

Jaakko Sivonen, *Patriotism in an Absolute Monarchy: Fatherland, Citizenship and the Enlightenment in Prussia, 1756–1806* (Helsinki: Faculty of Arts, University of Helsinki, 2020). 306 pp.

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Jaakko Sivonen's monograph *Patriotism in an Absolute Monarchy. Fatherland, Citizenship and the Enlightenment in Prussia, 1756–1806* focuses on the Prussian discourse of patriotism from the beginning of the Seven Years' War to the defeat of Prussia by Napoleon in 1806. The thesis contributes to a long-lasting debate about the nature of Prussian patriotism, advancing a clear position on this question. In a nutshell, the debate concerns the question whether Prussian patriotism in the second half of the eighteenth century should be seen as an independent discourse, or should be qualified as a form of nationalism. As a critical response to post-Second World War 'German Sonderweg' thesis, a prominent strand of scholarship emerged in Germany in the early 1980s, emphasising the fundamentally democratic, rationalist and internationalist nature of the German Enlightenment discourse of patriotism. Since the mid-1990s, however, this view has been challenged by a new generation of researchers (historians as well as literary scholars) who have drawn attention to the particularistic, collectivistic and emotional elements in the Prussian discourse of patriotism, highlighting its 'Janus-faced' nature.

In his thesis, Sivonen decisively sides with the first view, arguing that the Prussian discourse of patriotism was an 'emancipatory' discourse. Sivonen also rejects the idea that Prussian patriotism was just an expression of a widespread personality cult of Frederick the Great. Analysing not only philosophical treatises but also

<https://doi.org/10.7557/4.5893>

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political pamphlets, speeches by politicians and Christian sermons, Sivonen traces the gradual evolution of the discourse of patriotism in Prussia, highlighting the authoritative status of Thomas Abbt for the later intellectuals. At the same time, he carves out the developmental dynamics of the discourse of patriotism, specifying the distinctive central issues of debate in different periods (e.g., the question of luxury, the relationship of patriotism to religion and the question of toleration, including the Jewish emancipation question, the contribution of the Enlightenment to patriotism, the distinction between war-time and peace-time patriotism, the challenge of the French Revolution, etc.). Indeed, Sivonen nicely combines an overall diachronic approach with a systematic analysis of the intellectuals' discussion of different themes in distinct periods.

A number of critical points can nevertheless be raised about the dissertation. First of all, what does it mean to qualify a discourse as an 'emancipatory' one? Could competing discourses of patriotism in Germany (imperial patriotism, various kinds of local patriotism, also literary patriotism), too, be qualified as 'emancipatory discourses'? The question about 'emancipation' concerns the sociological role of a certain discourse; indeed, quite plausibly, many different discourses could serve this goal, even 'nationalist' ones, insofar as various kinds of 'nationalism', too, can encourage participation and even citizenship. Second, the author draws on Maurizio Viroli's controversial dichotomy between patriotism and nationalism.¹ Sivonen argues that the Prussian discourse of patriotism was distinct from nationalism, since it was not based on an ethnic understanding of nationhood. This is true, but is the debate thereby resolved? Provided we adopt a different understanding of nationalism – for example, the one that nationalism consists in a patriotic commitment to one's own state, understood as a 'nation' (as belonging to, and serving, the 'nation', i.e. the people represented by the state), combined with an endorsement of international commercial and military antagonism – most Prussian authors would qualify as 'nationalists'. The majority of Prussian authors discussed in the dissertation rejected the need for their state to comply with higher-order demands about international or transnational order, which in their case were institutionally embodied in the framework of the Holy Roman Empire. As such, Prussian patriotism could thus be seen to prefigure the rise of German state-centred nationalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, even without invoking an ethnic understanding of nationhood yet. An ethnic component simply came to be added to this understanding at a later stage.

A further limitation of the study is its narrow focus on Prussian debates. The author convincingly shows that the Prussian discourse of patriotism had anti-cos-

¹ Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country. An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1997).

mopolitan and indeed, anti-Habsburgian overtones, and was also distinct from *Reichspatriotismus* (imperial patriotism). However, we may still ask further as to why 'patriotism' became such a catchword in eighteenth-century Prussia. To what extent was this development a reflection of more general trends in Europe, and to what extent an indigenous development? It would have also been a good idea to engage with studies that have problematised the relationship between republicanism and monarchism. As Hans Blom et al. have shown, the concepts of 'unlimited monarchy' or 'civilised monarchy' were framed so as to demonstrate that some central values associated with republics in particular (e.g., rule of law, security of property, the politics of the common good) could also be implemented in modern monarchies.² Furthermore, when the Prussian patriotic authors praised the Prussian form of government, were they praising the actual political realities in Prussia, or were they thereby pursuing a broader reform programme supported by thinkers from different European countries?

A little surprisingly, Immanuel Kant only very briefly figures in the dissertation. However, in Kant's thought many of the central themes of Prussian monarchism are combined in an intriguing way. Kant was a supporter of Frederick's monarchy, yet became more critical of it in the 1790s, in response to the criticisms of his young republican admirers. On the one hand, his thinking was an excellent example of the 'emancipatory' potential of the discourse of patriotism; on the other hand, he also recognised the bellicosity of such a state form, and asked penetrating questions about the ways in which it could be curbed.

Despite these limitations, Sivonen's PhD dissertation makes a solid contribution to our understanding of Prussian political thought in the second half of the eighteenth century. It is also very well-written and makes for an enjoyable read.

² Hans Blom, John Christian Laursen & Luisa Simonutti (eds.), *Monarchisms in the Age of Enlightenment: Liberty, Patriotism, and the Common Good* (Toronto, 2007).