

Reasoning behind Moderate Patriotism

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Patriotism has a different face for everyone. Some follow it blindly, some reject and oppose it, some stand indifferent, and others choose to follow it cautiously. Patriotism is also now a challenge for multi-cultural societies because the back bone of social unity can no longer be merely similarities in ethnicity, culture, or religion. In this essay, I shall state the risks of following patriotism blindly and the risks involved in rejecting patriotism completely. I will also show the practicality and correct motives for following moderate patriotism.

Patriotism is the love, commitment, and loyalty an individual feels for his or her country. In the U.S. , patriotism started after English, Scottish, and Dutch settlers achieved their independence from England (Hibben 2). Later, a migration of multi ethnic people came to aid with the development of the country, adopting it as their own (3). Psychologically, patriotism is a result of people's definition of themselves according to the groups they love and belong to (Bar-Tal 216). I shall proceed to argue the limits of this love.

Blind patriotism is most popularly seen as harmless, or even a goal worthy of effort. How is it possible that blind patriotism, something that strengthens communal unity, be harmful by any means? In *Patriotism, Morality and Peace* , Stephen Nathanson writes, “Most people think of patriotism as a trait that is valuable and worth encouraging. . . . They expect other citizens to care about and support the country and assume that patriotism is a virtue. . . . No society can endure and flourish without some degree of commitment to its overall good” (Nathanson 3). Thus, patriotism is often viewed as a commitment necessary for the strength and growth of a community, in this case, a national community. Many people believe that following leaders for

the overall good of a community can by no means be harmful. In a recent interview with CNN, Britney Spears, a pop star, called on people to “trust the president in every decision he makes... and we should just support that and be faithful in what happens” (Alter). In other words, blind patriotism calls for people to stop thinking autonomously and instead adopt actions and ideas that please the rest of the national public, for the unity and good of the rest of the country.

However, according to some anti-patriotic thinkers, blind patriotism is a destructive idea that erodes the world. The flaw in blind and unconditional commitment to one community is the belief that a community is superior to other communities (Nathanson 4). Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) declared blind patriotism, “our country right or wrong,” as a form of “monarchical patriotism,” or repeating the historical mistake of abiding by the English throne without representation (Alter). Leo Tolstoy went even further and declared patriotism “very stupid and immoral” (Nathanson 4). He supported this statement by adding, “The sentiment (of patriotism), in its simplest definition is merely the preference of one's country or nation above the country or nation of any one else... (H)ow can patriotism be a virtue... when it requires of men an ideal...not of the equality and fraternity of all men, but of the dominance of one country or nation over all others?” (4).

However, the commitment, love, and loyalty an individual feels for his or her country does not mean he or she opposes, hates, or desires to dominate other countries. Tolstoy's argument is persuasive and by far more reasoned than that of blind patriotism, but there is a simple flaw in it—commitment to a nation does not necessarily mean the desire to dominate other communities (Nathanson 17). The commitment, love, and loyalty that individuals feel for their families does not mean they oppose, hate, or desire to dominate other families. Patriotism was described in 1915 by John Grier Hibben as a love for the country as well as love for the rest

of humanity, each love complimentary and necessary to the other. He describes two kinds of love, a sort of intimate love (as one has for the family or country) and a merciful love, a love for the stranger who needs a helping hand (such as that to other families or countries) (Hibben 4-5). In other words, loving our own family inspires us to love other families due to the moral principles we acquire from that experience. However, this love for the stranger must have some rules and limitations. Our love for another country should not overwhelm their autonomy and self thought. For example, Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt supported the annexation of the Philippines in the grounds of the U.S as a universal model; however, William James supported an anti-imperialistic idea that defended the Philippines in their right to self-government.

Thus arises a question of diversity and patriotism—can there be love for a nation if the ideal for the nation is as different as all the individuals in it? The problem with the concept of patriotism as loyalty and commitment to family, or a homogeneous society, is that modern nations are no longer homogeneous, but rather have divisions such as creeds, opinions, races, cultures, and values. These differences and divisions clash constantly as a result. This clash causes pain and divides a nation even further. In the late 1800's, immigrant children were extensively exposed to the American flag, patriotic songs, and military drills supported by the government in hopes to “Americanize” these children, or make them loyal to this country. (O'Leary 176) However, many of these children's parents (immigrant and non-immigrant) were offended because the government's attempts to inspire patriotism conflicted with the parents' religious principles. For example, the pacifist Quakers opposed the program's military drills (184). Surely, there must be better ways of creating or nourishing a patriotic sentiment among people. What are these common ties that will build or break a nation from its unity?

Many things unite people in a common bond; however, many of these bonds are artificial and weak. As Carol C. Gould has written, “Holding together multicultural nations has become one of democracy's greatest challenges...” because only a few nations are monocultural now. Thus she goes on to say, multicultural nations “...must seek common identity in something other than race, religion, and culture” (Gould 57).

In recent years, several instances have arisen in which other bonds have been substituted for those of culture. But they are not all healthy options. Modern common bonds such as consumerism and fear fail as worthy backbones of patriotism.

Consumerism should not be a common bond among Americans. As Benjamin R. Barber has stated, there should be a faith in national morals, or the constitution, but instead an artificial faith is being created in the values and products of a nation, to compensate for the contrast in cultural heritage (Gould 58). Although consumerism may appear to be a good basis for national unity because its basis is not culture anymore, this artificial faith in products causes problems. Consumers are seen by companies as potential individual shoppers but not as a group of citizens with the power to change the nation for better. In other words, marketers care about the consumption of their product but not about creating social solutions. On the other hand, the consumer has material power to consume products but not to change a nation through its marketers. For example, a marketer will listen to a consumer say “I want a new television set;” however, the marketer will fail to listen to a group of consumers who ask for less violence on TV (58). This method leaves citizens with a limited power to consume but not to organize in groups and improve society.

Fear is another negative option for promoting group unity. Psychologically, there are two kinds of self-identities in the world-- the autonomous and the group identity. (Bar-Tal 219)

American society values autonomous identities. Thus, the majority of people have autonomous identities in this country. This identity creates problems when a group is put together in a frightening situation, for the group will unite only due to fear of a common enemy. While group identity individuals are highly supportive of each other and fare better, the autonomous individuals will seek to connect to the other individuals by finding a common enemy and will create a scapegoat, and confront other groups (Bar-Tal 219). The main problem with this type of unity is that it may create hatred, and foster jingoistic attitudes towards the global community.

Clearly, there are better bases for patriotism. During the Civil War, African Americans had a clear idea of who they were—an American minority fighting for freedom. Their belief was that “...the struggle for liberation and equality would not only affect the future slaves, but also purify American ideals and redeem America's destiny” (O'Leary 112). The history of African Americans shows that one very positive common bond upon which to found patriotism could be the goals of progress, liberty, equality, and justice. These goals are best achieved if the citizens of a nation can all cooperate and participate in their vision of a better country. These goals encourage individuals with different experiences, beliefs, understandings, and cultures to come together to create solutions.

Thus the question bursts forth-- when is a person eligible to become part of a nation, and capable of uniting with others in the bond of patriotism? According to Aristotle, “To be a fellow citizen is to be sharers in one state, and to have one state is also to have one place of residence” (Gross 21). For Aristotle, residing in a country was enough for a person to be a legal citizen of the country. Ancient Greek societies believed citizenship to be “...a territorial identity fused with

a political identity...” (28). Thus they had separate ideas of tribal identity, or ethnicity, and citizenship. Modern times still hold that thought as valuable, believing ethnicity does not determine citizenship. So how did Americans become Americans? As explained by the Frenchman Crèvecoeur, “What then is the American, this new man?... He is neither European, or a descent of a European; however, most of all he is an American, who, leaving behind all his ancient prejudices and manners, receives new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank that he holds” (Renshon 287). This book further explains that Americans were once Europeans who “...had no economic or social standing, or hope to acquire it, here (in the U.S.) they did. Ubi pani ibi patria ... the motto of the new immigrants” (287). If the root of the American society is indeed this, “ ubi pani, ibi patria ” (literally where there is bread there is my country, in other words, I shall be loyal to the country that feeds me), individuals who feel their country feeds them should decide whether they want to be loyal and cooperative to a government or not. It would be hypocritical for an immigrant's descendant to close the doors to other immigrants, especially if their wish coincides with the current American's forefather's dreams. Immigrants are most often the true representatives of the righteous bonds of patriotism, those beliefs of liberty, equality, and justice. Are not these the principles of the American dream, that for which they left their native country and came to this one?

In conclusion, the individual choice of patriotism is most effective if the common factor uniting people is a belief in the moral principles. If all individuals took the time and effort of creating a better society based on these principles not only would this nation dramatically improve, but the rest of the world would also benefit tremendously. Patriotism is not a call for a

person to forget about the world, it is merely a call to build a stronger society so that the nation may later focus more in external aid rather than in internal schism.

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