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PRICE ON PATRIOTISM AND UNIVERSAL BENEVOLENCE

Rémy Duthille

A Discourse on the Love of Our Country is the title of a slightly edited version of the sermon Richard Price preached to the Revolution Society in the Old Jewry Chapel on 4 November 1789, to commemorate the Glorious Revolution. The sermon, based on 7 verses of Psalm 122, is divided into two parts. The first, which expounds the nature of the ‘love of our country’ and the duties attached to it, is often overlooked by historians, who concentrate on passages of the second, shorter, part, which provides an interpretation of the meaning and significance of the Glorious Revolution, moves on to a comparison with the French Revolution and ends with an impassioned peroration that foretells the downfall of despotic governments and the triumph of peace and liberty throughout the world. Price’s *Discourse* is usually considered as the earliest British pamphlet on the French Revolution. The last part of the sermon has thus attained the status of a classic and the peroration, a purple passage of oratory, has been republished in many anthologies. Focusing on those passages, and understandably so, historians have paid much less attention to Price’s arguments on universal benevolence and the foundation of true patriotism which are prominent in the first half of the sermon.

Price’s theory of patriotism in the *Discourse* has been discussed, however, in the context of celebrations of the Glorious Revolution; Price himself drew attention to this link arguing that ‘the nature, foundation, and proper use of [love of country]’ were ‘a subject particularly suitable’ to a 4 November service.¹ Indeed, this official day of commemoration was a natural occasion for discussing the Hanoverian polity and delineating the rights and duties of the subject; thus the numerous sermons preached on 4 November throughout the eighteenth century provide a rich context to understand the originality of Price’s contribution.²

¹ R Price, ‘A discourse on the love of our country’ (1789), in D O Thomas ed., *Price: political writings* (Cambridge, 1991), 177.

² M Fitzpatrick, ‘Patriots and patriotisms: Richard Price and the early reception of the French Revolution in England’, *Nations and nationalisms: France, Britain, Ireland and the eighteenth-century context*, ed. M O’Dea & K Whelan (Oxford, 1995), 211-230; R Duthille, ‘Célébrer 1688 après 1789 : le discours de la *Revolution Society* et sa réception en France et en Angleterre’, *Lumières et histoire / Enlightenment and history*, ed. T Coignard, P Davis & A C Montoya (Paris, 2010), 245-62. On 4 November

Martin Fitzpatrick has studied Price's theory of patriotism from yet another angle, locating it within the wider context of enlightenment attitudes towards patriotism and cosmopolitanism, and hinting at links between Price's *Discourse* and his earlier treatise of moral philosophy, *A Review on the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals*.³ By breaking from the immediate context of 1789, and the celebrations of the Glorious Revolution, this approach can bring out the philosophical core of Price's thesis.

The present article will pursue that line of inquiry: rather than interpreting Price's *Discourse* as the first episode of the French Revolution debate in Britain, it proposes to treat it as a contribution to a debate already established in Britain concerning the respective value of 'love of country' and universal benevolence, and on the compatibility of patriotism and Christian ethics. Evan Radcliffe has retraced the evolution of those philosophical debates from Shaftesbury to Jonathan Edwards, Joseph Butler, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, Lord Kames, Richard Price and William Godwin, and explained how they foreshadowed divisions in the 1790s. Radcliffe's account, however, focuses on Godwin at the expense of Price, and leaves the impression that the issue of patriotism and benevolence had never been politicized before the French Revolution.⁴ This article's contention is that, not only are those philosophical debates relevant to understand Price's position, but they already fuelled political discussion during the American War. Far from being confined to a few divines or moral philosophers, they spilled over into pamphlets, and were discussed in the pulpit and in debating societies, and as such provide a background to Price's argument in the *Discourse*.

celebrations up to the 1788, see K Wilson, 'Inventing revolution: 1688 and eighteenth-century popular politics', *Journal of British Studies*, 28 (1989), 349-86.

³ M Fitzpatrick, 'The patriotism of a *philosophe*: the case of Richard Price', *Richard Price and the Atlantic Revolution*, ed. C Williams (Cardiff, 1991), 36-57. First published in 1758, Price's *Review* was updated in 1769 and 1787. The edition used here is: R Price, *A review of the principal questions and difficulties in morals...* (London, 1758).

⁴ E Radcliffe, 'Revolutionary writing, moral philosophy, and universal benevolence in the eighteenth century', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54 (1993), 221-40.

Love of country and universal benevolence in Price's *Discourse on the love of our country*

Price's *Discourse* offers a defence of universal benevolence; and the choice of the sermon form and the nature of the discussion suggest that the *Discourse* must be placed in two discursive contexts: that of moral philosophy and that of sermons dealing with patriotism and benevolence.

As Radcliffe, and more recently, Fonna Forman Barzilai,⁵ have shown, the topic was central to discussions of moral philosophy, and major British thinkers have examined the subject, from Shaftesbury to Hutcheson, Hume, Smith, Kames and Godwin. Sermons were the other genre addressing those questions. From 1700 to 1800, indeed, 70 published books had titles containing the phrase 'love of country' (or very close variants), and of those no fewer than 54 were sermons,⁶ a very high proportion that suggests the sermon was a potent vehicle for discussing patriotism, especially given the immense number of sermons that went unpublished and unrecorded. The sermon form of the *Discourse* was therefore appropriate to engage in debates over the biblical injunction of loving one's neighbour. Price's choice of sermon text is traditional, as Psalm 122 is a prayer for the peace and prosperity of Jerusalem, and expresses the psalmist's love of his country. Psalm 122 seems to have been a frequent choice for sermons on charity, benevolence and patriotism in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England,⁷ and D O Thomas drew parallels between Price's conception of 'true love of country' and that expounded in a friend of his, William Adams, in a sermon 'on the love of our country' based on Psalm 122 as well. Thomas's suggestion that Price's *Discourse* might be a homage to Adams, who was lately deceased,⁸ is an invitation to compare Price's *Discourse* with other sermons on the same topic.

⁵ F F Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the circles of sympathy* (Cambridge, 2010).

⁶ The figure is based on the *English Short Title Catalogue (ESTC)*, available online at: <http://estc.bl.uk>. This indicator, however, is very partial, leaving out numerous articles in the press discussing those issues for example.

⁷ *ESTC* shows that before Price, 5 other clergymen had chosen Psalm 122 for a sermon on love of country; conversely, 6 out of 52 sermons preached on Psalm 122 bore the words 'love of country' in their titles.

⁸ D O Thomas, *The honest mind: the thought and work of Richard Price* (Oxford, 1977), 297.

The discussion can start with Price's definition of 'country', which will account for his distinction between true and 'spurious' patriotism, and his defence of universal benevolence:

First, That by our country is meant, in this case, not the soil, or the spot of earth on which we happen to have been born; not the forests and fields, but that community of which we are members; or that body of companions and friends and kindred who are associated with us under the same constitution of government, protected by the same laws, and bound together by the same civil polity.⁹

Price gives an inclusive and primarily political definition of 'country', as can be seen from comparisons with conservative or High-church Anglican sermons that limited the concept within the boundaries of the established church and defined the defence of Jerusalem as the defence of the Church of England against schisms. Price's definition paves the way for his plea for religious liberty and is in keeping with his political philosophy as expounded in the *Observations on the nature of civil liberty* in 1776.¹⁰

This definition of country echoes that given by Shaftesbury, who argued, in *Characteristics*, that love of country was not 'a Relation of mere Clay and Dust' but a relation that 'must imply something moral and social and presupposes a naturally civil and political state of mankind'.¹¹ Price, however, departs from Shaftesbury's civic humanistic insistence on landed property and contends that men engaged in trade can express their love of their country in a very specific way, by shielding it from bankruptcy, giving a rather literal interpretation of one of the verses of Psalm 122: 'They shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces.'¹² Price therefore assigns a patriotic duty to the merchants and tradesmen who formed a sizeable proportion of the Revolution Society. Interestingly, Price abandoned the notion that private interest should be sacrificed to the public good, arguing on the contrary that both may be reconciled.

⁹ 'A discourse on the love of our country' (1789), in D O Thomas ed., *Price: political writings* (Cambridge, 1991), 178.

¹⁰ Thomas, *The honest mind*, 298.

¹¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of men, manners, opinions, times*, ed. D den Uyl (1711; Indianapolis, 2001), vol.3, 89.

¹² *Price: political writings*, 195.

Price's defence of universal benevolence has a double foundation, religious and moral. It is based on the injunction to love our enemies and illustrated by the parable of the Good Samaritan, which Price interprets as an exhortation to practice 'universal benevolence', a phrase he equates with charity.¹³ In terms of moral philosophy, the superiority of universal benevolence over patriotism is a consequence of the principle that reason should prevail over inferior passions or instincts. Price's contention that patriotic feeling, though 'a noble passion', must be purified and ruled by reason, directly derives from his rationalist-intuitionist ethics. In his *Review on the principal questions and difficulties in morals*, Price argued that moral judgment is a perception of truth, not an act of the will or a manifestation of any moral sense. He insisted that knowledge is a precondition for the exercise of a true, informed moral judgment. It is therefore natural that Price, in the *Discourse*, should lay stress on reason and education, exhort his audience to scrutinize, 'correct and purify' their country, and engage them to 'enlighten' and 'liberalize' it, so that love of country should be directed to a worthwhile object.¹⁴

In the *Review*, however, Price did not discuss patriotism as such, except, as Martin Fitzpatrick pointed out, for a footnote in which Price agrees with Cicero that 'there are some acts so foul, that a good man would not do them to save his country.'¹⁵ The recurrence of phrases enumerating what man owes to kindred, friends, neighbours, country and fellow-creatures in general suggest that Price did not conceive of patriotism as a specific kind of duty, different in nature from others. It is, therefore, not the *Review*, but the *Discourse* which spells out Price's position on patriotism.

¹³ 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' (Price: *political writings*, 180). Price quotes from the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke, 10:27). In another sermon he conflates love, charity and benevolence (R Price, *Sermons on various subjects* [London, 1816], 31). In this Price is very close to Joseph Butler: J Butler, Sermon XII 'Upon the love of our neighbour', Rom. xiii.9, *Fifteen sermons preached at the Rolls Chapel upon the following subjects...* (London, 1726), 228.

¹⁴ Price: *political writings*, 179.

¹⁵ Fitzpatrick, 'The patriotism of a *philosophe*', *Richard Price and the Atlantic Revolution*, 48-49, and p.57 note 57. See phrases such as 'the prosperity of your nearest kindred, your friends, or your country'; 'to promote the happiness of his fellow-creatures, or to serve his neighbours or his country'; 'his relations, friends, neighbours, country and species' in Price: *political writings*, 128, 214, 265.

In the *Discourse*, Price distinguishes between ‘the love of our country and that spirit of rivalship and ambition which has been common among nations’.¹⁶ Far from rejecting patriotism, he offers a plea for a rightly understood love of country. The ‘spurious’ kind of patriotism, amounting to a ‘love of domination, a desire for conquest, and a thirst for grandeur and glory’ is condemned on the grounds of its passionate, irrational nature, whereas universal benevolence proceeds from a rational perception. ‘Spurious’ patriotism is therefore an extreme, collective, instance of a common source of errors in morals, whereby, in D O Thomas’s paraphrase of a passage from the *Review*, ‘our judgment may be darkened by passion and perverted by our concern for our own interest’.¹⁷ Price associates ‘spurious’ patriotism to warfare, and more generally, discord; he has a tendency, in the *Discourse* and elsewhere,¹⁸ to call this degraded form ‘patriotism’, and to reserve the phrase ‘love of country’ for the true sentiment he wishes to inculcate. It is a telling sign of Price’s dislike of party strife, and of the pejorative overtones of the word ‘patriot’, a term of abuse that was hurled at Price and his friends; Price’s sermon contained a pointed attack on Charles James Fox’s immorality, which appears to have been toned down in the published version.¹⁹ Price is concerned to establish that virtuous love of country proceeds from knowledge and the cultivation of reason, and his distinction between true and spurious love of country is reminiscent of his distinction of two kinds of benevolence drawn in chapter 8 of the *Review*. Rational benevolence, which ‘entirely coincides with rectitude’ and is therefore a source of virtue, is opposed to ‘instinctive benevolence’, which is ‘no principle of virtue’. Price goes further and asserts that any amount of instinct or passion in the motives for a virtuous action detracts from the moral worth of that action. Thus, the fondness of parents for their offspring has little value, derived as it is from mere instinct, and ‘actions proceeding from universal, calm, dispassionate benevolence, are, by all esteemed more virtuous and amiable’ than actions benefiting those nearest us and motivated by instinct or urgency, even if the latter produce

¹⁶ Price: *political writings*, 178-179.

¹⁷ Thomas, *The honest mind*, 64.

¹⁸ Price: *political writings*, 100.

¹⁹ Price: *political writings*, 193, and note ‘r’; on patriotism as a badge of the opposition throughout the eighteenth century, see Cunningham, ‘The language of patriotism’.

‘equal or greater moments of good’.²⁰ This devaluation of parental love is more discreet, yet present in the *Discourse*. Here, Price does affirm that we owe our first duties to kin and friends, but criticizes any preference for our family, kindred, neighbours or countrymen as a ‘delusion’, an unjustified ‘fondness’, ‘a partial affection’ that ‘blinds the understanding’.²¹ Here as in other writings, including the *Review*, Price is reluctant to ascribe any positive function to instinct, or passions, and always present them as weaknesses of human nature and as obstacles to moral judgment.²²

Price’s treatment of love of country in the *Discourse* thus contributes to debates on universal benevolence and partial affections originating with Shaftesbury in Britain and looking back to the Stoic concept of *oikeiosis*, the natural affection for those close to us, which constitutes a ‘foundation in nature for an objective ordering of preferences’.²³ Price acknowledges that ‘our affections are more drawn to some among mankind than to others, in proportion to their degree of nearness to us’, and asserts that ‘according to the order of nature’, an agent’s benevolence should begin with himself, and then reach out to ‘our families, and benefactors, and friends; and after them, our country’, and finally ‘mankind at large’. In this Price agrees with Shaftesbury, Hutcheson and Smith but differs sharply from them in refusing to assign a moral value to sympathy, or our propensity to love those closest to us:

We can do little for the interest of mankind at large. To this interest, however, all other interests are subordinate. The noblest principle in our nature is the regard to general justice, and that good-will which embraces all the world. I have already observed this, but it cannot be too often repeated. Though our immediate attention must be employed in promoting our own interest and that of our nearest connexions, yet we must remember, that a narrower interest ought always to give way to a more extensive interest. In pursuing particularly the interest of our country, we ought to carry our views beyond it. We should love it ardently,

²⁰ Price, *Review*, 332, 333, 334.

²¹ Price: *political writings*, 178.

²² See Isabel Rivers’s interpretation of ch.8 of Price’s *Review in Reason, grace, and sentiment: a study of the language of religion and ethics in England, 1660-1780* (2 vols., Cambridge, 1991 & 2000), vol.2, 229.

²³ R Bett, ‘Stoic Ethics’, *A companion to ancient philosophy*, ed. Mary Louise Gill & Pierre Pellegrin (Malden, MA, 2006), 536-7.

but not exclusively. We ought to seek its good, by all the means that our different circumstances and abilities will allow, but, at the same time, we ought to consider ourselves as citizens of the world, and take care to maintain a just regard to the rights of other countries.²⁴

The British moral philosophers, and the Stoics before them, illustrated *oikeiosis* by the image of man at the center of a number of concentric circles of affinity, an image which was popularized in literary works such as Pope's *Essay on Man*. This image is absent from Price's text yet informs it. Price's position that 'a narrower interest ought always to give way to a more extensive interest', was that adopted by Greek Stoic philosopher Hierocles, who contended that the interests of a smaller circle should be subordinate to those of a larger one.²⁵

There was no agreement on the question of how far benevolence should be carried, and especially whether it should stop within the limits of the nation or extend to the whole of mankind.²⁶ In the spectrum of opinions on the topic, Price's position is extreme. Hutcheson argued that universal benevolence could motivate human action, if strengthened by other impulses, and Jonathan Edwards even maintained that virtue resided in universal benevolence. Other philosophers, though, insisted on the limitations of human agency. While Hume was on the opposite extreme, going as far as denying the existence of universal benevolence, Joseph Butler and Adam Smith considered that universal benevolence was too weak a motive to have any practical effect. Adam Smith's chapter on 'universal benevolence' in the *Theory of moral sentiments* (Part VI, Section II, ch.3) provides a good example of a praise of universal benevolence accompanied by a denial of its validity as a source of moral action:

Though our effectual good offices can very seldom be extended to any wider society than that of our own country ; our goodwill is circumscribed by no boundary, but may embrace the immensity of the universe. [...]

²⁴ Price: *political writings*, 180-181.

²⁵ M Fitzpatrick, 'Patriots and patriotisms : Richard Price and the early reception of the French Revolution in England', *Nations and nationalisms*, 224.

²⁶ Radcliffe, 'Revolutionary writing, moral philosophy, and universal benevolence in the eighteenth century', 223-7.

The administration of the great system of the universe, however, the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings, is the business of God and not of man. To man is allotted a much humbler department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers, and to the narrowness of his comprehension; the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, his country [...]. The most sublime speculation of the contemplative philosopher can scarce compensate the neglect of the smallest active duty.²⁷

Smith pointed out the limitations of human agency; as the real scope of human action was confined to family, neighbours and country, love of country was the highest motive of exertion. Smith recognized the natural force of *oikeiosis*, but unlike Price, he did not accept the Stoic argument that man should resist this natural affection and adopted an anti-cosmopolitan stance.²⁸ Whereas Price praised universal benevolence as a normative ideal and a rule for action, in Smith's theory it became the unintended consequence of individual actions and ultimately an effect of God's providence.

The first pages of Price's *Discourse* may therefore be read as a contribution to a longstanding debate in British moral philosophy around the value of local affections and universal benevolence. But the importance of the debate did not rest so much in the intellectual argument *per se* perhaps, as in its practical implications. As is well known, Burke was quick to grasp that Price's emphasis on universal benevolence opened the door to radical, even revolutionary change, since Price welcomed the French Revolution as a triumph of liberty that would contribute to 'enlighten' Britain and other countries and bring down despots throughout the world. In *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), Burke countered this perceived threat by asserting the primacy of family ties and local and national attachments:

To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the first germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by

²⁷ A Smith, *The theory of moral sentiments*, ed. D D Raphael & A L Macfie (1759, Oxford, 1991), 235, 237.

²⁸ Barzilai, *Adam Smith and the circles of sympathy*, 8.

which we proceed towards a love to our country and to mankind.²⁹

It is well established in the 1790s ‘universal benevolence’ became a political catchword signaling adhesion to the principles of the French Revolution, and radicals and loyalists fought to control the definitions of universalism and the contours of patriotism.³⁰

This was not, however, the first time that love of country and universal benevolence had become politicized. While ‘patriotism’ had long been controversial, serving as a standard for the opposition as early as the 1730s, it is the American War that prompted debates around universal benevolence, and more specifically around the compatibility of patriotism with the Christian ethics of benevolence. Those debates surrounding the American War foreshadowed some of the positions adopted in the *Discourse* and expanded or contested in the 1790s.

The debate on patriotism and universal benevolence during the American War

Many of Price’s contentions in the *Discourse* were already present in his 1776 *Observations on the nature of civil liberty*. His political theory, founded on contract, popular sovereignty and allowing for the right of resistance, is recognizably the same. Several flights of oratory in the *Discourse*, denouncing the ravages of war and spurious patriotism, echo passages from the *Observations*.³¹

Price’s argument, in the *Discourse*, on the need to ‘purify’ and rationalize love of country, retrospectively justifies his attitude in 1776. In the *Observations*, he exhorted his fellow-countrymen to a soul-

²⁹ L G Mitchell & W B Todd, ed., *The writings and speeches of Edmund Burke. Volume VIII. The French Revolution 1790-1794* (Oxford, 1989), 97-8.

³⁰ Apart from Radcliffe’s article, see H Cunningham, ‘The language of patriotism’, and L Colley, ‘Radical patriotism in eighteenth-century Britain’, *The making and unmaking of British national identity. Volume I: History and politics*, ed. R Samuel (London, 1989), 57-90, 169-87 respectively, and more recently, M Rapport, “‘Deux nations malheureusement rivales’: les Français en Grande-Bretagne, les Britanniques en France, et la construction des identités nationales pendant la Révolution française”, *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 342 (2005), 2-46. On the continuation of the kind of patriotism inculcated by Price, see J E Cookson, *The friends of peace: anti-war liberalism in England 1793-1815* (Cambridge, 1982).

³¹ *Price: political writings*, 178-79; compare with attacks on the pretended ‘right of conquest’, the ‘spirit of domination’ and ambition in *Observations*; *Price: political writings*, 33, 47-48.

searching examination of the grounds of the war in America. That war was certainly a turning point in Price's position on patriotism: in 1759, in a thanksgiving sermon, aptly entitled *Britain's happiness, and the proper improvement of it*, Price did not feel the need to urge his audience to restrain their patriotic enthusiasm, in part because he thought the Seven Years' War was a just war. Price's proposition, in the *Discourse*, that we should not promote the interests of our own country at the expense of those of another political community, underpins much of his defence of the colonists in the 1776 *Observations*. Price had drawn a practical consequence: the proposition that a senate should arbitrate disputes between European powers to avoid any recourse to war.³²

Rejection of cosmopolitanism formed a basis for attacks on Price, who was repeatedly accused of betraying his country. At times defenders of the government resorted to a famous passage from Cicero's *De Officiis* stating that, of all the bonds of union connecting man to family, friends and countrymen, none is stronger than patriotic feeling: 'Parents are dear; dear are children, relatives, friends; but one native land embraces all our loves; and who that is true would hesitate to give his life for her, if by his death he could render her a service?'³³ The exaltation to die for one's country came in handy for the defenders of the war, but, more profoundly, some critics, such as Thomas Blacklock, used Cicero's hierarchy of duties to emphasize that 'local prepossessions, indeed, are far from being useless; they are the original hints of nature to awaken our tenderness'. The argument served to brand Price's theory as unnatural, and Price himself, as a traitor to his country.³⁴

Government supporters praised true 'love of country' while castigating treacherous 'patriotism'. Among them, Soame Jenyns, a placeman who supported the American War and attacked parliamentary reform, sparked

³² *Observations on the nature of civil liberty* (1776), sect. 2, in *Price: political writings*, 24-25. *Britain's happiness...* is reprinted in *Price: political writings*, 1-13.

³³ Cicero, *De officiis*, I, XVII, 57 (London; Cambridge, MA, 1913), 60-61.

³⁴ T Blacklock, *Remarks on the nature and extent of liberty, as compatible with the genius of civil societies; on the principles of government and the proper limits of its powers in free states; and, on the justice and policy of the American War. Occasioned by perusing the observations of Dr. Price on these subjects. In a letter to a friend* (Edinburgh; London, 1776), 15. Cicero's text is quoted in the epigraph of J Prince, *True Christian patriotism...* (London, 1781); see also e.g. R Markham, *The wisdom of appointing and supporting the civil magistrate: in a sermon preached at the Chapel Royal, St James's, on Sunday, June 25, 1780* (London, 1780), 12.

off a controversy in 1776 with his successful treatise *A view of the internal evidence of the Christian religion*. Jenyns argued that patriotism was no genuine moral value since ‘it not only falls short of, but directly counteracts the extensive Benevolence of’ Christianity.³⁵ Jenyns’s stark opposition between the patriot and the citizen of the world was rejected by many pamphleteers. In the course of the controversy there appeared several propositions that foreshadowed elements of Price’s *Discourse*. Particularly significant is an answer to Jenyns written by Archibald Maclaine, a student of Francis Hutcheson in Glasgow and minister of the Scots Presbyterian church in The Hague.³⁶ Maclaine contended that patriotism is compatible with love of mankind, and is an authentic virtue only insofar as its practice is ruled by universal benevolence. Quoting from Luke 13:34 he proceeded to explain why Christ did not recommend patriotism to the Jews in terms that are very close to a passage in Price’s *Discourse*. This is not to suggest that Maclaine influenced Price (though this cannot be ruled out either, as Maclaine’s name appears in Price’s correspondence).³⁷ Nevertheless, it is worth noticing that a defence of Price’s idea that patriotism should be ruled by universal benevolence was elaborated at an early stage of the American War.

The controversy launched by Jenyns took a political, and presumably a partisan, turn when it was taken up by debating societies, Coachmaker’s Hall and the Robin Hood Society, the second of which had radical leanings and could attract as many as 1200 spectators in the 1770s. In October 1777, and again in February 1778, the Robin Hood Society discussed whether ‘the character of a rigid patriot [was] consistent with that of a good Christian’ and coupled the query with overtly political questions about the necessity of prolonging the war. The audience declared unanimously against the war, against Jenyns and for the compatibility of Christianity and patriotism.³⁸

Those radicals and Dissenters who addressed the issue during the war

³⁵ S Jenyns, *A view of the internal evidence of the Christian religion* (London, 1776), 58.

³⁶ A Maclaine, *A series of letters, addressed to Soame Jenyns, Esq; on occasion of his ‘View of the internal evidence of Christianity’* (London, 1777), 183-84, 187-88.

³⁷ W Bernard Peach & D O Thomas ed., *The correspondence of Richard Price* (3 vols., Durham, NC & Cardiff, 1983-1994), vol.3, 92.

³⁸ Donna T Andrew ed., ‘London debates: 1777’, *London debating societies 1776-1799* (London, 1994), 14-29, at: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=38841>.

almost always defended positions compatible with those Price was to expound in 1789. Thus, Granville Sharp wrote that Galatians 5:14 ('Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself') is the root of both patriotism and universal benevolence and that the latter should predominate and restrain the former within the bounds of justice.³⁹ John Cartwright attacked Jenyns in the second edition of *Take your choice*, and then again in 1784: 'so far from there being any incompatibility between the characters of the patriot, the citizen of the world, and the Christian, they each respectively imply the other two.' Though Cartwright concedes that most men cannot extend their actions beyond the narrow boundaries of family, parish or country, he asserts that universal benevolence is an ideal that should be cherished, and tries to shed the elitist associations of cosmopolitanism and present it as achievable even by an 'honest ploughman'.⁴⁰ When allowance is made for rhetorical effect, it remains true that Cartwright tried to democratize cosmopolitanism, in keeping with his defence of universal suffrage and his affirmation of the active political role of the common people. Those passages make it difficult to classify Cartwright as an English nationalist and suggest that the contrast between patriotic Major Cartwright and cosmopolitan Dr Price should not be exaggerated (however much they might differ in other respects).

More directly relevant to the *Discourse* are sermons preached during the American War. For the first time, universal benevolence became highly politicized in sermons devoted to love of country and/or based on Psalm 122.⁴¹ Partisans of the government's policy of coercion tended to criticize cosmopolitanism and universal benevolence and affirm that Christianity enjoined patriotism understood as an exclusive preference for one's countrymen. A prime example of this attitude is a sermon preached by Isaac Hunt to the Laudable Association of Antigallicans.⁴² The case of Alexander Carlyle, an eminent member of the moderate party

³⁹ G Sharp, *The law of liberty, or royal law, by which all mankind will certainly be judged* (London, 1776), 16.

⁴⁰ J Cartwright, *Take your choice!* (2nd edn., London, 1777), 25; *Internal evidence; or an inquiry how far truth and the Christian religion have been consulted by the author of 'Thoughts on a parliamentary reform'* (London, 1784), 7.

⁴¹ Earlier sermons were not overtly political: see e.g. Isaac Maddox, *The love of our country recommended...* (London, 1737); Percival Stockdale, *Three discourses: two against luxury and dissipation. One on universal benevolence* (London, 1773).

⁴² Isaac Hunt, *A sermon, preached before the Laudable Association of Antigallicans, at the parish church of St. George's, Middlesex, on their general annual meeting, on Thursday, the 23d of April, 1778* (London, 1778). Hunt quoted Rousseau's criticism of cosmopolites (p.20).

of the kirk of Scotland, illustrates the continuity in debates from the American War to the wars against Revolutionary France. Carlyle attacked Price's *Observations* in 1777, and repeatedly denounced the *Discourse* (without quoting it) in the 1790s.⁴³ All of Carlyle's fast sermons, preached every year from 1779 to 1782, and again in 1793 and 1797, defend the idea that love of mankind and patriotism originate in the same principle of benevolence, but unlike Price, who gives little value to 'the spot of earth on which we happen to have been born', Carlyle points out that man's birthplace is assigned by Providence. For Carlyle there is a duty of 'general benevolence', but it cannot go beyond the boundaries of the nation (and here Carlyle follows Adam Smith) and it should consist in protecting the established constitution against factious reformers like Price, and defending the country against enemies in war.

A Dissenting position, on the other hand, clearly emerged, especially in fast sermons. In the provinces Jenyns's contentions were attacked by several Dissenting ministers, who gravitated in Price's or Priestley's circles and whose political outlook was largely shaped by Price's *Observations on civil liberty*.⁴⁴ Those ministers praised universal benevolence and criticized the war as a breach of that virtue and as an assault on constitutional liberties. In 1776, Joshua Toulmin, who was minister at the Mary Street General Baptist Chapel in Taunton and was later to join the Revolution Society, defended universal benevolence in a sermon aptly entitled *The American war lamented*.⁴⁵ He thundered against the thirst for power and riches that actuated the British government and exhorted his audience to imitate the Americans and pray for peace,

⁴³ M Brown, 'Alexander Carlyle and the shadows of enlightenment', *Scotland in the age of the French Revolution*, ed. B Harris (Edinburgh, 2005), 243. See especially A Carlyle, *The justice and necessity of the war with our American colonies examined. A sermon preached at Inveresk, December 12, 1776* (Edinburgh, 1779), 39, and *The love of our country: explained and enforced in a sermon from Psalm, cxxxvii, 5, 6, preached in St Andrews Church, Edinburgh, March 19, and in Dalkeith Church, April 2, 1797* (Edinburgh, 1797). The other sermons Carlyle preached in the years above mentioned exist in manuscript form at the National Library of Scotland (Edinburgh), MS 23844-23853.

⁴⁴ On Price's influence, see J E Bradley, *Religion, revolution, and English radicalism* (Cambridge, 1990), 134.

⁴⁵ J Toulmin, *The American war lamented. A sermon preached at Taunton, February the 18th and 25th, 1776...* (London, 1776), 17-18.

quoting a passage from Price's *Observations* and one of the verses from Psalm 122 which Price was to choose as text for the *Discourse*. Another example is that of Newcome Cappe, minister in York and active in Christopher Wyvill's Yorkshire Association and in campaigns against the Test and Corporation Acts. In his 4 February 1780 fast sermon, Cappe exhorted his flock to resist the passions excited by war and cultivate the 'universal sympathy and goodwill' which is essential to a Christian character.⁴⁶ Cappe added an epigraph taken from a sermon by Dr Richard Watson of Cambridge University, another vocal opponent of the war and champion of Lockean principles, to the effect that 'Christianity in its regards steps beyond the narrow bounds of national advantage in quest of universal good [...] annihilates the disposition for martial glory, and utterly debases the pomps of war'.⁴⁷ Universal benevolence was thus invoked by Dissenting preachers to denounce the war and warn against unconstitutional encroachments on civil liberties. Rather than opposing universal benevolence and patriotism, those writers, anticipating Price's *Discourse*, tried to distinguish between spurious patriotism (leading to war and destruction) and authentic expressions of love of country, which included the defence of civil and religious liberty and the right of resistance against abuse of authority. Neither Cappe nor Toulmin rejected patriotism; like Price, they defended a demanding conception of patriotism that avoided any national complacency and involved a critical attitude.

But ultimately, the ideological content of patriotic duties mattered more than the emphasis on Christian benevolence. This accounts for an apparent exception, George Walker's sermon to the Nottinghamshire militia *The duty and character of a national Soldier* (1779). Against Jenyns, Walker argued that:

Half-taught Philosophers, and half made Christians [...] may

⁴⁶ N Cappe, *A sermon preached on Friday the fourth of February, MDCCLXXX. The late day of national humiliation, to a congregation of Protestant-Dissenters, in Saint-Saviour-Gate, York...* (York, 1780), 37.

⁴⁷ R Watson, *A sermon preached before the University of Cambridge, on Friday, February 4th, 1780, being the day appointed for a general fast* (4th edn., Cambridge, 1780), 7. Richard Watson (1737-1816), Regius Professor of Divinity at the University Cambridge, had forcefully defended Lockean principles and denounced corruption and the influence of the crown in *The principles of the Revolution vindicated* (a sermon preached on 29 May 1776 to commemorate the restoration of Charles II).

reprobate [patriotism] as the narrower of a Christian's heart, as unfriendly to that equal and universal good-will which the New Testament would inspire; but while Jesus Christ, who came from the Father of the Universe, bids us love all mankind, God who has assigned to us our place amongst men, has left to most of us no wider expression of a Christian benevolence than the ardent and affectionate love of country. Our country is the whole world to us....⁴⁸

This argument, used by Carlyle for conservative purposes, served Walker to define a radical version of patriotism, stressing that the king was the servant of the people and that loyalty was due to the constitution and the people rather than to the monarch:

From you is expected, all the courage of a British Soldier, without the jealousy that awaits a standing army. You are the Soldiers of the People, more than of the Crown. [...] When we speak of Loyalty and obedience to the Prince, we mean in consistence with the Constitution and the Law....⁴⁹

Walker's contention that a citizen should always keep a watchful eye on monarchs and the holders of civil power had long been a staple of Old Whig thought. In the *Discourse*, Price was to present this duty as an integral part of true love of country, actually devoting more space to it than to the duty of national defence. Walker's emphasis on national defence was natural in an address to the militia in wartime, since the role of the militia was to fight a possible French invasion, not to launch an offensive against the Americans. Conversely, Price's downplaying of the duty of national defence, while generally explained by his enlightened hostility to warfare, can be more specifically ascribed to the context of optimism of the late 1780s and to Price's hope that the French Revolution

⁴⁸ G Walker, *The duty and character of a national soldier, represented in a sermon preached, January 2, 1779. At the High Church in Hull, before the Nottinghamshire Militia, commanded by Lord George Sutton, on the delivery of the colours to the regiment* (London, 1779), 18. George Walker (1734?-1807), Presbyterian minister and mathematician, was a leading figure in Nottingham in the opposition to the war and the campaign to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts. He frequented Shelburne's circle and Price supported his election to the Royal Society.

⁴⁹ Walker, *The duty and character of a national soldier*, 28. For a commentary on Walker's statements 'bordering on sedition', see Bradley, *Religion, revolution and English radicalism*, 133.

would usher in a period of peace that would render that duty nugatory.

Though Walker exalted patriotism and Price defended universal benevolence, the difference is largely due to context; in fact they agreed that both love of country and Christian charity were virtues, the difference being in the emphasis. The apparent exception of Walker's sermon in fact confirms that Price's conception of patriotism, involving popular participation and constant criticism of the constitution and the holders of civil power, was shared in radical and Dissenting circles during the American War. This difference, however, points to the limit of the inquiry into the philosophical content of the *Discourse*, showing that some arguments at least are best explained with reference to the immediate political context.

Price's *Discourse* provides a short and unequivocal defence of the necessary primacy of universal benevolence over any partial affection, including patriotism. Far from rejecting patriotism for the sake of some vapid cosmopolitanism, however, Price defended it as a virtue, taking care to define its proper limits and to distinguish it from degraded versions. Price's insistence on the proper bounds of patriotism should not divert the attention from the fact that the 4 November 1789 sermon was a celebration of the libertarian heritage of English history and an appeal to cultivate, not denigrate, love of country.

A reading that does not try to anticipate the debates of the 1790s makes it manifest that the *Discourse on the love of our country* spells out some implications of Price's *Review* and his pamphlets of the 1770s, thus revealing the continuity between his moral philosophy and his political theory. The opposition between enlightened and spurious forms of patriotism, central to the *Discourse*, was already present in Price's earlier works, but also in several sermons preached by radical ministers during the American War. Many ideas contained in the *Discourse* were debated, sometimes defended, in the radical discourse of the 1770s and 1780s, even in writings by those, like Cartwright, who were steeped in the national tradition and seemingly impervious to cosmopolitan ideals. The treatment of universal benevolence in the *Discourse* owes virtually nothing to French revolutionaries but derives from British debates around Christianity, sympathy and universal benevolence. But the French

Revolution had exalted into sanguine hope the mood of optimism that was already prevalent in the years following American Independence. In Price's eyes, the liberation of the French people confirmed his own theories, and the revolution prompted Price to expound the full theory of love of country and universal benevolence, because true love of country could henceforth be translated into action.

Price's *Discourse*, however, did not bring together all the strands of radical opinion. It is highly probable that his theory of patriotism was not espoused by all those who listened to his 4 November 1789 and attended the celebrations of the Revolution Society.⁵⁰ It would be most imprudent to suggest that any consensus around Price's principles existed during the American War; then, as in 1789, praise of universal benevolence coexisted with a traditional form of patriotism extolling the virtues of the ancient constitution, the Saxon forefathers and the martyrs of Stuart despotism. Price's defence of universal benevolence, while it was not contradicted in radical circles, was far from being fervently espoused by all radicals or all Dissenters and could therefore not be presented as the official theory of radical patriotism (there never was such a thing). Perhaps its most remarkable feature was that it was both a contribution to debates in moral philosophy and a tool that could be harnessed to criticize the government and defend the American and French revolutions. Both Price's allies and his opponents recognized this potency.

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⁵⁰ M Fitzpatrick, 'Patriots and patriotisms : Richard Price and the early reception of the French Revolution in England', *Nations and nationalisms*, 220.