
Review

Emotions, community, and citizenship: Cross-disciplinary perspectives

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Whither emotion studies? This volume of essays, the result of a symposium, admirably edited by a scholar of Montesquieu and graduate students from the University of Toronto, welcomes diverse guests, with the host setting the table and cleaning up after the meal. The experience included a rapprochement between the scientists and the humanists and promised fewer soliloquies and more colloquies.

The book gathers together mostly original and some previously published work from psychology, sociology, neurological-engaged philosophy, and political theory, organized into three courses. First come those who exemplify interpretive approaches: Ryan Balot argues that Plato's account of courage relies more on democratic Athenian norms than typically understood, Jay Purnis charts the interdisciplinary discourse of emotion during the Renaissance, and John Gunnell champions Wittgenstein's approach to knowledge about emotion. In counterpoint, the next section features naturalistic approaches, which include naturalistically inflected philosophy of mind, empirical work on the relationship between emotion and policy choices in public opinion, and how dispositions acquired through relationship insecurity might influence political orientation. The last section draws together James Jasper on indignation and protest with two chapters on emotion in Hannah Arendt and John Rawls. To connect to one another, all chapters have a parenthetical nod to one or more other chapters, but the real conversation happens later.

These chapters are set up by an introductory essay with summary snapshots of work in the sciences, humanities, and social sciences, and then later assessed by a concluding chapter written solely by Kingston. The introduction highlights two questions, which might helpfully serve as partial criteria for how well this colloquy project succeeds: 'What sort of account might help us to understand the various invocations of emotion across disciplines?' and 'What emotions... are normatively best associated with the context of liberal democratic citizenship?' (p. 5).



The concluding chapter is worth the invitation to dinner. Kingston arranges the table for progress in emotion studies by sketching the core consensus on emotion. Following the volume's main theme, she juxtaposes Gunnell's version of Wittgenstein's 'radical interpretive challenge' to the contributions of experimental scientific approaches. She points to a measure of consensus: that a 'relational' theory of emotion, in which the meaning of an emotion is constitutive of feeling, is shared; that attachment theory shows – at a different level – that emotion both records and reflects social meaning; and that 'the science of emotion is evolving to acknowledge the importance of embeddedness of the "emotional" subject in a number of environments' (pp. 273–274). She recommends we structure the field with two overarching questions, the *before* and *after* of emotion: what factors help shape emotional experience at both individual and community level? and, second, what is the upshot, the effects on attitudes and behavior and their place in normative theory?

This is a broadly useful framework. But is this the right way forward in emotion studies? So much of the deep and difficult divergence between naturalism and interpretive approaches remains, and a good part of the work on neurological studies of politics and emotion remain unaccounted for. We should be grappling more with Gunnell's argument, and its repercussions. Sure, the technological capacity to study the material reality of brain in experimental setting is invigorating. But the problem about how researchers should design – and their humanist readers approach – such studies, remains. Take, for example, the studies that tackle emotion and political ideology – an area the volume might have explored in more depth. Several studies have linked disgust and what is currently called conservatism, one concluding that political conservatives can be identified by their specific brain activity when viewing disgusting images, especially of animal remains, even when their self-reported sensitivity is not significantly different from liberals (Ahn *et al.*, 2014). Thus, the claim is that conservatives feel higher levels of disgust than liberals – at least about certain things, although they do not acknowledge it. Several questions should arise. Can we find more evocations of disgust in 'conservative' political speeches and writings? Should we expect to? But another problem is how to assess them historically. How might conservatives now in early twenty-first century America be related to conservatives in previous eras? The split in fifth-century Greece was more typically between oligarchs and democrats. Is that the same or different from that between conservatives and liberals? Another study found that a tendency for disgust predicts reactions to abortion and homosexuality, rather than, say, tax cuts. In ancient Greece reactions to these would hardly identify a conservative, if only because homosexuality as an identity was absent, and same-sex male erotic affiliations more culturally central (Halperin, 1990).

These concerns and linkages are critical for advancing political theoretical reflection about emotions. So, for example, if you want to know something about



emotion and liberal democracy, you should pick an institution, a fairly specific institution, understand the history of emotion language in that language culture, and understand the political and economic setting. And that is just the beginning. You should have a sense of the interaction between evolutionarily shaped aspects of human emotion, alongside a good historical knowledge of institutions that shape character and emotional character, in particular. Therefore, while I appreciate Kristin Tchalova's and Geoff Macdonald's important chapter on attachment security and insecurity in close human relationships, one needs to know something about parenting at this particular time in comparison with others, the availability of other small groups and civil society organizations as attachment substitutes, and the way they interact with the development of democracy. Interdisciplinary work is difficult, complex, and time-consuming, and continually problematizes any overarching emotion theory, but it seems clear from the cross-disciplinary engagement, that in political theory we cannot, and should not, do much without interdisciplinary work.

In her wonderful chapter, Sophie Bourgault argues that Arendt's disparagement of political compassion, while unconvincing, stands alongside a remarkable emotionality of her ideal principles of politics, and that she at least suggests the project of sifting the emotions, at least to the supporters of pluralist and deliberative politics. She disentangles Arendt's presentation of compassion as mute, overly intimate, and un conducive to heroism, to argue that Arendt's thinking about emotion, passion, compassion, pity and solidarity is inconsistent, imprecise and undermined by her theory's embrace of affective aspirations.

Yet the chapter should lead to exploring first, naturalistic probes of compassion and empathy, and second, specific institutions designed ostensibly to materialize compassion, everything from charity to the welfare state social policy to social entrepreneurship. If we just focus on the welfare state, we might consider whether Esping-Andersen's influential three typologies of welfare are aligned with three different hegemonic practices and governing scenarios of compassion or solidarity. Or if the feminist recalibrations of welfare state theory similarly point to a shift in the status and practice of specific emotions, either as effect or cause. Feminist care theory in general has put on the table a revision of what matters when we think about the development and constellation of the welfare state. Care and being caring, emotion and virtue, have been significantly reshaped by the welfare state and capitalist family life. But here we should be including not only poor relief, or de-commodification, but also the spread of universal free primary education. How do these respond to calls for compassion and/or discipline, how do they shape a certain kind of citizen in the long run, but also during contentious periods of debate about the scope and nature of social policy? What options do we have to nurture institutionally the future expression of needed emotions? The key point is this: to ask what the emotions appropriate to the liberal democratic state are means to ask what emotions are needed for specific, granular institutions. The promise of these



trans-disciplinary collaborations should be evident particularly in the political theory articles, as they are best positioned to be integrative.

Finally, I would have liked to see a gender analysis of the history of writing on emotion, a kind of sociology of our present moment and restraining biases in thinking about emotion. Ever since Mary Wollstonecraft noted sadly, ‘It would be an endless task to trace the variety of meanness, cares, and sorrows, into which women are plunged by the prevailing opinion, that they were created rather to feel than reason’ (1988, pp. 61–62), feminists have been at the forefront in a reappraisal of emotion and reason and its gendered substructure. This perspective is missing from this volume. Still, we can all enjoy and profit from eavesdropping on the conversation, nudging our way in, and planning the next colloquy.

References

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