

dialogues is the *Crito*, which is subtitled "The Duty of a Citizen." This is an account of a conversation between Socrates and his friend Crito, as the former awaits his execution by the city of Athens. Crito and other friends have devised a plan by which Socrates can escape the unjust sentence handed down. Yet, Socrates demurs. He explains to Crito that the city—even if it has done him harm—has a claim to his loyalty that surpasses even death.

The state, Socrates reminds Crito, "brought [me] into the world, and nurtured and educated [me]." Escaping would be nothing more than "running away and turning your back upon the compacts and agreements which you made as a citizen." It would, in short, be a repudiation of his entire life. In his later and more-detailed studies of government—*The Republic* and *The Laws*—Plato spends a great deal of time discussing the moral and civic education of the young, training them to be good citizens. His pupil Aristotle, too, was concerned with these matters, as a cursory reading of *Politics*—and even the *Nicomachean Ethics*—will show.

In modern times, however, that notion of patriotism has been eviscerated. British philosopher Thomas Hobbes, in *Leviathan*, declared that government is simply a construct designed to ameliorate the state of nature—which in life, in his memorable phrase, is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short." By identifying the fear of death—especially violent, painful death—as man's most powerful passion, Hobbes argued that the state had claim to our allegiance only as long as it preserved our life.

Once it no longer could protect us, we no longer were obliged to obey its commands; the paramount right of nature of man is to "preserve his own life and limbs, with all the power he hath." There is no good greater than one's own life; no man can surrender his right to self-preservation. On this theory, then, we would understand it if our troops were to surrender and join forces with the enemy when outnumbered in combat. It would be, Hobbes writes, cowardly—but not unjust.

That is not the understanding of patriotism accepted by our Founding Fathers, though. They created a nation to which they were dedicated, even at the cost of their own lives. It was a concept of a country—and a claim to loyalty—larger than one's own security and prosperity. Indeed, the Founders themselves risked their lives for this nation and its principles long before it ever existed. Many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence lost their homes, property, and fortunes. They were aware of the risk they were taking. As one signer put it, he and his fellow revolutionaries knew they were signing their own "death warrants." Nathan Hale famously remarked that his only regret was that he had but one life to give for his country—one that had yet to exist.

Still, in an age where so much has been scorned for so long, what does patriotism mean? Do we stand with American naval officer Stephen Decatur when he exclaimed, "Our country, may she always be in the right, but our country, right or wrong!"? Does patriotism mean that we love America simply because it is our country? In a word, no. The American understanding of patriotism has never been as simple as that.

American patriotism has always been rooted in love of the principles upon which the nation was founded: liberty, equality, justice, and democracy. We are, in that sense, unique—our patriotism is not parochial. That is to say, our love for America does not necessarily entail dislike of other countries. Indeed, insofar as those nations share our principles—think, for instance, of Great Britain or Israel—we consider them our friends and allies, not competitors.

Upon the death of Sen. Henry Clay, Abraham Lincoln said that Clay "loved his country partly because it was his own country, but mostly because it was a free country . . . he saw in [the advancement of his country] the advancement, prosperity, and glory of human liberty, human right, and human nature." American prosperity is not good only for America; it is good for the rest of the world, for the principles of America are good for the rest of the world. That is a lesson that we adults—as much as our children—need to learn, remember, and, when called upon, defend.