

Patriotism: Virtue or Vice?

Today I'm going to talk about the topic of patriotism, love of our country. Because of the trade war and recent turmoil in Hongkong, the patriotic sentiment of the Chinese citizens is now at a pinnacle. Seeing our social media flooded with patriotic voices, I started to wonder: what is patriotism? Is it morally mandatory or is it not? During the national holiday, I read some relevant articles on the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. After reading, I came to the conclusion that **patriotism is more like a kind of human nature, rather than a virtue; we should be patriotic for some reasons, but we shouldn't let it go too far.**

It's long been a tradition to view total devotion to our country as a praiseworthy behavior. But on closer inspection, patriotism is a type of group egoism, because being patriotic means always to place the interest of one's own country above others. Looking back to history, we see that for thousands of years humans have been struggling for a limited amount of resources on this planet. The competition for resources on earth can be approximately considered a zero-sum game, where you could cooperate with some people to make a better living, but you could never cooperate with everyone. This is how countries were formed, and why warfare has never stopped. This is also why Leo Tolstoy, a Russian novelist, argued that patriotism is not moral, in the sense that it is at odds with demands of universal justice and common human solidarity.

However, is there something more than group egoism, that constitutes patriotism? There is, and this is the question answered by Socrates in his conversation with his friends. Socrates believed, the citizens of Athens must be thankful to their fatherland, because they owed Athens their life, their language, and their liberty. That is the point. Between countries, there are inevitable conflicts and wrestles; but within a country, people are benefitting from their unity. The prosperity of our country improves our life, so it is reasonable to be grateful; in a similar vein, we show special concern for our compatriots, because they are doing the same to us in a manner of reciprocity.

Patriotism has its virtue and its vice. It is a necessary outcome of gratitude, but it also reveals the exclusive human nature in global arena. We should, therefore, practice patriotism carefully, that is, to love our country and fellow citizens in a way that doesn't bear malice to foreigners. It is therefore moral to join the public service and promote the society of our fatherland, but it is immoral to start a patriotic quarrel with foreigners on social media like Twitter. We are humans in the first place, patriots in the second.