

Articles

You Can't Take It with You: On Leaving Emotions Out of Political Life

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Abstract

Contemporary democratic theory, in its focus on the distinction between a private and a public sphere, tends to exclude emotions from political life. Arendt, Habermas, and Angus present critical theories of political action and deliberation that demand that emotions be left behind in favour of a narrower rationality. On the basis of a first step toward incorporating emotions into political life as accomplished by Martha Nussbaum – despite its limitations – and of a second step taken by Sara Ahmed, an outline of a theory of emotions becomes possible, and brings into question the distinction between private and public life. Emotions act as motivations that accompany every instance of participation or for non-participation, be it because of apathy or of disengagement.

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It is chiefly emotions that are left behind and excluded when we enter into a bounded public sphere. We are accustomed to think of politics as a domain: a gated territory with specific points of entry that belongs to those who live there, in fantastic white or copper-roofed buildings from another epoch. In speaking of political life, we use the analogy of spheres: we jump from one to another; we keep part of our lives private; we are made to see part of our lives, problems, and aspirations as ours only; and we insist on our liberty to choose on private matters, in isolation from the interference or domination of others. We are possessive, jealous, of what is ours, of what we own, just as politicians become possessive of their own right and capacity to decide and to act publically. It is important, then,

to ask the question of the relevance of such images and of the underlying distinction in political life: what we take with us and what we leave behind when we enter into politics affects the manner in which political decision and action will take place. In this article we suggest that the metaphor of an “entrance” into politics is inadequate.

More specifically, we argue that in order to recognize the place and role of emotions as motivations throughout political life, we must reevaluate the bounded view of the public sphere. We present three models of the passage from private to public, ensuing from the drawing of the boundaries of the public sphere and the characterization of politics and publicity that ensues.

In the first model, we only bring our reason with us. Hannah Arendt in her consideration of the publicity of action and Jürgen Habermas in his work on the public sphere, as well as Ian Angus, who brings their insights together, provide us with an attempt to give as much meaning and value as possible to democratic political life through a focus on the publicity of actions, which leaves emotions aside as strictly private. To fully understand this model, we begin with a description of the publicity and public sphere that underlie it. In the second model, we bring our body and our emotions into politics, but we must translate them into a universal language. Martha Nussbaum expands the scope of emotions, but presents them as judgments that need to be translated into actions: they are given an important but subordinated role in political life through their expression into actions. In the third model, we begin with our reason, our body, and our emotions, and we show others what we are perceiving and experiencing in an attempt to expand their perspective and establish common ground. This model focuses on emotions as they accompany action – but also as they point to a variety of perspectives due to different experiences and perceptions of the same reality.

We will conclude with the idea, emerging from these analyses, that the space of politics can be seen as a transversal space in which we are always located – a space in which we are more or less constricted and able to act; a space opened by participatory practices just as much as it is closed by exclusivist practices, and in which emotions motivate us not in terms of spurring actions, but of sustaining them and changing with them. To illustrate this conclusion, we will come back to the question of political action central to the bounded view of the public sphere, and create a distinction between apathy and disengagement as tied to different emotional dispositions toward politics.

1. *Leaving Emotions Out*

1.A. *The Boundaries of the Public Sphere*

Hannah Arendt, and after her Habermas and Angus, describe politics as a process that has its own worth, regardless of the results of any specific action. Political deliberation and action – which are two figures of the same process – take place in a specifically political, public space. In this space, we form specifically political communities of belonging, resulting from debate in common and action in concert. Such communities are distinct from the communities into which we are born and to which we belong as

a result of chance. Ethnic, national, cultural, and linguistic communities, like communities based on gender, class, or ability, can then be seen as communities tied to *what* we are, communities to which we are ascribed and to which we always already belong and from which we cannot easily separate ourselves. Political communities emerge instead through the creation of *who* we are, on what we have done and are attempting to do, and involve adhesion to common rules of deliberations and action such as constitutions: they are communities of action, often labeled social movements, communities we choose and into which we are born as political actors. We define who we are through our actions, while what we are is always already present for us.

In order to better see the phenomenon of action and thus to rehabilitate active life (the *vita activa*) against Western philosophy's tendency to favour contemplation (the *vita contemplativa*), Arendt focuses on the materiality of action: that is, on its consequences, on its products, as distinguished from the products of labour and of work (as in the examples of the baker and the carpenter, respectively). The distinction between the materiality of such products aimed at consumption or at giving an orientation to everyday life, and the materiality of political action, which is the creation and the occupancy of a space where we can come together in a durable manner, is mirrored in her distinction between economics and politics.

Economic life in general, through labour and work, has the function of maintaining *what* we are: through them we collectively look after our life, our habits, and our practices. Yet against this background of everything that escapes us, that is beyond our control, and that we have received – our culture, our gender, our ethnicity, our class, our capabilities, in other words, all that constitutes our materiality – we can also *show* who we really are, who we make ourselves to be, as the person who has undertaken

a specific course of action. Politics consequently consists in leaving the economic realm of the reproduction and protection of life (the rules and norms, *nomos*, of the home, *oikos*) in order to act upon that realm along with those with whom we choose to act in concert, the *polis*.

While action has its own worth, regardless of its consequences, these consequences do play a role in defining not only the action but also the actor. Action – be it in deeds or in words, and usually through the interplay of both – answers the question of *who* a person is, on the basis of what she has done and said, and so might do and say in the future. Action supposes that we choose not *what* we are, but rather *who* we are and *with whom* we will act. As we come together, we create power and heighten our capacity to transform the space in which we live and our relationships with each other¹. As we will see, the materiality of action and politics in general is thus what we show and what appears in public as a basis for our creation of new communities for action in concert.

Drawing further inspiration from the work of Hannah Arendt and commenting directly on Jürgen Habermas’s theory of the public sphere, Ian Angus develops an explicitly democratic position by arguing that that all people can rule themselves through processes of discussion, debate, and decision making². Democratic action is thus a specific kind of action as Arendt more generally defined it; democracy is a “practice involving participants’ very sense of themselves and their relations to others”³. The foundational idea underlying democracy is “the ideal that all those who are affected by a decision should be able to participate meaningfully in a public interchange that leads to making the decision.”⁴

Angus adds a second foundational layer to democracy, which consists in the necessity, for such meaningful public participation to be possible, for participants to create a common identity which they can adopt, allowing for a common way of speaking for the expression of that identity, and thus identify with each other⁵. In other words, for democracy to be possible, we must create commonality with others in society⁶ and the individual person must identify with the larger group and its goals⁷.

On the basis of such commonality and belonging, democracy becomes possible not as a regime, but rather as a process of deliberation and action in common. Democracy is “the processes of public decision-making to which economic, social and cultural institutions must be subjected in order to be legitimate and binding upon citizens”⁸. As democracy can only be an ongoing process, institutions must also continuously adapt to it.

Common deliberation requires a critical debate: that is, a constant questioning of social arrangements by those who are affected by them⁹, who must then address their critiques to their fellow citizens, who in will turn respond. Through this rational-critical debate¹⁰, the resulting ideas and actions are likely to be much better for both the individual and society, but also to lead to the common good.

This exchange must take place both among citizens and between citizens and institutions. Ideally, based upon the dialogue, an answer or solution will emerge, and the social form that is more appropriate for all citizens is more likely to be found. Indeed, the only required institution is one that enables and protects the right of citizens to speak and to be heard, and to respond to one another¹¹, because the resulting dialogue is the action out of which the democratic process emerges. Engaging in the democratic dialogue is in fact the very action that turns a person into a citizen instead of being a subject¹².

Such an exchange has an epistemic value: while the outcome is simply better than random processes of decision-making and is not worse than non-democratic processes, it offers “the epistemic benefits of thinking together, resulting in a tendency to make good decisions”¹³. A rational-critical debate involves the willingness on the part of every participant to modify some of her beliefs and opinions as she is persuaded by others and in the hopes of reaching a common agreement which will be good for her and acceptable to all¹⁴. The resulting consensus, or at least common opinion, unites citizens and provides a sense of an identity of community to which they can feel they belong. With a common opinion detailing the common interest, a common identity is formed in and for democracy, that binds citizens together despite the many possible, and unavoidable, differences that occur amongst citizens¹⁵.

A third foundational layer of democracy has been instituted, resting atop the ideal of participation of all in the decisions that affect them, and the process of their participation. Indeed, a space must exist for this debate and this action in common. The public sphere serves as such a space where rational-critical debate takes place and which is also shaped by rational-critical debate. Angus refers to the public sphere as the key component of democracy, and the determining factor of the degree of democracy in a society¹⁶, while Habermas develops the idea that the formation of the public sphere was foundational in the development of democracy in Europe, and subsequently in North America¹⁷. With each layer, we gain more and more solidity and concreteness – each layer making the

precedent layer possible, while emerging historically out of its demands. However, this layering remains contentious.

Habermas describes the public sphere as a constituted by private people who have come together as a public; individual citizens with their faculty to reason granting them access to this sphere and a right to rule themselves¹⁸. This sphere is separate from both the private sphere, which is civil society (essentially trade, labour, and commerce) and the family, and also the sphere of public authority, which is the state¹⁹. The public sphere developed as the bourgeoisie, who could afford to read and interact with the nobility, while being still distinct from the nobles, began critiquing the sphere of public authority. The private sphere was also changing at this time, so that society eventually had to be shaped to suit the needs and demands of the bourgeoisie. The public sphere, developing from the use of rational-critical debate, remained as a way to protect this very debate, as well as social criticism, from the intervention of those who control non-democratic institutions and who have interests in limiting such debate.

Habermas presents democratic institutions as opening the possibility of critical communication that acts on the very norms used by bureaucratic, administrative, and state apparatuses that seek to extend their power by instrumentalizing reason. Instead, the kind of communication that allows for debate over public opinion, and thus the formation of a rational public will, generates power by bringing into question what legitimates political authority and administrative power, thereby allowing for its redefinition. A democratic formation of public will, a form of rationalized public opinion, is only meaningful if it can influence governmental decisions, and it can only take place through voluntary associations that transform the attitudes and the values not only of their members, but also of the broader public²⁰.

As a result of this interaction with and struggle against non-democratic institutions, the public sphere was also institutionalized as a physical space. As the public sphere became a political space, rather than one of only literary criticism, it inevitably became institutionalised. Parliament is one such institutionalised space that the space of the public sphere has constructed, solidified by constitutional law²¹. Angus stresses the fixity of the institutions that emerge from the public sphere, and believes that the process of democracy itself can be understood by the coming-into-being and passing-away of these solidified spaces²²; for we can see the ways in which people established their participation. The media – for example, newspapers and journals, potentially television, and the Inter-

net – has also been, from the very beginning, a space for rational critical debate, and thus a space both forming and formed by the public sphere²³. Through the media individuals express their opinions to one another and respond²⁴ and its ability to transmit widely is vital in any society with a substantial population.

Angus argues that new institutions are the result of criticisms of the exclusion from participation of some members of society, criticisms which make them political actors, often gathered in social movements that can carry them as claims²⁵. As a result, each time a new space is created, there is increased belonging and an expansion of participation, and democracy is enhanced and furthered. In fact, Angus believes that due to the foci and assumptions of certain groups acting within democratic space, we should be perhaps thinking of a plurality of public spheres, and even alternative public spheres²⁶. The interactions and dialogues of and between these spheres will determine the course of democracy²⁷.

The metaphor of the actor requires a stage, a physical location reserved for a story to unfold, whence it can be seen by spectators who give it its value and who also emerge from the theatre transformed by their experience²⁸. This same story is echoed and transcribed into words, becoming the narrative of news stories and of history books²⁹. Media also create places where information about what has taken and is taking place can be found and discussed, even if a spectator was not present at the scene of actions, even if she stayed at home and minded her own affairs. The pages of the newspaper and the bookstore, the location of the television set (set as studio, set as physical object) are thus potentially political spaces, habitual locations to which she turns and which she enters in order to inform herself: that is, forms, shapes her opinion and finds her position, her location, toward the events that take place. Publicity is created through, in, and around these physical and abstract spaces, in which she can enter, so as to solidify the commonality and participation without which there can be no democracy.

1.B. Emotions at the Boundaries of Political Life

The divide between the public sphere and the private sphere is cited as a significant structural factor related to the absence of emotional drive in politics. The relegation of emotions to the private sphere has the effect of privatising emotions and excluding them from political deliberation and action. Miller suggests that those who rely on emotions in politics are portrayed as unsophisticated and ignorant³⁰. And indeed, without proper

attention being paid to the role of emotions in politics, those who do rely on emotions find them muted or confusing in their attempt to understand them and deciding on how – or even whether – they should let themselves be guided by their emotions³¹. To take emotions seriously, as a part of political life, might then allow us to reach further sophistication in understanding our emotions and in undertaking action.

Critical theory shares with the liberalism it criticises the exclusion of emotions from political life. In Habermas' critical theory, this exclusion takes place under the guise of a norm of rationality of deliberation and of the public sphere: we are asked to check our emotions at the door, even if they might have led us there. Vetlesen argues that Habermas only pays lip service to emotions and sees them as opening the way for deliberation, which must then take place as a cognitive process; at best, emotions are purified and survive only in their cognitive elements³². Against this position, as Neblo argues, Habermas does give emotions a number of roles in deliberation: they act as inputs for reason; they are implicit judgments that need further formulation; they allow for solidarity; they enable us to take on roles; and they help us apply universal norms³³. However, Neblo himself points out that these roles for emotions remain under-developed. What is more, emotions continue to be left outside of the public sphere, perhaps as a condition of possibility, but remaining outside of deliberation itself and of rational argumentation, as Iris Young argues: feelings are not recognized and are not part of discussions about norms³⁴.

In Arendt's political thought, this exclusion takes place under the guise of a focus on action as a manifestation of the self, action as visible and public as opposed to emotions, which are invisible and thus can only be private. While for Arendt emotions can be made public through their transformation in art, it is still not emotions that are seen, but only their manifestations. Action, on the contrary, is already entirely manifestation, and manifests the self, and not its emotions, which are only transitory aspects of the self. Reality is what appears, what others can see and confirm – what is public, what can be the subject of a shared experience, as Arendt explains:

The presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves, and while the intimacy of a fully developed private life, such as had never been known before the rise of the modern age and the concomitant decline of the public realm, will always greatly intensify and enrich the whole scale of subjective emotions and private

feelings, this intensification will always come to pass at the expense of the assurance of the reality of the world and men.³⁵

In other words, reality is dependent on an external form of materiality: real is what can be experienced, witnessed or participated, by others – real is what is public. Emotions and feelings can only be private, and as they take on more importance in our lives, we become dissociated from reality. Arendt indeed deplors the rise of the “social” as the overtaking of the public realm by the private realm³⁶. Because they only belong in our private lives, and because we can never be sure of their reality, emotions cannot be reliable guides for action.

2. *Leaving Emotions Behind*

Despite the view that emotions affect participation and act as catalysts, they continue to be viewed under this model as non-political³⁷. The negation of the political character of emotions takes place following two strategies of exclusion from political life. The first strategy consists in focusing on what aspects of a political actor’s life ought to be made public, relegating emotions to the private sphere or to personal life. We find this position in Rawls, as well as in both Habermas and Arendt. Rawlsian liberalism has a tendency to leave emotions entirely outside of the political sphere, mostly by remaining silent on their subject³⁸. Emotions would then be as irrelevant as taste in food or art are to political theory and action: while they might be necessary for the citizen to be a well-rounded moral agent, they need not be discussed in political terms. Nussbaum criticizes this position in Rawls³⁹, yet even in her most recent work on emotions, her own political liberalism demands that emotions be treated like political doctrines in the Rawlsian framework: *public* emotions ought to be both narrow and shallow, just like political conceptions of justice, in contradistinction from *private* emotions and comprehensive doctrines⁴⁰.

The second strategy, which counters the first but nonetheless excludes emotions from political life, consists in speaking of political emotions as mere bases for actions. Politics then takes place against a background of emotions, but consists in moving away from emotions. We find this second model of a position toward emotions in Nussbaum, even as she attempts to take emotions *very* seriously in political philosophy. It is useful then to remember that the thesis we defend has to do with the role given to emotions in political life, and not the absence of their treatment by political philosophy.

Nussbaum asserts that emotions are of fundamental importance, underlying all of human thought and action. Because emotions play a factor in all we do, we cannot ignore them in accounting for political life⁴¹. She presents emotions as having their roots in infancy⁴², and as being both biologically and socially constructed, with the biological and social constructs interacting and influencing each other⁴³. Emotions are “intelligent responses to the perception of value, and are thus a part of ethical reasoning—emotions are not detached from or opposed to rationality or intellect⁴⁴. Indeed, emotions are tied to human flourishing, ensuring our survival but finding relevance well beyond these needs⁴⁵. As recognitions of good and bad⁴⁶, emotions seek what is good for a person⁴⁷. They are thus not mere impulses, but rather intentional entities⁴⁸, and are always value-laden⁴⁹. Nussbaum rigorously defines the place of emotions in three important aspects of human existence⁵⁰: music, literature, and ethics, which includes politics and religion.

However, Nussbaum does not fully bring emotions into politics. Though Nussbaum very thoroughly discusses emotions as foundational to human consciousness and life, she keeps them at the foundation of human action, treating emotions as background and base only. Nussbaum does not bring emotions into the foreground; she treats emotions only as important and influential undercurrents, never as immediate or fully involved motivations. She considers emotions as the basis for political values, such as freedom, equality, and justice⁵¹, but only at this foundational level. Emotions are not brought into a fully cognitive position, or a place of agency, where a person might acknowledge her emotions within the political sphere and political action. As Nussbaum describes them, emotions do not have a place in politics. They instead solely function in the background as a general basis for other motivations and values.

This exclusion of emotions from politics remains strongly anchored in contemporary political philosophies, despite efforts to rethink the private-public dichotomy. For instance, suggesting, as some feminists have, that “the personal is political”⁵² does not necessarily imply questioning the distinction between the political and the personal, but only requires that we question the criteria that serve to categorize phenomena and issues as political or personal. Yet this formulation of the idea presents the separation of society into two spheres as a major cause of women’s subordination.⁵³ Therefore, the distinction between the public and the private must be re-examined, and altered.

The meaning of the formula ‘the personal is political’ then appears as: ‘much of what is said to be personal, much of what is said to be unseemly for politics, *is* in fact political and must be seen in the public sphere.’ According to this formula, emotions are not brought into the public sphere; rather, all of the formerly private aspects of life must conform to political rationality. Most importantly, they must be made rational so as to compensate for the dominant view of emotions as weaker and less valuable, and for the connection of these emotions to women only⁵⁴. To address conflict present in the self-image of women based on the private-public dichotomy, for example, whether a woman sees herself as a mother or as a worker⁵⁵, does not prevent a neglect of the emotions involved in this dichotomy, which prompt such issues of self-image.

In the case of these two positions, politics is about crossing a threshold: we enter into political life; we make our views public; we enter into the public sphere to act, and then retire into private life. The political is public, to be seen by all; the personal is private, to be seen only by a chosen few – either because it cannot be seen by others, or because it should not be seen by others, and is unseemly. The focus is on political *activity*: passivity belongs to the realm of the personal, the private, whereas all political life is a matter of will, of decision, of action, all activity on a background of passivity that may or may not be necessary to politics. Emotions are passive, they are passions, acting upon us, making us feel things and desire or want things. In both positions toward emotions, politics is a matter of agency and emotions a matter of passivity. The exclusion of emotions concerns the manner in which politics takes place, the norms that guide political life and action within the public sphere: public emotions must be narrow and thin, and translated into actions.

3. The Passion for Politics

Many contemporary political theorists and philosophers are arguing for the need to see emotions politically, in such a way as to overcome the distinction between rationality, logic and cognition on the one hand, and emotions and empathy on the other hand⁵⁶. A broad definition of emotion, leading to a reconsideration of the distinction between private and public spheres, can be found by comparing the views of those philosophers who have sought to include them into political life. In this manner, we can define a third position toward emotions, which shows them as

continually accompanying and sustaining political action, because emotions are something we do. Such a position, as we will see, requires that public life be less bounded – if at all.

3. A. *The Political Character of Emotions*

This approach highlights a tension within Nussbaum's position. In her interrogation of the "positive" and "negative" character of emotions, she relies on the different sources of motivation allowing us to decide whether we will gather with others in view of deliberation and action and for the manner in which to do it. She distinguishes most clearly between the positive or negative character of emotions using the concept of eudaimonism: positive emotions are those associated with feeling as though life is enhanced and benefitted, whilst the negative emotions are those experienced with feelings of harm or hindrance to living. Emotions, as eudaimonistic entities, are concerned with human flourishing – that is, living how a human being should live in order to develop and live a good life, in relation to the things she values or deems important⁵⁷. We do not *experience* an emotion because what brings it about is inherently good or bad, but because we deem it to be beneficial or harmful⁵⁸.

Emotions may thus be tied to our capacity for pleasure and pain, and thus to our evaluations and judgments; a definition of emotions might then read as "those things through which, by undergoing change, people come to differ in their judgements, and which are accompanied by pain and pleasure..."⁵⁹. While they are uncontroversially tied to our biology⁶⁰, they also always remain practices, and so are always social and cultural, emerging from our body and from social interaction⁶¹. Thus, with Ahmed, we can emphasize not the question of "what are emotions?" but rather "what do emotions do?"⁶²

As such, emotions are always intentional⁶³, in that they are about or directed at a phenomenon we are experiencing. Inevitably, emotions involve a stance on the world or a way of apprehending it⁶⁴. In fact, different emotions are considered and named as different entities in that they are different orientations towards some object⁶⁵. When a person is oriented to an object in one way, the characteristics of that orientation are labeled as an emotion; a different orientation to that object is named differently (for example, love and hate are two orientations a person might have to the same object; it is the stance towards the object for which the emotion is named and categorised). In that regard, emotions are explanatory⁶⁶. Emotions describe our conditions, our intentions, and our preferences and

values—though often these explanations are invisible in use⁶⁷. They are thus bound with judgements, and may be seen as a mode of judgements, being strongly connected with values⁶⁸. Judgements are certainly constituent elements of emotions, as Nussbaum notes⁶⁹. Responses are judgments of whether what is experienced is beneficial or harmful. Negative emotions contain very plain judgements⁷⁰, as we can see in the case of anger at an action or event deemed immoral, or of the blame that follows.

However, an important tendency seems to structure the study of the role played by emotions in politics in relation to Nussbaum's eudaimonism: political emotions are almost always “negative”, “*bad*” emotions. Often a reaction to an undesired political event, such as outrage over feared practises or the shame of a soiled collective identity⁷¹, a negative emotion may also be the result of the continuous and prolonged experiences of other negative emotions, such as disappointment and frustration⁷².

Anger and indignation provide very strong motivation for political action. According to Kemper, “social movements often arise from a sense of grievance and/or injustice”⁷³. Anger is the main emotion of those who believe they have been denied, and the anger is the driving force behind action in pursuit of the justice they seek⁷⁴. Shame, though a negative emotion triggered by a belief about a person's own character⁷⁵, may become transformed into collective solidarity through the attempt to overcome it, providing the energy for political action⁷⁶. Contempt and hatred also inspire action, though this action is an effort to separate rather than to join others. Hate has the capacity to align the general with the particular as it imposes general feelings and judgements onto every particular object categorised under the object of hate (for example, in hating a religion or race in general, every particular person of that religion or race—and all of their beliefs, features, and actions—becomes hated, whether or not they would not be hated if tied to a different race or religion)⁷⁷, broadening the object and thus providing a wider motivation for political action. Such emotions must then be countered⁷⁸.

The concept of injustice frames provides an example of how emotions are used to mobilise political endeavours. An injustice frame uses the negative emotions, such as suspicion, hostility, anger, and indignation, to view a situation so as to identify targets, strategies, and tactics⁷⁹. These emotions are viewed as and felt to be just and righteous, and thus the emotional experiences are structured in such a way as to find a political course of action.

Anxiety also promotes and enhances citizen engagement⁸⁰; indeed, Marcus argues that “anxiety is the central emotion on which reason and democratic politics rest”⁸¹. The uneasiness of anxiety compels a person to examine and judge more critically their environment and its politics, and become more involved so as to gain certainty and stability⁸². Anxiety heightens awareness of a person’s surroundings, and motivates people to act to ensure their surroundings are set in a way that suits them.

In spite of the prevalence of negative emotions, positive emotions do find their way into the attempts to understand the political role of emotions. Hope, like hatred, broadens a person’s emotional intentions, uniting specifics with a broad target, and thus opens up the desire for political participation; hope may even be necessary for political possibility⁸³. Hope provides joy in imagining a better society, and participating in the effort of realizing that society⁸⁴. The moral sentiment, solidarity, love, and compassion are positive feelings that also elicit their own political experiences. Love can provide a drive for politics in the effort to express this emotion towards the object, whether the emotion is experienced for one’s community, nation, or other people in general. Love involves a person giving themselves to objects that are outside of their control, and as such the object also internalised by that person, and becomes a part of them and their well-being, and so we do seek our own flourishing in love⁸⁵. Love has the capacity to unify a community; further, love may unify a population as they view the national or political community as an object of love⁸⁶. Compassion is experienced when another person’s situation is perceived as undeserved and unjust, and this leads a person to act on the sufferer’s behalf⁸⁷. It has even been argued that compassion is eudaimonic beyond the satisfaction a person feels when she believes she is doing what is right and just, in that it ties the good of the other person to her own cares and values⁸⁸.

Emotions are also tied to considerations of power and status. Different uses of power can trigger different emotions, and different political consequences would follow. For example, guilt may be experienced if a person believes she has used her own power excessively⁸⁹; but if her own power falls, she will most likely experience fear and/or anxiety. A decrease in status will likewise bring about disappointment, anger, depression, shame, and even hatred⁹⁰. A person will experience these negative emotions as well when her opponent experiences an increase in status and power⁹¹.

Considerations of power and status apply to positive emotions as they do to negative ones. If a person uses power in what they believe to be a le-

gitimate way, she will feel satisfied⁹². When a person's own power or status rises, so will her sense of safety and security, and thus her contentment, satisfaction, and pleasure⁹³. And when an opponent's power or status decreases, a person will also experience positive emotions. Love will sustain power relations, in that a person is likely to be at least content with them, or even to love the relations themselves.⁹⁴ Emotions are already part of a person's life, both before she acts and as she acts, through their ties to power and status (and although we have two theories of power in Kemper and Ahmed), through the interaction of negative and positive emotions that lead a person to act or not, and through the judgments and intentions that take place through them.

3. C. Emotional Orientation

Following Ahmed⁹⁵ and a broader phenomenological attitude, we can understand emotions as part of what orients us: they give us our bearings, they compel us to act in certain ways, to reach out to others. They define a space for our actions, and transform the physical spaces and the manner in which we relate to the objects and the others who inhabit them and make them what they are. They shape and are shaped by our habits. Quite simply, in the phenomenological sense, they are part of our intentionality, of the manner in which we are directed toward things. In moving to the topic of orientation in general, beyond emotions, Ahmed summarizes her "phenomenological model of emotions as intentional: as being 'directed' toward objects. [...] In other words, emotions are directed to what we come into contact with: they move us 'toward' and 'away' from such objects."⁹⁶ Emotions define our very spatiality – and all its instances: they cannot be detached from the objects toward which they are directed, and which they apprehend, of which they take hold, so that we may do something with them.

We can broaden this notion of orientation for our actions. Participation generally begins when there is perceived a problem to be addressed, and follows through when an appropriate action response (a strategy made, a target selected, a plan or proposition developed) is pursued⁹⁷. Political actions need emotions as condition of possibility, just as emotions create a need for action, to the point where we may say that passion fuels politics⁹⁸ and emotions create belonging to a community of action⁹⁹. In this manner, emotions are not merely to be left behind when acting, but continue to bind us to those with whom we act. All political gatherings – thus all collectives – hold an "emotional energy" in the collective and in the individual participants¹⁰⁰. Of course, political actions and events elicit

emotions as well. These emotional reactions may, in turn, lead to further political actions.

The vocabulary of passivity is inescapable in speaking of emotions. But in passivity, we remain active: we do not choose how we feel, but we decide to continue feeling in the same manner or to bring about the conditions for different emotions. Pleasant emotions might lead us to continue the experience – success in action breeding further success, creating emotional energy¹⁰¹; unpleasant emotions might lead us to abandon the experience, or to transform what created it in the first place. In this sense, we can say that those who act politically are driven: their emotions accompany them and sustain them throughout the process leading to action, through a series of small decisions and small reactions furthering the emotion or creating new ones – each time potentially creating confusion or frustration –, against adverse odds, against the likelihood of facing adversity and the actions and reactions of others, against the likelihood of failing to achieve the goals that have been set.

3.D. Engagement and disengagement, passion and apathy

The strength of accounting for emotions in political life lies in the possibility to explain participation and disengagement in politics. The hesitation to enter into the public sphere, to take part in politics, to join others, instead of withdrawing to or remaining in the private sphere, is already the topic of wide literature and broad political concern around the question of voter turnout, and is more broadly known as the problem of political apathy or political disengagement. A focus on the categories of apathy and disengagement will help us understand the importance of emotions in politics in relation to the lack of participation, and present an account of political motivation that may come to amend the view of democracy and political action laid out by Arendt, Habermas, and Angus.

The concept of apathy is commonly used to refer to the lack of political participation in democracies¹⁰². The term is heavily charged, referring to a “democratic malaise”¹⁰³ – or in economic terms to a “democratic deficit” – a pathology of democratic practice that must be cured, but does not threaten the survival of the democratic regime itself. The logic of the reference to voter apathy is simple enough: voters are apathetic, they are only weakly attached to the system and to its values, they are content to let others choose and govern for them, they do not care enough to vote for one party or another. The remedy to this pathology takes on many

forms, but all in their logic are also simple: “we” – those who are engaged, who do vote, who run for office, who decide for others – must engage the others and make them care. Given the failure of rational explanation of the merits of political participation in the media, political education, especially through schools, party reform, and electoral reform are among the common remedies for this pathology.

While it remains difficult to suggest a model for political participation that might differ from our current institutions – as necessary as that attempt, as found for instance in Pateman¹⁰⁴ might be –, another conceptual possibility remains open: we are able to question the very conception of apathy as the lack of participation and caring. After all, it seems difficult to conceive of someone who is truly apathetic: that is, someone who experiences no emotions whatsoever toward politics. Instead, apathy can be seen as the absence of *passion* – of a clear drive, clear motivation, or clear emotional response – as distinguished from disengagement, which results from emotions of frustration and powerlessness.

In relation to the question of the lack of participation, distinguishing between apathy and disengagement, rather than speaking in terms of barriers to entry in the public sphere, allows us to focus on the experience of mixed or unclear emotions, or emotions of frustration at these barriers, as causing withdrawal from political participation, while explaining why some persons do participate in spite of such barriers. A person does not always know how she feels¹⁰⁵. Emotions may even be repressed¹⁰⁶. When a person has no clear emotional experience, she also cannot find a clear response: the only reactions mixed and unclear emotions provide is hesitation or resignation. In the absence of a clear desire or refusal, there can be no clear course for action. A person will be held back, not knowing if anything should be done, let alone could be done, about a political issue. The only comfortable motivation provided by hesitation and resignation is a withdrawal from political action. Rather than a political actor or even a political spectator who participates by remaining attentive to events and judging them¹⁰⁷, a person becomes a bystander due to the lack of emotions or to the emotional dissonance she experiences¹⁰⁸. What is more, a person’s sentiment that she lacks power to affect an outcome will lead her emotions to be muted, and she will experience disappointment along with her discontent; the result of this disappointment may become pervasive apathy¹⁰⁹. If she experiences disappointment from her active participation in politics, she will have no reason to participate in the future. Consequently, the structural lack of power and status may be a

root reason for political apathy.

Confusion can also arise from the emotions themselves, since we cannot be said to ever experience one emotion at a time, or without interruption. There are general and particular emotions, background and situational emotions¹¹⁰, determined by different emotional objects¹¹¹, and a person may easily be conflicted by their multiple coinciding emotional experiences. Even pleasure and pain are not wholly distinctive¹¹². What is more, Elster suggests that persons often persuade themselves to have emotions they do not have but they believe they should have, or not to have the emotions they do experience because they believe they should not have them¹¹³. Often, this adaptation is a result of social presentation, as a person chooses to hide or display particular emotions¹¹⁴ and thus likely believes that there is a correct way to feel that corresponds to her situation. As such, rather than simply hiding an emotion, a person will convince herself that she should and does feel a particular emotion.

When a person lacks clarity in her experience of an emotion or when she experiences multiple emotions at the same time, she can be said to be apathetic. After all, if she is unclear on what she is experiencing, she will not be pushed or led to respond to these experiences. To be aware of emotions, to be able to identify their source and their resemblance to and difference from past emotions or other possible emotions, and thus to be able to respond to these emotions is a learned skill¹¹⁵. The lack of discussion around emotions in political life contributes to the lack of an emotional education in collective matters, or as part of an already limited political education, and to the lack of experience in relying on emotions. While there can be no question of achieving complete clarity on our emotions, we can nonetheless contrast the apathetic person, who receives no clear signals from her emotional response to events and does not know how to interpret them or whether she can act on them, with the passionate political actor, who is driven by her emotions and is able to act in response to her experiences because she has a *feeling*, a *sense* for the possibilities opened by the situation.

In distinction from apathy understood as the lack of clear emotions – confused or mixed emotions, confusion about the emotions that are experienced –, disengagement can be understood as an emotional response of frustration and disappointment. It is only possible for a person to disengage from politics if she was previously engaged in politics; the drive to take part in politics, to deliberate and to undertake an action, is replaced following failure or treachery by the strong and active desire *not*

to take part in politics. Another instance of disengagement would be the replacement of the drive to participate by other attachments or drives. Politicians thus often leave public life after a defeat in an election or a nomination procedure, or to pursue other interests, to focus on their family, their health, or another career. As opposed to apathy, which prevents participation (or entrance into the public sphere, if we are to maintain that language), disengagement is the movement of withdrawal from participation and action (and into “private” life). Both phenomena are consequently tied to human emotions, rather than solely to the structures of a public sphere.

Conclusion

The three models presented here are just that – models. Habermas seems to have attempted to modify his position in order to make room for emotions, without integrating them fully. In the process, he hinted at Nussbaum’s position, which clearly lays out a role for emotions, which have an effect on politics from outside the public sphere. However, this stated theory clashes with her descriptions of emotions, which shows them at work in politics, hinting at the third position. We sought to flesh out this third position on the basis of many recent contributions, framed by the arguments presented by Ahmed and Collins. If we follow this third model position as to the role of emotions in politics, which presents them as inherently political, we are faced with the blurring of the boundaries of public life. Because emotions orient us and are a constant aspect of our relationships – be they to objects, to persons, to institutions, to actions, or to events – it is more precise and useful to speak not of private and public spheres, but rather of a single plane of existence. A more relevant distinction might be made between what is relevant to an action and to a group, and what is not. Much of what we deem to be “private life” is indeed simply irrelevant to much of political actions and appointed or elected office. What is more, emotions are an intrinsic part of political life. Not only can we not always decide which emotions we display to others, it is our emotions and emotional energy that brings us together and keeps us together, and the misunderstanding of our emotions by others – the feeling of their being trampled, even as we carefully decide which emotions we *should* hide – is as good a reason as any to disengage from acting with them. Not only can we not simply leave our emotions behind, but there is no place for us to leave them at all. Not only can we not simply detach our reasons from our emotions, our reasons are often transformations of our emotions. In being better aware of the role

emotions play in political participation and in the creation of communities for action, we may be able to further the chances for democracy and provide answers that come to complement those that are already being offered to the challenges political philosophy.

Notes

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- 3 Angus 2001, 9.
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- 7 Angus 2001, 62.
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- 9 Angus 2001, 72.
- 10 Habermas, Jürgen. 1989. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. Page 43.
- 11 Angus 2001, 25; Habermas 1989.
- 12 Angus 2001, 24.
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- 14 Cohen, Joshua. 1997. "Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy." James Bohman and William Rehg, eds., *Deliberative Democracy. Essays of Reason and Politics*, Cambridge, MIT Press: 67-92. Page 76-78.; Estlund 2008, 175-176.
- 15 Angus 2001, 83.
- 16 Angus 2001, 33.
- 17 Habermas 1989, 13 and 18.
- 18 Habermas 1989, 27.
- 19 Habermas 1989, 30.
- 20 Habermas, Jürgen. 1998. *Between Facts and Norms*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press. Page 483-485.
- 21 Habermas 1989, 57.
- 22 Angus 2001, 22-23.
- 23 Angus 2001, 25.
- 24 Angus 2001, 27.
- 25 Angus 2001, 42.
- 26 Angus 2001, 73.

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- 36 Arendt 1958, 38-50.
- 37 Miller, Patrick R. 2011. "The Emotional Citizen: Emotion as a Function of Political Sophistication." *Political Psychology* 32 (4): 575-600. Page 575.
- 38 Rawls, John. 2001. *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. Page 87; Tomlin, Patrick. 2008. "Envy, Facts, and Justice: A Critique of the Treatment of Envy in Justice as Fairness." *Res Publica* 14: 101-116. Page 101.
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- 40 Nussbaum 2013, 133; cf. 393.
- 41 Nussbaum 2001, 487.
- 42 Nussbaum 2001, 194.
- 43 Nussbaum 2001, 199.
- 44 Nussbaum 2001, 1.
- 45 Nussbaum 2001, 212.
- 46 Nussbaum 2001, 206.
- 47 Nussbaum 2001, 487.
- 48 Nussbaum 2001, 231.
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- 51 Nussbaum 2001, 646 and 648; 2013 134-135.
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- 58 Ahmed 2004, 5.
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- 60 Marcus 2002, 50.; Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001,13.
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- 63 Nussbaum 2001, 231 and 501.
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- 65 Ahmed 2004, 14 and 191.
- 66 Marcus 2002, 9.
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- 68 Nussbaum 2001, 49 and 232.
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- 82 Marcus 2002, 139.
- 83 Ahmed 2004, 183.
- 84 Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001, 13.
- 85 Nussbaum 2001, 458 and 487; 2013, 174-177.
- 86 Ahmed 2004, 135.
- 87 Nussbaum 2001, 335.
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- 89 Kemper 2001, 63.
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- 110 Nussbaum, Martha C. 2001. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Page 4.
- 111 Nussbaum 2001, 5.
- 112 Elster, Jon. 1999. *Alchemies of the Mind: Rationality and the Emotions*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Page 57.
- 113 Elster 1999, 97.
- 114 Elster 1999, 96.
- 115 How this clarification might take place is another matter altogether; the ideas laid out here seem to demand that such emotional clarification take place through an inter-active process. Sara Ahmed (in *On Being Included*, London: Duke University Press, 2012) points to a process including interactions with others attempting to help them experience similar emotions, or perhaps to help them experience emotions about our own.