

Lectures on Loyalty

Josiah Royce

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Lecture I – The Conflict of Loyalties
Lecture II – The Art of Loyalty
Lecture III – Loyalty and Individuality

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Lecture III - Loyalty and Individuality

In opening these lectures, I gave, by way of introduction, a general account of the reasons why I suppose it right to try to define all of our duties in terms of the one central duty to be loyal. At the basis of everything that I have said in the two lectures which have preceded the present one, lies the general thesis that loyalty to a rightly chosen and life-absorbing cause constitutes [2] the whole duty of every reasonable human being. And as to what is meant by a rightly chosen cause, to which one is to be loyal, my further thesis has been this, that we ought so to choose and so to serve our personal causes that, through our choice and our service, the common loyalty of mankind should be, as far as possible, furthered and increased, rather than hindered or impoverished. Thus my doctrine is that the whole moral law, in its most general form, consists simply of the two precepts: (1) Be loyal, and (2) See that your [3] loyalty is such as to help [missing “the”] rest of mankind to be loyal to their own individually chosen and life-absorbing causes.

What I mean by the spirit of loyalty itself I have tried pretty fully to illustrate. You are loyal not merely when you feel enthusiastic about something, but when you are practically devoted to the actual service of a cause. Loyalty is an affair of action, and never of mere sentiment. Moreover, while love [note: Royce originally wrote “affection”] is an accompaniment of loyalty, loyalty is never identical with affection or with devotion to any one individual person, or to any mere collection of individuals. Loyalty always includes personal affections, and naturally grows out of whatever love helps you to be absorbed in service. But the cause to which [sic: missing “you are devoted”] [4] must be something more than your love for individuals can embody. It must be a cause that joins, in some higher unity of spirit various individual lives, so that they become, as the poet says: “the undivided soul of many of soul.” Thus, you love your friend; but you are loyal to your friendship, to the tie that binds the friends into a single unity of personal and yet also of super-personal life, so that the friendship is something more than the friends. You may be benevolent towards your fellow-citizens; but you are loyal to your country; and your country is at once something that helps individual persons to live their own lives, and that is, in a true sense, a kind of super-individual union of many persons in one common life. [5] Furthermore, your cause must always be something which is not merely forced upon you, but which you personally choose. Loyalty is the voluntary devotion of a self to a cause. Consequently, nobody can determine for another person precisely what is the cause to which that other shall be loyal. We can lay down the principle that one should choose some absorbing and life long cause. We can assert also, in general, that one’s choice of a cause should be subject to the requirement that one’s cause should help on the common loyalty. [“on the common loyalty” is Royce’s phrasing] Therefore nobody can rightly say: For my part I choose to [6] be loyal to my robber band, or to my pirate ship, or to my corrupt political organization that preys upon the common cause of all loyal citizens, or to my little coterie of friends whose cause involves a contempt for everybody outside of our set. Nor is one right in case his family loyalty, or his other chosen cause, is served in a spirit of prevailing hostility to other families, or to other causes.

Subject to such limitations, however, the choice of a cause is free, and must be left to the Will of each person. One can choose to live a life of devotion to science, or to art, or to public business, or to private philanthropy. One's natural ties, – say the family and the community into which one is born, will of course furnish one's principal [7] opportunities to find a cause for loyalty. And most of us discover pretty early that we are indeed already committed to causes from which we never afterwards ought to wish to escape. Nevertheless nobody can say to the individual, before and apart from the willing choice of that individual: "Here I show you your personal cause; I can tell you from without what it is. No matter what you choose, this is the personal cause to which, as I say, you must be loyal." Such dogmatism indeed interferes with the rights, just because it meddles with the duties of other people. The command "Be loyal" is absolute, and strict. The other command: "Further the universal loyalty through the choice of your cause" is also absolute. But neither command can relieve the individual from the precious responsibility of choosing how he [8] will serve the universal loyalty.

This obvious, but often forgotten remark, is of great importance for the understanding of the true spirit of loyalty. In these days of manifold social enterprises, each one of us is constantly receiving through the mails, or is hearing from personal friends, enthusiastic exhortations to be loyal to this or to that old or new cause. The world thus tries to distract us by ordaining from without to what our allegiance [sic] is to be due. Now it is well that the loyal should by fair means try to win new fellow servants for their own good causes. They may be right to use exhortations and [9] circulars. But they must not pretend to decide for us individually what cause we ought to serve. It is loyal to have your *own* causes, – woven into some sort of unity as your own one life cause. It is loyal to keep an open mind as to enlarging your cause by the annexation of new special enterprises. But it is also loyal to keep a wastebasket to hold these proposals of causes foreign to your own which constantly attempt to make you undertake what, as you perceive, is not your office. Resist stoutly those people who so earnestly disapprove of you because, being loyal to your own, you have no time or strength left for [10] their enterprises. Respect them for their own loyalty; but when, as sometimes happens, they express pain or scorn at your indifference to their great work, remind them that, just *because* loyalty is sacred and universal, one has to seem personally indifferent to the proposed task that one cannot undertake. If one may misuse a well known word of a poet, we should learn not to think much, or too anxiously, about possible pledges, "by fretful fancy feigned," to causes "that are for others." Of course, meanwhile, we can earn the right to such indifference only in so far as we are really absorbed in our own [11] loyal service of our cause. The unattached who have no cause to serve have no right to be indifferent to new plans for service. They ought to seek their cause as their one pearl of great price.

I.

So much then, by way of general summary. I have found, however, as a teacher, that the foregoing doctrine about loyalty, simple as it now seems to me, is subject to a good many misunderstandings. Some of the misunderstandings prove to be very stubborn. I want to devote my main attention in this my last lectur [sic] to [12] guarding as well as I can against leaving

these misunderstandings at all prominent in your minds. The misunderstandings in question often take the form of objections to my doctrine. But sometimes they take the form of a simple misreading of the [note: Royce originally wrote “my” and omitted in favor of “the”] meaning of loyalty, – a misreading such that one who appears to accept the doctrine might be led even in attempting to apply this doctrine, to act as I do not want anybody to act.

The usual misunderstandings of the spirit of loyalty concern the difficult and delicate problem of [13] the relations between loyalty on the one hand, and self-cultivation, self-assertion, or some such concern of the self on the other hand. To some people the search for inner personal perfection of character seems the central moral ideal. And such people wonder whether piety and saintliness and spiritual peace are mainly to be sought through loyalty. To others, loyalty seems opposed to independence of spirit, and to the cultivation of private judgment. To still others, the loyal spirit is supposed to involve a kind of abandonment of personal responsibility, just because the loyal man makes his cause his conscience. Yet others, accept the [14] general statement of the doctrine of loyalty very readily, but interpret loyalty as meaning something that they define too much in negative terms, as mere self forgetfulness, or self-effacement. My discussion is intended, today, to remove or to supplement what I suppose to be these wrong or these inadequate interpretations of what loyalty means.

I can help you best if I set down in order several accounts of the meaning of loyalty which I believe to be imperfect, and if, before I am done with the present lecture, I try to show precisely what the imperfection of each account is.

[15] The first imperfect account of loyalty that I propose to treat sums up the matter by saying: “Loyalty is just the same as unselfishness, as self-sacrifice, as concern for others.” The second imperfect account is closely related with this first, and asserts that “Loyalty means the same as pure benevolence, as devotion to the general happiness.” The third incomplete account is often urged by my opponents, and declares that “Loyalty means subservience, – some sort of blind obedience to authority.” The fourth view, also imperfect, and [16] also often urged by my opponents, affirms that “Loyalty means conservatism, and implies a disposition to resist reform and progress.” A fifth view, also employed by those who oppose me, interprets loyalty as “an absorption in mere tasks, opposed to inner personal and spiritual cultivation.” All these imperfect accounts have to do, as you see with what sort of individual the loyal person himself is supposed to be. Or, as we may say, these imperfect views all are concerned with the relation of loyalty to the training of one’s own individuality. What sort of [17] individuality is characteristic of the loyal man? Is it the unselfish sort, or the benevolent sort, or the obedient sort of individuality that is in question, when one insists upon loyalty as a personal quality? Or is it the conservative type of individuality, or the merely practical and hence unspiritual individuality that is praised when one recommends loyalty as a virtue? To such questions I want to suggest answers. That is why I have entitled this lecture “Loyalty and Individuality.” I want to study the relation of the loyal life to the developement [sic] and the cultivation of individual character.

And so let me meet each of these imperfect accounts of loyalty by a somewhat dogmatic counter assertion. [18] To do this will not wholly clear up the situation. For mere opposition is

often rather bewildering. But having done this I want then to bring this lecture to a focus by a brief general discussion of what the valuable sort of self is, and by indicating what kind of individual character it seems to me to be to be wisest to try to cultivate.

II.

In answer then, to the five imperfect accounts of the loyal spirit just proposed, I assert: –

First, Loyalty is not adequately to be defined as pure unselfishness, because that is a merely negative definition. Furthermore, since you [19] are a self, and since you never will be anything but a self, it cannot be your duty simply to abolish or to ignore or to get rid of yourself. Hence the merely destructive word unselfishness ill defines the whole duty of man. Yet further, it cannot be the whole duty of everybody simply, as they say, “to live for others.” For then, as my colleague Professor Palmer so aptly insists, and as he tells us that a little girl, a niece [sic] of his with childlike wisdom, once stated the case: “If we are to live for others, what are the others to live for. [sic: “?”]”

[20] As a fact, the word unselfishness is indeed in its place a good word; but it is much misused. And you cannot well define the duty of a self by simply telling it not to be a self. As for “living for others,” Professor Palmer’s niece [sic] was right. Pure altruism, that is, simple “living for others,” would mean a total deadlock in the moral world. For if it were each person’s whole duty to see that somebody else got possession of all the good things that each could give, while sin consisted in seeking, or even in accepting, any good things for one’s self, well then it would indeed be everybody’s duty to give, while it would be a sin for anybody to take. And in that world the whole duty of each [21] person would consist in tempting all the others to the supposed sin of accepting good things for the self. “Living for others,” viewed as the whole and unmodified plan of life, and carried out by everybody, would therefore leave everybody at all times in the position in which two over scrupulously courteous men sometimes stand, when each obstinately insists that the other shall precede him in going through a doorway. A little hesitancy in such cases is good. But if the hesitation lasts, what soon becomes the situation? Vainly bowing and gesturing, each pretends at the moment to “live” in a stupid dumb show “for the other,” while neither of them dares to get through the door, and while each all the while maliciously [22] insists that the other shall assume the supposed guilt of the selfish precedence. We all know that any rule of precedence, however arbitrary, is preferable to such a fools’ deadlock, and that the first principle of courtesy is to have rules for showing courtesy and so for determining order and precedence, – not of course without a due hesitancy and deference in the doubtful cases, but with an essential decisiveness which is of the essence both of courtesy and of loyalty.

Devotion of the self to the cause then, is not mere negative [23] unselfishness, nor yet self-effacement, nor is it giving others the good things which it is supposed to be a selfish sin to accept. Loyalty is absorption of the self in the common cause of the many selves. But the absorbed self is not the abolished self. The ideal knight of romance is more of a self through his knightly service. He has the dignity and grace of loyalty about him. It is the unity of many real and distinct selves, – not the mere abolition of the self, which is the purpose of loyalty.

Of course when people object to selfishness as bad, and counsel [24] unselfishness as good, they in general have more or less vaguely in mind the sort of truth that I am now meaning to expressed [sic: “**express**”]. By selfishness they mean the attitude [sic: “**attitude**”] of the detached self that wants to remain detached. By unselfishness they mean the abandonment of the detached and disloyal attitude. But I beg you not to conceive loyalty in merely negative terms, and not to think of it as mere unselfishness. The ideally loyal person prizes himself as the servant of the cause, just as the ideal knight prizes his sword, his lance, and his shining armor. The loyal man cultivates [25] himself in order to furnish to the cause a good servant. It would be as absurd to abandon yourself to nothingness in order to be loyal, as it would be for the warrior to break his own sword. And so loyalty is indeed much more than mere unselfishness.

Again, when people speak of “living for others” of course they do not mean to counsel the moral deadlock of which I just spoke. What they mean is that a loyal man’s cause requires him to look outside of his private self, and always does, as a fact, bring him into relations with other people. But what the motto “Live for others” fails to express is the fact that it is not for [26] a mere collection of other people that you live, but for the unity of many lives in the service of one ideal cause. In the ideal family the members do not merely live for one another. They live for the family, – a spiritual unity which is more than are all its detached members merely summed together. The family is not only personal, but in a sense superpersonal. That is, it has a sort of higher personality of its own.

III.

But next, in answer to the second of the imperfect views of loyalty that I stated above, I insist that Loyalty is not identical with pure benevolence, nor with a dis- [27] -position simply to make everybody happy.

Now why do I assert this? Is not benevolence a virtue? Is it not well to try to make everybody happy? Are not the noblest types of individuality the benevolent types? Can one be loyal if he is not benevolent?

I answer, Benevolence is simply one aspect of loyalty. But one can be sentimentally benevolent without knowing what true loyalty means. Such benevolence without loyalty is chaotic, and has often proved mischievous. Do not imagine – so I should say to any lover of human happiness, – do not imagine that you are already loyal merely because you are kindly. To wish well to everybody is not a solution of the problems of life. [28] Loyalty tends to make men happy; but not every effort to increase the general happiness is loyal. And here I speak of an aspect of the art of life which some of us find very hard to learn.

There early comes to many naturally benevolent people a lesson which some of them find very bitter and disappointing. It is the lesson that, try as you will, you cannot make people happy unless they are ready for happiness. And readiness for happiness is a complicated affair. The human will is naturally insatiable. Until it learns to find rest in its own chosen form of loyalty, you in vain endeavor to feed it with the means of happiness. The more toys you give to a child, [29] the worse he cries for more, unless what you have given to him happen [note: **Royce writes “happens” but marks through the “s”**] to absorb him in some sort of activity which begins to

give him his first glimpse of a coming loyalty. The familiar tragedy of parental affection is that we toil and plan to give our children advantages, so that we may make them happy, while, unless they have the luck to find and the will to choose some sort of loyal service, the result of all our toil is that we have simply heaped up for them the things with which they are now able to be discontented. To try to deal out simple happiness to mankind at large is like persistently plying them with wine. One in so far makes them at best stupid, – perhaps vicious.

And now all this is true not [30] because man is irrational, but rather because he has in him, even at the worst, a sort of thirst for the infinite, – a thirst which you cannot shake with mere joys. What man wants, he indeed usually imagines as a coming joy. But if you dole out joy to him, he declares that this is, after all not what he wants. What in fact he wants is activity, and absorption in activity, and some sort of unity with the common life.

And so the cause of increasing human joy is never the whole cause to which a reasonable loyalty devotes itself. Our power to give pleasure, or even to relieve pain, is far more limited than [31] is our power to further the general cause of loyalty. Remember, after all, how much a loyal person can do to help on causes that are not his own, just by being faithful in his own way to his own task. Now whoever, by the example of his own faithfulness, inspires other people to choose a cause and to serve it, does far more good to mankind at large than he could possibly do by merely trying to make people happy without doing anything to make them loyal. A captain, after a collision, first quietly looks out for the safety of his passengers, and then, because there is always the chance, to the last moment, that something be done for the sinking ship, with quiet resignation, he goes down [32] with his ship. His life is saved; but he has first offered it freely to the service. And he has done far more than save his passengers and to do his duty by the property committed to his charge. He sends as it were, the wireless message all over the world, – Be loyal to your own. It is a good message. It ought not to be a surprising one. Such acts ought to be the commonplaces of loyal life, in case fortune chances to demand this sort of service. But whoever is privileged to greet his fellows through such a message and such an act, he gives to the world what the higher benevolence demands, – namely the thought of loyalty, and the suggestion of a devotion which is better than all passing joys.

It is a great thing when we first make up our minds that the only [33] permanent rational satisfaction that we can find in this life is the satisfaction of having a cause so vast, and so much above our own personal level, that we can never finally win it in this life. Then we are henceforth content to be discontent; because we are henceforth discontented with our imperfect service of the cause, but content to be always trying to serve it better. We are in any case doomed always to hunger and thirst after something, for we are finite and it is not satisfactory to be finite. We become peaceful so far as that for which we hunger and thirst is the good of our cause, which is in its highest form infinite. For then it is in the cause that we live and move and have our being.

The illusion of the merely benevolent then, is the illusion that you can feed men with happiness, as with sweetmeats. In the long run you cannot do so; because man is a [34] spirit, thirsting for the infinite, whether he knows the fact or not. Hence, if he knows no better, he

grumbles over business and chagrins, and the cooking and the amusements, not perceiving that he is discontent simply because he wants the infinite; blindly supposing that it is his dinner or his livelihood or his card parties that are going wrong. So far as he is awake and reasonable, he knows that his real trouble is just his finitude and his longing for God, and that it is therefore an absorbing service that he wants, and that the cooking and the amusements are properly the mere incidents and clothing of a loyal life.

Perhaps all this seems to some of you too austere. You will say, “Has not pure benevolence, the mere will to make people happy, its own limited but real place [35] in life? Is not the cause of trying to make people happy itself a proper part of the cause for the loyal?”

I answer, Yes. Joy and amusement and humor and gaiety are parts of the loyal life. But the proper places for making exclusively prominent in our minds the effort to make people happy, are, to my mind two in number. That is, in two sorts of relations in life the work of the loyal takes the form simply of trying then and there to make people gay and joyous, or of trying simply to relieve pain. These two places are: (1) The part of life in which we have *no other* chance to deal with people *except* by appealing to their present state of feeling. In this place we stand in some [36] of the least personal and intimate of the relations of life, where we are so remote from the inner life of the people with whom we deal that there is nothing better to do for them than to try to relieve their pain, or to amuse them. And (2) At the other extreme of our life’s relations, viz. in the *most* intimate and personal of the relations of life, when all the other obligations of loyalty are for the time secure, – then there is indeed nothing else to do but to try to enjoy to the full the transient and temporal fruits of loyalty, and we are then free to give and to take as much joy as we can, because we have loyally earned the right to do so.

[37] These two extremes of life, I say, are the regions wherein loyalty most shows itself in the form of simple benevolence, and appears absorbed in trying to make pain cease, and to make joy abound. At the one extreme of life, that is, when you have for the time no other relation to people than the opportunity to appeal to their present feelings, belongs the whole business of simply relieving intense suffering. The acute sufferer is in a tragically lonesome, an inhuman, and an irrational position. Until his pain is relieved, he may have no chance for any sort of significant existence. And so, in that case, loyalty to a cause which includes him in its scope can only counsel so far as he is concerned, simple benevolence. [38] You help to relieve his pain however you can. And for the moment you may have no other conceivable duty to him but the duty to relieve. In such cases loyalty is indeed expressed as pure benevolence, and the relief of pain appears as the one ideal that applies to the case. All this is perfectly consistent with our general principles.

But in a similar, although much more happy situation, when you are in company with the casual acquaintance, or, as when on a journey, are simply passing the time with the chance fellow-traveller [sic], loyalty to the common cause may have no other counsel to give than that you should be as pleasant, as kindly, as simply and directly benevolent, as [39] the casual relation permits or requires. In such cases, one ought to please if one can, simply because there is nothing better to do for anybody concerned. Whoever defines duty, at such moments, in other

than purely benevolent terms, appears as a pedant; and whoever, by natural or by acquired skill, simply radiates joy and is good company, is loyal in the best sense that is just then possible.

At the other extreme of life, however, in the most intimate and dearest human relations, the offering of joy is often the best means of exercising loyalty, just because, at any one time, the other tasks of loyalty may have been accomplished, so far as it is then possible [40] to accomplish them. The mother or father at play with the children, the lovers when their meetings make December June, – these interpret loyalty for the time in purely benevolent terms, and they are justified for the moment in doing so, if and only if, all the rest of loyalty has been otherwise made secure through faithful and united service.

Thus then, benevolence appears as the one central feature of loyal action at the two extremes of life, – namely when the other work of loyalty cannot be done because we are not near enough to each other, and when the other work of loyalty has been, thus far, well done, just because we are so near to each other. Under such conditions, the feelings of the flying moment rightly pre- [41] dominate. It becomes duty to give comfort to those who suffer, and to be gay with those who are gay. Seen from this side, Duty appears as Wordsworth so beautifully phrased the matter: –

Stern lawgiver! Yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face.

Some of you might here be disposed to add a third type of cases wherein loyalty appears mainly as pure benevolence. Is it not the artist's duty, you will say, to give us pleasure? Is not loyalty to art the same as a service of the joy of mankind?

[42] I reply: It is the artist's duty to give joy. But if he is loyal to his art it is only the rightly ideal sort of joy that he wants to give. Now the idealized joy in art is valuable not as mere pleasure, but as a symbol of the higher unity and inner harmony of a life that is above our ordinary human level. The beautiful is, amongst other things, a presentation of the goal that a loyal life seeks. Hence even the comic artist must not merely give you transient joy. If that is his whole aim, he is a mere buffoon, and a poor one at that. In serving the ideal of his art, the true artist is more than merely benevolent.

[43] So much then for the general relations of benevolence and duty, or, if you will, of amiability [missing "and"] loyalty. One may be loyal without having learned to be amiable. That is a pity. But one may be persistently amiable without having learned to be loyal. And that is a tragedy and may become a scandal.

IV.

Two questions have now been answered which bear upon the type of individuality which the loyal should cultivate. Neither mere unselfishness nor pure benevolence [44] constitutes the whole of loyalty. Hence, as you see already, loyalty involves the tendency to cultivate a type of individuality which you cannot define without mentioning virtues that are other than the purely

amiable virtues. And now something that is indeed most essential to the loyal type of individuality comes into sight when I mention the next, the third of the incomplete accounts of the loyal spirit which my former list contains, and when I show why this account is incomplete.

Loyalty, I assert, does not mean subservience. Loyalty does not imply any sort of blind obedience to authority. One of the best ways to make [45] clear to [missing “you”] in this respect my thesis, is to ask you to look back upon the conflicts of loyalty that I discussed in my first lecture, and upon the study of the art of loyalty that I attempted in my second lecture.

The apparent conflicts of loyalty, as we saw, can often be wisely dealt with be [sic: “by”] remembering certain principles which I endeavored to state. But, as I insisted, no catalogue of maxims can ever exhaustively codify the law of the loyalty. Loyalty is an affair of a certain spiritual attitude. And at last, after all the advice [46] is given which we can attempt to formulate, something will be left, in the more complicated cases of doubt to the personal decision of the loyal soul. Loyalty, even in the simplest and least reflective of faithful people, includes decisiveness of character. Mere following is never the whole of loyalty. You must decide for yourself many of the most critical problems of the loyal life. And consequently loyalty requires of you a certain independence which can never be satisfied by simple subservience.

In particular, the cause to which you are to be loyal must in some [47] way be chosen by yourself. And this choice must have independence about it. Moreover, while fickleness is excluded by the spirit of loyalty, you are required to serve your cause so that the cause itself shall grow in variety and dignity as you yourself grow. But growth in spirit does not wholesomely occur unless you yourself take a part, and an independent part, in the process. And next, if your cause is worth serving, it will be important enough to involve you in many problematic undertakings, in which apparent conflicts will arise. And [48] decisive action, in case of conflict, will always require a fresh act of your own will, – an act that will be at once an earnest, often reverent acquiescence in what you view as the demand of your cause, and meanwhile an act of higher self-assertion, because you will consider, and you will personally decide.

It is of course perfectly true that loyalty usually includes a great deal of obedience. If I am loyal, I have my chiefs, and I follow, in a faithful way, the instructions that, as representatives of the cause, they rightfully give me. But obedience to individuals is never [49] the main purpose of the loyal. Service of the cause is the central thought. One obeys those through whom the cause speaks, and precisely in so far as the cause speaks through them. One obeys precisely in the same spirit in which, when one’s turn comes, one commands, simply in the spirit of loving the orderly service. Such obedience, even in the case of the wilful boy whom, in the first lecture I mentioned as learning to love to obey his athletic coach and the will of his team, – such obedience is always, for the loyal, a proud and gracious act. It enhances their sense [50] of deeper independence. They scorn the merely wilful caprice. They love order for its own sake, because orderly grace of action is part of the art of loyalty. The resemblance of the dutiful life to the appearance of natural order in the movements of the heavenly bodies, has been the

source of countless symbolic words regarding what one may call the outward form of the loyal life. As Wordsworth again phrases the matter, in his Ode to Duty: –

“Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong;
And the most ancient heavens through
thee are fresh and strong.”

To conceive our obedience, in so far as that is required for the purposes of the [51] loyal life, – to conceive this our obedience as simply an incident in the effort to live a starry life, – well that is indeed one way to get before us a symbol of what a wise obedience means. Of course, if it is my cause that by my own will is really commanding me, it is indifferent to me through what fellow-servant the cause just then speaks. The infant’s cry or the policeman’s voice, the order of a court or the word of a friend, the law of the land or the Dean of the College, the circular that comes by mail or the request of somebody in the household, – any of these may possess, at [52] any moment, the force of a command; because, from such a source I may learn of some required act that I should not have thought of myself, but that, when once it is suggested to me, appears as an act which my loyalty needs to have me execute. When commands happen to annoy us, the thing to remember is this: It is not surprising that I did not think of this myself. I am ignorant and fallible. Or again, this matter was one which involved the discretion of somebody else besides myself. But now that I happen to get this idea in the form of a command, let me think. Is not this after all my own loyal [53] will, simply written out before me so that I can see it, or spoken from without so that I can plainly hear? If so, obedience is self-fulfilment. One of Scott’s Highlanders of the old days somewhere indignantly replies, when somebody speaks of his “master”: “I have no master. No man is my master. But I have my chief.” That is one way to express the proud obedience of the warrior.

People often discuss who has the authority to give commands to others. The democratic spirit often seems to rebel in general against recognizing commanders and commands. But the rational answer to the question is: Anybody may upon occasion give commands [54] to anybody, or accept commands from anybody, – the sole condition being that the relations of the loyal fellow-servants of a common cause are in question, and that nobody gives commands in his own personal name, but only speaks as the momentary voice of the cause, while nobody loyally obeys any mere individual, and every loyal person obeys the one who just then and there acts as the mere vehicle, transmitting by words the requirements which the loyal soul freely recognizes as those of the common cause. The form of the command is, in general, a con- [55] venient abbreviation, – a concession to the ignorance or to the momentary need of the person to whom the command is addressed, – or an expression of the fact that, at the moment, something has to be left to the discretion of the one whose office it then is to give commands.

More or less permanent commanders, such as judges, rulers, generals, captains, are indeed needed in certain sorts of service; but a permanent commander is still a fellow servant, and rightly speaks to the loyal only as such a fellow servant. Upon occasion, he too, if loyal, will cheerfully obey.

[56] Meanwhile every loyal person inevitably retains his own range of personal, individual, inalienable discretion. Loyalty never can mean, therefore, the suppression of individuality. You choose your own cause. You are faithful to it. But you are faithful in your own way. Your very obedience, when loyalty takes the form of obedience, is your own sort of obedience, and comes out of your own insight into the value of the command as an expression of the will of the cause through the voice of its individual representative, your fellow-servant.

Moreover, in the cases of doubt, where the loyalties seem to conflict, [57] and where the principles of the art of loyalty seem to furnish no sufficient ground for decision, your duty remains the duty of being decisive, and of choosing for yourself, knowingly if you can, ignorantly if you must, but always devotedly and faithfully, – the duty of choosing, I say, for yourself, where your true loyalty lies. One thing that no loyal mind can tolerate, in doubtful cases, is essential indecision of mind. Of course you are considerate. You try to think over the doubtful matter carefully, to weigh consequences, to dwell upon over **[note: Royce originally had “think” but crossed out in favor of “dwell upon” – he likely intends to cross out “over”]** the principles of your art, to [58] avoid caprice, to surrender mere self-will, to look to your highest cause, to remember how all the loyal need your good example, and your help in the spirit of faithfulness. You try in short, to bethink you, in Wordsworth’s metaphor, of that spirit which preserves the stars from wrong. But if, when all the most universal and lofty considerations have been thought over, if when all insight has been fairly tried, if the matter still remains doubtful, – then one duty remains, and that duty is indeed certain. You must decide for yourself, and fear not, and act out your decision. This is loyalty. And without such a personal and practical decisiveness, loyalty is but a dream. And this is why loyalty is never mere subservience, despite the fact that loyalty is absolute and willing devotion of the self to the cause.

[59] – If all this is so, the fourth of the imperfect views of loyalty is set aside at once. Loyalty does not mean mere slavish conservatism. Loyalty is opposed to fickleness, but not to growth. Your cause, if worthy at all, is your means of serving the cause of loyalty at large among mankind. Hence your cause, if a good one at all, tends to become more and more universal the longer you serve it. The loyal are not fond of revolutions in the conduct [60] of the affairs of life. But if fortune forces upon them the need of fighting through some revolutionary enterprise, they know that “He is the best conservative who lops the mouldering branch away.” The loyal are faithful to their chosen friendships. But if death removes their friends from sight, they idealize the seemingly lost cause of the old friendship, and try to live out its spirit in the new life. When the doubtful case of conflicting loyalty arises, the loyal of course try to recall precedents. But when the case is [61] itself novel, they have the courage to make novel decisions. Loyalty means freedom of spirit won through willing devotion. Hence it is never content with barren routine. What can I do for the cause today which I never did before? Such is the loyal soul’s question. And so much may now suffice as to the relation of loyalty to conservatism.

V.

My closing word is now due to the final one upon my list of imperfect views of loyalty. Loyalty, so some people object to me, means too much [62] an absorption in practical affairs. Loyalty, therefore, is opposed to inner spiritual peace and self-possession. Loyalty should consequently belong to the outer life, and should concern only a part of our higher existence. The cultivation of the inner life remains, – the cultivation of virtues that are inaccessible to the merely practical soul. Beyond loyalty is piety, and the contemplative life, and rest in God.

Let me speak quite frankly to you, as my last word regarding this matter. There are those of you who, [63] finding the practical calls of life confusing in their manifoldness, are prone to believe that the highest life would consist in some sort of withdrawal from these sources of confusion. Now I myself know perfectly well what it is to find the practical calls of life extremely confusing. But I have learned to recognize that the two things which make life distracting to me are: – (1) Simple awkwardness about understanding the mere technique of business, – inability for [64] instance to order my engagements or my papers well enough, – carelessness about memoranda, about correspondence, about errands, and the like; and (2) Lack of unity as to the principles of my Loyalty [note: orig. “loyalty,” written over]. In other words, it is I who interfere, in these matters with myself. As for my awkwardnesses, they are either incurable defects, or else they are best to be cured by practice. But as to that distraction in life which is due to my imperfection in loyalty, – that is not to be cured [65] by forgetting action, nor by retiring into mystical contemplations of any sort, but by being so fully absorbed in the service of one life embracing [sic: needs “-”] cause that my voluntary activities are kept from the sense of distraction merely by their conscious relation to the unity of that cause. Of course rest, relaxation, amusement, joy, relief, sleep, – these all belong to our natural life. None of these should be regarded in their place as in conflict with loyalty; since they prepare us for service. And you may be sure that a student of [66] philosophy is eager to insist that certain sorts of contemplation are themselves parts of an intense and free and loyal activity, and are such whether the world calls them unpractical or not. As a fact, one of my most absorbing personal interests, at present, is an effort to solve certain technical problems in the field of modern mathematical logic, – problems so remote and theoretical in seeming that most of you, if [67] I ventured to portray those problems to you, would say at once, like my dear friend and colleague Wm. James: “That sort of thing is vicious intellectualism.” Nevertheless, to me, the effort to work out those problems seems to be an essential part of my present practical attempt to serve the cause of my life. And when I work upon them, I work hard, and feel correspondingly peaceful.

But whatever one’s cause, it is in the service and in the unity of this cause that relief from distraction and confusion of life is to be found. Whoever [68] says, the variety of the calls of practical life confuses me; hence I need to get something at the centre of my spirit which is above all practical activities, simply confesses, I think, either that he has not yet found his cause, or else that he is fickle and is therefore distracted by his fickleness, or else, like myself, that he has not yet learned his art, and is often distracted by his unbusinesslike awkwardness, or finally,

that he is not really [69] talking about the highest aspect of life at all, but only about his natural need for rest and relaxation, – a need with which, of course, loyalty has no quarrel.

Fix your eyes upon the unity and the perfection of your highest ideal, and then create, – create its expression in your household, in your calling, in your social order, in this city, in our country, in the world, in company with all the loyal. That is the one counsel of spiritual perfection that any one can [70] give you. That call to the creation of the unity of the loyal life is the one interpretation of the hymn “Adeste fideles” which I believe to be of permanent worth. “Verite Adoremus,” – “come let us adore him.” Yes but loyalty is true adoration; and adoration is naught without loyalty.