

Reviewer: Gary Clemitshaw

Review of the Book: "Patriotism and Citizenship Education"

Bruce Haynes, ed.

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"Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel."
-- *Samuel Johnson 1775 (Boswell's Life of Johnson)*

This is perhaps the most casually referenced quotation regarding the concept of patriotism. In my own time, it has often been used as a charge by the liberal left of the political right, suspicious of the right's mobilisation of nationalist sentiment against the liberal left's concerns with issues of social justice, progressive principles and universal values. It is worth remembering that in Johnson's pamphlet *The Patriot* (Johnson 1774) the charge of patriotism Johnson was making was against popular agitators and opponents of 'order' and 'the Crown,' people such as Edmund Burke and John Wilkes, historical heroes of the liberal left.

It is necessary to be sensitive to the particularities of the discourse in which a concept appears, and this is particularly apt for patriotism. This book offers important insights into the dynamic of the concept in different national contexts; the USA, South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, and the UK.

The current interest in citizenship education in many national contexts might suggest a degree of commonality, indicating a shared democratic uncertainty about political engagement, social cohesion, and security. These are often linked to perceptions of youth culture, cultural diversity and the experience of international terrorism. But when national education systems are mobilised for the firmer definition and practice of citizenship, a varied discourse of national identity and values emerges. It is within this variety that the particularities of the discourses of patriotism and education are located. They are discourses that often tell a history, and also explore how history is a battleground for patriotic conceptions.

Within the context of the USA, and the 'current political leadership' (1) (read Bush II), the concept is rescued by considering *critical* patriotism (2) to be of value, *loyal* patriotism (1) as dangerous. These categories are founded on the binary that patriotism can be either 'coerced' or 'freely offered.' Loyal patriotism brings with it national myopia, national arrogance and a coercive requirement of loyalty. Critical patriotism, whilst acknowledging the *emotional* patriotic attachments (3) to the location in which life is lived,

accepts pluralism, promotes social cooperation and is willing to criticise government for falling short of ideals. There is considered to be a tendency in public school education in the USA to promoting loyal patriotism, which exhibits itself in daily ceremonials relating to the flag and the oath of allegiance, and in textbooks supporting history education. This promotion of loyal patriotism is considered to be beyond the legitimate aims of liberal education.

Patriotism in South Africa is discussed with an overtly future-orientated focus in the context of building a nation after the end of apartheid. The national 'pledge' is examined so as to identify where it embodies the dispositions of democratic citizenship and where it falls prey to *blind* patriotism (23), with suggestions offered to make sure the catechism embodies all the virtues. In the shadow of the experience of World War Two the chapter on Japan offers insights into an intense struggle between advocates of patriotic education and anti-nationalists, charting their fluctuating influence over recent decades.

In the chapter relating to Australia, again education for patriotism is considered valid as long as it does not become jingoistic, chauvinistic and offensively nationalist. The chapter considers the link between the promotion of patriotism and interpretations of history, and, as in other chapters, acknowledges the interpretations of history that the objective of education for patriotism inevitably seeks to mobilise so as to create a patriotic identity.

Let us move from summarising the chapters and consider the methodologies of the authors. Whilst most contributors adopt liberal progressive assumptions, the chapters on Britain and New Zealand offer contrasting forms of analysis. The chapter relating to Britain presents an exercise in analytic philosophy which concludes that, out of four possible approaches to education for patriotism, avoidance, neutrality, active promotion, active discouragement, that which implies patriotism should only be taught as a controversial issue, is the only rational, logical conclusion. In contrast, the analysis offered by the chapter on New Zealand sees citizenship, the definition of the 'good' citizen, as part of a fluid governmental exercise in citizenship formation within the dynamic of neo-liberal ideology, bringing with it, in the context of tertiary education, a serious threat to criticality.

The final chapter explores the possibilities of transcending national identity through considering education for world citizenship. Arguing that there is a 'gradual emergence of a global era', education should support the idea of 'world citizens in an emerging global civic culture' (87). The chapter argues for a developing cosmopolitan conception of citizenship which consequently diminishes the relevance of commitment to the *patria*. Nevertheless, the nation is acknowledged as the first line of community, albeit 'imagined community' (96). Leaving aside Benedict Anderson's own concern that his concept, originally coined to consider the emergence of new identities in colonial America, has become 'a pair of words from which the vampires of banality have by now sucked almost all the blood' (Anderson 2006, 207), the phrase 'imagined community' allows us to assert that nations, and national identities, are contingent constructions, and in a perpetual state of reconstruction. Perhaps dangers occur when that allowed, understandable

emotional identity, understandable presumably in terms of familiarity, security and stability, is invited to romanticise its origins and its destiny.

Let us return to the distinction between *loyal* patriotism and *critical* patriotism. The book's first chapter, on American education, argues that *loyal* patriotism draws uncritically on the notion of 'American exceptionalism ... the idea that the United States, in some intrinsic way, stands ... above the broader concerns of the world owing to the unique calling of America's founding and leadership' (5) and can reference its 'Manifest Destiny' (18), the idea that there is an American mission to promote and defend democracy across the world. Hence, from the encouraged position of *critical patriotism*, support is given to this quote from Eamonn Callan;

[I]f the very point of American democracy is the pursuit of justice, the greater its failures in that regard the greater will be the revulsion of the [patriot]. (Callan 1999, 198).

One cannot help wondering if, even from the position of the critical patriot who suggests that the USA sometimes falls short of its best ideals, some attachment to the idea of American exceptionalism and its destiny persists.

References

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- Callan, Eamonn. 1999. A Note on Patriotism and Utopianism: Response to Schrag. In: *Studies in Philosophy and Education*, Vol.18, 197-201.