

## The Ties of Loyalty

Mary Healy

Roehampton University  
Grove House  
Froebel College  
Roehampton University  
Roehampton Lane  
London SW15 5PJ

[Mary.Healy@roehampton.ac.uk](mailto:Mary.Healy@roehampton.ac.uk)

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## Introduction

Any vision of what a socially cohesive, democratic society should be, must consider how its citizens relate to each other and the bonds and loyalties required of them. Many theorists of the 'social fabric' that makes a society argue that interactions and relationships of trust require a certain level of shared values and purposes. This claim is particularly pertinent in such studies as social cohesion in which theories start from the assumption that society can be examined through studying patterns of the interconnections, ties or bonds between people which hold groups together.

Much of the literature on educational policy in English speaking countries has an explicit directive to promote 'civic bonds' in schools. The question of balancing the civic bonds that enable citizens to live together whilst, at the same time, respecting the flourishing of the associational bonds that tie communities of tradition and culture together still remains of critical importance. What has received less attention, however, is the place of *loyalty* in these bonds. Neither has adequate attention always been given to a consideration of what is involved in 'balancing' conflicting commitments. This paper argues that loyalty bonds are an unavoidable and important part of our psyche and our social lives. Citizens that live in a plural society may be subject to a variety of loyalties and associated allegiances, some of whose bonds will inevitably clash. It is this factor, and the role of schools in supporting children faced with such difficulties, that I wish to explore in this paper.

Education and schools, more than any other institutions, shape normative values and beliefs and transmit these to successive generations. Schools are one of the first experiences of 'group living', stepping outside the immediate family circle for the first time. This suggests that education and schooling has a pertinent role to play in developing or nourishing these bonds. In Section 1, I start by differentiating between associational bonds and civic bonds. I argue that these bonds serve to tie us to others and contribute towards generating motives for action. Leading from this, in Section 2, I explore how this may relate to obligations between citizens through a consideration of the relationship between loyalty and trust. In Section 3, I turn to the problem of civic loyalty and briefly consider the bond of patriotism as an exemplar of group loyalty. In Section 4, I consider the importance of loyalty by reflecting on the possibility of the absence or disintegration of loyalties and the subsequent effects to both our personal and social well-being using the literary exemplars of *Antigone* and *The Death of Grass*. Finally in Section 5, I indicate the importance of the subject for education.

### **Section 1: Associational and Civic Bonds**

It is generally accepted that for humans to survive and flourish in society we need to somehow see ourselves as bonded together to thus generate reasons for cooperative behaviour. The phenomenon of group loyalties and the sharing of resources based upon ties of kinship and familial bonds arguably formed the basis for the duties and moral obligations required by living in groups, and as such existed long before political terms for it were coined (Stjernø, 2005). Research indicates that we are much more likely to share things with those we feel we share some form of

our identity, hence the perceived political and social import raised by this forms the basis for many government policies (Blunkett, 2005).

At a literal level, *associational* bonds refer to the bonds between, or tying together, a group of people who associate with a common purpose or interest in mind, for example a sports club, a political party. Within the general usage of the term, there is a presumption of a commonality between members, that they share a common interest of some sort through participating in the group. These bonds tend to be distinct from those based on family or friendship. Additionally, the bond can be used to characterise a relationship between people of the same kind, connected by a joint endeavour.

Associational bonds are affective: there is some emotional tie to the group, which is particularistic - these particular people, this particular project. This attitude of affection promotes a sense of belonging and loyalty commitments from one to the other as members of the group, hence a strong sense of partiality to fellow members. To say that someone belongs, is to value them in a particular way, to include them and likewise, to say that someone does not belong can be to 'disvalue' them and exclude them from the obligations of attachment.

To *feel* bonded with others requires an affective disposition of a particular kind: it carries with it an inclination to action based on the bond, a practice of working with others in pursuit of common interests. Some interests are short lived and require directed, cooperative working of a particular kind, for example, the collective action of workers at Visteon, who in answer to losing their jobs at the firm, undertook a rooftop occupation. Or the workers in Woippy, France who 'boss-napped' five managers of FM Logistic in protest at plant closure.<sup>1</sup> It is unlikely that these

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<sup>1</sup> The Observer:26.4.09: Business and Media Section, p6-7, Kathryn Hopkins

individuals would share all interests in common, but the shared nature of their common problem motivated common response. When the common interest no longer exists, the bond is unlikely to continue.

When the bond is a *civic* bond, it denotes the group of people to whom we are bound within a complex mesh of obligations and responsibilities over a longer period of time. Here, the bond springs from the need to identify those who are to be governed together, and those outside the scope of such governance (Gilbert, 1998, p26). It seems reasonable to assume that it marks out that grouping as being of special concern: I am obliged to regard them in some way differently from those to whom I am *not* bound and this may ground the extent of the help that I am willing to give them. The linkage with the political tends to have some basis in the belief that associational life tends to be the place in which we learn to develop relationships of trust, to learn and develop loyal behaviours, to share, cooperate and learn to mediate our interests, to socially integrate and practice particular civic skills.

A further way in which to regard this difference is to distinguish between the ties of *public* social life and *non-public* social life to pinpoint the particular bonds upholding purely civic relationships. Public social life encompasses those factors specifically aligned with our lives as citizens. Within non-public social life, on the other hand, are those ties between persons already bound together by ties of a 'closed group', a relationship between people of the same kind, connected by a joint endeavour or with ties to a community: these are the ties of our everyday lives. Whilst this distinction is obviously not clear-cut it proves a useful starting point for the analysis.

There is a growing acceptance amongst theorists that the precise mechanism by which the bonds of the associational life are converted into, or enrich, macro level

bonds are as yet open to question and speculation (Green, Preston and Gemen Janmaat, 2006). Furthermore, whilst some associational bonds may indeed have parallels in the civic sphere, not all associations provide opportunities for the nourishing of bonds needed in the civic forum: many associations are themselves undemocratic in their organisation and/or practices, hence could be argued to *undermine* civic bonds. It may be that the loyalties demanded between groups may differ *in kind* from the loyalties between members within groups. In the following section I start to explore further the problem of loyalty for civic bonds.

## **Section 2: Loyalty and Civic Bonds**

Loyalty is a complex topic of study. It is an important part of any relationship network that wishes to remain stable. Yet it is important to note that being loyal, having ties and commitments, is fundamental to what it is to be human (as will be further demonstrated in Section 4). These ties are formed in many ways: we are born into families and develop loyalties to the family unit; these ties may have their initial basis in security, safety, provision of food and shelter. Our commitment to uphold these values and attachments reinforces those attachments within a moral community.

Loyalty does not arise in the abstract but is directed towards particular ends. One is loyal to something or someone: it has to have some object. Whilst we speak of it in the singular, it is usually expressed in the plural in the attachments and associations with which we come to identify ourselves in some way. Implicit within our loyalty to an object is the judgement that the values within the object are compatible with values for which we stand. Thus associations that induce our loyalty tend to be with ones that we identify with in some way or are deeply involved with.

We do not identify with just any group or association; we do so with those to which we feel bound in close proximity so as to call them *ours*.

Associational relationships ground a particular concern for the well-being of one's associates involving certain obligations within the context of the allegiance undertaken. When they are to particular people, the obligations are regarded as 'special obligations'. If I have a special relationship with X, then I am obliged to do more for X than for others. Common sense morality, according to Diane Jeske, seems to indicate that there should be some 'benefit' from being so related – that it should be morally significant: we should take special care of our loved ones (Jeske, 1997). These special obligations are not owed to everyone, only to the limited number of people with whom I share the relationship; the relationship grounds the obligation.

Yet it is worth bearing in mind that various factors may influence both the strength and depth of these concerns. Our personal bonds can interfere with our deepest convictions in deciding on and judging moral behaviour, clouding our ability to be impartial where questions of our ties to others come into play. A loyalty to friends and family and hence to maximising their good could result in undermining other values held elsewhere. For example, a core value of liberalism is that of equal citizenship. This, in turn, demands that no one should occupy a morally privileged status simply on the basis of their relationship to another (Wellman, 2000). Yet loyalty, by its very nature, appears to accord privilege to certain groups or individuals. Consider the following example: in 2005, President George Bush nominated his old friend and personal lawyer, Harriet Miers, for Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court. As a former corporate lawyer, she had no experience as a judge and was felt to be unqualified for the role, being chosen simply on account of

her friendship with the president. We instinctively feel that there are times when our personal bonds with others are inappropriate in the civic realm, that nepotism is somehow 'wrong'.

Loyalty aims at allegiances, indicating those we are bound to and can count on for help and who in turn can count on us. As such, it can be intimately connected with the virtue of trust. When we trust people, we have particular expectations about what they are committed to doing. Trust enables us to form relationships with and come to depend on others: the ability to trust *grounds* our loyal behaviour. It is often claimed that trust is tangled between convenience and morality (O'Hara, 2004). When we trust someone, we are loyal to them; distrust can lead to disloyalty. Central to this is that we have some form of emotional tie to that which we trust, that encourages us in these patterns of behaviour and that discourages us from jumping ship should something "better" come along (Fletcher, 1993, p7). Without this factor, allegiances could not hold.

Trust is formed between people who have certain beliefs about how others may behave and that those beliefs have proven to be correct, to be well-placed in the past leading to certain expectations of future behaviour. The more confident we are of each other's moral character, the more intimately we trust. Within the bond of loyalty, we need to be able to trust those with whom we seek allegiances, that we can count on their support and help when needed (the difficulties arising from this will be further explored through the examples of *Antigone* and *The Death of Grass*). Loyalty thus enables us to predict the behaviour of others: if we can assume loyal behaviour from others, it is easier to act. The possibility of extending our understanding of loyalty to group level forms the basis of the next section.

### **Section 3: Civic Loyalty**

Historically, humans have defined themselves in some part according to the loyalties they were bound by, all too frequently being demanded by birthright from those ruled to their social superiors (Franck, 1996). The revolutions of the late eighteenth century in America and France in the West, with the move from subject to that of citizen, led to a view of loyalty as being owed by the people to each other. This ideal of a mutual loyalty became one of the bonds tying us together. These historical societies were smaller, more self contained, people did not travel as much or as far, which in turn had a psychological effect. People really did know their neighbours. When travelling to a distant town only two centuries ago, people would often bring letters of introduction so that their new place of abode would know they could be trusted, and could be vouched for as illustrated in many novels of the times.

Loyalty denotes how we stand to one another within an intricate web of relationships hence it is more than merely having an attachment to something or someone. These bonds of loyalty have an affective dimension: we care about our attachments and derive satisfaction from their flourishing. Lu argues that a commitment to these values requires a commitment to their public display and expression – a commitment to seeing those loyalties prosper: “Public loyalty is an important consequence of moral maturity in the life of a shared moral community” (Lu, 2005, p224).

Loyalty has benefits to others as well as to ourselves: it keeps us bound to like-minded others when there are alternative choices. As such, it forms a crucial plank in our civic obligations to others in the liberal state. It enables us to identify with certain groupings: to see ourselves as being of the same sort and thus have reasons to consider their well-being. Loyalty is frequently the glue that binds us together and

allows us to see the relationship as a joint venture. Civic loyalty demands that in some way, within the sphere of civic engagements, all actors are somehow equal and interdependent.

Social life is made possible by the development of group loyalties - where an object of loyalty can be shared with others. This move, Oldenquist refers to as the move from egoism (mine) to group egoism or social values (ours) (Oldenquist, 1982). Loyalty, as Oldenquist states:

defines a moral community in terms of a conception of a common good and a special commitment to the members of the group who share this good... Those who share this common good comprise my tribe; the common good is its flourishing (Oldenquist, 1982, p177)

This form of loyalty goes beyond particular individuals to collective others. Nathanson identifies this form of group loyalty as a basis for patriotism (Nathanson, 1989), the group boundaries being extended to those of nation. As such, it is usually understood as an affective attachment to one's homeland and/or attachment to national values. Archard refers to it as:

...love of one's country or nation, and this love is, in terms of the ideal, prescribed as a virtuous disposition to act in certain, often self-denying and self-sacrificial, ways on behalf of one's country. (Archard, 1999, p159)

Patriotism is thus not merely an attitude or emotional disposition, but an "action-generated regard" (MacIntyre, 2003, p287).

It is no longer so easy to define oneself exclusively in terms of one's group loyalty. Mass migration and globalisation have created ties outside of the 'my-ness' of our own grouping. Characteristics and achievements of nations are so intertwined, distinctions blur. Globalisation of trade has created new ties. With this point in mind, Friedman argued that no two nations that had McDonalds outlets had ever gone to war (Friedman, 1999). Whilst debatable from an empirical stance, under the joke

rhetoric was the point that trade agreements made for competing layers of loyalties, meaning that nations now had more to lose through combat.

Civic loyalties may be ties that bind us together, either as individuals or as societies – but that does not necessitate that the actions leading from the tie will be good or virtuous. Loyalty alone cannot be used to justify or ascribe value to actions. Simply positing the creation of a sense of belonging, sharing a tradition or belief says nothing about the value or the worth of the joint enterprise. It does not rule out a severe form of inequality through a caste system, or the exploitation of members. Even the Jonestown suicide sect had a sense of belonging, a shared purpose and belief system<sup>2</sup>. We need to add something more, some form of judgment about the *worth* of the loyalty object itself.

A loyalist, as Oldenquist points out, tends not to value something *just* because it is his, but because it has features that make it worth having (Oldenquist, 1982, p178). That we can be mistaken in the worth of the object we are loyal to is a frequent occurrence in everyday life. We can be misled; we can be subject to disloyal behaviour on the part of the other, making us question the worth of our allegiances; our continued loyalty can even become unjustifiable over time with changes in either ourselves or the object of the loyalty. The concept of ‘blind loyalty’ is frequently used to speak of those situations where the attachment to something which one sees as being of value is held unquestioningly and uncritically (for example, the loyal Nazi etc).

What has not been clearly stated as yet is our capacity to have several different and sometimes competing loyalty bonds at once. Of these, some may clash in their aims and objectives; others sit side by side. In the next section, I shall

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<sup>2</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/november/18/newsid\\_2540000/2540209.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/november/18/newsid_2540000/2540209.stm)  
[last accessed 19.11.2009]

consider the importance of loyalty bonds from the opposite point of view: what would be the effect having none at all? In what follows, I shall explore this possibility further using the examples of *Antigone*, often used as an example of the clash between the personal and the public, and a lesser known work of fiction *The Death of Grass*.

#### **Section 4: Competing Loyalties**

There is, arguably, a certain psychological component of what it is to be connected in this way, that we need a group identity, a community we think of as 'us' (Anderson, 1991). It is difficult to find a person with no loyalties at all: most people will have several: some groupings may clash in their aims and objectives; others sit side by side. One of the most widely used examples of the clash of loyalties is that found in *Antigone* (Sophocles, 1982). However, whilst the play is usually read as public versus private loyalties, seeming to pit the familial and religious duties owed by Antigone towards her dead brother against the loyalties owed to the state, I wish to suggest a different reading: that it can also be read as a portrayal of the disintegration of loyalties held within the bonds of association. It illustrates some of the importance of having bonds to others as being a significant part of our personal well-being.

The first point to make is that the play is underpinned by a complex mesh of intertwined loyalties to family, to lovers, to the state and to the gods. The conflict of visions between Antigone and Creon, however can be difficult to understand out of context, and thus a short recap of the story of the tragic house of Oedipus becomes necessary for those unfamiliar with the plays. Both of Antigone's brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices (with their uncle Creon), were left as joint rulers of Thebes reigning in alternate years after the loss of their parents. However, when the time came for

Eteocles to give up rule to his brother at the end of the first year, he refused; hence Polyneices raised an army in Argos to do battle against Thebes. The two brothers of Antigone died in battle – one fighting for the homeland and the other fighting with the invading army of Argos. Creon, now becoming sole ruler of Thebes, decrees that the Eteocles will have an honourable burial, but that the Polyneices, as a traitor, should be left unburied - a common Attic policy (Westphal, 2003). According to Greek understanding, if the body was not given proper burial rites, the soul became trapped between the two worlds. This could then be understood as a punishment of the dead, condemning them to this entrapment as well as punishing the families left behind.

Antigone and her sister Ismene are the last surviving members of their family. Antigone had previously promised her brother that she would bury him should he die and her loyalty to carrying out this promise forms the motivation for her actions. She is thus torn between two competing positions of loyalty. Her role as sister to Polyneices requires her to disobey the decree: her loyalty is owed to the gods and to obey their instructions to bury her brother, a religious rite necessary for his passage to Hades (the private ties). However, her role as citizen of Thebes requires her to obey the decree, as does her relationship to her uncle as ruler (the public ties). Along side this is the fact that Creon, as uncle, is himself also bound by the familial loyalties and religious duties to bury both nephews; however, his role as ruler demands that these bonds should not play a role in the procedure of the state.

One of the greatest threats to life in ancient Greece was the extensive presence of personal ties which were in tension with the needs of the state (Deneen, 2000). Obligations to family through blood relationships were a constant threat to state order. This historical background makes sense of the fact that Creon insists

that obedience to the law is required for stable government; for Creon, as Fletcher points out,

civil loyalty transcends the flesh and blood attachments that move  
Antigone to commit her crime

(Fletcher, 1993, p30)

Whilst Creon's initial decree is based on a desire to reward the loyal and punish the disloyal (Fletcher, 1993), Antigone's motivation is loyalty within the terms of a family attachment. Thus far, it appears to be a conflict between civic loyalty and personal loyalty, with Antigone choosing personal loyalty and Creon, civic loyalty.

As Nussbaum points out, part of the tragedy of the play is that Antigone has to make a choice: whichever one she makes, she loses something of value (Nussbaum, 2001). In following the actions demanded by her loyalty to her brother, Antigone sacrifices her loyalty to both her community and abandons Haemon, son of Creon, to whom she is betrothed. The bond of love tying Antigone to her brother and the bond freely given as a promise equally bind Antigone to her fate.

Having explored the play as a clash between competing loyalties, I now wish to unpick a slightly different interpretation of the tragedy: as a study of the importance of these bonds of attachment tying us to others. Antigone and her sister are the last remaining women of the increasingly tragic house of Oedipus. She has lost her father, mother and two brothers within a very short period of time (one of the brothers under circumstances which pitched him at odds with the rest of the family) and even her remaining sister, whom she would normally have expectations of support, stands against her. Her remaining uncle (to whom she would expect to look for support in such circumstances) is now ruler and in this role has rent further the familial loyalties by declaring the penalty of death to anyone who performs the funeral rites for a traitor. Antigone is thus adrift without emotional and psychological

anchorage. She has been stripped of the people to whom she owed loyalty and to whom she was tied by familial bonds; all that is left to her is the act of loyalty itself, to carry out her promise and familial duties.

Cut loose from the bonds to others that would ordinarily give meaning and motivation for action, Antigone's highly emotional state of grief clouds her judgements. As Creon himself intimates, Antigone is herself half in love with death as a means to rejoin her family in the underworld; left with no valuable attachments, Antigone, cut off from all of her family loyalties and attachments that would normally support her, chooses to rejoin her dead in the afterlife.

Is the problem of Antigone one of personal loyalty versus civic loyalty? Is it one of excessive loyalty on the part of Antigone? She is certainly facing what can only be described as an ethical crisis in choosing between competing, exclusionary loyalties. But she has also been stripped, little by little, of the bonds and ties to others that enable social life to continue: parents, brothers, abandonment by sister, uncle etc. The play also works at a psychological level, illustrating the effects of having bonds torn apart. Contrast this portrayal of the dissolution of the bonds of association tying us to others, with those portrayed in the post-apocalyptic novel, *The Death of Grass* (Christopher, 1956).

The novel opens with a highly contagious rice virus wiping out the rice harvest in 'the Far East' causing wide spread famine and social unrest. The virus mutates to the extent it wipes out all species of grass plants, including major crop plants (rye, barley etc.). Against this background, the novel centres on the character of John Custance, an engineer living in London, and his attempts to lead his family to his brother's farm in Cumbria where they might find food and safety.

What is interesting in this far from perfect novel is the tracing of the breakdown in bonds, ties and loyalties across nations, as each nation attempts to reserve help and aid for their own population, and the subsequent descent into protectionism. Parallel to this, in the novel, is the growing breakdown in trust between governments and the governed as those in power attempt to preserve what little there is for themselves: rumours circulate that the government is to order the dropping of nuclear weapons on urban populations to reduce numbers sufficiently to enable the survival of only those that could be supported by available food supplies. The disintegration of societal values quickly follows, as the populace scrabbles for survival amongst the growing chaos.

As the breakdown in law and social order becomes widespread, the family, realising that their small grouping could be at risk from other armed marauders, wait by the roadside to form alliances with other groupings that would best enable their group to survive, refusing to help or join with those who might threaten their survival by other 'tribal' ties. Finally, even the family loyalty breaks down, with Custance transferring his loyalty bonds from immediate blood family, to the group, recognising that the former depends on the latter to survive. As the bonds that tied him to wider society wither away, the values and character of Custance change dramatically: he leaves London as a liberal, middle-class ordinary man, arriving in Cumbria a hardened murderer, only interested in the survival of his grouping.

Both the play and the novel can be argued to portray the social nature of humans: we need our personal attachments to others for both psychological reasons and for the utility of survival. When these ties are suddenly withdrawn, we are left adrift without a compass. The play can be said to illustrate the effects on individuals, the novel the effects on social life – or lack of it. These loyalties and ties to others

motivate our actions – they give us reasons to go on. The sudden loss of attachments are often claimed to psychologically disorientate people. We need our attachments, not just for human flourishing, but to *be* human. Interestingly, news reports of the aftermath of the tsunami disaster of 26<sup>th</sup> December 2004 reported a growing fear amongst relief agencies concerning the rise of suicides amongst survivors who have lost entire families, not just from ‘survivors guilt’, but from lacking a purpose to go on.

The ties that form the basis for many of our bonds, both associational and civic, are rarely exclusive. The demands and obligations created by these bonds frequently clash or require moderation. Being able to juggle our ‘multiple selves’ is part and parcel of modern life. In the final section, I ask what role *schools* can play in enabling us to contend with these issues.

## **Section 5: The role of education and schools**

The preceding sections have clearly illustrated that the bonds of loyalty may, in fact, be far more important and more complex than generally acknowledged in much of the literature. I have demonstrated that having loyalties is a basic feature of life and cannot be avoided entirely, that they are fundamental to our psyche in enabling social life to continue. As education is primarily engaged in enabling society to re-imagine itself over the generations, the complicated nature of the bonds required to uphold civic relationships becomes an urgent issue for educational policies.

I have intimated that we all hold a variety of loyalties, which inevitably will clash at times. As we saw in the examples in the previous sections, we are bound within a multiple of ties, some familial, some chosen, some social. We may even, in

a 'pick and mix' fashion, choose from a variety of mores and values interweaving many contradictory points of view. That we allow our beliefs to influence our actions is not that remarkable, yet how we choose which one takes precedence, can be complex, with constant interplaying between competing demands. The ability to deal with conflicting loyalties then assumes an important role in our moral development.

Schools, having access to a large segment of the future citizen population, are uniquely placed as ideal sites in which to develop the role of supporting the development of the moral reasoning required in issues of judgment involved in apportioning the appropriate level of loyalty owed. Children are subject on a daily basis to the demands of competing loyalties from situations such as whether or not to 'grass' on a friend versus their loyalty to their teacher/group, to other situations whereby children have to weigh between competing demands of comprehensive ideologies. Educational policy makers need to carefully consider the issues involved for pupils in dealing with conflicting loyalties, to enable pupils to develop the relevant skills and attitudes necessary to unpick the issues involved. One solution may be a consideration of the place of philosophy and moral education in the curriculum, as suggested by Pring (Pring, 2008).

The issue of loyalty as a focus for schools is not new. Educational institutions have always played a part in activities aiming at binding disparate individuals together. One of the historic functions of public education in democracies has always been to connect people, build common values and drive the engines of democracy. Even at micro level, schools have always had a role to play in the development of loyalties. Most schools develop systems for encouraging particular school loyalties through the use of team building practices: the wearing of uniforms, school houses, earning group credits for example.

What is being suggested, however, is a review and revision of some aspects of these practices. Perhaps some schools may need to show a greater sensitivity when dealing with issues of loyalty clashes between those fostered and encouraged by the school and the already existing loyalties of the school students. Others may need to reconsider the emphasis they put on the creation of school loyalties and the appropriateness of so doing.

One positive suggestion arising from this discussion of the nature of the bonds that bind us together is not just recognition of the complexity of the issues involved but also of how these issues interlink with both moral and ethical holdings. If loyalties are an unavoidable part of our moral landscape, education for the quandaries surrounding the subject becomes equally unavoidable.

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