

# For the Union Makes Us Strong: Anarchism and Patriotism

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## **Introduction**

The hostility of anarchists towards patriotism is notorious, with several of the most ringing denunciations of patriotism being penned by anarchist writers.<sup>1</sup> An investigation of whether patriotism is something that might be embraced by anarchism may therefore appear quixotic. Yet I have several reasons for pursuing this topic.

Firstly, to declare my own political colours, I am personally committed to an anarchist politics arising out of the tradition of the Enlightenment. Yet I am also by inclination a communitarian in philosophical debates about liberalism and culture and have written elsewhere about the conceptual and pragmatic connections between political community and forms of exclusion which are problematic for universalists. My democratic commitments suggest that there should be a strong connection between democracy and citizenship. My universalist and egalitarian intuitions suggest that discriminating between citizens and non-citizens cannot be justified. Whether or not these competing (and widespread) intellectual

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<sup>1</sup> Emma Goldman, ‘Patriotism: A Menace to Liberty’, in Wendy McElroy (ed.), *Freedom, Feminism, and the State* (Washington, 1982), pp. 337-50; Leo Tolstoy, ‘Patriotism and Government’, in David Stephens (ed.), *Government Is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism* (London, 1990), pp. 78-92; Leo Tolstoy, ‘The Kingdom of God Is Within You’, in David Stephens (ed.), *Government is Violence: Essays on Anarchism and Pacifism* (London, 1990), pp. 93-111.

commitments can be reconciled is unclear and this paper is part of a larger project of trying to examine and resolve this tension.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, the relationship between anarchism and patriotism is, I think, of interest in its own right. While anarchists have been amongst the harshest critics of patriotism they have also defended the virtues of localism and community against “mass” society. Historically some anarchists have explicitly allowed space for a genuine love of national traditions where this is clearly distinguished from jingoistic attachment to nations and their governments.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in its celebration of the virtues of solidarity in the class struggle, the communist anarchist tradition is committed to celebrating a form of partiality which is interestingly analogous to patriotism. It is my hope that investigating what attitude anarchists should have towards patriotism might reveal some unexpected features of both anarchism and patriotism.

Thirdly, thinking about the possibility of anarchist patriotism forces us to pay close attention to the relation between patriotism and political institutions. Anarchist patriotism, if it exists at all, must be patriotism of a very special sort. While patriotism is usually represented as love of “country”, countries are usually distinguished with reference to states; thus in practice patriotism usually presents as love of *states*. Yet states are an anathema to anarchists. In order even for the conceptual space for an anarchist patriotism to exist we need to distinguish between a series of subtly different concepts which are competing descriptions of the possible objects of patriotic feeling. The attempt to reconcile anarchism and patriotism therefore involves examining the connection between the possible objects of particularist loyalty, political community, and the relation of each of these to institutions. It also involves a re-examination of the origins of anarchist hostility to patriotism. I will argue that the anarchist critique of patriotism has been divorced from its historical and political context, such that its basis in a critique of the institution of the state has been forgotten.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Sparrow, ‘Barbarians at the Gates’: The Moral Costs of Political Community’, in Igor Primoratz (ed.), *Politics and Morality* (Basingstoke, 2006), pp. 170-188; Robert Sparrow, ‘Borders, States, Freedom and Justice’, *Arena Magazine*, 66/August-September (2003): 25-31.

<sup>3</sup> Michael Forman, *Nationalism and the International Labour Movement: The Idea of the Nation in Socialist and Anarchist Theory* (University Park, 1998), pp. 24-5, 36-7; Rob Knowles, *Political Economy From Below: Economic Thought in Communitarian Anarchism, 1840-1914* (New York & London, 2004), pp. 30-39.

Finally, I hope that thinking about anarchism and patriotism can tell us something about patriotism in relation to more familiar political philosophies. There is now a large literature on whether patriotism is compatible with liberalism; the question of whether it is compatible with anarchism has been less discussed. Yet, in many ways, anarchism—even more so than liberalism—is the quintessential political philosophy of the Enlightenment, drawing on both liberal and socialist traditions and demanding that all institutions and social relations be subjected to the searching light of critical reason and rejected if they cannot be demonstrated to have a rational foundation. Investigating whether or not anarchism is compatible with patriotism therefore allows us to think through the more general problem of the relation between universalism and morally permissible forms of partiality in a context where the relative unfamiliarity of the anarchist tradition of political thought throws the philosophical commitments of the Enlightenment into stark relief and provides an illuminating contrast to other forms of politics.

## ***Patriotism***

It is a platitude to say that patriotism refers to love for one's country. The philosophical controversy about the definition of patriotism begins when we turn to the task of explaining what sort of love is involved and precisely what is meant by "one's country". This is a much larger debate than I can afford to engage in, in any detail, in the current context.<sup>4</sup> Fortunately, the subject of my inquiry itself provides reason to adopt a particular approach to the question of the definition of patriotism. If there is to be any possibility of a reconciliation between anarchism and patriotism we must discover an account of patriotism which does not define it in relation to the institution of the state.

While most discussions of patriotism assume that countries are defined by states, this distinction between the country which the patriot loves and the state which usually governs it is defensible. It is clearly possible to defend one's country against its government, implying that one's government does not define one's country. It is also possible to defend a people against their state. Together these observations suggest that the country which the patriot loves can be distinguished from the state which usually governs it.

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<sup>4</sup> Igor Primoratz, 'Introduction', in Igor Primoratz (ed.), *Patriotism* (New York, 2002), pp. 9-24.

Does this mean that patriotism can have no relation to a sense of political community? This depends on whether we believe that politics begins and ends with the state. Anarchism just is the belief that people can govern themselves in the absence of the state.<sup>5</sup> Yet, as I have argued elsewhere, self-government requires the existence of a political community.<sup>6</sup> Anarchists are therefore committed to the possibility of political community without the state. Insofar as we are concerned with patriotism in the context of an investigation of the possibility of anarchist patriotism, then, we are concerned with love for, and loyalty to, a political community.<sup>7</sup>

However, this description fails to distinguish between patriotism and other forms of particularist political commitment. Not any form of political community can serve as the object of patriotism. It must be a community which is “identity forming” and within which one locates one’s “home”. That is, it must be a community with which people are inclined to identify and feel positively towards. Moreover, it must be one that other people recognise as identity forming. This means that the political communities which are the appropriate object of patriotic love are those that we think of as most fundamental and least dependent on historical contingencies.

Given this qualification, it is natural to ask whether the only plausible candidate for a non-state patriotism is a love of nation, wherein “nation” is thought to refer to an ethnically homogeneous historical group associated with a particular region or territory. However, this conclusion would be too swift. It is entirely possible for people to identify and be identified with political communities which are drawn either beyond or inside of the boundaries of

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<sup>5</sup> Of course, it is possible that anarchists are mistaken about the possibility of political community in the absence of institutional authority, or alternatively, that whatever mechanisms of political decision-making apply in anarchist political communities are ultimately indistinguishable from a form of state. However, this is a much larger debate that I can settle here. The possibility of political community in the absence of the state is the very matter of contention between anarchism and other political ideologies. For the moment, it will have to suffice to note that rejecting anarchist patriotism on the grounds that government requires the state is simply to define away the question that interests me here—whether anarchists can be patriots—by denying the possibility of anarchism.

<sup>6</sup> Sparrow, ‘Borders, States, Freedom and Justice’; Sparrow, ‘“Barbarians at the Gates”: The Moral Costs of Political Community’.

<sup>7</sup> Igor Primoratz (‘Introduction’) has suggested, following Mary Dietz (‘Patriotism: A Brief History of the Term’, in Primoratz (ed.), *Patriotism*, pp. 201-215) that such a usage involves a return to a pre-political concept of patriotism. However, this criticism conflates political community and state in a manner which—I have argued above—prejudges the question of the relation between anarchism and patriotism by denying the possibility of anarchism.

nations so conceived. Many countries are multi-national and do not seem any less the appropriate object of patriotism because of it.<sup>8</sup> Thus, for instance, one may be a Canadian patriot regardless of whether one comes from the French-speaking, English-speaking, or Native nations which coexist within Canada. Equally well, one might be an Iraqi patriot despite being a member of a Kurdish nation which extends across existing borders between states. It is therefore clear that in the ordinary case at least the political communities which are the objects of patriotism need not be national ones.

The possibility of a “post-national” patriotism has been much discussed recently in the debate surrounding Habermas’s notion of “constitutional patriotism”.<sup>9</sup> Constitutional patriotism also relies on the fact that it is possible to distinguish the political community to which the patriot is loyal from the nation and also from any particular government. If we allow that the political or constitutional order with which the patriot identifies can be a non-state political order then anarchist patriotism will be a version of constitutional patriotism.<sup>10</sup>

There is one particular interpretation of the “country” to which a patriot might be loyal, which, while it avoids any reference to states or nations, nevertheless relates it to love of a specific territory. Modern environmentalism has promoted the idea of “bioregionalism”, as a solution to the problem of the appropriate scale of social organisation and the boundaries of political communities.<sup>11</sup> The core idea of bioregionalism is that human social organisation should be sensitive to ecosystemic demands and therefore be conducted, at least in part, in geographic regions, and at a scale, which match the distribution of ecosystems. This implies that the boundaries of at least some forms of political community would coincide with differences in climate, landscape, watershed, flora, and/or fauna. In a world organised along bioregional lines, then, love of country is given a plausible and unique object—the local environment. While I cannot afford here to investigate this idea at any length, the notion of

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<sup>8</sup> Of course, the boundaries of such multinational polities are established by states, but there is little reason to think that a multinational political community without a state is any more improbable than any other form of political community in the absence of a state.

<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘Citizenship and National Identity: Some Reflections on the Future of Europe’, *Praxis International*, 12/1 (1992): 1-19.

<sup>10</sup> My thanks to Neil Levy for drawing my attention to this possibility.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion, see the essays collected in Michael Vincent McGinnis (ed.), *Bioregionalism* (London, 1999).

bioregionalism offers a vision of a society wherein patriotism and an environmental awareness converge on a love of the land itself.<sup>12</sup>

More controversially, there is, I think room to argue that the political communities which constitute our home need not be geographically bounded at all. There is an intimation of this possibility in the thought that it is possible to be a patriot of a national community which is dispersed and which has no homeland. However, it may also be possible for a geographically dispersed political community based on forms of solidarity other than national sentiment to be the primary locus of the identification for its members. The slogan “workers of the world unite” is in part a call on proletarians to acknowledge that their home is in the company of other members of their class wherever they are to be found. At various points in the history of socialism, this call has arguably met with a strong response, with activists and unionists in the socialist movement around the world acknowledging class solidarity as more important than any other form of group loyalty. Where this is the case, such class solidarity is a love for a political community which people identify as their home.

Of course, if such solidarity is going to be included within “love of country”, country here will obviously need to be understood metaphorically. Yet, the “country” which patriots love is always already somewhat metaphorical. The country which the patriot loves may be made up of physical regions which are discontinuous, as when British patriots rallied to the cause of the Falklands (Malvinas). It includes regions which the patriot has never visited and compatriots whom they have never met.<sup>13</sup> One can be a patriot while living away from one’s homeland and even without having lived there at all. Patriotic sentiment extends to include compatriots who may never have lived at “home”. All of which is to say is that even in patriotism’s core usage, “country” is defined with reference to the boundaries of a political community (usually, but as I have argued, not necessarily, marked by the boundaries of the state) rather than any geographical or physical features of the landscape.

Given that it is political community rather than geography which is the primary referent for “country” it may be appropriate to analyse love for non-geographical communities which are

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<sup>12</sup> Robin Eckersley, ‘Environmentalism and Patriotism: An Unholy Alliance?’ Paper prepared for the *CAPPE Patriotism Workshop*, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, August 21 & 22, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1991), p.6.

people's homes alongside more familiar examples of patriotic identification. Of course, whether we are willing to describe such a phenomenon as patriotism is a matter of judgment. It may be in the end that love of political communities without any geographic reference is simply too far from the ordinary usage of the term patriotism for us to feel comfortable including it within its aegis.<sup>14</sup> However, regardless of our ultimate judgment on this matter, I hope I have shown that there is a form of love for a non-state, non-geographical, political community which is interestingly analogous to patriotism and which may be productively placed alongside it.

Thus far I have been discussing how we should conceptualise the object of patriotic identification. It is one thing to identify the object of patriotic feeling, another to characterise its nature. I have been content to this point to gloss it as "love" and will largely continue to do so. Yet, of course, the nature and limits of patriotic feeling are at least as—if not more—controversial than its proper object. However, other authors have done a much more thorough job of investigating this matter than I could attempt in the current context.<sup>15</sup> I will settle for assuming that patriotism is love for the political community within which one feels at home and its members, accompanied by the belief that one is morally required to assert the interests of one's compatriots over the interests of strangers in some circumstances.<sup>16</sup> Later in the paper I will discuss the limits to the circumstances in which it will be acceptable to make this distinction between the moral claims of compatriots and of strangers which are imposed by anarchism's egalitarianism.

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<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, in her discussion of the right of the state of Israel to try Otto Adolf Eichman for crimes committed in Europe, Hannah Arendt argues that, " 'territory', as the law understands it, is a political and a legal concept, and not merely a geographical term. It relates not so much, and not primarily, to a piece of land as to the space between individuals in a group whose members are bound to, and at the same time separated and protected from, each other by all kinds of relationships, based on a common language, religion, a common history, customs, and laws. Such relationships become spatially manifest insofar as they themselves constitute the space wherein the different members of a group relate to and have intercourse with each other." Hanna Arendt, *Eichmann In Jerusalem: A Report On The Banality Of Evil* (New York, 1966), pp. 262-263.

<sup>15</sup> See Primoratz, 'Introduction', and the other essays collected in Primoratz (ed.), *Patriotism*.

<sup>16</sup> Of course, this definition is inevitably controversial, especially in relation to the extent and force of the requirement to assert the interests of compatriots over the interests of strangers. However, to attempt a defence of this definition here is outside the scope of the paper; in any case, I hope the discussion which follows will be of interest regardless of the precise definition of patriotism endorsed by the reader.

## ***Anarchist communism***

Before I proceed any further, I need to take a moment to specify the kind of anarchism (and anarchists) with regard to which I will be conducting my inquiry. The anarchist tradition is an extremely broad one and it is difficult to say very much about it without first narrowing down the object of analysis. Anarchist attitudes towards patriotism will vary dramatically with the type of anarchism being considered. Definitions of anarchism are, moreover, notoriously contested.<sup>17</sup> Despite this, the central ideal of anarchism is relatively easy to get a sense of, if not to define precisely. Anarchism is founded in a thoroughgoing and radical egalitarianism and consequently in a hostility to political authority. In particular, anarchists are hostile to the authority of the state. At a bare minimum, anarchism is the belief that social life is possible in the absence of the state and that justice requires the abolition of the state.<sup>18</sup>

Beyond this, there is a major division in anarchist thought concerning the economic relations appropriate to an anarchist world and in particular the relationship between individuals and the “free” market. Individualist anarchism emphasises that just social arrangements must be founded in the free consent of individuals. On some interpretations, this is compatible with the operations of a free market wherein individuals voluntarily exchange goods and services, including their labour.<sup>19</sup> Communist or collectivist anarchism is also concerned with the freedom of individuals, but holds that this is incompatible with the inequalities of social and economic power established by private ownership of the means of production.<sup>20</sup> Communist anarchism therefore favours social control of productive resources.

In what follows, I will be discussing whether patriotism is compatible with the communist anarchist tradition. I choose to focus on this particular anarchist tradition because it is the tradition with which I identify and because its commitment to various forms of collective

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<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, the contributions collected in Section 1 of Leonard I. Krimerman and Lewis Perry (eds.), *Patterns of Anarchy: A Collection of Writing on the Anarchist Tradition* (New York, 1966).

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Guerin, *Anarchism: From Theory to Practice* (New York, 1970), pp. 11-13; George Woodcock, *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements* (Harmondsworth, 1971), pp. 7-8.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin R. Tucker, ‘State Socialism and Anarchism’, in Henry J. Silverman (ed.), *American Radical Thought: The Libertarian Tradition* (Lexington, 1970), pp. 101-5.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander Berkman, *What Is Communist Anarchism?* (New York, 1972), pp. 15-17; Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London, 1972); Errico Malatesta, ‘Expropriation’, in Vernon Richards (ed.), *Malatesta: His Life and Ideas* (London, 1977), pp. 167-9.



solidarity means that it perhaps allows room for a form of patriotism—or something like it—which is less obviously available to individualist anarchists. Major writers and historical figures in this tradition are Bakunin, Kropotkin, Malatesta, Emma Goldman, and Alexander Berkman.<sup>21</sup> However, my concerns are philosophical rather than historical; I am interested in what anarchists in this tradition should, or might, say and not what particular figures have said. This project will therefore inevitably involve a certain degree of rational reconstruction of a communist anarchist politics.

A full elaboration and defence of communist anarchist politics is beyond the scope of this paper. However, in order to properly investigate the possibility of anarchist patriotism I need to briefly sketch a few more details of a communist anarchist politics. As well as being egalitarian communists who are opposed to the authority of the state, communist anarchists are radical democrats and federalists.<sup>22</sup>

A crucially important observation for the discussion which follows is that this part of the anarchist tradition allows a role for government—or rather “self government”—in an anarchist society. Communist anarchists accept that social life requires organisation and that social control of the means of production will require formal mechanisms of social decision making.<sup>23</sup> The difference between the anarchist and (non-anarchist) communist and other democratic socialist traditions is that within the anarchist tradition self-government is thought to be distinct from, and possible in the absence of, the state. According to anarchists, government is something that people do for and by themselves, whereas the state is an institution above and separate from the people.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Michael Bakunin, *God and the State* (New York, 1970); Peter Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historical Role* (London, 1969); Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (London, 1972); Peter Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*, edited and with an introduction by Paul Avrich (New York, 1972); Errico Malatesta, ‘Anarchism, Socialism, and Communism’, in Richards (ed.), *Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, pp. 141-7; Goldman, ‘Patriotism: A Menace to Liberty’; Emma Goldman, ‘What I Believe’, in Alix Kates Shulman (ed.), *Red Emma Speaks* (Amherst, 1998), pp. 48-60; Alexander Berkman, *What Is Communist Anarchism?* (New York, 1972).

<sup>22</sup> Guerin, pp. 16-17, 63-6.

<sup>23</sup> Berkman, p. 211; Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*.

<sup>24</sup> Berkman, pp. 182-5, 188-9; Bakunin, pp. 42-3; Guerin, pp. 14-16, 42-3; Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historical Role*, pp. 10, 59; Kropotkin, *The Conquest of Bread*; Knowles, pp. 30-39.

The attitude of communist anarchists towards *democracy* historically has been equivocal. As communists committed to social control of productive resources, it seems that they require some mechanism whereby such control can be exercised. Democratic decision making by some relevantly delineated community of interested parties is the obvious candidate. On the other hand, anarchists have also traditionally been extremely conscious of the evils of the “tyranny of the majority” and so have typically preferred consensus decision-making models over majoritarianism models and also to try to minimise the potential for conflicts of interests by emphasising the freedom of competing interest groups to disassociate and pursue their projects separately.<sup>25</sup> The anarchist obsession with federalism stems largely from the thought that it makes possible a partial reconciliation between democratic communism and individual liberty by means of a vigorous defence of freedom of association. Federal structures create the maximum amount of room for disagreement within a system of social decision making.

Yet it seems clear to me that consistent communist anarchists should be majoritarianism democrats in the last resort. Equal respect for individuals seems to require abiding by the decision of the majority, because to do otherwise would be to give more weight to the opinion of each individual in the minority. This has the—for anarchists, unpalatable—consequence that when a decision cannot be avoided an anarchist society must permit the possibility of the coercion of the minority by the majority. If I’m correct in this, then the distinction between anarchism and other forms of radical democracy can’t be that anarchism abjures coercion or even (perhaps) the political authority of the community.<sup>26</sup> Instead, majoritarian anarchism is distinguished from similar ideologies by its insistence that the possibility and occasional necessity of such coercion need not involve the establishing of institutional mechanisms to wield such coercive power in the form of the state. The difference between anarchism and socialism then turns out to be largely a question of post-revolutionary institutional design.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Guerin, pp. 54-5, 63-6; Alexandre Skirda, *Facing The Enemy: A History Of Anarchist Organization From Proudhon To May 1968* (Edinburgh, 2002).

<sup>26</sup> The question of the moral authority of majorities in genuine democracies is probably the most vexed question in the anarchist tradition—and for good reason. It forces anarchists to confront the question of where their priorities lie when the freedom of some individuals interferes with the freedom of others.

<sup>27</sup> Some communists might quibble with this description, pointing out that in a fully communist society the state is supposed to “wither away”, leaving a communist society identical to a communist anarchist society. However, most communists also believe that a transitional “workers state” will be necessary for an extended period to suppress counterrevolution and usher in the communist world (V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (Peking, 1970)), which anarchists deny. Anarchism and socialism also famously differ on the political means required to

This conclusion is less deflationary than first appears as the institution at issue—the state—is thought to be essential by all political ideologies other than anarchism.

In what follows then, when I refer to anarchists I am referring to thinkers in the communist anarchist tradition I have described above.

### ***Anarchism against patriotism***

Any plausible account of the relationship between anarchism and patriotism must begin by acknowledging the notorious hostility of anarchists towards patriotism. Anarchist hostility towards patriotism stems, I think, from four sources.

First, the thorough-going egalitarianism of anarchism means that anarchists can have no truck with forms of patriotism which deny the full humanity of those who are not our compatriots. If feeling for one's compatriots is to be admirable, or even permissible, it must not lead to our depriving other people of the respect which is owed to them. Anarchism's commitment to the moral equality of persons thus places clear limits on any possible reconciliation with patriotism.<sup>28</sup> I will discuss these limits further below. For the moment, I merely want to note the role they play in motivating anarchist hostility to patriotism *per se*.

Second, anarchist hostility to patriotism derives from a deep cynicism about the uses to which the concept of patriotism has been put historically. While non-state patriotism may be possible, patriotism is almost always invoked to encourage loyalty to states or to nations pursuing statehood. According to anarchists, states are artificial creations designed to serve a class interest.<sup>29</sup> The class character of loyalty to the state is evidenced by the fact that patriotism is a moral duty that, in practice at least, is demanded selectively. Patriotic sentiment seldom seems to stand in the way of the ruling class if there is money to be made.

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bring about a proletarian revolution, with the anarchist hostility towards the state extending to organisational forms they consider to represent a socialist proto-state in the making (Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historical Role*.)

<sup>28</sup> Tolstoy, 'The Kingdom of God Is Within You'.

<sup>29</sup> Goldman, 'What I Believe', p. 51; Knowles, pp. 30-39; Kropotkin, *The State: Its Historical Role*, pp. 56-60; Tolstoy, 'The Kingdom of God Is Within You', pp. 94-6.

It is only working-class people who are expected to sacrifice their lives for their country.<sup>30</sup> Sacrificing for their country also looks surprisingly often like sacrificing for their local ruling class. Patriotism works to disguise the real differences which exist amongst people—which are differences of class and which involve deep and irreconcilable differences of interests—and to encourage workers to identify with the institution—the state—which is the primary defender of class society. Anarchists have therefore tended to denounce patriotism in the course of denouncing class society and its institutions.<sup>31</sup>

Third, anarchist hostility towards patriotism is also motivated by a perceived connection between patriotism and militarism.<sup>32</sup> Patriotism plays an obvious role in making possible the mobilisation of populations for war. According to anarchists, it is a tool used by the ruling class to motivate the working class to fight in their interests.<sup>33</sup> Patriotism can also be a *cause* of war, when popular anger at perceived slights to national pride itself becomes a pressure towards war. Yet overwhelmingly it is the working class who are the victims of war both directly as casualties, but also indirectly when resources are diverted from socially productive uses to preparations for war. The role played by patriotism in both causing and facilitating war has therefore been one of the main targets of the anarchist critique of patriotism.<sup>34</sup>

By distinguishing so clearly between state and country, anarchism opens up the possibility that the worst evils of patriotism are in fact due to its expression by means of the state. An important question for my investigation, then, is how much of anarchism's hostility to patriotism stems from the first of these sources—egalitarianism—and how much from the second and third? I want to suggest that a sizeable percentage of anarchist hostility to patriotism actually stems from this latter set of concerns about the role patriotism plays in a class society and in world which is organised into competing states.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Goldman, 'Patriotism: A Menace to Liberty', p. 339.

<sup>31</sup> Goldman, 'Patriotism: A Menace to Liberty', pp. 346-7; Tolstoy, 'Patriotism and Government', pp. 79-82.

<sup>32</sup> Tolstoy, 'The Kingdom of God Is Within You', pp. 96-7; Tolstoy, 'Patriotism and Government', pp. 81-2.

<sup>33</sup> Goldman, 'Patriotism: A Menace to Liberty', p. 342; Tolstoy, 'The Kingdom of God Is Within You', p. 99.

<sup>34</sup> Less reputedly, Goldman ('Patriotism: A Menace to Liberty') links patriotism to the spread of "sex perversion" in the form of homosexuality in the barracks.

<sup>35</sup> In fact these two phenomena are connected, as anarchist communism shares with Marxism the belief that the primary function of the state is to serve and defend the ruling class.

It is clear at the very least that the evils associated with patriotism are greatly exacerbated by the division of the world into competing nation-states. States cultivate a patriotic loyalty in order to bind their citizens together. Much of the symbolism of patriotism is consequently oriented towards the state. The state works to divert class resentments to focus on external enemies while the class inequalities which—according to anarchists—the state maintains fuel patriotic bigotry. The causes of the wars which patriotism makes possible are often conflicts between states and many of the “injustices” that spark wars, such as violations of “sovereignty” or loss of territory, are crimes against the state rather than the community which it claims to represent. Some—but not all—of the atrocities carried out in the name of patriotism would not have been possible without technologies or institutions which are maintained by states. In particular, modern warfare is only made possible by the existence of weapons and military institutions which could not be built or maintained without the state.

The connection between of the worst manifestations of patriotism and the institution of the state highlighted by anarchists has, I think, been neglected by philosophers writing about patriotism precisely because they are philosophers; they have focused on the intellectual or conceptual connections between patriotism and its abuses at the expense of the historical and political connections which have been the main concern of anarchist thinkers. In particular, philosophers writing about patriotism have largely been concerned to separate patriotism from nationalism, and have for the most part, blamed the worst excesses of patriotism discussed above on the conflation of country and nation.<sup>36</sup> However, it is loyalty to the nation-*state* that has been implicated in these atrocities, many of which would not have been possible except for the institutions of the state. An investigation of anarchist patriotism may therefore serve as a useful reminder that the real-world evils associated with patriotism may have more to do with the way the world is organised than with patriotism itself. In a world without states, patriotism might be a harmless loyalty, perhaps even a virtue.

Finally, for the sake of completeness I should mention a fourth source of anarchist hostility to patriotism. While the anarchist criticisms of patriotism discussed above reflect political/pragmatic concerns about the evils of state power and the dangers of allowing the state to harness the energies of patriotic sentiment to its own ends, there is also the basis for

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<sup>36</sup> Primoratz, ‘Introduction’, p.19.

an *ontological* critique of state-centred forms of patriotism in anarchist thought. For instance both Kropotkin and Bakunin have contrasted artificial institutions such as states with the natural order of human affairs, which includes nations and peoples.<sup>37</sup> According to this way of thinking love of state is a form of delusion—a love for an imaginary object. This objection to patriotism lapses if patriotic sentiment is directed towards a non-state political community.

### ***Anarchist patriotism?***

Given the vehemence of major thinkers in the anarchist-communist tradition towards patriotism, it may appear that there is no motivation, or even means for, any reconciliation between anarchism and patriotism. Yet there are at least three reasons to believe that the incompatibility of anarchism and patriotism has been overstated in the course of the anarchist critique of patriotism. First, in other writings, anarchist-communist thinkers have acknowledged that love for one's own people, community, and historical traditions, is both understandable and sometimes admirable.<sup>38</sup> Second, while anarchists have been hostile to national loyalties they have also sung the praises of class loyalty and collective solidarity.<sup>39</sup> These forms of partiality and collective identity are interestingly analogous to patriotism and may teach us something about it even if we ultimately decide that they are too far from the ordinary usage of the term to be named as patriotism. Finally, because of its commitment to democratic self-government anarchist communism seems to require a rich conception of citizenship, or something like it. That is, it must allow that when particular decisions need to be made a particular group of people should make them, and consequently that members of this group should share a common interest, and an awareness of the common nature of that interest.

### ***Anarchism and national communities***

I suggested above that anarchists have often argued that the objects of patriotic feeling are artificial and the product of the political manipulation of elites. This argument leaves intact

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<sup>37</sup> Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid*, pp. 293-300; Bakunin, cited in Knowles, pp. 35, 181-182; Knowles, pp. 30-39.

<sup>38</sup> Forman, pp. 36-7; Knowles, pp. 30-39.

<sup>39</sup> Berkman, pp. 89-93; Errico Malatesta, 'Anarchists and the Working Class Movements', in Richards (ed.), *Malatesta: His Life and Ideas*, pp. 113-115.

the possibility that people may come to care—and care deeply—about some consequences of these artificially created differences. In terms of the lived experience of individuals it may be irrelevant to them that their deepest loyalties are the products of historical processes which have been shaped by the deliberate actions of political elites. Loyalties can be both manipulated *and* real. Moreover, it is unclear whether *all* of the phenomena, such as language, historical consciousness, and culture, which are associated with national identities can be dismissed as the product of class society. While some aspects of nationalism are clearly artificial creations, other phenomena such as language and ethnic identification seem to have more complex histories and origins. Finally, there is a danger that in denying the moral weight of these aspects of identity we commit ourselves to denying the significance of the majority of issues that actual people actually care about. Both anarchist and Marxist criticisms of national identification, have, for instance, occasionally verged on an elitist insistence that intellectuals know better than working class people what is important to them, which anarchists should be concerned to avoid.

Some anarchist writers have therefore accepted that national communities play an important role in the lives of individuals and should be maintained and defended for that reason.<sup>40</sup> Love for these communities is unobjectionable and admirable so long as it does not lead us to identify our interest with those of the ruling class, implicate us in support of the state, or cause us to neglect the moral claims of others. Anarchism and patriotism are reconciled by insisting on the distinction between country and state defended above.

However, as I noted above, the egalitarianism of anarchists means that anarchist patriots will need to be extremely careful about where their patriotism leads them. An especial concern for the interests of our compatriots is only legitimate when it is compatible with the moral rights of others: an expression of freedom of association, rather than a defence of privilege. Preferential treatment of compatriots over strangers can only be justified if the strangers are not thereby denied access to any primary social goods. That is to say, anarchist patriotism must needs be a version of moderate patriotism.<sup>41</sup> It will therefore be subject to the same criticisms that have been made of moderate patriotism more generally. Indeed, the emphasis

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<sup>40</sup> Forman, pp. 12-13, 62-3; Knowles, pp. 30-39.

<sup>41</sup> Stephen Nathanson, 'In Defense of Moderate Patriotism', *Ethics*, 99/3 (1989), p. 535-552.

on solidarity in the communist anarchist tradition even in those strands of the tradition which allow room for national patriotism suggests that anarchist patriotism may need to be more “moderate” than liberal versions thereof.

The debate about the coherence and permissibility of moderate patriotism is too extensive for me to survey or engage in here.<sup>42</sup> It is clear though that anarchist patriotism will be hostage to the conclusions of that debate.

However, as is intimated above, there is one regard in which anarchism may be better situated than liberalism to defend the possibility—if not the likelihood—of moderate patriotism. One of the main challenges which besets accounts of moderate patriotism is to establish that moderate patriotism is both psychologically plausible and politically stable: that is, that it is plausible to expect a large number of patriotic members of a community to maintain their commitment to their compatriots and to universalist morality simultaneously without this “moderate” patriotism collapsing into either liberal universalism or a stronger variant of patriotism.<sup>43</sup> A defender of patriotism who is prepared to embrace anarchism perhaps has more reasons to be optimistic about this possibility than adherents of other ideologies. Anarchism would moderate patriotism in at least four ways. The absence of states would deprive patriots of the worst and most dangerous means to pursue patriotic goals at the expense of the rights of other communities. It would also deprive them of powerful means to encourage chauvinism in others within their political community. The absence of class conflict in an anarchist world would remove one of the factors which fuels patriotic bigotry. Finally, without the large-scale inequalities that are characteristic of the contemporary political order there would be fewer causes for conflict between political communities. Yet, according to some anarchist visions at least, an anarchist world would continue to sustain political communities, even national communities, which could be the appropriate objects of patriotic loyalty. An anarchist world therefore seems to offer the best possible circumstances for moderate patriotism to flourish.

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<sup>42</sup> For a collection of sources in this debate see Primoratz (ed.), *Patriotism*.

<sup>43</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, ‘Is Patriotism a Virtue?’, in Primoratz (ed.), *Patriotism*, pp. 46-7, 56.



Of course, egalitarian liberalism can also aspire to achieve a world in which inequality cannot serve as the fuel to transform the spark of moderate patriotism into the destructive flames of national chauvinism. However, if liberalism is to be distinguished from anarchism, it must allow a role for the state even in a liberal utopia. This means that even in the most utopian liberal world there is the danger that the competing interests of states, the elites that states inevitably establish, and the powerful mechanisms for propaganda and indoctrination that states possess, separately or together may fan this spark towards whatever fuel *is* available, turning moderate patriotism into its more dangerous “strong” form. The anarchist critique of patriotism can be read as a warning that this is not only likely but inevitable. Only in a world without states could we be secure in the expectation that patriotism would remain moderate.<sup>44</sup>

It is one thing to establish that there are plausible objects available for a non-state national patriotism which is compatible with anarchism, it is another to establish that such patriotism can be expressed in ways which are politically productive for anarchism in our current political circumstances. There is an important and complex debate which has to be had about the *politics* of loyalty to a national community in a world in which states exist and in which speaking out in support of a national community may be received as support for the state. Given that the language of nation and community has been so thoroughly co-opted by the state, it may well be that in practice there are very few occasions on which it is productive for an anarchist politics to campaign on behalf of the defence of existing national political communities. At the very least, anarchists should be extremely cautious about the circumstances in which they speak out in support of national political communities.

### ***The union makes us strong: anarchism and partiality***

While anarchist-communists have been scathing towards patriotism, they have simultaneously exalted the virtues of another form of moral partiality—class and/or collective solidarity.

The emphasis on solidarity in the anarchist condition stems from anarchism’s origins as a tradition founded in the context of class struggle. Anarchist communism developed within

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<sup>44</sup> It must be admitted that this may be cold comfort to advocates of moderate patriotism, given how unlikely the prospect of an anarchist world looks at the moment.

the labour movement and of necessity developed intellectual and political tools to serve it. One of these tools was the idea of solidarity—to one's class and to one's comrades. Without solidarity workers are helpless in the face of the ruling class's monopoly of the means of production. If workers can stick together, they can respond to employers' control of the opportunity to work by controlling the supply of labour. Solidarity between workers is therefore an essential prerequisite for success in class struggle. It seems then that anarchists should place an extra moral weight on the demands of their comrades compared to the demands of others. This form of partiality is not just acceptable but actually obligatory for anarchists in the communist tradition.

The concept of solidarity has been subject to less philosophical scrutiny than the concept of patriotism. Its structure is closely analogous to patriotism, and it raises some of the same dilemmas. In particular, there appears to be a conflict between the universalist egalitarianism which motivates communist politics and the particularism involved in solidarity. This tension is revealed most dramatically when anarchists are confronted with working-class strike breakers. In such circumstances, the universalist foundations of anarchist politics seem to point of the need to respect the choice of the strike breakers not to participate in industrial action. In practice, the communist anarchist tradition at least has tended to adopt tactics designed to enforce solidarity such the naming and shunning of scabs, or physically enforcing pickets. That is to say, this form of loyalty to a collective has often been less than moderate in the history of the communist anarchist tradition. Other strands of the anarchist movement have tended to be less sanguine about denying the liberty of others for the sake of collective solidarity.

However, interestingly, such class-based partiality is arguably capable of being reconciled with universalism in a way in which orthodox patriotism is not. The class struggle in which anarchist partiality has its role is, on the working class side at least, a struggle to abolish class society. The need for solidarity is also established by class conflict. Loyalty to class is therefore self-limiting. If the working class were to succeed in abolishing class society there would no longer be any need for this form of solidarity. The contingent and finite nature of the need for class solidarity renders such solidarity compatible with universalism in a way which is not true of national patriotism. Working-class loyalists can properly insist that in a

just world everyone would be a member of the working class and proud of it.<sup>45</sup> National patriots on the other hand cannot insist that in a just world everyone would be a member of their nation. The exclusion of others is essential to national or state-centric patriotism in a way it is not to communist struggle.

The importance of loyalty to a collective or commune, on the other hand, is unlikely to disappear with the abolishing of class society. I noted above that while communist anarchists reject the institution of the state, they do not deny the necessity of government. This means that anarchists must have some plausible story as to how and why individuals are motivated to participate in the collective institutions and processes necessary to self-government. In the absence of the coercive power of the state, anarchists rely on individuals having a strong sense of public duty or civic community to motivate their participation in government and their willingness to accede to the decisions of the majority. It may even be the case that something *like* patriotism turn out to be *necessary* for anarchists, in order for anarchist social institutions to be able to function effectively. This will be true regardless of whether the collective institutions concerned are local bodies within a larger political community or the political community itself. In the latter case, an identification with, and concern for, the political community and its members represents an anarchist version of republicanism.

The need for some forms of collective solidarity even in an anarchist society should serve to underline the familiar communitarian point that there are forms of political association which will inevitably fail unless their members are committed to them in ways which compete with their commitment to a universalistic morality. However, it also suggests that there is a trade-off between the existence of institutional forms of social coercion and the need for individuals to acknowledge loyalties to groups in order to make possible important social goods. More familiar political ideologies have arguably disguised the need for citizens to be committed to partialist goals by relying on coercive institutions to resolve collective action problems. If those institutions are to be justified then ultimately the underlying partial commitments that would replace them in world devoid of coercive authority will need to be justified. The

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<sup>45</sup> Of course, another, perhaps more accurate, way of describing this goal is that class would disappear in an anarchist world. However, it would remain the case that people would be proud of their status as both workers and owners simultaneously.

philosophical problems posed by the justification of partial commitments may therefore be more urgent and even more widespread than initially appears.

Finally, there are also resources available within the anarchist tradition which suggest that anarchists *might* be able to mount a plausible defence of one form of preference for members of a political collective using an argument which in the hands of other political philosophies is inevitably a parody. One of the reasons that patriots' belief that their compatriots have distinctive virtues is a problematic phenomenon is that in ordinary circumstances it seems both that it is unlikely to be true and also that, even if it were true, whatever character traits they possess don't seem likely to reflect any special effort on the behalf of those purported to possess them. If, for instance, the reason the country of France is worthy of patriotic loyalty is because its citizens have access to the French language and the wisdom contained in its literature then not only will this not be true for some citizens (who may not speak the language) but where it is true it will be true largely due to accident of birth and not because of any special effort on the part of individuals. However, if the object of patriotism is a voluntary association of the sort exalted by anarchists then it may indeed be that all members of this association share features or even virtues which are not possessed by those outside of the association and which reflect choices they have made. It may be a formal condition of membership that members have these properties or an accurate empirical generalisation that those who are inclined to join the association have these virtues. Where this is the case, loyal members of a political community or association can rightly point to the virtues of other members of the community as a grounds for their especial preference for them.

Of course, even in an anarchist society, it is unlikely that the majority of people will be members of the political communities to which they belong as a result of conscious choice. Many people will come members of political communities by accident of birth or other circumstance. Nevertheless, the possibility that a significant percentage of the members of a voluntary association may in fact share character traits that they each admire and value can go some way towards explaining how patriotic sentiment could arise through a process of extending a justified belief in the virtues of some members of the community to the community as a whole. While, for reasons of space, I am unable to develop the argument here it also does not seem impossible that it might also play some role in the *justification* of patriotism proper in the rare circumstances where membership of political communities was

largely, if not entirely, voluntary.

## ***Conclusion***

My examination of the possibility of anarchist patriotism has revealed that there is more room for such a phenomenon than first appears. If we admit the possibility of political community without the state—that is, anarchism—then we should also allow that patriotic love for country, nation, or community, can be described without reference to the institution of the state. This in turn opens up a conceptual space for an anarchist patriotism. There are two possible candidates for the object of anarchist patriotism, with two possible versions of one of these. Anarchist “patriots” might love their nation, where this body is thought of as a historical community defined with reference to a culture, language, or ethnicity which is distinguished from any institutional political community, or they might love some non-state non-national polity. This might be the political community as a whole, in which case we would have an anarchist republicanism or it may be some smaller political entity—the commune or union of my title. There are elements in the communist anarchist tradition which have embraced each of these.

Because egalitarianism is at the very core of anarchism, anarchist patriotism must be a version of moderate patriotism and thus will be subject to the same criticisms. Awareness of the possibility of an anarchist variation on patriotism is, I think, salutary because of the way in which it contextualises the morality of patriotism to institutional and political contexts. The anarchist account clearly link the evils of patriotism to the political institutions which sustain it and give it expression. While this observation is not unique to anarchism, other political traditions, including liberalism, which are more comfortable with the authority of the state are liable to neglect it. Furthermore, the role played by class and collective solidarity in the anarchist tradition is a topic deserving of further investigation in the hope that it might shed light on the nature, role, and justification of partial commitments more generally.

To a certain extent, it must be admitted, these observations are of academic interest only. Anarchism as a political movement dedicated to the creation of an anarchist world has yet to recover from the collapse it underwent after the physical elimination of a generation of anarchists in Russia (and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union) after the Russian Revolution, the defeat of the Spanish revolution in the 1930s, and the government repression of the

IWW in the United States during and immediately after World War I. Moreover, those anarchist groups and organisations which do still exist tend to emphasise anarchism's individualism and internationalism rather than its communism and concern for the rights of self-determination of nations. Yet I hope I have shown here that they *are* of academic interest at least and can usefully illuminate the larger debate about the nature and morality of patriotism.<sup>46</sup>

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