

**6** George E. Marcus

***The Psychology of Emotion and Politics***

Understanding emotion has for a very long time been central to the ongoing attempt to understand human nature. And this understanding has also been central in the debate about the proper political regime that human nature can sustain. Indeed some have argued that it was concern about the noxious impact of emotion that gave rise to philosophy in ancient Greece (Nussbaum, 1994). Most share with many ancient Greek philosophers the presumption that emotions are a problem, indeed *the* problem that hinders our ability to sustain individual and collective just rule. Consider the following quote from John Locke's *Second Treatise* (1993): "The freedom then of man and liberty of acting according to his own will, is grounded on his having reason, which is able to instruct him in that law he is to govern himself by, and make him to know how far he is left to the freedom of his own will" (p. 45). That view is representative of dominant tradition: rationality is the mental faculty that makes us free and that gives us the capacity to establish political regimes that are democratic and just. With this claim comes the companion view that emotion, a powerful enigmatic force, too often intrudes and undermines our capacity to reason. The tradition has it that if reason cannot be autonomous we must abandon not only this ennobling ideal but also the political programs of democracy and justice that rest on reason's foundation.<sup>1</sup>

But perhaps there are other possibilities; perhaps emotion is not as we have long imagined it, mysterious and detrimental.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps a reexamination of emotion will offer an escape from the following conundrum: if people are emotional creatures, they cannot thereby also be rational creatures—leaving us with little prospect for achieving democratic rule and justice. We have placed collective rule founded on reason's sovereign nobility beyond the reach of humans. Whether emotion is a help, or hindrance, in achieving democratic and just regimes is perhaps the highest-stakes issue current in political psychology.

I have three goals for this chapter. First, I illuminate the normative presumptions that have shaped the study of emotions and politics. Second, I review how the predominant approaches in political psychology attempt to deal with the scientific study of emotions and politics, with special attention to each of their strengths and weaknesses. I argue for neuroscience as the preferred scientific literature to derive insights as to how emotions impact on politics. Finally, further progress requires resolving an ongoing dispute over the structure of emotion. I offer some suggestions as to the

