

## The Case for Political Loyalty

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### ABSTRACT

This paper proposes the idea of loyalty being a force that must be chosen and given freely, as well as the demand for political loyalty to be selfless concept. The first part of the paper uses examples from the HBO series *Rome* to illustrate how loyalty works within society, as well as the works of modern political scientists Jean Hampton, Christopher W. Morris, and W.L. Newman to explain the faults within these examples of loyalty. The essay then moves on to Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics* to explain better where the concept of political loyalty comes from, and the importance of this loyalty to a just state. Through the use of these various authors, the thesis that political loyalty is necessary is explored and confirmed.

When civil war threatens in the HBO series *Rome*, the character Lucius Vorenus is presented with a unique dilemma: Stay loyal to his legion (Caesar's famous 13<sup>th</sup>) or stay loyal to Pompey and the Republic. Vorenus, in the end, was forced into loyalty of the 13<sup>th</sup> because he had been injured and cared for by the 13<sup>th</sup> and therefore was assumed to be on the side of the 13<sup>th</sup> when he recovered. Some might argue that because he is on the side of the 13<sup>th</sup> due to the inability to choose, the loyalty involved is not true, just loyalty. Such a view implies that there is more to loyalty than just who you choose (or who you are forced to align with due to circumstance) but instead why they are chosen. Another character in *Rome*, Atia, demonstrates what might be considered false political loyalty. Partially due to family ties, but also because it benefits her the most, Atia begins on the side of Caesar. However, the moment that Pompey's fortune seems to be ascendant, Atia quickly plots how to get onto "team Pompey." Atia's "loyalty", then, is neither to Caesar nor to Pompey (though she may support these people) but instead to herself and her own self-interest. This approach to loyalty undermines political authority for the core reason that self-interest changes while the State needs consistency. Being politically fickle and constantly changing loyalty is detrimental to the State. After all, if people were constantly changing their loyalty based on what best suits them there would be no stability within the State. The State, a selfless entity by nature, is set up to better serve the good of the whole. When thrown into disarray by the competing ideals of what is best based on what is best for various individuals, the State will either collapse or transform into an unjust tyranny that serves only the individual in power.

I turn to these examples within *Rome* to begin exploring the concept of loyalty within the State. These examples also bring up two important issues: first, that of loyalty being a force that must be chosen and something given willingly. Second, the fact that loyalty based in self-interest is not political loyalty at all. Loyalty within the State, while not the only form of loyalty seen within the modern world, is needed in order for us to live in a just and prosperous state. Though they are different, both the examples of Vorenus' forced loyalty and Atia's false loyalty have dangerous implications. To look at forced loyalty and the specific dangers of forced and false loyalty, one can turn to Jean Hampton and her work *Political Philosophy*. According to Hampton, "beyond a kind of attitude toward the State, endorsement consent is a decision to support it because of one's determination that is a good thing to support. By giving this form of consent, the subject conveys her respect for the State, her loyalty to it, her identification with it, and her trust in it...One might also call it loyalty consent" (Hampton 96). The consent to rule, in other words, can only be given through loyalty and the ability to choose that loyalty. On the other side of the coin, when one consents to the power of the State, that person is required to be loyal to the State. Without this

consent, the State is tyrannical and unjust. The implications and importance of a state without consent are explored later, linked with the story of Atia. However, when the State comes under the rule of someone tyrannical and just, one also has the right to withdraw that consent. This occurrence is not the person being disloyal to the State. Instead, this withdrawal of consent for an unjust ruler to rule is a form of loyalty to the State, because the leader is breaking the ideals of the just State. One must be careful not to confuse this with a person “switching sides” simply for self-benefit, such as seen in the case of Atia.

To understand the example of Atia and why her loyalty is false, one can turn to “The Modern State” by Christopher W. Morris. Morris claims that “We may think of states in terms of a number of interrelated features... [One of which is] allegiance. The State expects and receives the loyalty of its members and of the permanent inhabitants of its territory. The loyalty that it typically expects and receives assumes precedence of that loyalty formally owed to family, clan, commune, lord, bishop, pope, or emperor” (Morris 200). Using Morris’ approach outlined here, we already see a problem in Atia’s loyalty. After all, in the beginning, her loyalty is because of family ties. The State demands that family ties must be set into a secondary position for a more powerful loyalty to the State. If we dig deeper into the quote, however, it is possible to assume that Morris holds the State above all else. While the list he gives shows examples, they are not the only examples. Loyalty to the State must also be first before one’s loyalty to god, possessions, company and finally one’s self. In fact Morris later clarifies, “Citizens and other subjects of states are held to be obligated to obey the law and to have no greater loyalty to any other country or cause” (Morris 202). It is a simple, undisputable thought. Citizens are to have no greater loyalty than to that of the State. Anything less can not be considered a form of loyalty when it comes to the State. This self-serving loyalty also has another downfall. The act of loyalty in and of itself is a necessary function. Without any sort of loyalty, the State would weaken and eventually crumble.

To go back to Hampton’s discussion, she claims “no existing state in the world has ever completely eschewed attempts at mastery over some of its rebellious population, but states that we consider just are ones in which the use of techniques of mastery is rare, the convention consent of the members has generated an agency relationship between the ruler and the people, and most subjects give their (loyalty) consent” (Hampton 113). In other words, in order for a state to be just, thrive and even survive, it must have the consent of the people. This consent is shown in one’s loyalty towards the State. Without this loyalty and this consent, a state would fall into injustice and eventually collapse because of instability and corruption caused by people using the State’s power for their own means. It is for this reason that I call loyalty a necessary function. To better explain why selfishness is something that cannot be a factor in loyalty, one must only turn to the first volume of W.L. Newman’s book, *The Politics of Aristotle*. In it, Newman states that “necessary functions...are practiced for the convenience of another” (Newman 1: 113). Newman’s quote supports the claim that loyalty must be not only to the State above all, but it must also be a selfless gesture, done for that state instead of with other ulterior motives.

In order to have a just State then, loyalty must be something given freely, something given to the State above all else, and something given selflessly. We can find some of the earliest theoretical discussions of loyalty and its significance to the State in two of the most important writers and philosophers near the beginning of the Western tradition of political thought. Aristotle and Plato are two of the first philosophers in the Western world to have written extensively on politics. I turn to these two philosophers to better understand the concept of loyalty to the State when the idea of the State is just coming into play. Plato, in his work *The Republic* and Aristotle, in his work *Politics* both questioned the idea of the good man and his position within the State. The subject of the good man is one of many that the two disagree over. While Plato, through his

discussion of justice, brings up the idea that loyalty is loyalty no matter what, it is Aristotle that brings up a startling and relevant point: the quality of loyalty is not a matter of your service or support to a person or idea but instead is related to the intentions behind that support.

Plato introduces his idea of loyalty in his questions about the man and the city. To Thrasymachus he asks “Do you think that a city, an army, a band of robbers or thieves, or any other tribe with a common unjust purpose would be able to achieve it if they were unjust to each other?” (Plato 179). Thrasymachus of course replies that indeed, they would not be able to accomplish much and Plato goes on to say that by being just to each other, the thieves would be able to accomplish more. To the outsider, this justice can be seen as a sort of loyalty. By not disrespecting each other, the thieves are, in the traditional sense, being loyal to each other. They are being partially just and partially loyal and a part of them must be good. However, Plato does not explore the implications of this “loyalty.” Yes, the thieves are being loyal to each other. They are preventing a sort of civil war within their band, keeping everything together. The only reason that they are banding together, though, is because it benefits each one of them individually. The band of thieves could not be as fruitful if it fell apart, making the individual thief irrelevant. This should not be called loyalty, then, but instead self-interest. To Plato, this self-interest is necessary for the State to run, and is a trait that can be exhibited by the working classes below the complete guardian (who are the ruling class in Plato’s ideal city, and the most virtuous of men). For these men below the guardian class to be good men, all that is expected for them is to be as much as they can be. Since they are not the Complete Guardian, they are expected to be a bit selfish. After all, if they were completely selfless, they would be Guardians, for this is one of the core traits Plato uses in Book III to define the Guardians: “We must find out who are the best guardians of their conviction that *they must always do what they believe to be best for the city*” (Plato 212). Socrates, in Plato’s work, even goes so far as to say that there should be no shame in being in a lower class. In his telling of the parable of the metals, a story made up about the consistency of a man’s soul to better explain the difference in the classes, Plato says: “If an offspring of [the Guardian class] should be found to have a mixture of iron or bronze, they must not pity him in any way, but give him the rank appropriate to his nature and drive out to join the craftsmen and farmers” (Plato 213). To Plato, as long as a man is living up to the standards of the class he is in, he is a good man and the self-serving loyalty we see is just. However, as stated earlier, because of the self-serving aspect of the loyalty, and the fact that even though it benefits the State, it is not given as a service directly to the State, it does not constitute as political loyalty.

At first, Aristotle appears to agree with Plato. When talking about democracies, Aristotle says the following:

But of all the ways that are mentioned to make a constitution last, the most important one, which everyone now despises, is for citizens to be educated in a way that suits their constitutions. For the most beneficial laws, even when ratified by all who are engaged in politics, are of no use if the people are not habituated and educated in accord with the constitution—democratically if the laws are democratic and oligarchically if they are oligarchic. (Aristotle 409)

Here, Aristotle almost advocates for being loyal to one’s state, even if it means that one’s intentions are not true or good. After all, if one is doing well in a democracy it is to one’s benefit to be loyal to that democracy and to do things (sometimes even seemingly selfless things) in order to keep that democracy going. This loyalty would not be because of some obligation to the State, but one’s obligation to one’s self. Instead of taking the words at face value, one must look further into Aristotle to see his true intent. Aristotle believes that democracy is not a good thing and contrasts it with a similar form called a “polity.” Hampton outlines this which she says “if [the people] invest that authority in all the free men, then their constitution is a polity if it operates

well (which happens when the society is structured so as to secure virtuous rule) and a democracy if it operates badly" (Hampton 31). By this endorsement of a polity, in which the rule is virtuous and one can assume the rulers are good men, and mentioning the possibility of a more problematic idea of democracy, we can see that what he is truly advocating is for one to be a good citizen in hopes that this will at least help a State from becoming a complete failure, though this is not the most efficient nor just way for a State to run. Being a good man in a good State, however, is a completely different matter.

Aristotle starts Chapter 4 of Book III with the following: "The next thing to investigate... is whether the virtue of a good man and of a good citizen should be regarded as the same or not the same" (Aristotle 395). Soon after, he answers his own question: "Evidently, then, it is possible for someone to be a good citizen without having acquired the virtue expressed by a good man" (Aristotle 395). By mentioning that a citizen can exist as 'good' without having something that is needed in order to be a 'good man', Aristotle suggests that it is possible for the good man and the good citizen to be two separate entities. However, one can flesh out more about Aristotle not by his question and answer but instead the substance between the two. In telling a story about sailors and their propensity towards doing what is best for the ship, Aristotle says "It is clear both that the most exact account of the virtue of each sailor will be peculiar to him" (Aristotle 395). The fact that each sailor has a virtue that is peculiar to him later becomes important because it is this characteristic that separates the good man from the good citizen. "It is clear that there cannot be a single virtue that is the virtue—the complete virtue—of a good citizen. But the good man, we say, does express a single virtue: the complete one" (Aristotle 395).

What does this definition of a good man have to do with loyalty, though? The truth is, while it is not completely obvious at first glance, this has everything to do with loyalty. Aristotle explains that the citizens, in wanting different things, are each working for their own good. By working for their own good, the supposedly "good citizen" is not actually working for the good of the State in an unselfish way, which, as argued by Morris, is necessary. In the end, this good manifests itself in the same form. "For the safety of the voyage is a task of all of them, since this is what each of the sailor strives for. In the same way, then, the citizen, even though dissimilar, has the safety of the community as their task" (Aristotle 395). This sounds strikingly similar to Plato's idea of loyalty amongst thieves. All of the sailors want a safe voyage. However, it is not because of the good of the ship that they want a safe voyage. They want a safe voyage because the safety of the whole benefits them directly in an individual manner because loyalty in general is necessary for the ship to run, and in fact necessary for a country to run, Aristotle (like Plato) acknowledges that to a point, this is helpful. While it may seem as though Aristotle is suggesting the good citizen can be selfish and till helpful towards the country, an analysis by Michael Curtis suggests otherwise. "It therefore follows that the excellence of the good citizen cannot be identical with that of the good man in all cases, though it may be when he is a ruler" (Curtis 76). Once again, this almost seems to fall into lockstep with previously given theories. The startling fact that must be recognized, though, is the call for rules to be not just good citizens, but good people. When you combine this with what comes next, a picture startlingly different than what was first presented becomes clear. "Men held in esteem the double capacity which consists in knowing both how to rule and how to obey, and they regard the excellence of a worthy citizen as consisting in a good exercise of this double capacity" (Curtis 76). By suggesting that a good and worthy citizen must have the ability to both rule and be ruled, Curtis is explaining that good and worthy citizens most poses the quality of a good ruler: namely, the virtue of the good person. This need for the quality of a good ruler completes the circle. Aristotle, therefore, must be suggesting that while a good citizen and good man differ, in order for a state to run justly, a state must possess good citizens that are also good men. The helpfulness of the "good citizen" that is *not* the good man is enough to help a country run for a short length of time. However, it is the pure

loyalty to the State exhibited by the good citizen that is the good man that is the backbone upon which a good and just country must rest in order to prosper.

By using the texts of Morris, Hampton, Curtis and Newman, we are given a more clear vision of loyalty within the classical works of Plato and Aristotle. Though the classic writers deal in terms of justice, by using more contemporary writers, we better see that underlying justice continues to be central to the idea of loyalty. Without Morris' demand for an unselfish loyalty to the State above all else, Plato's suggestion of loyalty being needed despite the motives behind it stands strong. The implications of allowing this are serious: A State whose governance is consented to through selfish loyalty is one which will ultimately be used to satisfy those in power, while the good of the State itself and the people as a whole within it will be left to wither and die. Ultimately, a State running on selfish loyalty cannot survive. Likewise, the works of Morris, Hampton and Newman back up Aristotle's call for a good man. Newman, and his claim that loyalty is a necessary function (and one done for the good of another) supports Aristotle's good man and likewise helps sustain the idea that being a seemingly good citizen is not enough to serve the State.

Through exploring both of these contemporary and classic writers, we can also better understand loyalty in the practical, modern day world. When one looks at Hampton's call for consent, one can see that it is incontestable that forcing *Rome's* Vorenus' loyalty is wholly unjust. In the same way, when one looks at Aristotle's good man, and the need for such a man to exist and give loyalty to the State in order for the State to survive, one can see the implications of being forced into loyalty rather than choosing it based on the good man's natural virtue. The example of Atia is also better explained through these modern and classical works. Firstly, her selfishness presents a discrepancy against what Morris is claiming with his unselfish loyalty. Secondly, though Atia might have been considered a "good citizen" because of her willingness to work for the State, her selfishness shows a lack of virtue that is demanded by both Plato's Guardian class and Aristotle's good man.

The idea of a loyalty for the sake of serving anything and anyone itself, then, is not what is important but instead *what* one is being loyal to and *why* one is being loyal is the important part when it comes to looking at loyalty within the State. It is not simple enough to be loyal at one given moment, or to be a good person at one given moment, nor is it enough for one simply to be a good citizen and disregard one's role as a good man. Instead, in order to build a more just and fair society, one must strive to be a person that sees beyond appetites and selfish desires. One must learn to be loyal not only to one's self, but instead one's friends, one's family, and most importantly, one's country. After all, without this brand of loyalty, the just world as we know it would eventually collapse into injustice.

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