficence, the performance of actions intended to benefit others on the basis of proper motives.⁸ According to this model, the sentiment of patriotism in itself is neither vicious nor virtuous. It is *vicious* when it degenerates into prejudice and animosity toward other nations and causes economic and moral harms. It is *permissible* when one's partiality for country and compatriots remains bound by norms of justice. It is *virtuous* when it inspires individuals to overcome selfishness and other subpolity partialities and to promote the greater happiness of all members of the polity.

The article makes several contributions to the growing scholarship on Smith's moral and political philosophy. First, some recent work has emphasized his critique of the economic and moral harms of patriotism, and has, at best, mentioned his view on its potential value without paying close attention to it.⁹ This article offers a corrective to this prevailing tendency by reconstructing and analyzing Smith's account of virtuous patriotism

LRBL: *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. J. C. Bryce (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1985).

CAS: *The Correspondence of Adam Smith*, ed. E. C. Mossner and I. S. Ross (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1987).

LER: "A Letter to the Authors of the Edinburgh Review," in EPS.

HA: "The Principles Which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries; Illustrated by the History of Astronomy," in EPS.

⁶On love of country as the sentiment of the patriot, see TMS VI.ii.2.2–4, 227–29. Love of country is, for Smith, love of the "society" or "nation" of one's country, or in other words, love of one's compatriots. Smith does not explicitly discuss the potential implications of the size of the territory or the community on the sentiment of patriotism.

⁷TMS VII.ii.4.8, 309. For the association between love of country and public spirit, see TMS III.6.1, 171; IV.i.11, 185–87; VI.ii.2, 227–34.

⁸TMS II.ii.1.1, 78.

⁹See, in particular, Fonna Forman-Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the Circles of Sympathy: Cosmopolitanism and Moral Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 23, 204–11; Samuel Fleischacker, *On Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations": A Philosophical Companion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 250–57; Lisa Hill, "Adam Smith's Cosmopolitanism: The Expanding Circles or Commercial Strangership," *History of Political Thought* 31, no. 3 (2010): 449–73; Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 13–14, 172–75. A notable exception is Ryan Hanley's interpretation of Smith's virtuous patriotism in terms of magnanimity,

(section 2). The analysis fleshes out a hitherto neglected distinction between three models of virtuous patriotism found in Smith's work, described here as heroic, aesthetic, and humane (section 3). While scholars have pointed out the significance of public spirit in Smith's work,¹⁰ they have not reconstructed the relations between patriotism, public spirit, and beneficence. This article offers a new interpretation of the virtue of patriotism as a combination of public spirit and beneficence. I highlight Smith's depiction of the virtuous patriot as beneficent, which is distinct from Ryan Hanley's depiction of Smith's virtuous patriot as a magnanimous self-lover (section 4).¹¹ The article reconstructs Smith's consequentialist defense of patriotism against strong cosmopolitanism,¹² which has not been properly discussed in the scholarship, introducing what I describe as his "principle of effective beneficence," and showing how he employs it in defense of partiality toward compatriots (section 5). The article reconstructs three forms of impartiality involved in Smith's account of virtuous patriotism—impartial judgment, impartial justice, and impartial beneficence—and explains why the third constitutes the essence of virtuous patriotism (section 6). Finally, arguing that Smith's account of patriotism idealizes the pursuit of public interest may seem counterintuitive to readers who have in mind primarily his "invisible hand" argument.¹³ I aim to illuminate aspects of Smith's work that contrast with the "invisible hand" argument and to demonstrate that Smith endorses the pursuit of public interest in some contexts (section 7).

A more general aim of the article is to contribute to recent philosophical discussions of patriotism by recovering from Smith's work a distinctive way of thinking about impartial patriotism. Speaking of impartial patriotism may seem paradoxical because patriots, by definition, are partial to their country and compatriots. But as Bernard Gert has argued in an influential account

which is discussed below. See his *Adam Smith and the Character of Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 155–62.

¹⁰Knud Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator: The Natural Jurisprudence of David Hume and Adam Smith* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), chap. 4; Douglas Long, "Adam Smith's Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adam Smith*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 288–318; Eric Schliesser, *Adam Smith: Systematic Philosopher and Public Thinker* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017); Donald Winch, *Riches and Poverty: An Intellectual History of Political Economy in Britain, 1750–1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 4; Jeffrey T. Young, *Economics as a Moral Science: The Political Economy of Adam Smith* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1997), chap. 8.

¹¹Hanley, *Character of Virtue*, 157–58.

¹²David Miller has defined strong cosmopolitanism as requiring "that as agents we should acknowledge equal duties or equal responsibilities to everyone in the world without exception." See his "Cosmopolitanism: A Critique," *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 5, no. 3 (2002): 84.

¹³WN IV.ii.9, 456; TMS IV.i.10, 184–85.

of the relation between impartiality and morality, one is always impartial in some respect with regard to some group.¹⁴ Recent philosophical work on patriotism has argued that patriots can be impartial in respect of justice with regard to all of humanity. In other words, they can be constrained by impartial, universal norms of justice.¹⁵ As Igor Primoratz has pointed out, however, such accounts of impartial patriotism have not clearly explained why patriotism may be morally valuable rather than merely permissible.¹⁶ In Smith's work we find an additional sense of impartiality, which better accounts for the value of patriotism. Smith's virtuous patriots realize an ideal of impartial beneficence, which consists in the overcoming of partial commitments in order to promote the happiness of a greater number of individuals who are of equal moral worth. This ideal of impartial beneficence, when realized with regard to the group of compatriots, is the core value of virtuous patriotism.

2. Two Faces of Patriotism

A growing body of scholarly literature has illuminated the significance of Smith's work beyond economics, especially as a moral and political philosopher addressing the dilemmas of commercial society. Some of this scholarship has explored Smith's idea of patriotism, but as elaborated below, it has mostly focused on his critique of the potential dangers of patriotism. This section lays the foundation for the ensuing discussion by offering a more balanced overview of Smith's treatment of the negative and positive faces of patriotism.¹⁷

Smith's account of the negative face of patriotism highlights its economic and moral harms when it degenerates into prejudice and animosity toward other commercial nations. Smith highlights the economic harms. In his critique of mercantilism, he singles out "national prejudice and animosity" as one of the two causes—alongside "the monopolizing spirit of merchants and manufacturers"—which lead to the imposition of unreasonable and harmful restraints on free trade.¹⁸

¹⁴Bernard Gert, "Moral Impartiality," *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (1995): 102–28.

¹⁵Marcia Baron, "Patriotism and 'Liberal' Morality," in *Patriotism*, ed. Igor Primoratz (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2002), 59–86; Marcia Baron and Taylor Rogers, "Patriotism and Impartiality," in *Handbook of Patriotism*, ed. Mitja Sardoc (Cham: Springer, 2020), 409–27; Nathanson, "In Defense of 'Moderate Patriotism.'"

¹⁶Igor Primoratz, "Patriotism and Morality: Mapping the Terrain," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2008): 214–15.

¹⁷I am drawing on Martha Nussbaum's account of patriotism as a Janus-faced emotion. See *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 204–56.

¹⁸WN IV.iii.a.1–3, 474–75; IV.iii.c.9–13, 493–96. See also LJA vi.159–65, 389–92; LJB 262–65, 512–13. Smith is following in the footsteps of David Hume, who describes the boundless jealousy and hatred of the English for France as the cause of two

But there is also an accompanying moral problem: national prejudice can lead individuals to lose their moral compass and to cause injustice to outsiders. The argument, as Smith develops it in the 1790 edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (TMS), is an ingenious twist on his well-known doctrine of the impartial spectator. According to the doctrine, proper moral judgment is guided by a sense of praiseworthiness and blameworthiness that aspires to conform to the imagined approbation and disapprobation of an impartial spectator.¹⁹ But in intergroup conflict, whether international or domestic, citizens are unified by their animosity toward an opposing group, and the consensus among them corrupts their moral judgment and subordinates it to a shared, deceptive moral standard, which Smith describes as the viewpoint of “the indulgent and partial spectator.” Adopting the viewpoint of the partial spectator leads the “ferocious patriot” to disregard and violate the laws of justice in dealings with the “public enemy.”²⁰

Smith thus turns out to be an acute analyst and critic of the adverse economic and moral effects of patriotism when it devolves from its “noble” form into “the mean principle of national prejudice.”²¹ As noted above, some recent work on Smith’s account of patriotism has focused on his critique of its dangers without looking as closely at its potential value. Fonna Forman has emphasized Smith’s critique of national prejudice and isolationism, describing him as arguing that love of country is noble in its foundations, but “frequently whipped into group hatred.” She has said little about Smith’s account of love of country beyond that.²² Samuel Fleischacker has mentioned Smith’s understanding of real love of country as love for laws and institutions that promote peace and well-being, but has focused on the “highly sceptical” aspects of his treatment of national glory and war.²³ Martha Nussbaum has rightly said that Smith articulates “a positive yet critical notion of patriotism”; yet she, too, has elaborated mainly on its “highly critical” aspects.²⁴ Lisa Hill has gone furthest in arguing

groundless and harmful jealousies of trade: the fear that the supply of money will be drained by free trade and the fear that domestic industry will be hurt by the prosperity of a neighboring country. David Hume, “The Balance of Trade,” in *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1987), 308–26; Hume, “The Jealousy of Trade,” in *Essays*, 327–31.

¹⁹TMS III.2–4, 113–61, esp. III.3.32, 130–31, III.3.26, 146–47; VI, 212–64, esp. VI.i.11, 215. On the doctrine of the impartial spectator, see D. D. Raphael, *The Impartial Spectator: Adam Smith’s Moral Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). My interpretation of moral judgment is informed by the different reading offered in Douglas J. Den Uyl, “Impartial Spectating and the Price Analogy,” *Econ Journal Watch* 13, no. 2 (2016): 264–72.

²⁰TMS III.3.41–42, 154–55.

²¹TMS VI.ii.2.3, 228–29.

²²Forman-Barzilai, *Circles of Sympathy*, 23, 204–11.

²³Fleischacker, *On Smith’s “Wealth of Nations,”* 250–57.

²⁴Nussbaum, *Cosmopolitan Tradition*, 13–14, 172–75.

that “Smith did not much like patriotism”; while he believed that patriotism is natural and sometimes laudable or useful, “on balance, he conceives of patriotism as doing more harm than good.”²⁵

Smith never says whether the potential disadvantages of patriotism outweigh its potential advantages. There is, however, ample evidence that he views some manifestations of patriotism as useful and admirable. We can see this early on in his career, in his praise for Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s patriotism in the “Letter to the Authors of the *Edinburgh Review*” (1756). Smith applauds the patriotic spirit of Rousseau’s dedication of his *Discourse on Inequality* (1755) to the Republic of Geneva. He describes the dedication as “an agreeable, animated, and I believe too, a just panegyric,” and adds that it “expresses that ardent and passionate esteem which it becomes a good citizen to entertain for the government of his country and the character of his countrymen.”²⁶ This may be a controversial example, because Smith’s praise for Rousseau’s patriotism has been read as satirical.²⁷ But the text provides no clear evidence for such a reading, and the Smith scholarship has mostly read his praise for Rousseau’s patriotism as sincere.²⁸

Smith’s major work of moral philosophy, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, provides ample evidence for his endorsement of virtuous patriotism, especially in parts IV and VI.²⁹ For example, when Smith speaks of the “patriot who lays down his life” for society as someone who “excites not only our entire approbation, but our highest wonder and admiration,” he is describing patriotism in favorable terms.³⁰ And yet, it is quite challenging to reconstruct out of the textual evidence a coherent philosophical account of virtuous patriotism, because there are some perplexing differences and tensions between Smith’s comments. For instance, in part IV of TMS, Smith says that the public spirit of patriots is not commonly motivated by humane sympathy

²⁵Hill, “Smith’s Cosmopolitanism,” 455, 460–61.

²⁶LER 16, 254. For Rousseau’s dedication, see his *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men*, in *The Discourses and Other Political Writings*, ed. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 114–23.

²⁷Daniel B. Klein, “Adam Smith’s Response to Rousseau,” *Adam Smith Review* 7 (2014): 325–26.

²⁸Charles L. Griswold, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith: A Philosophical Encounter* (London: Routledge, 2018), 35–36; Jeffrey Lomonaco, “Adam Smith’s ‘Letter to the Authors of the *Edinburgh Review*,’” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63, no. 4 (Oct. 2002): 676; Peter Minowitz, *Profits, Priests, and Princes: Adam Smith’s Emancipation of Economics from Politics and Religion* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1993), 30; John Rae, *Life of Adam Smith* (London: Macmillan, 1895), 124; Dennis C. Rasmussen, *The Problems and Promise of Commercial Society: Adam Smith’s Response to Rousseau* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2008), 66–68.

²⁹TMS IV.1.11, 185–87; IV.2.9–11, 190–92; VI.ii.2, 227–34.

³⁰TMS VI.ii.2.2, 228. See also TMS IV.2.10–11, 190–92.

with their compatriots and points out that “love of system” can serve as an alternative source of motivation, whereas in part VI, he criticizes the “man of system,” whose attempt to impose “an ideal plan of government” brings about disorder and misery, idealizing instead the patriotic reformer “whose public spirit is prompted altogether by humanity and benevolence.”³¹ I offer three keys to untangling and clarifying Smith’s account of virtuous patriotism: Smith’s three models of virtuous patriotism (section 3), the role of beneficence in unifying these models (section 4), and effective beneficence as the principle justifying patriotic partiality against strong cosmopolitanism (section 5).

3. Three Models of Virtuous Patriotism

The differences and tensions between Smith’s comments on virtuous patriotism in TMS may reflect a development in his thought over the years. While part IV dates back to the 1759 edition of the work, part VI was added in the 1790 edition. It is possible that Smith changed his mind on some issues and neglected to smooth over all of the inconsistencies.³² Much of the apparent confusion is cleared up if we recognize that the 1790 edition contains three different models of virtuous patriotism, distinguished by the predominant motive that prompts the patriot to virtuous action and by the general way of acting associated with it.³³

The heroic model comes up when Smith wants to illustrate what makes “the greater exertions of public spirit” admirable. True, he argues, public spirit is one of the virtues “most useful to others,” and yet the admiration for “heroic” or magnanimous acts of public spirit arises most immediately from the “great, the noble, and exalted propriety” of such acts rather than from their utility to the public.³⁴ The motives that Smith associates with magnanimous self-overcoming are the love of praiseworthiness, which is the desire to do the proper thing regardless of actual praise, and the love of true glory, or the desire of being praised for doing truly praiseworthy things.³⁵

Smith offers two striking examples of heroic patriotism: patriotic soldiers sacrificing their lives in war, and the story of Lucius Brutus, founder of the Roman Republic, ordering his two sons, who had conspired against the liberty of the new republic, to be scourged with rods and decapitated before his eyes.³⁶ He recognizes that such extreme acts of sacrifice for the

³¹TMS IV.1.11, 185–87; VI.ii.2.15–18, 232–34.

³²Fleischacker makes a similar argument regarding TMS VI.i.10 in his *On Smith’s “Wealth of Nations,”* chap. 6.

³³In speaking of motive and general way of acting, I am drawing on Smith’s account of virtue in TMS I.i.3.5–7, 18; VII.iv.1–35, 327–40.

³⁴TMS IV.2.9–11, 190–92; VI.ii.2.2, 228.

³⁵TMS VII.ii.4, 306–14. See also TMS III.2, 113–34.

³⁶TMS IV.2.9–11, 190–92; VI.ii.2.2, 228. On Lucius Brutus and his sons, see Livy, *History of Rome*, trans. B. O. Foster, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University

public good tend to manifest themselves under “the boisterous and stormy sky of war and faction,”³⁷ and he is not calling to cultivate them in commercial society. His tendency is to relegate such acts to the ancient republics or to “savage” and “barbarous” nations—terms that he uses, in his theory of economic and social development, to describe societies of hunters and fishers and societies of shepherds, respectively.³⁸ Through these examples, Smith clarifies in a dramatic way what is admirable about virtuous patriotism: the overcoming of private interest for the public good.

Alongside this model of heroic patriotism, we find in part IV of TMS an entirely different story about patriots who are driven to public-spirited reform by what Smith calls “love of system” or “spirit of system.”³⁹ Elsewhere Smith describes the passion for creating philosophical systems—constructions of the imagination that connect otherwise discordant phenomena by a few common principles—as a fundamental characteristic of the human imagination, which is distressed by disorder and incoherence.⁴⁰ In part IV of TMS, he explains how this passion for coherence can be utilized to motivate the reform of public institutions and policies in order to promote the happiness of society. “When a patriot exerts himself for the improvement of any part of the public police,” he says, it is not commonly due to “pure sympathy with the happiness of those who are to reap the benefit of it.” In fact, some of the greatest reformers, such as Peter the Great, were “not very sensible to the feelings of humanity.” Smith argues that patriotic reformers are more likely to be drawn to the aesthetic pleasure derived from creating a beautiful and harmonious political system, and the best way to motivate them to public spirit is through systematic studies of politics.⁴¹

In speaking of “love of system” and “spirit of system,” Smith was entering polemical grounds. On the one hand, system building is central to enlightenment science and to Smith’s work itself.⁴² On the other hand, the phrase “spirit of system” was pejoratively employed by sentimentalists and

Press, 1919), 233; Plutarch, *Plutarch’s Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 515–17.

³⁷TMS III.3.37, 153; VI.ii.2.13, 232.

³⁸TMS V.2.8–10, 204–8; VI.ii.2.3, 228–29. Like some other French and Scottish writers in that period, Smith assumes that societies undergo successive stages of economic and social development distinguished primarily by their mode of subsistence. See Ronald L. Meek, *Social Science and the Ignoble Savage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

³⁹TMS IV.i.11, 185–87.

⁴⁰HA II.12, 45–46; IV.19, 66–67; IV.76, 105; LRBL ii.132–34, 145–46; WN V.i.f.25, 768–69.

⁴¹TMS IV.i.11, 185–87.

⁴²On Smith’s own “love of system,” see Dugald Stewart, “Account of the Life and Writings of Adam Smith,” in EPS III.15, 306; Schliesser, *Smith: Systematic Philosopher*.

physiocrats in criticizing rationalist and mercantilist attempts to impose their theoretical schemes on nature.⁴³ As mentioned above, in part IV of TMS, Smith speaks favorably of love or spirit of system as a motivation to public spirit, but in the 1790 edition of the work, in part VI, he portrays the “spirit of system” as a dangerous motivation for political reform, animating the immoderate “man of system.” This can be read as an outright rejection of aesthetic patriotism, but if we assume, as I do, that parts IV and VI are roughly consistent, then the “man of system” can be seen as representing a perverse manifestation of aesthetic patriotism, which is more likely to show itself in some specific situations. Smith mentions two such situations: “times of public discontent, faction, and disorder,” when public sentiments are enflamed and constitutional reform might become immoderate and harmful; and the reign of arrogant and tyrannical sovereign princes, who turn the spirit of reform against any constitutional limitation of their power.⁴⁴

In contrast to the man of system, Smith introduces a third, humane model of virtuous patriotism. He describes the “real patriot” as the moderate reformer and legislator, whose “more gentle public spirit” is “founded upon the love of humanity.” This humane patriotic leader respects existing privileges and prejudices and establishes only the best political system that can be promoted without violence.⁴⁵

4. The Virtue of Patriotism

What unites these different models of patriotic action—heroic sacrifice, systematic reform, and humane leadership? In this section, I argue that these models are unified by a similar conception of the virtue of patriotism, as a combination of public spirit and beneficence.

Let us start by looking at Ryan Hanley’s illuminating account of Smith’s virtuous patriot as a “noble self-lover,” who is able to transcend vulgar self-preference and replace it with the magnanimous desire to have a praiseworthy character.⁴⁶ Hanley’s account draws our attention to the fact that Smith describes public spirit, the virtue that he commonly associates with patriotism, as involving the spirited, magnanimous overcoming of private interest. “The great and exalted virtue of magnanimity” is identified, in Smith’s work, with an exceptional exertion of self-command, which aims at “what is honourable and noble” out of regard for one’s own “rank and

⁴³The dialectic of system in the Enlightenment is beautifully described in Jessica Riskin, “The ‘Spirit of System’ and the Fortunes of Physiocracy,” *History of Political Economy* 35, no. 5 (2003): 42–73.

⁴⁴TMS VI.ii.2.12–18, 231–34. See also F. P. Lock, “Adam Smith and the ‘Man of System’: Interpreting *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, VI.ii.2.12–18,” *Adam Smith Review*, no. 3 (2007): 38–46.

⁴⁵TMS VI.ii.2.15–16, 232–33.

⁴⁶Hanley, *Character of Virtue*, 156–62, quote at 157–58.

dignity" in the eyes of real or ideal spectators.⁴⁷ Similarly to Plato, Smith identifies magnanimity with the irascible part of the soul, spirit (*thumos*), when it is guided by reason to pursue what is honorable and noble.⁴⁸ The rational guidance of spirit is provided, in Smith's account, by the employment of impartial judgment, which steers the agent toward what is truly honorable and noble. Some magnanimous agents are virtuous enough to be content with the imagined approval of the impartial spectator (the love of praiseworthiness), while others require, in addition, actual praise from society (the love of true glory).⁴⁹

But while Hanley's interpretation of Smith's virtuous patriot as a magnanimous self-lover perfectly captures Smith's heroic model, it sits more awkwardly with the other two models. The aesthetic patriot is predominantly motivated by the love of system rather than by the desire for status and recognition associated with magnanimity.⁵⁰ Humane patriotism is even more difficult to reconcile with magnanimity: Smith contrasts the "amiable" virtue of humanity, which is based on sympathy with others, with the "awful and respectable" virtue of magnanimity, which is based on the command of the passions and their subjection to the demands of "our own dignity and honour."⁵¹

These difficulties can be resolved by looking more closely at Smith's most elaborate discussion of patriotism, in a chapter found in part VI of TMS.⁵² The title of the chapter, "Of the order in which Societies are by nature recommended to our Beneficence," suggests that Smith is discussing patriotism as part of his account of the virtue of beneficence. Moreover, the broader section (TMS VI.ii), which includes the chapter on patriotism, discusses "the direction

⁴⁷TMS I.i.5.6, 25; I.ii.3.8, 38; I.iii.1.15, 49; II.iii.3.6, 108; IV.2.11, 191; VII.ii.1.4–7, 267–68; VII.ii.1.13, 271; VII.ii.4.2, 306; VII.ii.4.9, 310–11.

⁴⁸TMS VII.ii.1.4–7, 267–68. See also Hanley, *Character of Virtue*, 152–55.

⁴⁹TMS VII.ii.4.8–10, 309–11.

⁵⁰I am following Hill's account of the concept of spirit in Smith's work as "the desire for status, social recognition and approval." See her "Adam Smith on Thumos and Irrational Economic 'Man,'" *European Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 19, no. 1 (2012): 2.

⁵¹TMS I.i.5, 23–26, esp. I.i.5.6, 25.

⁵²TMS VI.ii.2, 227–34. My interpretation of this chapter as concerned with patriotism and beneficence differs from other readings of it—for instance, as a conflicted appropriation of the Stoic model of concentric circles of affinity (Forman); as an account of the ennoblement of self-love (Hanley); as a critique of physiocracy and an endorsement of international competition for economic excellence (Hont); and as a warning against immoderate reform in Europe and Britain (Lock). See Forman-Barzilai, *Circles of Sympathy*, 120–34; Hanley, *Character of Virtue*, 155–62; István Hont, *The Jealousy of Trade: International Competition and the Nation-State in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 111–25; István Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society: Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Adam Smith*, ed. Béla Kapossy and Michael Sonenscher (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 123–31; Lock, "Smith and the 'Man of System.'"

and employment of our very limited powers of beneficence,"⁵³ and each one of its chapters is devoted to beneficence in a different sphere of action: private (VI.ii.1), public (VI.ii.2), and universal (VI.ii.3). Smith, then, identifies patriotism with the practice of beneficence in the public sphere, the sphere of one's compatriots.⁵⁴

How exactly does beneficence help us in reconciling Smith's three models of virtuous patriotism? Beneficence is the performance of "actions of a beneficent tendency, which proceed from proper motives."⁵⁵ The scope of actions covered by beneficence is broad: Smith implies that "proper beneficence" includes all active social duties toward others, including duties of distributive justice.⁵⁶ Arguably, the scope of motives that can prompt agents to beneficent action is also broad, and includes not only benevolent affections, but also motives that proceed from self-love.⁵⁷ Virtuous patriots aim to benefit their compatriots on the basis of various proper motives, including the love of praiseworthiness, the love of true glory, the love of system, and the love of humanity.

Why, then, does Smith speak of patriots as exhibiting "public spirit" rather than "public beneficence?" This may be partly due to contemporary moral and political discourse, which often uses "public spirit" as synonymous with virtuous patriotism.⁵⁸ But it may also indicate that, no matter which predominant motive drives the agent to beneficent actions, virtuous patriotism always involves some measure of magnanimous self-overcoming. Taking

⁵³TMS VI.ii.intro.2, 218.

⁵⁴Hanley argues that section VI.ii is "not immediately recognizable as a treatment of a specific virtue," in contrast to the immediately preceding and following sections, whose headings declare their concern with the virtues of prudence and self-command. He reads section VI.ii as a "crucial preparative for the treatment of magnanimity in VI.iii." See his *Character of Virtue*, 155. Indeed, the heading of section VI.ii is general: "Of the Character of the Individual, so far as it can affect the Happiness of other People." But the introduction to the section straightforwardly recognizes it as a treatment of beneficence, after having set aside the other virtue concerned with the happiness of others, justice (TMS VI.ii.intro.2, 218).

⁵⁵TMS II.ii.1.1, 78.

⁵⁶TMS VII.ii.1.10, 269–70. See also Charles L. Griswold, *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 252; Leonidas Montes, *Adam Smith in Context: A Critical Reassessment of Some Central Components of His Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 93–94.

⁵⁷I believe this to be implied in Smith's discussion of the motives of "generous and public-spirited actions" in TMS VII.ii.4.8, 309, and reinforced by his description of the love of the superiority of one's own character as a virtuous motive of action that affects the happiness of others in TMS III.3.4, 137.

⁵⁸See, for example: "TRUE PATRIOTISM, then, considered as a principle, is the same thing with public spirit, or a generous love to our country, — a regard for the happiness of our fellow-creatures, especially a tender concern for the welfare of our fellow-subjects." Noah Welles, *Patriotism Described and Recommended* (New London: Timothy Green, 1764), 8.

into consideration both public spirit and beneficence, I suggest that the virtue of all of Smith's virtuous patriots lies in overcoming private interest in order to benefit one's compatriots on the basis of proper motives.

Finally, Smith may be inviting us to consider the different proper motives that he mentions as complementary. In commercial society, ideal patriots would magnanimously overcome private interest not in order to risk their lives in war, but to promote the happiness of their compatriots, through the pursuit of a systematic idea of the perfection of policy and law, while showing humane respect for the established social order.⁵⁹ Arguably, Smith's ideal patriot would be a magnanimous, visionary, and humane social reformer.

5. Patriotism and Effective Beneficence

If the virtue of patriotism lies in overcoming private interest in order to promote the happiness of society, why restrict ourselves to a national society rather than preferring the interests of humanity? This section reconstructs Smith's consequentialist defense of patriotic partiality, which has not been properly discussed in the scholarship.⁶⁰ I present Smith's model of concentric circles of beneficent affections, explain his general rationale for their weakness or strength (described here as "the principle of effective beneficence"), and show how this rationale is applied in defense of patriotic partiality.

There are good reasons for viewing Smith as committed, in some sense, to cosmopolitanism, the idea that all human beings are citizens in a single world community. Scholars have described as cosmopolitan his commitments to the equal moral status of human beings, to universal norms of justice, and to a global commercial community.⁶¹ However, he is clearly an antic cosmopolitan in his treatment of beneficence in TMS.⁶² Following Cicero, he distinguishes between duties of justice, whose scope is universal, and duties of beneficence, whose scope may be limited.⁶³ He describes the natural order of beneficent

⁵⁹TMS VI.ii.2.7–18, 230–34.

⁶⁰James Otteson and Forman have emphasized the logic of "familiarity" or "proximity" that guides Smith's concentric circles model, while Hanley has described the model as part of his account of the ennoblement of self-love. But these are reflections on Smith's discussion rather than a reconstruction of his consequentialist argument. See James R. Otteson, *Adam Smith's Marketplace of Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Fonna Forman-Barzilai, "Sympathy in Space(s): Adam Smith on Proximity," *Political Theory* 33, no. 2 (2005): 189–217; Hanley, *Character of Virtue*, 155–62.

⁶¹Forman-Barzilai, *Circles of Sympathy*, chaps. 6–7; Hill, "Smith's Cosmopolitanism"; Nussbaum, *Cosmopolitan Tradition*, chap. 5.

⁶²Nussbaum has argued that in WN, Smith shows greater sensitivity to problems of material aid or beneficence; see *Cosmopolitan Tradition*, chap. 5.

⁶³On justice and beneficence, see TMS II.i–ii, 78–91. On the scope of beneficence, see TMS VI.ii, 218–37. For Cicero's account, see Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Duties*, ed. M. T.

affections in terms of the Stoic model of concentric circles of affinity (*oikeiōsis*), starting with care of the self and progressing in concentric circles to family and relatives, friends and acquaintances, strangers distinguished by their wealth or poverty, compatriots, and other inhabitants of the universe.⁶⁴ But as Forman has pointed out, he rejects the radical Stoic prescription to become citizens of the world by eradicating the private and partial affections and cultivating indifference toward the near and dear.⁶⁵ The version of the concentric circles model that he embraces instead is roughly that of Cicero, who argues that the public fellowship with the republic holds priority over more limited and more extensive fellowships.⁶⁶

What is the rationale behind prioritizing love of country? In Cicero's account, gratitude to the republic plays a central role in accounting for civic commitment. Smith justifies patriotism on the basis of its beneficial consequences. To fully appreciate this, let us first look at his general rationale for the strength or weakness of all beneficent affections. The section on beneficence in TMS VI sets out to explain "the foundation of that order which nature seems to have traced out for the distribution of our good offices, or for the direction and employment of our very limited powers of beneficence." Smith is not arguing that the order of beneficent affections is justified because it is natural. He is rather asking how this natural order can be justified. The answer is that the "unerring wisdom" that regulates nature directs the order of beneficent affections so that "they are always stronger or weaker in proportion as our beneficence is more or less necessary, or can be more or less useful."⁶⁷ In other words, there is a happy, providentially ordained correspondence between the strength or weakness of beneficent affections and their utility.⁶⁸ Let us call this happy correspondence "the principle of effective beneficence."

The principle of effective beneficence pervades Smith's discussion of the private, public, and universal spheres of action. In his discussion of private beneficence, for instance, human beings are endowed with a strong instinct of self-love because "every man is. . . fitter and abler to take care of

Griffin and E. M. Atkins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1.20–60, 9–25. On the Ciceronian distinction between justice and beneficence, see Martha C. Nussbaum, "Duties of Justice, Duties of Material Aid: Cicero's Problematic Legacy," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2000): 176–206.

⁶⁴On Smith and *oikeiōsis*, see Vivienne Brown, *Adam Smith's Discourse: Canonicity, Commerce, and Conscience* (London: Routledge, 1994), chaps. 4–5; Forman-Barzilai, *Circles of Sympathy*.

⁶⁵Forman-Barzilai, *Circles of Sympathy*, 120–34; Forman-Barzilai, "Smith's Anti-Cosmopolitanism," *Adam Smith Review*, no. 5 (2010): 145–60. See TMS III.3.11–16, 140–43; VII.ii.1.43–47, 292–92.

⁶⁶Cicero, *On Duties*, 1.42–60, 19–25.

⁶⁷TMS VI.ii.intro.2–3, 218; see also VI.ii.2.1, 227.

⁶⁸That the unerring wisdom is God's is made explicit in TMS VI.ii.3, 235–37.

himself." One's love for family members comes next in the order of affections because family members are "the persons upon whose happiness or misery his conduct must have the greatest influence." Love of relations decreases with distance and separation because one's usefulness to them decreases accordingly. And so on.⁶⁹

The chapter on patriotism employs the same logic in order to justify the motivational pull of love of country. Smith explains that the state or sovereignty is "by nature, most strongly recommended" to individuals because it is "in ordinary cases, the greatest society upon whose happiness or misery, our good or bad conduct can have much influence."⁷⁰ The normative assumption that underlies this statement is that beneficence calls upon us to promote the good of the greatest possible number of individuals.⁷¹ Taken on its own, this might lead to strong cosmopolitanism. But Smith counters this expansive commitment with the empirical statement that beneficence is ineffective beyond national borders. While the sentiment of universal benevolence is "noble and generous" and "circumscribed by no boundary," he says, "our effectual good offices can very seldom be extended to any wider society than that of our own country."⁷² Smith approves of universal benevolence, but rejects universal beneficence.⁷³

Smith's rejection of universal beneficence can be broken down into a negative component and a positive one. Negatively, he argues that universal beneficence is doomed to fail because of the "weakness" of human powers and comprehension. Given this alleged limitation, he thinks that we should focus our energies where they would serve a clear purpose.⁷⁴ Positively, he argues, in a key paragraph, that the natural disposition of individuals to

⁶⁹TMS VI.ii.1, 219–27.

⁷⁰TMS VI.ii.2.1–2, 227.

⁷¹In this, Smith agrees with his teacher Francis Hutcheson, who believed, he says, those actions "aimed at the happiness of a great community" to be "proportionally the more virtuous," and whose system, he adds, adequately explains "the peculiar excellency of the supreme virtue of beneficence." He disagrees with Hutcheson's refusal to acknowledge self-love as a motive of virtuous actions (TMS VII.ii.3.10–15, 303–4, quoted text at VII.ii.3.10, 303 and VII.ii.3.15, 304).

⁷²TMS VI.ii.3.1–2, 235.

⁷³In Part III of TMS, Smith says that "extreme sympathy" with the misfortunes of those "who are placed altogether out of the sphere of our activity" and "whom we can neither serve nor hurt" is both unnatural and "perfectly useless." But there he is concerned specifically with refuting the doctrine of the "whining and melancholy moralists, who are perpetually reproaching us with our happiness, while so many of our brethren are in misery." The fault of their doctrine lies in aiming to "damp the pleasures of the fortunate, and render a certain melancholy dejection habitual to all men" to no apparent use (TMS III.3.9, 139–40). In TMS VI.ii.3, Smith describes *moderate* sympathy with the fortune and misery of others as natural and virtuous, and what concerns him is its translation into active universal beneficence.

⁷⁴TMS VI.ii.3.6, 237.

love their country for its own sake and independently of the interest of humanity is, in fact, the best way of promoting the interests of humanity:

We do not love our country merely as a part of the great society of mankind: we love it for its own sake, and independently of any such consideration. 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 both of his abilities and of his understanding. (TMS VI.ii.2.4, 229)

This paragraph describes a global division of beneficent labor, which directs individuals to act within their national sphere. Again, we see a providential wisdom fitting beneficent affections to beneficial ends, and in this case, designing patriotism to serve the interests of humanity.

I take no firm position here on how essential providence is to Smith's defense of patriotism.⁷⁵ Recent liberal defenses of patriotic partiality have made roughly similar arguments about a global division of positive duties without appealing to providence. In particular, Smith's consequentialist defense of patriotism resembles Robert Goodin's "assigned responsibility model." According to Goodin, special duties toward compatriots can be reconciled with the moral principles of universality and impartiality on the assumption that specialization and division of labor will enable general duties toward people to be more effectively discharged.⁷⁶ What we can learn from Smith to enhance Goodin's account is the integration of the consequentialist argument into virtue ethics and the argument that patriotic partiality becomes justifiable insofar as it serves the exercise of beneficence.

6. Patriotism and Impartiality

Having reconstructed Smith's account of virtuous patriotism, I would like, in this section, to consider its relation to the ideal of impartiality and to ask whether and in what sense Smith's virtuous patriot is an impartial patriot.⁷⁷

⁷⁵There is a scholarly debate on the role of providence in Smith. A good starting point would be the discussion in Michelle A. Schwarze and John T. Scott, "Spontaneous Disorder in Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*: Resentment, Injustice, and the Appeal to Providence," *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 2 (2015): 463–76.

⁷⁶Robert E. Goodin, "What Is So Special about Our Fellow Countrymen?," *Ethics* 98, no. 4 (July 1988): 678–86.

⁷⁷Smith never explicitly describes patriots as impartial, but in the political discourse of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, patriotism and impartiality are often related in some way or other, as argued in Christine Gerrard, "The Language of Impartiality and Party-Political Discourse in England, 1680–1745," in *The Emergence of Impartiality*, ed. Kathryn Murphy and Traninger Anita (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 211–22. David Hume uses the phrase "an impartial patriot" in describing an imaginary

I argue that Smith's virtuous patriots are impartial in several ways, and most distinctively, in overcoming private and partial interest and preferring the happiness of a greater number of individuals who are of equal moral worth.

One reason to assume from the outset that Smith thinks of patriots as being impartial is that all the threats to public spirit that he describes are forms of partiality. The villainy of traitors consists in their dramatically partial preference of their "own little interest" to the compounded interests of all of their relations and compatriots.⁷⁸ The moral corruption of religious or political fanatics consists in adopting the deceptive standard of "the indulgent and partial spectator" constructed by their surrounding in-group.⁷⁹ Mercantilist monopolists represent "the clamorous importunity of partial interests" and act against the public interest in free and universal competition.⁸⁰ Prejudiced and belligerent patriots are apt not only to cause injustice to non-compatriots, but also to act against the interest of their own compatriots in peaceful commerce.⁸¹ Immoderate reformers allow their arrogant partiality for their own intellectual systems to cause violence to their country.⁸² Smith's virtuous patriot must be immune to the seductive powers of partiality in all of these different forms: self-preference, factional fanaticism, the spirit of monopoly, national prejudice, and arrogant spirit of system.

There are three forms of impartiality involved in these dangerous forms of partiality: impartial judgment, impartial justice, and impartial beneficence. I consider them in turn and argue that impartial beneficence constitutes the essence of virtuous patriotism.

Virtuous patriots are guided, at least to some extent, by impartial judgment. The heroic patriot, in particular, "appears to view himself in the light in which the impartial spectator naturally and necessarily views him."⁸³ But this is far from distinctive of patriotism. Impartial judgment is the most general kind of impartiality in Smith's moral philosophy. It guides various forms of virtuous conduct, including partial conduct. The prudent person, for instance, who sacrifices present for future enjoyment, "is always both supported and rewarded by the entire approbation of the impartial spectator."⁸⁴

member of the British Parliament who is deliberating whether to support the house of Stuart or that of Hanover and attempts to "form a just judgment" by "weighing, with impartiality, the advantages and disadvantages on each side" amid contrasting partisan views. See Hume, "Of the Protestant Succession," in *Political Essays*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 216, 219.

⁷⁸TMS VI.ii.2.2, 228.

⁷⁹TMS III.3.41, 43, 154–55.

⁸⁰WN I.xi.b.5, 163–64; IV.ii, 452–72.

⁸¹TMS VI.ii.2.3, 228–29; WN IV.iii.c, 488–98.

⁸²TMS VI.ii.2.16–18, 233–34.

⁸³TMS VI.ii.2.3, 228; see also IV.2.9–10, 190–92.

⁸⁴TMS VI.i.11, 215.

The greater drama of impartiality lies in cases in which the moral principles inspired by the imagined viewpoint of the impartial spectator compel agents to overcome their partiality for themselves or for those close to their heart. Both justice and beneficence require such self-overcoming. They differ, however, in the way in which they relate to patriotism. Impartial justice applies to the whole of humanity and operates as a constraint on virtuous patriotism.⁸⁵ Impartial beneficence applies only to the community of compatriots and can be seen as the essence of virtuous patriotism.

Some of the recent philosophical discussions of the morality of patriotism have focused on its potential compatibility with impartial, universal requirements of justice. It has been argued that such compatibility is required for patriotism to be morally permissible.⁸⁶ Smith can be reasonably interpreted as advancing a similar view in his critique of the injustice caused by national prejudice and animosity. In order for patriotism to realize its potential as a “noble” principle, it must overcome the inclination to treat neighboring nations with “little justice,” and treat all fellow human beings with fairness.⁸⁷

Smith condemns the “savage patriotism” of the Roman senator Cato the Elder, who repeatedly called for the destruction of neighboring Carthage. He contrasts it with the plea of the Roman consul Publius Cornelius Scipio Nasica Corculum not to destroy Carthage, which he describes as “the liberal expression of a more enlarged and enlightened mind.”⁸⁸ This has been interpreted as a contrast between the patriotism of Cato the Elder and the “enlarged and enlightened mind” of Scipio Nasica.⁸⁹ But Plutarch, Smith’s likely source for this episode, depicts Scipio Nasica as a patriot and a conservative.⁹⁰ It seems more plausible that Smith depicts him as a just and liberal patriot, whose love of country is consistent with the love of mankind.⁹¹

⁸⁵On justice and self-overcoming, see TMS II.ii.2.1–3, 83–85; III.3.4, 136–37. The universal scope of justice is nicely demonstrated by Smith’s discussion of the dilemma between the loss of one’s finger and the loss of the empire of China in TMS III.3.4.

⁸⁶Baron, “Patriotism and ‘Liberal’ Morality”; Baron and Rogers, “Patriotism and Impartiality”; Nathanson, “In Defense of ‘Moderate Patriotism’”; Nathanson, *Patriotism, Morality, and Peace*.

⁸⁷TMS VI.ii.2.3, 228.

⁸⁸TMS VI.ii.2.3, 228–29.

⁸⁹Hill, “Smith’s Cosmopolitanism,” 466.

⁹⁰Plutarch explains that Scipio Nasica called to spare Carthage because he “saw, probably, that the Roman people, in its wantonness, was already guilty of many excesses, and in the pride of its prosperity, spurned the control of the Senate,” and “wished, therefore, that the fear of Carthage should abide, to curb the boldness of the multitude like a bridle, believing her not strong enough to conquer Rome, nor yet weak enough to be despised.” Plutarch, *Plutarch’s Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. 2 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914), 383.

⁹¹See also Fleischacker’s argument that Smith’s true love of country is consistent with the love of mankind (*On Smith’s “Wealth of Nations,”* 251).

Hont has interpreted the same paragraph as presenting a “competitor to patriotism”: national emulation, or competition for the economic excellence and superiority of one’s nation without envy and animosity.⁹² He overlooks the fact that Smith calls for “national emulation” that involves promoting the excellence of neighboring nations, which is hardly consistent with competition.⁹³ He also overlooks Smith’s distinction between moral and economic emulation.⁹⁴ Moral emulation is not the desire to outdo others, but the ability to learn from their excellence, or in Smith’s words, “the anxious desire that we ourselves should excel” and be “as admirable as those whom we love and admire the most.”⁹⁵ In the comment on national emulation, Smith is arguing that virtuous patriots should promote the excellence of neighboring countries and derive from their excellence, in turn, the desire to improve the excellence of their own country.

Arguing for the compatibility of patriotism with impartial justice only clarifies when patriotism may be permissible, and not why it may be valuable.⁹⁶ The value of patriotism, on Smith’s account, can be understood in terms of realizing an ideal of impartial beneficence. To better understand what this means and how this works, let us look more closely at Smith’s description of the heroic patriot in the beginning of the chapter on patriotism:

The patriot who lays down his life for the safety, or even the vain-glory of this society, appears to act with the most exact propriety. He appears to view himself in the light in which the impartial spectator naturally and necessarily views him, as but one of the multitude, in the eye of that equitable judge, of no more consequence than any other in it, but bound at all times to sacrifice and devote himself to the safety, to the service, and even to the glory of the greater number. (TMS VI.ii.2.2, 228)

Adopting the viewpoint of the impartial spectator, virtuous patriots view themselves “as but one of the multitude . . . of no more consequence than any other in it.” They recognize that they are morally equal to others.⁹⁷ Subsequently, they prefer the overriding interest of a greater number of individuals who are of equal moral worth.

This type of moral self-overcoming is not unique to patriots. Smith says that individuals see themselves as “but one of the multitude” when they overcome

⁹²Hont, *The Jealousy of Trade*, 111–25; Hont, *Politics in Commercial Society*, 123–31, quote at 131.

⁹³TMS VI.ii.2.3, 228.

⁹⁴TMS I.iii.3.2, 62.

⁹⁵TMS III.2.2.3, 114. For the economic model of emulation as competition for excellence, see WN I.viii.44, 100; IV.v.a.39, 523; V.i.b.21, 720; V.i.f.12–13, 763; V.i.f.4, 759–60; V.i.f.45, 780.

⁹⁶Primoratz, “Patriotism and Morality,” 214–15.

⁹⁷Fleischacker and Stephen Darwall have adduced this phrase as evidence of Smith’s moral egalitarianism. Fleischacker, *On Smith’s “Wealth of Nations,”* chap. 4; Stephen Darwall, “Equal Dignity in Adam Smith,” *Adam Smith Review*, no. 1 (2004): 129–34.

natural self-preference in order to act justly.⁹⁸ But in the case of the virtuous patriot, the ability to prefer the overriding interest of a greater number of individuals who are of equal moral worth is employed not in abstaining from harming others, but in positively acting to promote their happiness. The distinctive virtue of patriots can be described as consisting in impartial beneficence, or the overcoming of selfishness and other subpolity partialities and the promotion of the greater happiness of all members of the polity.

7. Conclusion

In reconstructing and analyzing Smith's account of patriotism, I have aimed, among other things, to contribute to a body of scholarship that has questioned the image of Smith as a champion of selfishness and greed.⁹⁹ More controversially, I have sought to show that, notwithstanding his endorsement of self-preference in some economic contexts, Smith endorses the conscious pursuit of public interest as an ideal of moral excellence and as a practical principle of conduct in some social contexts.

Arguably, the virtue of public spirit, the preference of public to private interest, is the republican ideal of good citizenship. At least, this is how Montesquieu describes the republican ideal of political virtue: the preference of public interest over one's own.¹⁰⁰ I have refrained from using the word "republicanism," because it brings in a host of additional problems. Whether and in what sense Adam Smith was a republican has long been a matter of contention, complicated by his enigmatic politics and by the elasticity of the concept of republicanism in the eighteenth century and in recent scholarly work. There is a strong case to be made for seeing Smith's account of patriotism as one of several ways in which he is indebted to republicanism, as he himself understood the concept, in terms borrowed from Montesquieu and from Hume. I leave the development of this argument to future work.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸TMS II.ii.2.2, 82–3; III.3.4, 136–37.

⁹⁹See, for example, Fleischacker, *On Smith's "Wealth of Nations"*; Griswold, *Adam Smith and the Virtues of Enlightenment*; Hanley, *Character of Virtue*; Iain McLean, *Adam Smith, Radical and Egalitarian: An Interpretation for the Twenty-First Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Jerry Z. Muller, *Adam Smith in His Time and Ours: Designing the Decent Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹⁰⁰Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia C. Miller, and Harold S. Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 35–36.

¹⁰¹For some discussions of the question of Smith's republicanism, see Dennis C. Rasmussen, "Smith, Rousseau and the True Spirit of a Republican," in *Adam Smith and Rousseau: Ethics, Politics, Economics*, ed. Maria Pia Paganelli, Dennis C. Rasmussen, and Craig Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 241–59; Shannon C. Stimson, "Republicanism and the Recovery of the Political in Adam

I have aimed to offer a charitable reconstruction of Smith's account of patriotism. I would be remiss not to mention some of its shortcomings. First, the argument that humanity benefits from a global division of beneficent labor, which directs individuals to act within their national sphere, is based on empirical assumptions about the epistemological and practical limitations of human beings, but Smith does not justify these. Even in his own time, effective attempts to benefit others often extended beyond national borders, for instance, in transatlantic cooperation between members of the same religious denominations in Britain and the American colonies.

Second, Smith is never clear on whether and how the ideal of seeing oneself as one of the multitude and preferring the happiness of the greater number works hand in hand with the economic and social inequality that he believes to be useful and necessary in commercial society.¹⁰² While I cannot develop this issue here, Smith could be interpreted as embracing a division of political labor according to one's economic and social position in society, with the "middle and inferior stations of life" serving society by working, producing, obeying the law, and fulfilling their duties when called upon, and the "superior stations of life" entrusted with the more substantive expressions of public spirit.¹⁰³

Third, in his 1790 comments on constitutional reform in times of public discontent, Smith eloquently describes the tension between two patriotic principles, respect for the established constitution and the desire to promote the welfare of the whole society of one's fellow citizens;¹⁰⁴ but rather than laying out the theoretical dilemma and allowing for its various resolutions in different circumstances, he comes down on the side of protecting the old system against dangerous innovation. Compared to the argument that the British radical Richard Price makes around the same time, that the duty of patriots is "to liberalize and enlighten" their country, Smith's argument is uninspired and uninspiring.¹⁰⁵

Smith," in *Critical Issues in Social Thought*, ed. Murray Milgate and Cheryl B. Welch (London: Academic Press, 1989), 91–112; Donald Winch, "Commercial Realities, Republican Principles," in *Republicanism: A Shared European Heritage*, vol. 2, *The Values of Republicanism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Martin van Gelderen and Quentin Skinner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 293–310.

¹⁰²Dennis C. Rasmussen, "Adam Smith on What Is Wrong with Economic Inequality," *American Political Science Review* 110, no. 2 (2016): 343–44.

¹⁰³See TMS I.iii.3, 61–66; VI.i.7–15, 213–16.

¹⁰⁴TMS VI.ii.2.11–12, 231–32.

¹⁰⁵Price, "Discourse," 184. However, on the points of alignment between Smith's and Price's accounts of patriotism, see Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, 122n226; Emma Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments: Adam Smith, Condorcet, and the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 278n106. There is much more to be said about the ideological context and import of Smith's treatment of patriotism in the 1790 edition of TMS. On this topic, see Stewart, "Life and Writings of Adam Smith," in EPS

Having said all that, political philosophers interested in patriotism have much to learn from Smith. First, his distinction between patriotism as a sentiment and the virtues associated with it, public spirit and beneficence, is insightful and helpful. Following Martha Nussbaum, I have been speaking of patriotism as a Janus-faced emotion, which has negative and positive faces,¹⁰⁶ but in Smithian terms, it would be more precise to say that patriotism is a morally neutral sentiment, an empirical fact, and its normative significance lies in its ability to motivate vice (national prejudice and animosity) or virtue (public spirit and beneficence). Moreover, Smith's work is helpful in thinking about different motivations for patriotic conduct (the love of praiseworthiness, the love of true glory, the love of system, the love of humanity), as well as in thinking about the role of such motivations in shaping different expressions of patriotism (heroic conduct, systematic reform, humane leadership).

Second, looking closely at Smith's account throws light on the different senses in which patriots can be impartial. In particular, it provides insight into the eighteenth-century way of thinking about the impartiality of patriots as their ability to overcome all subpolity partialities and to prefer the happiness of all of their fellow citizens. This way of understanding the possible value of patriotism, which takes as its premise the equal moral worth of individuals rather than drawing on communitarian accounts of morality, may be of particular interest to moral universalists interested in explaining what patriotism might look like at its conceptual and normative best.¹⁰⁷ In the midst of neoliberalism's reinvention of modern individuals as entrepreneurs of their own satisfaction,¹⁰⁸ and the concurrent rise of populist nationalism,¹⁰⁹ Smith's account of impartial patriotism offers a surprising alternative.

IV.18–20, 317–319; Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, chap. 5; Lock, "Smith and the 'Man of System.'"

¹⁰⁶Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, 204–56.

¹⁰⁷For communitarian accounts of the value of patriotism, see Alasdair MacIntyre, "Is Patriotism a Virtue?," in Primoratz, *Patriotism*, 43–58; Andrew Oldenquist, "Loyalties," *Journal of Philosophy* 79, no. 4 (April 1982): 173–93.

¹⁰⁸Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 226.

¹⁰⁹Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, Neil Narang, and Brian C. Rathbun, "Introduction: What Is Populist Nationalism and Why Does It Matter?," *Journal of Politics* 81, no. 2 (April 2019): 707–11.