

Patriotism: Vice or Virtue?

Today I'm going to talk about patriotism, love of our country. Because of the trade war and the recent turmoil in Hongkong, the patriotic sentiment of Chinese citizens is now at a pinnacle. Seeing our social media flooded with patriotic voices, I started to question: what is patriotism? Is it morally mandatory or is it not? During the national holiday in October, 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, than a virtue; we have certain reasons to be patriotic, but we must keep it within limit.**

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 to always 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. This 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 together, but you could never cooperate with everyone, you could never not be egocentric. 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 anything more than egocentricity, 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 thing to us, a manner of reciprocity.

Patriotism has its vice and its virtue. It is an outcome of gratitude, but it also reveals the exclusive nature of human in the global arena. We should, therefore, practice patriotism carefully, that is, 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 against foreigners on social media. After all, we are humans in the first place, patriots in the second.