

Estoril Political Forum 2018
Comments on the Dahrendorf lecture – 6/25/18
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As always, Bill Galston has given a lucid and compelling presentation. I don't think there is anything in his paper that I really disagree with, but there are a few points in his account that I would like to elaborate upon.

Bill presents the dichotomy between patriotism and cosmopolitanism by highlighting two parallel dichotomies—first, that between particularism and universalism, and second, the dichotomy between one's own and the good.

With respect to the first, his argument is about the nature of political life. Even though moral principles are universal, if they are to be effectively applied in the real world they require enforcement. And the agency for enforcing them always has been and probably must be a particular political order. This is at bottom a version of the old argument of John Locke—though natural law universally applies to all men, many fail to obey it; therefore, to enforce the law a particular political order is needed, one that is based on the consent of the governed. Establishing such an order on a global scale is simply not feasible.

Bill argues that since political order is required for human beings to be able to lead a secure, decent, and moral life, and because civic attachment is needed to provide the basis for a sound political order, patriotism is at least an *instrumental* good. Provided that one accepts the notion that government should be based on the consent of the governed, I think this is a strong argument.

At the same time, it does not capture what is noble about patriotism, why it is that men are willing to fight and die for the sake of their country. This brings us to the dichotomy between one's own and the good. While one may claim with the Ancients that all human beings seek the good, there is no question that human beings generally love what is their own, beginning with their families but also including their political communities. The passions stirred by the World Cup offer a striking example.

Now it is true that this passionate attachment to one's own can sometimes lead to injustice toward others. But it can also produce remarkable acts of altruism and self-sacrifice. Moreover, as Bill points out, it need not lead to the attitude of "my country right or wrong."

Last month I attended the Assembly of the World Movement for Democracy in Dakar, Senegal, which brought together prodemocracy activists from 90 countries. Although all the participants expressed solidarity with struggles for democracy in other places, it was clear that they viewed each of these struggles primarily in a national context. The overriding concern of most of the attendees was to strengthen democracy in their home countries. For those living under dictatorial regimes or in exile, the goal was to introduce democracy to their own countries.

This points to the crucial distinction between a country and a regime, a distinction that must be kept in mind when we discuss patriotism. One can clearly continue to love one's country even if one despises its current regime. The participants at the Assembly clearly regarded democracy as a good, but precisely for this reason they wanted their own countries to enjoy it. One may take a similar view of the efforts of parents everywhere to provide for their children. The strength of their attachment is clearly based on the children being their own, but what they desire for their children is the good as they understand it. So perhaps the gulf between one's own and the good is not quite so wide as some philosophers claim.

Let me just add a word about the connection of patriotism with democracy, a point to which Bill alludes in his opening paragraph. Precisely because democracies are based on the consent of the governed, they have a special obligation to take care of their own citizens first. Take the example of a situation where people of various nationalities are being held as hostages and a rescue mission is sent to retrieve them. If a particular country organizes the mission and sends its own soldiers to risk their lives in hostile territory, should it not give priority to saving its own citizens? This does not preclude doing what it can to rescue others, but in such a situation it would undoubtedly be regarded as a dereliction of duty if a political leader did not put his or her own citizens first.

Obviously, the desire to put one's own citizens first can be abused, yielding counterproductive policies and other damaging consequences. Similarly, patriotism can be abused, and I am not seeking to exculpate the crimes that have sometimes been justified in its name. Like Bill Galston, I support a reasonable patriotism, even though I acknowledge that its sources are not wholly reasonable.