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### *The Politics of Rationality - A Critique*

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Bruno D. de Brito Serra

# The Politics of Rationality

## A critique

PhD Thesis  
2015

## Abstract

In this thesis, I challenge the validity of a pervasive conception of political action and decision-making that grounds both on the so-called “public use of reason”. The latter, underpinned by a notion of “pure” reason inherited from the Enlightenment and largely sustained by liberal theory, not only promotes a reductionist view of human rationality, but also implicitly leads us to disregard a critical aspect in contemporary politics: the political role of the emotions.

The opportunity to exploit the emotions in order to pervert the democratic process follows from that disregard. Reading it in light of Schmitt and Agamben’s ideas on the state of exception, I examine the pervasiveness of emotional dynamics in contemporary western politics, illuminating phenomena such as democratic propaganda, the ongoing “war on terror”, and the persistent threat of global economic collapse. I subsequently posit that the rationalistic hubris of the politics of (limited) rationality opens the door for *irrational* politics, ultimately enabling the creation of a permanent state of exception through the manipulation of misguided emotional inclinations.

In order to address this problem, I argue for an abandonment of the sterile reason-emotion dichotomy implicitly preserved by the current debate on the cognitive status of emotions. Instead, I propose an expanded model of human rationality, which incorporates emotion into processes such as decision-making, motivation, and action – thus arriving at the notion of *emotional rationality*. This enables me to consider the commonly overlooked possibility to educate emotions, and advance a conception of emotional education that relates them with the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis*. I conclude by arguing that a heightened political awareness of emotions and a conscious effort to educate them are necessary steps towards avoiding the undesirable political fate entailed by our present situation.

# **The Politics of Rationality – A Critique**

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2015

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## Introduction

“For when appetites overstep their bounds and, galloping away, so to speak, whether in desire or aversion, are not well held in hand by reason, they clearly overleap all bound and measure; for they throw obedience off and leave it behind and refuse to obey the reins of reason, to which they are subject by Nature's laws” (Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*)

The metaphor of human emotion as a rampant horse, demanding steadfast reining in by the horseman of reason is one that – knowingly or otherwise – has been a significant part of western thought. It is pervasive in common-sense knowledge – the familiar notion that one must keep emotions in check in order to make sound decisions or behave appropriately – but almost just as so in philosophical reflexion. Within the latter, the perils of ungoverned emotions and their potentially destructive consequences have been a recurring theme, underpinned by a simple rationale: since “raw” emotionality brings us closer to the base instinctiveness of animals than to luminous wisdom, human beings should not be, by nature and definition, emotional creatures. Emotion has thus often been regarded as an accident that threatens to sully the human soul's potential for virtue, a somewhat fateful circumstance of life whose influence on the latter fortunately can – and indeed should – be subdued and minimized via the influence of reason. Those are, in fact, as Cicero puts it, “Nature's laws”, and any other relation between reason and emotion would thus not only be disadvantageous, but *unnatural*.

Sometimes regarded as an unfit or unimportant topic for philosophical inquiry, the emotions have nevertheless recently been the subject of a disciplinarily broad wave of research interest, animated by the conviction that human existence cannot be genuinely understood – or experienced – without regarding it in its wholeness. The idea of a purely rational human being, which was never more than a useful fiction, has increasingly come to lose even its status as aspiration, following a reevaluation of the legitimate role of emotion in various dimensions of human existence. Damásio's famous *Descartes' Error* is perhaps one of the most significant contemporary works in that regard, having managed to convey the instrumentality of emotion towards a fulfilling existence to an audience well outside the usual academic

circles. Popular works such as Kahneman's *Thinking Fast and Slow* (2011) and Haidt's *The Righteous Mind* (2012) have both followed and revitalized that trend, having contributed to foster a generalized rethinking of the processes of reasoning, moral judgement, and general decision-making to include something other than purely rational mechanisms.

Following this renewed interest in the emotions, some studies have surfaced proposing to examine their role in one of the most critical dimensions of human existence: the political (Ahmed, 2004; Moïsi, 2009; Nussbaum, 2013). They have, however, proved unable to significantly alter the paradigm of political thought regarding the matter. Within contemporary democratic states, charges and counter-charges of appeals to voters' emotions remain commonplace in the verbal jousting of political actors, with such appeals frequently denounced as illegitimate attempts at base manipulation. Even if emotions are surreptitiously regarded by the political strategist as useful political instruments, in public discourse there is a relative consensus regarding the unacceptable possibility of emotions infiltrating the deliberative exercise – for emotions impair judgement, and sound, reasonable judgment is the *sine qua non* condition of the democratic process<sup>1</sup>.

A philosophical examination of the role of emotion in politics is, at this point, a necessity. The prevailing current approaches, stemming from fields like political science and political economy, lack the comprehensiveness to truly progress beyond the circumstantial, and thus reach the deeper existential layer of the problem. Generally speaking, little thought is spent on the possibility that emotions are necessarily and *legitimately* involved in the political process. On the contrary, the fact that they have been proved to influence voters' behaviour usually leads back to the conclusion that political actors must strive to keep emotions in check. But what if emotions are inextricably involved in the political process? Would not our ignorance of that fact be substantially more dangerous? In light of this possibility, statistical studies on the effectiveness of campaign ads focussing on either "positive" or "negative" emotions, while instrumentally useful, cannot constitute the full scope of our concerns; the reason *why* emotions play a role, the extent to which they do, how

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to note how this sort of argument resembles those employed to oppose women's suffrage. It seems the concession made afterwards was not that there was nothing fundamentally wrong with being an *intrinsically emotional* being, but rather that women were capable of being just as *unemotional* as men.

their presence comes to shape our political reality, and how this should direct both our political education and action, are more worthwhile questions.

In order to answer such questions, however, we must overcome a significant gap in the contemporary study of emotion, whose expression is essentially threefold. It begins, in western political thought, with an almost endemic aversion towards any serious attempt to include emotion in the political process as something other than an avoidable and disruptive influence. That aversion, as we shall realize, is the result of a widespread rationalistic conception of politics, that regards emotion as essentially a- or even anti-political. Although the existence of this political rationalism is reasonably evident, its origin and philosophical foundations remain largely unexplored – and must thus be identified and examined before anything else.

Secondly, while the traditional hierarchy of the relationship between reason and emotion is often questioned and even inverted in current literature, a critical rethinking of the nature of that relationship, truly challenging its assumed dichotomy, is still sorely lacking. If anything, that dichotomy has extended itself to the framing of the debate, opposing cognitivist perspectives – that ultimately attempt to subsume emotions into reason, likening them to rational judgements or appraisals – to non-cognitivist ones, which either adopt a quasi-Humean stance, or regard emotions as purely somatic phenomena which are rationally contextualized *ex post facto*. To resolve this unfruitful disagreement, a new conception of human rationality is required, one within which reason and emotion are not either's slaves, but different expressions of the same phenomenon of consciousness.

Thirdly, even though the influence of emotions in general decision-making and political deliberation is sometimes acknowledged, it is systematically done from a standpoint that preserves the aforementioned dichotomy. A good example is provided by the debate surrounding rational choice and game theories, which opposes proponents of so-called “rational” and “irrational” sources of political behaviour, in a battle to assert the effectiveness of descriptive and predictive models – but without fully considering the implications of the anthropological conception they are implicitly advancing. In terms of political theory, this entails that most accounts of emotional influence fail to apprehend the pervasiveness of the latter, and how it has come to shape the very political landscape that it is presumed to affect solely by accident. In terms of knowledge of the human mind, on the other hand, it

further promotes an inauthentic, virtually bicephalous conception that must be abandoned.

Unless these aspects are addressed, our understanding of the complex relation between reason, emotion, and politics will remain fundamentally flawed, neither a credit to philosophical knowledge nor a worthy guide for our political action. If and when they are, however, we will still be left with the present consequences of our long-standing disregard for emotion's place in the political sphere. Chief among them, our permeability to certain instruments of political manipulation – such as propaganda and the abuse of the state of exception – that have decisively marked our recent political history, and threaten to continue to do so if the problem of emotion is left fundamentally ignored. Here too our contribution can add something new to the discussion. A critical look at our political reality, informed by our philosophical inquiry into emotion's political role, will unveil the nature of such threats. It will allow us to relate significant politico-philosophical conceptions such as Schmitt's and Agamben's to our work on emotion, and consequently apply that relation to shed light on some of the most significant – and democratically dangerous – political challenges of our time. And it may even enable us to point out possible routes to address them.

Informed and animated by these concerns, the core thesis posited here can be thus summarized: there is an overly rationalistic understanding of human rationality in western politics, which allows for the exploitation of certain political expedients – such as propaganda and the state of exception – in order to manipulate citizens, and therefore entails a serious risk towards the sustainability to the democratic system. That risk, I argue, can only be coherent and efficiently addressed by taking the education of emotions as a serious concern within political education.

With this brief outline of the argument in mind, the first chapter will consist of an examination of the rationalistic bias of contemporary western politics, its politico-philosophical roots, and whether the usual arguments of its critics are not actually allowing the most significant problem at stake – the political role of emotions – to go unnoticed.

The second chapter will progress deeper into the philosophical roots of the problem by considering the traditional dichotomy between reason and emotion, in an attempt to expose and overcome its reductionist effect – particularly in the political

sphere. In order to achieve this, I propose a model of human rationality which transcends the dichotomy imposed by the Enlightenment's notion of "pure reason" and moves towards a more holistic understanding of reason and emotion: an *emotional rationality*.

In the third chapter, I build upon the conclusions of these efforts and reflect on the difference between individual psychology and group dynamics in what pertains to political deliberation and decision-making, focussing especially on the phenomena of contemporary mediated rhetoric, expert systems, our cognitive insufficiency regarding political matters, and an eventual democratic need for propaganda.

Drawing on preceding chapters, as well as on the work of thinkers like Carl Schmitt and Giorgio Agamben, the fourth chapter considers contemporary events such as the 9/11 attacks in New York, the ensuing (and ongoing) "war on terror", the seemingly cyclical WHO pandemic alerts, and the threat of worldwide economic collapse, employing them to examine how the hubris of reason in politics can enable the creation of a permanent state of exception and plant the seeds of despotism within a democratic polity.

The pressing twofold question raised by this realization – namely, how that risk comes about and what can be done to circumvent it – provides the motif for the final two chapters. Starting from the premise that any significant political vices within contemporary democratic states (as well as the possibility for their solution) decisively depend on the [political] education of citizens, chapter five seeks to examine the ideological and pedagogic foundations of what we might generally term the western system of formal schooling, and how they might be contributing for the problem rather than for its solution.

Chapter six builds upon this critical examination and considers the question of how an alternate model of education – one that regards emotion as an integral part of political virtue – might be achieved, thus dispelling the danger posed by a political existence led under what we might dub the "rationalistic illusion" of contemporary politics. I will conclude by examining whether there are valid alternatives to the customary (and reductionist) appeal towards a suppression of emotion in the political sphere, casting a critical glance at popular theories presenting themselves as such – like Daniel Goleman's model of *Emotional Intelligence*.

Ultimately, the political essence of the problem at hand can be synthesised in a simple question: is it preferable to accept a comfortable but dangerous fiction, or be forced to address an uncomfortable and taxing reality? Such is a question which, in Philosophy, can only have one answer.

## Chapter I – Political Rationalism

Contemporary western politics have come to be widely dominated by the assumptions and expectations of liberalism. That influence is felt both in the political sphere – where liberal ideals purportedly animate much of the policy-making and the political justification in western polities – and in the realm of economics – where economic liberalism (or “neo-liberalism”, as it is sometimes termed) increasingly determines the nature of interactions. The existence of a worldwide market economy, sustained and enforced by international agencies such as the IMF or the ECB, ensures that the rule of the game for polities around the globe is increasingly evident: embrace and agree to be shaped by that neoliberal agenda, or suffer under the unrelenting pressure of the markets.

That there are significant political and economical consequences to this should be immediately clear; what interests us are its less obvious philosophical implications, which are liable to affect not only the nature of our interactions in the public sphere, but also the very nature of human experience. In what follows, we will attempt to demonstrate that liberalism – both as political theory and practice – is the main source of a rationalistic bias that characterizes contemporary western politics, and ultimately presents a significant danger to the sustainability of democratic politics.

Regarding this, an important caveat must be made: in light of the relation we will seek to establish between liberalism and political rationalism, one might hurriedly assume that our criticism ultimately aims to target the former through (or even rather than) the latter. That, however, is simply not the case. The target of our critique is, unequivocally, *political rationalism* – more specifically, a particular form of the latter that is exhibited and promoted by liberalism. Liberalism, however, is obviously far from being the sole source of a rationalistic bias in contemporary politics; both communism and socialism, for instance, could be perceived as encompassing an appeal to the rationalization of politics at least as great as liberalism’s, and thus warrant the same kind of criticism in that regard.

The question that concerns us here, however, is neither what all the possible sources of political rationalism might be, nor which one of those three ideological currents – i.e., liberalism, communism, or socialism – is the most “rationalistic” in

itself. The truly relevant question, in light of our concerns, is simultaneously more pragmatic and ideologically neutral: what is, considering the current political reality of the West, the most likely and pervasive source of a pernicious kind of political rationalism? Given the particular circumstances of that reality, liberalism – through its collaboration with other ideological constructs that we will mention further down – presents itself as the clearest answer. That, and no other reason, is what motivates the following examination of the nature of liberalism's central tenets and the manner in which it finds itself interconnected with other dimensions of contemporary political existence that further amplify its influence.

## **1. Liberalism and Rationality**

What is “liberalism”? As Ryan puts it, one is “immediately faced with an embarrassing question: are we dealing with liberalism or with liberalisms? It is easy to list famous liberals; it is harder to say what they have in common” (2012, p. 21). In light of the changing character of liberalism across history (and distinct representatives), it may indeed appear more reasonable to seek an understanding of “liberalisms” rather than of its singular form. Or perhaps, as Wall suggests, liberalism should be understood as a single political tradition, but one that is not very unified, encompassing a variety of rival strands of thought” (2015, p. 1). For one, the rivalry between so-called “classical” and “modern” liberalism – the former being “limited in its aims, cautious about its metaphysical basis, and political in its orientation”, while the latter is “unlimited, incautious, global in its aims, and a threat to the achievements of ‘classical liberalism’” (Ryan, 2012, pp. 24-5).

A related issue is the divergence between liberalism and libertarianism, which exhibits a similar “tendency for the partisans of one side or the other to claim that their version of liberalism is true liberalism and the alternative something else entirely” (*Idem*, p. 26). The distinction between the two, however, cannot be so easily drawn – in essence, “[b]oth are committed to the promotion of individual liberty; both rest most happily on a theory of human rights according to which individuals enter the world with a right to the free disposal of themselves and their resources” (*Idem*, p. 27). When they differ, it is almost exclusively on the status and

necessity of government, as well as the fact that libertarians tend to regard “rights as a form of private property” (*Idem*).

Given the complexity of liberalism as both political theory and practice, it might seem impossible to define it with total accuracy. But perhaps an absolutely closed definition is unnecessary for our present purposes. If, instead, we focus on unveiling the foundations of the idea presiding over its various manifestations, it should still be possible to find crucial points of contact. Now, those foundations are – roughly speaking – typically provided via either “natural rights, social contract, [or] consequentialist approaches” (Swan, 2015, p. 9). The points of contact between them, on the other hand, consist in the key liberal values shared by all – autonomy, liberty, and, most crucially, *rationality*. Retrospectively, natural rights “were taken to provide the rational grounding for a political order that preserved individual liberties”; social contract theories assumed the possession of rationality on the part of contractees as *sine qua non* of its legitimacy; and consequentialist approaches such as Mill’s have consistently appealed to “the fundamental idea of utilitarian ethics – its commitment to rationality” (Ryan, 2012, p. 259). The latter can even be regarded as the guarantor of the other cited key values of liberalism – inasmuch as true autonomy and liberty cannot be said to exist without the ability to know and to pursue further knowledge.

One of the core beliefs of liberalism lies in the conviction that it is possible to comprehend (and therefore organize) the world around us through the use of reason. It is, as Waldron notes, a conviction that mirrors the Enlightenment’s “burgeoning confidence in the human ability to make sense of the world, to grasp its irregularities and fundamental principles, to predict its future, and to manipulate its powers for the benefit of mankind” (1987, p. 134). This is held to be true both in what pertains to the material world – by means of scientific and technological advancement – and to the more intangible circumstances of human existence – via a rationalization of the fields of morals, economy, and politics.

The claim that reason is the most important of all human faculties is simultaneously the logical antecedent and consequence of such a belief. Thus, the anthropological conception of liberalism becomes self-evident: human beings are essentially *rational* beings; the greater the purity of that rationality, the higher the degree of human perfection. In all realms of human existence, rational behaviour

becomes the standard and the aspiration of the liberal thinker. Morality should be regarded as either a rational calculus of utility or a matter of obeying a universal law derived from reason. Economic relationships ought to be grounded upon a rational understanding of market logic in order to maximize profits and reduce the risk of loss. Social life must be regarded as a matter of accurately identifying the best means to pursue the rationally acknowledged greatest common good. The appeal to rationality in all these different spheres of human existence ultimately comes together in the sphere that encompasses them all: the political. If individuals can “grasp the rational order of the world as the Enlightenment promised, [...] each individual, as a rational agent is in a position to demand that the [political] restrictions on his freedom be justified to him” (Wall, 2015, p. 4). To liberalism, politics (and political actors) are ruled by – and should hence be understood on the basis of – rational principles. Thus politics become rationalized, to the extent that rationality itself becomes politicised.

This realization – that politics have become increasingly rationalized – is neither unprecedented nor wholly original. Oakeshott’s *Rationalism in Politics* ([1962] 1991) notably posits that this rationalization of politics is found across all political persuasions, moulding the intellectual matrix of the West to the extent that either “by conviction, by its supposed inevitability, by its alleged success, or even quite unreflectively, almost all politics today have become Rationalist or near-Rationalist” (Oakeshott, 1991, p. 5). According to him, in no other field of human activity has rationalism become so pervasive and influential as in politics, fuelled by the post-Enlightenment conviction that if reason should be the guide of our conduct of life, it should also guide us regarding public affairs. Consequently, the prevalent political type has gradually become that of the “political rationalist”, who

stands for independence of mind on all occasions, for thought free from obligation to any authority save the authority of ‘reason’. [...] Moreover, he is fortified by a belief in a ‘reason’ common to all mankind, a common power of rational consideration [...]. But besides this, which gives the Rationalist a touch of intellectual equalitarianism, he is something also of an individualist, finding it difficult to believe that anyone who can think honestly and clearly will think differently than himself (*Idem*, pp. 5-6)

The question of the origin of this rationalism is one that Oakeshott briefly addresses, by linking it to a conception of *technical* (as opposed to *practical*) knowledge largely deduced from Descartes' *Discours de la Méthode* and Bacon's *Novum Organum*<sup>2</sup>. Although we broadly agree with that assessment, it fails to fully account for the complexity of the question. Crucially, and while Oakeshott did not explicitly state it, the above characterization of the political rationalist patently incorporates some of the key tenets of liberalism – autonomy, critical reason, and equalitarianism – along with one of its most common critiques: individualism. As such, I would contend, there is good reason to expand the search for the source of any contemporary political rationalism to the roots it might share with liberalism.

The clearest testament to the origin of the rationalistic spirit of liberalism – and of the politicisation of rationality – can be found in Kant's *An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*, where he postulates the “public use of one's reason” as the essential demanded by the Enlightenment. Human reason applied to public [political] life was for him the culmination of the laudable motion towards rationality that the Enlightenment inaugurated. And it is this idea of the public use of reason advanced by him that still animates the work of those who were principally responsible in shaping and establishing what is known as modern liberal political theory. Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* (1984), for instance, argues for a rehabilitation of the Enlightenment's ideal of rationality against Max Weber's critical account of the process of rationalization of politics, thus facilitating the birth of what he perceived to be a much needed *communicative rationality*. In a similar manner, Rawls' *Political Liberalism* (1996) famously postulates the idea of a *public reason*, the exercise of which is *sine qua non* of a liberal democratic polity and the kind of overlapping consensus that the latter's endurance requires.

Interestingly, it is mostly the relative prevalence of Rawls' work in this field that has muddled our perception of the origin and significance of the idea of public reason within contemporary liberalism. Many “believe that if there is such a creature as ‘public reason liberalism’ it is a Rawlsian creation”; the truth, however, is that the “social contract theories of Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant are all based on the conviction that the main aim of political philosophy is to identify an agreed-upon public judgement or public reason” (Gaus, 2015, p. 112). From very early on,

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<sup>2</sup> See Oakeshott, 1991, pp. 17-25.

liberalism and public reason converged as “interrelated responses to the modern problem of creating a stable social order in societies deeply divided by religious and moral disagreements” (*Idem*, pp 112-3). As such, and despite some critics of Rawls’ specific approach arguing to the contrary, this so-called public reason liberalism relies on a conception of public reason which aims to cope with cultural diversity, by allowing “the different reasons (and reasoning) of citizens [to] converge on liberal principles, rules, and institutions” (*Idem*, p. 113). In the pursuit of this intent, liberalism has necessarily interfaced (and integrated) with other compatible – albeit conceptually independent – politico-philosophical constructs, which have served not only to legitimize the rationalistic nature of former, but also to deepen and intensify its effect.

### *1.1. Liberal Rationalism and Cosmopolitanism*

Liberalism is often associated with cosmopolitanism, to the point that many liberal theorists seem to acknowledge the existence of an almost umbilical relationship between the two (Nussbaum, 1996, 1997, 2000; Moellendorf, 2002; Kok-Chor, 2002). Considering the nature of both concepts, that relationship is logically consequent: after all, what has constituted the foundation of cosmopolitanism since Diogenes the Cynic first uttered the words “I am a citizen of the world” is the same universalistic account of human reason espoused by ideologies such as liberalism – or socialism.

A brief caveat: admittedly, it may appear strange to throw liberalism and socialism together in this fashion, without making any sort of fundamental distinction between them. But despite their obvious differences in approach to a number of socio-economic issues, there is something concerning which they are very much in agreement: a profound faith in the power of human rationality and the consequences the latter necessarily entails for the political realm. Indeed, one could even argue that “as a doctrine socialism is not so much a call to reject the principles of liberalism as a claim that it alone can fulfil them” (Gamble, 1990, p. 100). And in sharing the aforementioned faith in rationality, liberalism and socialism can also be said to share a “final great bond” which “lay in the cosmopolitan and universal principles they both embraced” (*Idem*, p. 108). Regardless of whether one is looking

at the United States of America Declaration of Independence or at *The Communist Manifesto*, both cosmopolitan rationality and designs are there to be found.

The argument that cosmopolitanism is implied whenever one embraces the same kind of perspective on rationality adopted by liberalism is far from intellectual novelty. If we once again return to Kantian philosophy, we may unambiguously realize it. Both *Perpetual Peace* and *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose* clearly point towards the morally necessary transition between acknowledging the kind of universal[izable] rationality that Kant regarded as intrinsically human, and drawing from it significant political consequences – namely, the responsibility to lead humanity away from the limited political conception of nation-states, and towards a truly cosmopolitan existence. Thus, if liberalism adopted a universal reason, it could not do without – at least to some degree – embracing cosmopolitanism as well.

In socio-political terms, “the cosmopolitan idea was to follow logically from the avowed universalism of liberalism”, and it was a view espoused by many that even a “liberal theory of justice is a *reductio ad absurdum* if it cannot be universalised to support a theory of cosmopolitan justice” (Kok-Chor, 2002, pp. 431-2). While the notion of a necessary political affiliation between liberalism and cosmopolitanism has recently been subjected to substantial criticism – namely, on the part of proponents of an alternative “liberal nationalism” such as Tamir (1995) and Callan (1997) – there still seems to be an inherent mutual attraction that causes liberal theorists to gravitate towards cosmopolitanism. That attraction is caused precisely by the shared conception of rationality that Kant had already acknowledged.

The connection between cosmopolitanism and liberalism thus persists today, albeit often in a much more complex and nuanced manner. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, famously argues for a civic education on the grounds of a *liberal* education imbued with *cosmopolitan* concerns – an idea which she advances most explicitly in *For Love of Country* (1996) and *Cultivating Humanity* (1997), and which has probably been one of the key catalysts for the contemporary discussion around cosmopolitanism in both politics and philosophy. Liberal and cosmopolitan principals are, in Nussbaum’s conception, tightly interwoven. Both are instrumental in combating the pernicious temptation to construct citizenship simply by “finding in

an idealized image of nation or leader a surrogate parent to do our thinking for us”; against the latter, it is the task of educators “to show our students the beauty and interest of a life that is open to the whole world”, and that there is “more genuine love and friendship in a life of questioning and self-government than in submission to authority” (1997, p 84). Ultimately, the key liberal goals of “equality and justice” are not only in line with, but indeed “better served by [...] the very old ideal of the cosmopolitan, the person whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings” (1996, p. 4).

Recent work on the subject has taken matters beyond the concerns expressed by Nussbaum, to include discussion around the phenomena surrounding globalization and how they affect the possibility of forming genuinely cosmopolitan political arrangements (Audi, 2009; Maak, 2009; Went, 2004). We have even witnessed the rise of a sort of *economic* cosmopolitanism – stemming from Hayek’s defence of a liberal global market order that ought to supersede individual States – which has complicated matters by creating a conceptual rift between it and “philosophical” cosmopolitanism.

Nevertheless, and in spite of the nuances that separate the different contemporary approaches to cosmopolitanism, all of them have something in common: the assumption of the universality of human reason, which – as we have argued – they share with liberalism. There is, in fact, a sort of rational continuum between these two ideologies, which pervades the spheres of morality, economy and sociology. The result is a rationalistic liberal-cosmopolitan world view which legitimizes – and is in turn sustained by – politico-economic realities such as international organizations oriented by purportedly universalistic goals – of which the U.N. and the E.U. are good examples – multinational business corporations, or even something as the existence of a *universal* declaration of human rights. In sum, where cosmopolitanism and liberalism go, their particular conception of rationality follows; and given the fact that contemporary western polities are determined by ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity to a degree that seems to *demand* the adoption of liberal and cosmopolitan principles, the “where” is virtually everywhere.

## *1.2. Liberalism and Economic Theory*

The relationship between liberalism and economics is a complex one. The existence of something commonly dubbed “economic liberalism” does not necessarily entail that the latter is an true economic correlate of political liberalism – or even that such a correlate exists. That being said, it is possible to perceive a degree of conceptual interplay between political and economic concerns within some of the subdivisions of liberalism that we identified above. Regarding classical liberalism, if one, for instance, examines Locke’s account of natural proprietorship, it is already possible to perceive that the rational ability that enables individuals to be politically autonomous and free, can also manifest itself in different ways. According to this perspective, “[r]ationality is evinced by the ability to acquire goods and to go on acquiring them up to the limits set by the law of nature” (which is valid for immaterial goods, such as knowledge, but also for material ones); a “rational man is one who obeys the law of reason, and the law of reason is in turn the law of nature, and this is the will of God” (Ryan, 2012, p. 524).

We are thus faced with an argument reminiscent of Weber’s account of the development of the “spirit” of capitalism, expressed in what he terms the Protestant ethic. The latter, a form of religious asceticism within secular occupations, called for the “methodological rationalization of life” (Weber, 2002, p. 87) in the name of god – and, “like any ‘rational’ asceticism”, worked “to enable man to demonstrate and assert his ‘constant motives’ against the ‘emotions’” (*Idem*, p. 81). It is the rationalism of Protestantism that promotes the transition from the social and the moral to the economic: when a “restraint on consumption is *combined with* the freedom to strive for profit, the result produced will inevitably be the *creation of capital*” – along with the establishment of an “economically *rational* conduct of life” (*Idem*, pp. 116-7). Inasmuch as it arguably too represents a form of secular rational asceticism, classical liberalism mirrors the rationalization of life operated by Weber’s Protestant ethic, pouring political concerns into the realm of economics. As such, liberalism comes to regard the political and economic liberation of individuals not only as parallel and co-dependent processes, but also as being founded upon and legitimized by the same conception of human rationality – something which is patent in the works of Locke as much as in Adam Smith’s.

This original connection between liberalism and economic concerns was further deepened by the subsequent evolution of neo-liberalism – or economic

liberalism – on the back of thinkers like Hayek and von Mises. Neo-liberalism relies on the idea of rationally self-regulating markets, while arguing for the advantages of a market economy based upon private initiative and limited government. Regardless of the economic nature of the theory, however, the latter was ostensibly justified with recourse to arguments derived from political liberalism. The benefits could be presented as essentially threefold: “it was best placed to cope with conditions of imperfect knowledge; it allowed for experimental evolution; and it provided protection against the abuse of [political or economical] power by a selfish minority” (Jennings, 2015, p. 56). The alternative, as Hayek inferred, was the “road to serfdom” – a return to *illiberal* conditions, in both economic and political terms.

Whether it is regarded as legitimate or not, this attempt to explicitly translate the bases and implications of liberalism into economic terms is the likely cause of yet another dimension of the bond between liberal rationalism and economic theory. Contrary to what happened in the past, the study of politics is today increasingly determined not by disciplines like philosophy or political science, but by economy. In accordance with what is perhaps the spirit of our times, to paint an explanatory picture of politics is now an affair largely dominated either by economists or those at least inspired by economic theory. In what pertains to what interests us more specifically – political behaviour and decision-making – Anthony Downs’ *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957) paved the way for a variety of attempts to account for the way in which voters, politicians and states interact with each other, via an application of principles stemming from economic theory. Despite the considerable criticism that Downs’ work has since garnered, more recent theoretical constructs, such as rational choice theory or public choice theory, have continued – and further disseminated – the trend inaugurated by him.

Now, the particular merit of each of these theories is not to be presently subject to an in-depth examination – neither time nor opportunity allows it. What does need to be examined about them, however, is the nature of the explanatory (and often predictive) models they employ in the analysis of political behaviour, and the sort of principles inherent to them.

Rational choice theory, along with public choice theory (which expands on its ideas but essentially shares its foundations), does not fall short of the promise entailed by its denomination; simply put, it postulates that “all action is

fundamentally ‘rational’ in character and that people calculate the likely costs and benefits of any action before deciding what to do” (Scott, 2000, p. 126). Just from this quick enunciation, it is evident that, much like in the case of liberalism and cosmopolitanism, there is an undeniably rationalistic anthropological perspective implicit in this conception – even if the kind of rationality at stake here is not the pure, all-encompassing kind proposed by Kant and his intellectual heirs, but a merely *instrumental rationality*. According to these theories, there is an ultimately rational logic presiding over what we, via an analogy with familiar economical notions, might call *political markets* (Wittman, 1997). And whether we assume that political agents are indeed well informed and thus – as Wittman puts it – [politically] *efficient* – or that their actions are, to the contrary, determined by a *rational ignorance* (Downs, 1957) which prevents them from being so, the fact remains that rationality is still perceived here to be the source of action in general, and political action in particular.

Despite the introduction of some interesting qualifications of the concept of rationality<sup>3</sup>, with its insistence on maintaining a rationalistic bias in approaching the problem, economic theory has not only failed to contribute towards a broader understanding of political behaviour, but it has in fact perhaps made it even narrower. It lent its scientific credence to the already deeply entrenched reductionist perspective of political action, which causes contemporary politics – along with the behaviour of political agents – to be systematically understood and explained on the grounds of a highly questionable rationalistic assumption.

## 2. Criticisms

We have just focussed our analysis on three key aspects which – I would argue – are among the principal causes of the pervasiveness of a rationalistic approach to the understanding of political action: liberalism, cosmopolitanism and the political application of economic theory. All of these aspects, however, have certainly not gone unchallenged and indeed continue to spark lively debates in the

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<sup>3</sup> Such as the notions of *bounded rationality* (stemming from the works of Herbert Simon and Daniel Kahneman) and *rationality irrationality* (advanced by Brian Caplan in his 2008 work *The Myth of the Rational Voter*), which we will subsequently examine.

area of political science and philosophy. Each of them has its own habitual interlocutor within that debate: liberalism is systematically challenged by conservatism; cosmopolitanism by nationalism or patriotism; and rational choice theory finds some of its fiercest critics inside the field of economics itself. We will now briefly examine the nature of each of those debates, to assess whether the correct questions are being asked.

Let us start with the contemporary challenge to liberal theory. Historically, the political – and ultimately anthropological – liberal thesis we have presented above has had to contend with many conflicting political ideologies, but none of which being more diametrically opposed, one could argue, than conservatism. The debate between liberalism and conservatism is surely one whose duration we would be hard-pressed to predict. Despite a somewhat pervasive sentiment (generated in the wake of WWII and heightened by the subsequent fall of the Soviet Union) that political ideologies in general have withered to the point of losing any sway and relevance in the minds of contemporary voters, it seems to be a case of the news of their demise having been greatly exaggerated. Even concerning a country such as the USA, for instance – assuredly one of the bastions of liberal (and neoliberal) faith – there is mounting evidence to the existence of a lively and deeply felt ongoing debate between liberalism and conservatism (Jost, 2006; Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Carney et al, 2008).

The contemporary vigour of the debate notwithstanding, the fundamental reasons for conservatives' disagreement with the rationalist view advanced by liberalism can be, almost in their entirety, traced back to the origins of the discussion. Conservatives reject liberalism's ethical individualism, its belief that all human beings are *equally* capable of self-governance, and, primarily, its "doctrine of liberty of thought and discussion based on belief in the unrestricted autonomy of reason – that is, the rational capacities of individual people – as the sole and sufficient canon of objective truth" (Skorupski, 2015, p. 403). What conservatives find most objectionable about liberalism is indeed the sort of unlimited structuring and creative power the latter seem to afford individual (or even "universal" or "public") reason.

Much of the criticism coming from conservatives regarding liberal theory can then be subsumed in an attempt to refute its political rationalism "which attempts to reconstruct society from abstract principles or a general blueprint, without reference

to tradition” (Hamilton, 2015). This has been the case since Burke’s critical perspective on the liberalism of his time, and is also much the case with contemporary arguments against the liberal theory. The task that liberalism’s political rationality seems to demand would require each citizen to become a sort of *philosopher-democrat* (Vaughan, 2005), something which conservatives perceive to be not only highly implausible, but also ultimately not necessarily desirable. For the latter, human reason – especially in what pertains to political and social existence – can never operate in a sort of vacuum. To create a global virtuous political and social order, or even to conceive of the best direction for one’s individual political action, is not something we can create *ex nihilo*, simply in virtue of the power of human reason; it is, to the contrary, something that can only occur in the presence and with the aid of a certain intellectual and cultural tradition, as well as with the invaluable contribution of the social and political institutions that are responsible for maintaining and actualizing such tradition. Things like family, nationality, religious wisdom and intellectual tradition should not – and cannot – be wiped clean to make way for “pure universal reason”, for they are the guarantee that the in fact *limited* human reason is not misguided, but working in the benefit of the continuity of the nation.

The conservative counterpoint to the rationalistic approach of liberalism is, hence, the key notion of *tradition*, which is grounded in social institutions such as family, community, church, nationality, and so on. Oakeshott, for instance, ostensibly contrasts tradition and habit – the wealth of communally-shared past experience, that should ground our [political] education<sup>4</sup> – with the intellectual near-arrogance of the rationalist who “never doubts the power of his ‘reason’” and for whom “the past is significant [...] only as an encumbrance” (1991, p. 6). Tradition, on the other hand, does not (or should not) reject individual reason, but keep it in check, by offering a point of reference – provided by the accumulated knowledge of our predecessors – and a much needed orientation to its activity. To the conservative, this does not mean that politics should be absolutely crystallized and immutable; as Burke famously argued, “a state without the means of some change is without the means of its conservation” (1998, p. 72). The question is thus not to abolish change

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<sup>4</sup> An education consisting of “an initiation into the moral and intellectual habits of his society, an entry into the partnership between present and past, a sharing of concrete knowledge” (Oakeshott, 1991, p. 38).

and progress, but to have a collective and traditionally-rooted wisdom decide upon it, instead of permitting an abstract, unbridled – ultimately dangerous – individual reason do so.

Changing the focus of our analysis to cosmopolitanism, we will see that there is a certain overlapping of themes between the debate among the latter and nationalism with the liberalism-conservatism divide we have just discussed. That should come as no surprise, however, since “the natural tendency of liberalism is towards cosmopolitanism” (Skorupski, 2015, p. 410), and considering the fact that *nationalism* – its interlocutor – essentially draws from many of the essential aspects of conservatism. The criticisms made of cosmopolitanism by proponents of nationalism – or, indeed, even by those who, not necessarily adhering to the latter, still find serious faults within the former – have fundamentally to do with the universalistic reason that cosmopolitans place at the centre of all human relations.

As rational human beings, cosmopolitans argue, our main political allegiance should be to a *universal community of human reason* and not to accidental aspects such as being born a citizen of a given nation or belonging to a given ethnicity, religion, and so on. To cosmopolitans, the intrinsically and decisively rational nature of human beings should necessarily dictate that the “interests of humanity come first in any conflict between them and national interests” (Audi, 2009, p. 372), and not be clouded by the moral narrowness that almost always ensues from understanding oneself as, for instance, a “patriot”. According to some of its more passionate proponents, cosmopolitanism thus comprehended would in fact facilitate the solution of many of the most significant current socio-political issues, such as racial tensions, ethnic conflicts, human rights issues and even ecological ones (Nussbaum, 1996).

Apart from often considering this to be an overly optimistic, borderline utopian perspective, its critics have significant objections concerning its rationalistic foundation for political existence. Any kind of active and involved citizenship, they argue, decisively relies upon the ability to create some sort of indelible *affective bond* between citizen and State (Williams, 2007) – and, by doing so, to insure a political and social cohesion grounded upon the values of participation, abnegation and solidarity. But the content of that affective bond can only be provided by the emotional allegiance to one’s family, community and country. If we fail to understand this and merely try to create the kind of “citizens of the world” that

cosmopolitanism proposes, we will ultimately be left with citizens “of an abstraction” which “has never been the locus of citizenship” (McConnell, 1996) – and who, due to their lack of emotional attachment for their country, will not be compelled by the urge to act on its behalf.

Lastly, we shall consider the criticisms made of rational and public choice theories, of which some of the most significant – as we already pointed out – often arise from within the field of economics itself. That is certainly the case with the work of Brian Caplan, who, in a number of journal articles (2000; 2001a; 2001b), as well as in his book *The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies* (2008), advanced the notion of *rational irrationality* in order to account for the common decision-making processes of political agents living in democratic polities. By doing so, Caplan attempted to refute the dominant belief in the canonical economic approach to politics: that “the thesis of global human rationality is internally consistent” (2008, p. 114). The assumption that the behaviour of political agents is essentially rational is thus put under scrutiny, one that Caplan argues it cannot withstand. Against it, and to occupy its place, he proposes the assumption that political behaviour is determined by a rational irrationality. What does this mean? The average voter, Caplan argues, is rationally aware of how little his or her vote actually matters in determining the outcome of an election or a referendum on a given policy; by proceeding via a rational calculus, he or she realizes that the actual cost of supporting an ultimately inept politician or a detrimental policy (multiplying the actual cost of the policy by the probability of the voter having a decisive role in determining its approval) is very low. Now, there is often a psychological wellbeing associated with supporting candidates or policies which *feel good* but are in fact detrimental, which greatly surpasses the negligible foreseeable cost of voting for them. Therefore, Caplan states, voters often behave irrationally – voting for politicians or policies which they rationally acknowledge to be potentially harmful – for instrumentally rational motives – maximizing their psychological welfare.

### **3. Reframing the Critique**

After considering the main arguments and counter-arguments employed in the debates we have just considered, it is now time to explain why I feel that those debates have been inadequately approaching the problem, which needs to be reframed in order to be truly understood. There is, as we have often stated and verified, a prevalent rationalistic assumption in the contemporary understanding of political action and decision-making. This assumption, I have argued, is fundamentally due to the pervasiveness of three aspects: liberalism, cosmopolitanism and economic political theory. Even though the critics of each of the latter – as we have also seen – explicitly target the rationalistic nature of their understanding of political behaviour, do so from *within* the very same rationalistic paradigm, which they ultimately – and mistakenly – leave unchallenged. Ironically, the manner in which different the criticisms we have seen are conceived causes all of them all to *brush* upon the issue which should really be at stake, but without ever acknowledging its existence.

Conservatives tend to use tradition as the counterpoint of liberalism's absolute human reason; but their criticism falls short of the mark by failing to explicitly account for exactly *how* the sources of tradition they quote can have a significant and undeniable effect on political action. In that respect, the same can be said for nationalism's critique of cosmopolitanism, even if the former manages to clarify the influence of the aspect we are looking for in a much more obvious manner. Both conservatism and nationalism stress the importance of notions such as family, community (understood here in the sense of Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft*) and country to ensure that the political action of individuals is not only grounded in something tangible, but simultaneously *motivated* and encouraged by it. But what is it that makes these aspects of human life, upon which both tradition and national allegiances rely, so relevant in the lives of individuals that they actually manage to produce an effect in the way he acts and decides politically? The answer is decisive: they draw upon not on the *rational* – in the reductionist sense the word has been used so far – but on the *emotional* nature of human beings.

In *Rationalism in Politics*, Oakeshott makes use of Pascal as a critical counterpoint to Descartes' artificially technical account of the human mind, attributing to him the realization that “the significance of rationalism is not its recognition of technical knowledge, but its failure to recognize any other” (1991, p.

25). Pascal's most famous contribution for common-sense knowledge, however, could equally be used to challenge an aspect of the problem which is just as significant, if not more: *le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connait pas*. What the debates we have examined so far should not have neglected – for, in fact, the very idea of it is implied in their ongoing discussion – is what role do emotions play in the political behaviour of individuals. And I do not mean by this to consider emotions in the same way that Caplan did with the introduction of his notion of rational irrationality. What we have there is nothing more than a critique of the ideal rationalism inherent to economic theory by saying that sometimes disturbing *irrational* factors inhibit standard rational processing. Even though Caplan implies that there is something *rational* about this irrationality, this is still a fundamentally dualistic conception of reason versus emotion that does little to actually challenge the concept of ideal rationality proposed by economists.

The explanation for (political) action that ensues from this reductionist rationalism hinges on what Popper dubbed the “rationality principle” – which, albeit a “good approximation to the truth”, useful as a theoretical tool, “is actually false” (Popper, 1997, p. 177). The unreserved assumption of its veracity, widely espoused in place of Popper's conscious methodological concession, leads to a crucial misunderstanding of some of the most decisive aspects of human existence, as well as of its essence. As Ryan puts it, considering the human proneness to error, the rationality principle provides a poor empirical generalization regarding moral or political behaviour. Furthermore, if it is interpreted in the more narrow sense adopted by many who “claim that rational behavior is common in economic matters but not so in social life generally”, it becomes something much closer to “Max Weber's account of *Zweckrationalität* or [...] Vilfredo Pareto's account of logical action” than a true reflection of the essence of human rationality (Ryan, 2012, p. 576).

As such, and in light of our considerations so far, what we should be asking is this: since there seems to be a number of occasions in which *emotionally charged* concepts have a decisive effect on political behaviour, would not it be possible that *emotions actually play a decisive role in the political process*? Indeed we would do well to go beyond that, for this formulation still leaves room for the dismissal of that role as merely disturbing, misleading and irrational. What we propose to do is to reframe the discussion around rationalism in politics not simply to include emotions

in politics – that would be of little consequence – but to include them in *political rationality itself*. We will argue that the conception of rationality forced upon us by a certain intellectual theory is reductionist and manifestly insufficient to account for the processes of motivation, action and decision-making intrinsic to human life in general, and our political existence in particular. A new notion of rationality is needed in order to do so. A rationality which is neither ideal, nor instrumental, because the human reason we know is genuinely none of those things. This new conception of reason has to be able to encompass the multiple dimensions of human experience and the way in which they shape the very way in the former operates. Only then will we be able to truly understand political behaviour.

## Chapter II – Rationality and Emotion

As we have just argued, there is a widespread form of political rationalism in contemporary western politics that imposes a reductionist – because essentially artificial and instrumental – notion of rationality on our understanding of political behaviour. Furthermore, we have posited that what makes such a notion of rationality at once philosophically illegitimate and politically dangerous is the fact that it artificially excises emotions from mental and social phenomena inherently connected to the political sphere. Since the roots of this malaise of contemporary political thought can be traced back to a very specific conception in philosophy of the mind, it seems both warranted and necessary at this point to suspend our consideration of the specifically political problem at stake, and first present our own conception of how the relation between human reason and emotion can be understood in a much more holistic – and therefore genuine – manner. That is precisely what we propose to accomplish in this chapter.

With that intent in mind, and in order to later successfully redirect the discussion towards its political dimension – ultimately establishing the key argument that emotions play a legitimate role in our political lives – we must begin by developing a concept of “emotion” which is not inherently incompatible with the demands of democratic political life, but that may actually prove to be political in itself. Thus, an examination of the nature of emotions as universal phenomena of human life should provide a valuable stepping stone towards understanding the *particular* relationship between emotions and politics – and lay down the foundations upon which we may ground a coherent conception of a political existence that necessarily involves emotions. Current accounts of emotion and its relation to reason, usually polarized into cognitivist or non-cognitivist, rationalist or anti-rationalist, are largely unable to provide an accurate picture of a problem whose complexity invalidates such polarization. I reject both cognitivist and non-cognitivist approaches on the grounds of their excessive narrowness, and propose to find a more comprehensive alternative.

To accomplish this, some key aspects must be explored: firstly, the connection between emotion and cognition, and the possibility to contradict the commonsense view on emotions as unruly passions that, by definition, are *passively*

experienced by the subject – thus diminishing accountability; secondly, the role played by emotions on deliberation and general decision-making – which, unless the role in question is a disruptive one, still strikes most as a bizarre notion; thirdly, the relation between emotion and action, focussing on the phenomena of motivation and weakness of will (*akrasia*). By the end of the present chapter I thus expect to have established that emotions not only inevitably play a significant (and not necessarily disruptive) role in mechanisms of general decision-making, motivation, and action, but also the legitimacy of that role.

## 1. Emotion and Cognition

The “most notorious point of contention in the philosophy of emotion” – which markedly separates “cognitivists and non-cognitivists” – lies in the possible cognitive nature of emotion (Debes, 2008, p. 2). The conception of emotions as being (in some measure) intrinsically cognitive is an idea that has been consistently advanced by a number of contemporary thinkers – thus motivating the establishment of a *cognitivist theory of emotion* as a prevalent counterpoint to the inherent bias of the customary reason-emotion dichotomy. Robert Solomon, for instance, flirting with and being seduced by what he calls the “strong cognitivist thesis” on emotions, essentially conceives them as being akin to judgements (2003, p. 78). Nussbaum’s *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (2003) also largely subscribes to the view of emotions as “appraisals or value judgements”, which she derives from the Stoics – while dismissing the canonical Stoic thesis that “the evaluations involved in emotions are all false” (2003, p. 4). Concurrently, the so-called “appraisal theory of emotions” postulates that emotions are essentially evaluative mechanisms that enable us to rapidly assess a given situation and respond to it, by providing us with “(partly) preformulated solutions” to the problem at hand (Parkinson, 2004, p. 108).

Its prevalence in contemporary literature on emotions notwithstanding, this cognitive theory of emotions entails a significant problem: in pursuing the worthwhile goal to rehabilitate emotion from rationalistic prejudice, it often succumbs to the temptation of merely exchanging one extreme – that emotions are

*utterly irrational* – for another – that they are a sort of *pseudo-rationality*. Assenting to this over-intellectualization of emotion, as Goldie (2000) calls it, thus traps us within the very dichotomy that we should be trying to overcome; indeed, it implies that the only way to rescue the value of emotion as a legitimate aspect of human existence is to surreptitiously portray it as a sort of mock-rationality – thus succumbing to the same mistaken prejudice all over again. Conversely, our purpose should not be to merely find a way to fit emotion into any ideal notion of “*pure*” rationality, but to question the latter and thus rethink human rationality in a broader manner – one that organically relates it with emotions. There is, undoubtedly, a relation between emotion and cognition. But as much as they are not mutually exclusive, neither is there a mere *identification* between the two. Emotions are not cognitions; they can, however, have *cognitive elements*.

In order to fully support this view I will start by focussing on Aristotle’s work on emotions (primarily found in both the *Rhetoric* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*) and the considerations that such work subsequently elicited. Despite all the more recent work on the subject, Aristotelian theory of emotion, I would argue, provides the germ of a more coherent and holistic view on emotions and their cognitive element. As Kristjánsson notes, recent interest and research on the moral and politically relevant effect of emotion in everyday life has been “propelled by the powerful resurgence of an Aristotle-inspired cognitive view of the emotions”, and many of the ideas being currently discussed “would have sound outlandish prior to this Aristotelian renaissance” (2007, p. 1). His perspective offers a unique possibility to understand the relationship between emotion and action in a way that rescues the former from being construed as a merely misleading influence on the latter – and thus blatantly hindering genuine comprehension of our emotional dimension.

Concerning the topic of emotion and cognition in Aristotle, a relative consensus exists among Ancient Philosophy scholars that the path followed by him was laid down by Platonic tradition. Fortenbaugh, for instance, argues that the inquiry into the relation between knowledge and pleasure in the *Philebus* “certainly makes clear that Plato saw an intimate relationship between emotion and cognition” – even though he ultimately “fails to make [the nature of] this relationship clear” (2006, p. 25). The aporetic conclusion to this dialogue must have caused the echoes of the discussion to endure within the Academy, something which was not seemingly

met with indifference by Aristotle. Making use of the logical resources comprised in what was later – and meaningfully – dubbed his *Organon*, Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* presents what was then a rather unique approach to the study of emotions. First referring to emotions in general – but employing *anger* as a paradigmatic case, he tells us that in order to fully understand an emotion such as anger, the latter must necessarily be analysed following three particular headings: “what is their *state of mind* when people are angry, against *whom* are they usually angry and for what sort of *reasons*” (1378a27-30). To this prescription on the proper way to proceed in the analysis and deconstruction of a given emotion, Aristotle then adds a particular definition of anger, which is to be construed as a “desire, accompanied by pain, for manifest retaliation because of a manifest slight that was directed, without justification, against oneself or those near to one” (1378a36-9).

For Aristotle, cognition is necessarily involved in emotions: if emotions are to have an object (*whom*) and involve *reasons*, they inevitably imply some sort of cognitive activity on the part of the subject. Concurrently, if acknowledging the (manifest) existence of both a slight directed against us or our own and the evaluation of that slight as being *unjustified* are essential components of anger, one could not properly experience such an emotion without the involvement of cognition. In this regard, the same could be said of *fear*, which is defined by Aristotle as “a sort of pain or distress derived from the appearance of a future destructive or painful evil” (1382a28-9). A cognitive assessment that a threatening danger looms is required, on the part of the fearful, for the emotion of fear to be experienced.

But what role does cognition actually play in Aristotle’s analysis of emotional phenomena? Upon first inspection, it appears to be twofold, concerning two important aspects of the human experience of emotion: justification and causation. Regarding the first, and looking back to Aristotle’s definition of both fear and anger, cognition seems to play a definite part in answering the question “why are you angry/afraid?” To Aristotle, the answer could never reasonably be “I am angry on account of a desire for revenge, accompanied by pain”, or “I am afraid because I feel a sort of pain or distress” – even though William James would certainly argue otherwise. But to the Stagirite, such would be simply pointing out the psychosomatic effect of the emotion, not justifying it. According to the Aristotelian analysis, the answer to those questions would be “I am angry because I *think* person A has

unjustifiably slighted me in doing Y” or “I am afraid because I *think* I face imminent harm by the presence of object X or situation Z”. Under these circumstances, and to borrow Aristotelian terminology, the presence of cognition in emotion cannot be discounted as merely *accidental*; it is, in fact, *essential*. As Fortenbaugh puts it, “for Aristotle the thought of outrage and the thought of danger are not merely characteristic of anger and fear respectively. They are necessary and properly mentioned in the essential definitions of anger and fear.” (1975, p. 12)

The involvement of a cognitive aspect in the essence of emotions thus provides us with the possibility for a justificatory account of the latter. But what about causality? Might we infer that the cause of a given emotion, of something we have grown accustomed to perceive as irrational – or arational, in the very least – could be caused by a *cognitive* assessment of the situation at hand? According to Aristotle, the answer is yes. Again making use of his *organa* by discerning between different kinds of causes and seeking a syllogistic explanation of emotional phenomena, it is not only possible but also reasonable to assign the *efficient* cause of emotions such as anger and fear to their cognitive element. Syllogistically, the middle term is the efficient cause, and, in the case of anger, it is the “apparent insult” that constitutes the middle term<sup>5</sup>.

So, we become angry *because we think* someone has unfairly slighted us, in the same way that we become fearful *because we think* that harm may ensue from the situation we find ourselves in. It is our cognitive acknowledgement of an apparent unjustified insult or an apparent impending pain that can be said to be the efficient cause of the emotions there in play.

As one could have expected from the onset, there is a noticeable overlapping between causation and justification. This provides one of the chief arguments in support of the enduring validity of Aristotle’s conception of emotions and their connection to cognition: it is the very fact that there is a cognitive element involved in the causation of emotions that allows for their justification. One of the major problems of the opposing view on emotions – that they are fundamentally irrational and nearly irresistible pulls in a given direction – is the fact that it implicitly denies us the possibility of retaining the notions of responsibility and accountability for “patients” of emotion other than in a very weak sense – in the sense of being the mere

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<sup>5</sup> See Fortenbaugh, 1975, pp. 13-4.

material cause of their actions, for instance, but not their efficient one. Aristotle, on the other hand, believes that when “a man responds emotionally, he is not the victim of some automatic reflex”, but is rather “acting according to his judgement” (Fortenbaugh, 2006, p. 29). By endowing emotions with a certain degree of cognition, his view allows for emotional action (action “out of emotion”) to be not only *intelligible* – it can be justified – but also *intelligent* – it can be grounded on rational grounds.

Obviously, many objections can be raised to the view, and that even within the latter there are a number of nuances that we may be accused of overlooking. Even though most of them shall be addressed in due time, there are some which I would like to address immediately, in order to avoid misunderstandings. First of all, a caveat: the fact that we have just claimed that emotions can be both intelligible and intelligent should not be misconstrued as meaning that we have dismissed our own words of caution and adhered to a cognitive theory of emotion. There are degrees to be observed, and to say that emotions – in light of their cognitive element – can be intelligent is not to say that they are always and necessarily so. This is not an attempt to portray emotion as pseudo-rationality. Even though there are cognitive processes involved in emotions, the workings of the latter do not mirror those of “pure reason” – or would not, if such a thing ever existed. Paradoxically, as far as the traditional perspective on emotions is concerned, this does not, however, rob emotions of their validity or importance – it may actually even *add to it*, as we shall see later.

Secondly, I feel that some objections to the view I proposed can come from the *non-cognitivist* side of the argument on the nature of emotion, presenting themselves in the form of Jamesian arguments or – following the contemporary revival of James’ theory in fields such as neurobiology – those we might dub as neo-Jamesian. Concerning the first kind – which operates under a strong somatic theory of emotion – it would seem that the incommensurability between conflicting perspectives provides little room for fruitful philosophical debate. Given current scientific knowledge, no one seriously still believes that James’ original thesis retains full legitimacy without any sort of adaptation. Yet, if we were to read it in light of what has just been proposed, one might suggest that he overlooked the fundamental Aristotelian distinction among types of causes – thus mistaking material and efficient causes.

Undoubtedly, emotions are accompanied by physiological alterations to our body-state – Aristotle himself acknowledges this in his *De Anima*, when he picturesquely points to the boiling of blood around the heart as the material cause of anger. But even though its existence is required to grant the emotional experience its psychosomatic nature, material cause alone is not enough to fully produce the emotion in question; an efficient cause is needed here, and the latter is to be found in cognition rather than visceral sensations. If we failed to acknowledge the actual threat posed by James' bear and experienced only the physiological effects usually associated with flight-inducing situations devoid of cognitive contextualization, would we really be afraid? Not only is that highly implausible, but even if we did, it would more likely be due to the cognitive realization that we were experiencing an unexplained (and unpleasant) visceral uproar rather than on account of the bear itself.

That being said, I see no reason for the Aristotelian approach to emotions to be fundamentally incompatible with the contemporary rethinking of James' theory. I see them, on the contrary, as being closely related: the former, as we just established, is flexible enough to accommodate the diversity of elements that complexly intertwine themselves to cause emotions, while the latter's contribution to the understanding of what those elements might be and how they associate is surely a worthwhile one towards the clarification of that very complexity.

Some of the more recent developments in theory of emotions have suggested that our emotions can never be fully understood if we try to study them as individualized phenomena, without taking into account the multiplicity of factors – psychological, physiological, and even environmental – that the experience of a given emotion entails. Ben Ze'ev, for instance, tells us that “looking simply at the ‘objective’ nature of the situation” is insufficient to predict the generation of emotions, since any prediction of the sort “is much more complex and should refer to other personal and contextual factors” (2001, p. 4). This seems correct. Overly simplistic accounts of emotions that rely on unidimensional cause-effect relations as the source of explanation for the emotional phenomenon can never come close to grasping the full scope of the latter, and do little more than further deepen the chasm of our misunderstanding on such matters<sup>6</sup>. Once again borrowing the words of Ben

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<sup>6</sup> This temptation to regard emotional experience as a sort of stimulus-response process was, it would seem, further heightened by the advent of the computerized model of rationality – which likens it to a

Ze'ev, "classic definitions in terms of sufficient and necessary conditions are not very useful in the study of emotions" (*Idem*, p. 3).

The Aristotelian approach that we have discussed eludes this criticism through a proper understanding of what an efficient cause really meant for Aristotle. Speaking of an emotion such as anger we could refer to a material cause (the physiological changes), an efficient cause (the perception of an unjustified slight) and a final cause (the desire for retribution). Indeed, following what Ronald de Sousa (1987) says about *paradigm scenarios*, we might even speak of a formal cause of anger<sup>7</sup>. As we have seen previously, it is the efficient cause that can be defined as the moving force behind the change. But that does not mean that whenever the efficient cause is present it must necessarily be *actualized*. The change it is liable to produce may thus exist potentially, but its coming into actual existence does not automatically follow. We could say that even though the efficient cause is necessary for the production of emotions, it is not *sufficient*; and we could even add to that: of the different causes implicated in the generation of emotion, neither of them – taken independently – may be construed as sufficient. Hence, there is a flexibility to Aristotle's perspective that enables it to escape reductionist cause-effect paradigms and explanations, while providing room for an explicatory effort that accounts for all the different personal and contextual factors that Ben Ze'ev refers to.

The actualization of the potential for change entailed by the efficient cause may depend precisely upon those factors: if I am sitting in a comedy club, I may not experience anger due to the unjustified insult directed at me by the stranger standing on stage; but if that same person were to similarly insult me in a different context, my emotional reaction might be altogether different. Conversely, even if I am sitting in the comedy club but there is something in my personal history that has caused me to be especially susceptible to that particular kind of insults – let us say it is a pun regarding my balding head, and that I have been (sadistically) brought up to believe that bald-headed men are sexually diminished – that personal factor may be enough to override other contextual factors and ultimately lead to the experience of anger.

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mere input-output relation, where the input represents a given object or situation and the output our emotional (and automatic) reaction to it.

<sup>7</sup> De Sousa argues that the way in which emotions are culturally portrayed – in literature, for instance – actually supplies us with paradigmatic examples of how to experience those emotions, granting us paradigm scenarios that ultimately shape our perception of the *proper* way to both experience and express them.

There is such a complexity in emotional experience that even when we speak of the cognitive element as being the efficient cause of emotions we cannot assume that we are referring to a simple cause-effect relation; and if we truly understand the subtleties of Aristotle's multidimensional treatment of causality, we certainly should not.

## **2. Emotion and Decision-making**

The realization that, throughout a significant part of our history, the tightly knit notions of deliberation and decision-making have been conceived as essentially rational affairs should constitute no surprise. Common-sense knowledge – as we have already mentioned – has always informed us that the “heart” is a poor advisor, a notion widely corroborated by the rationalism of the Enlightenment. This rationalistic claim, however, has since been systematically challenged by a perspective that argues for the insufficiency of reason – of logic, if you will – to fully account for the process of decision-making. Zajonc, who remains one of the most oft quoted authorities in the study of emotion, cognition, and decision-making, famously argued that “[q]uite often, ‘I decided in favour of X’ is no more than ‘I liked X’. [...] We buy the cars we ‘like’, choose the jobs and houses we find ‘attractive’, and then justify those choices by various reasons” (1980, p. 155). As further studies demonstrate, this process of justification entails a search for information in support of the individual's initial emotional response, in order to be able to internally (and thus externally) portray the latter as a rationally well-founded decision (Pham et al, 2001; Pham, 2007; Yeung and Wyer, 2004). As such, emotional impressions arguably “have a powerful impact on reactions to, decisions about, and cognitive processing of people and objects in our environment” (Herr et al, 2012, p. 833).

That is not to say that reason should here be simply replaced by emotion; as we previously stated, shifting to the “emotionalist” extreme would be as erroneous as stubbornly persisting in its rationalistic counterpart. Instead, what we should strive to find is the middle-ground between both, and seriously consider the hypothesis that while “misguided emotion can be a major source of irrational behaviour”, a forced

“reduction in emotion may constitute an equally important source” of the latter (Damásio, 1996, pp. 52-3).

Damásio’s work in the field of neurobiology – alongside the philosophical propensity of his reflection upon the former – could arguably be credited with securing widespread attention towards the possibility that emotions play a critical role in the processes of deliberation and decision-making. In *Descartes’ Error* (1996), Damásio presents the case of one of his patients (referred to as Elliot) as a paradigmatic example on how our rational and logical ability alone is *not enough* to enable us to make proper decisions – ironically, what we commonly dub “rational decisions”. Following the removal of a brain tumour which caused a particular kind of injury to his prefrontal cortex, to put it simply, Elliot suddenly became a case-study for neurobiology. Up until then a successful man in both business and family life, Elliot’s social existence gradually starts collapsing under the blows struck by poor – sometimes seemingly absurd – decisions. Understandably, the assumption that Elliot’s cognitive abilities have been impaired by the brain surgery begins to surface. But after being subject to a wide array of intelligence, memory and personality tests it eventually becomes clear that his ability for logical reasoning remains fully intact<sup>8</sup>. Even after his injury, he could be said to possess a “superior intellect” (*Idem*, p. 41).

All the more puzzling then, when such an intelligent man suddenly finds himself unable to make even the most trivial of decisions with any measure of *good sense*, as we would call it. Nonetheless, the fact that Elliot was a seemingly normal man “who was unable to decide properly, especially when the decision involved personal or social matters” (*Idem*, p. 43) still remained, and had to be accounted for. To do so, Damásio was forced to turn away from the traditional notion of a purely rational decision-making mechanism and broaden the scope of his analysis to consider the impact of other factors in the way we commonly make our decisions – namely, emotions.

This shift did not happen by chance; during the course of the time spent analysing and interviewing Elliot, Damásio began to notice that he always conveyed his experiences – even the more dramatic ones – with a sort of cool detachment. Not once did he seem struck by the tragedy of his situation, nor in the least distressed by any of the unpleasant consequences it often entailed. Following a

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<sup>8</sup> See Damásio, 1996, pp. 39-43 for a detailed account of such tests and their results.

psychophysiological experiment he was subject to, Elliot himself acknowledged that even “topics that had once evoked a strong emotion no longer caused any reaction, positive or negative” (*Idem*, p. 45). Could his inability to properly make decisions in his everyday life be connected with this *emotional impairment* he seemed to be suffering from?

To answer that question, Damásio and his colleagues decided to put Elliot through another battery of tests, this time focussing not on purely cognitive abilities, but on the ability to correctly evaluate (and respond to) social situations that entail both social conventions and moral values. But even here Elliot responded admirably, scoring highly on the tests and presenting multiple possible response scenarios when thus elicited, seemingly in stark contrast to his performance in similar real-life situations. After the surgery, Elliot had lost his job, divorced his wife, rashly married someone else, divorced the latter shortly thereafter and gotten involved with (and been taken advantage of by) some rather unscrupulous characters. All these failings were due to his inability to properly decide when presented with the same sort of social situations he was now responding to exemplarily in the tests. How then to account for this utter dissonance between laboratory and real-life performance?

The key difference, as Damásio points out, has to do with the fact that our *practical rationality* – which, in philosophical terms, is what is truly at stake here – does not simply proceed by means of a rational analysis of possibilities and divergent hypothetical scenarios; responding to tests in a controlled environment fundamentally differs from real life in the sense that, in the latter, decisions have consequences, situations appear within a context that constrains our choices, and we are often pressured into deciding by various circumstances. The very diversity of stimuli we are subject to in real-life situations is beyond what laboratory experiments are able to emulate: tests are merely verbal, whereas life is not. Hence, in terms of actual decision-making, even though someone like Elliot (whose cognitive abilities were proven to be essentially intact – and even above average, in some respects) seems to maintain the necessary faculties to ascertain the situation and envisage most of the available avenues, the process of reaching a sound decision is ultimately compromised. As Damásio puts it, the tragedy of his condition is that, despite being “neither stupid nor ignorant”, “he acted often as if he were” (*Idem*, p. 38).

Concerning this impediment to sound decision-making processes, however, perhaps the most astonishing thing about patients such as Elliot is that not only their ability to decide *properly* is hindered by their pathologically induced apathetic state, but also the ability to decide *at all*. Speaking of another one of his patients, Damásio tells us the story of how he, when confronted with the need to decide between two different dates for his next doctor's appointment, spent something like half an hour enumerating "reasons for and against each of the two dates: previous engagements, proximity to other engagements, possible meteorological conditions, virtually anything that one could reasonably think about concerning a simple date" (*Idem*, p. 195). Finally, Damásio and his colleagues decided to stop him and just suggest one of the dates, admittedly not knowing how long his deliberation would have lasted if they did not.

These extreme cases from the realm of neurobiology can thus help us to better understand exactly how emotions might be involved in the processes leading up to our decisions. The patients referred by Damásio display two chief characteristics that interest us here: i) their calculating cognitive abilities remain intact, and ii) their ability to "normally" experience emotions is barred from them. Two significant consequences follow them, being – I would argue – causally related to each respectively: a) the patients are still able to produce detailed rational cost-benefit analyses between alternative possibilities, and b) they are unable to narrow the scope of those analyses to focus on the more relevant aspects towards the decision they have to make. Upon serious consideration of all previous points, we may begin to realize that the role of emotions in decision-making is deeply connected with the so-called *frame problem*, at the core of which we find the realization that a merely rational cost-benefit analysis may have to consider a virtually infinite number of variables in any given situation. Let us imagine the case of a relatively trivial decision – deciding, for instance, what to cook for dinner: we can begin by taking into account the ingredients available in our pantry, proceed by calculating the number of possible combinations between those ingredients, consider the nutritional pros and cons of each of those combinations, ascertain the caloric intake required by our body as dictated by our level of physical activity during the day and factor that into the equation, analyse the monetary cost of each alternative and ponder it under

the light of the monthly budget, as well as the overall trend of the economy, etc. – thus proceeding nearly *ad infinitum*.

Now, it is fairly obvious that this is not only an impractical way of deciding, but most likely even an impossible one. Human brains are not computerized super-processors able to consider all the variables entailed by a single decision – in fact, not even actual computerized super-processors are able to do so; even the most complex probabilistic models of prediction inevitably hit a wall beyond which further calculations are impossible. Hence, and especially if we consider the human brain's comparatively limited processing ability, it becomes clear that our decisions cannot rest on reason alone<sup>9</sup>. The solution to the frame problem – the problem of how we are able to narrow the field of possibilities entailed by a given situation and focus on the aspects deemed most relevant – must then lie partially within man's emotional ability. Note that the usage of the term “partially” here is intentional: although I would not argue that the frame problem is *entirely* solved by the presence of emotions in decision-making, I would still contend that emotions – in conjunction with other unique aspects of human experience (such as personal history and contextual semantic perception<sup>10</sup>) – ultimately allow us to limit the amount of possibilities perceived as viable in any given decision-making scenario.

But exactly how is this supposed to happen? According to a prevailing view in the study of emotions' effect on decisions, the former essentially control the salience attributed by the deciding subject to the different aspects of the possibilities entailed by the situation at hand. In doing so, emotions necessarily grant different weights to those often diverging possibilities and focus the subject's attention on the more relevant – or viable – ones, thus enabling him to narrow the scope of his deliberation<sup>11</sup>. By framing the problem within a manageable amount of alternatives, emotions – insofar they relate to both our past experiences and interpretation of our present context – are actually indispensable elements of our decisions. As Mameli

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<sup>9</sup> For an increasingly comprehensive effect, we could also consider here Ronald de Sousa's argument on how a purely rational creature would be utterly unable to decide between alternatives perceived to be *equally advantageous*, since no *purely rational* criterion would be able to incline it towards one or the other. (1987, pp. 14-5)

<sup>10</sup> A clear understanding of his notion of *contextual semantic perception* may benefit from an illustrative example, like the one of a nude model who suddenly feels ashamed of her nudity when she realizes that the artist painting her has begun to think of her not as a mere *model*, but as a *woman* (Ben-Ze'ev, 1998)

<sup>11</sup> “Emotion can endow one set of supporting considerations with more salience than the other. We need emotion [...] to break the tie when reason is stuck.” (*Idem*, p. 16)

argues, “*in no case* does unemotional cost-benefit analysis determine action – choice”; rather, emotions are involved “not only in the preselection phase of decision-making, but all the rounds, including the final one” (2004, p. 171).

In order to explain this phenomenon, and deeming what he calls the “high-reason” view of decision-making too complex to be practical in most scenarios, Damásio posits the existence of a psychosomatic mechanism that enables us to quickly qualify alternatives as leading to either positive or negative outcomes – granting higher salience to the former, and swiftly dismissing the latter. That mechanism is constituted by what he calls “somatic-markers” – emotional feelings that act upon our body proper and that rely on past experiences to inform present decisions. The theory, understood in this fashion, is in agreement with much of the recent philosophical research on the same subject. Evans, while discussing emotion’s effect on memory, concludes that “[a]ny event that produces a strong emotion in us, whether negative or positive, is recalled more easily and more accurately than an emotionally neutral event” (2001, p. 112). Damásio’s work in neuroscience, on the other hand, is able to take this philosophical perspective further through the analysis of somatic-markers and their mode of functioning. Succinctly put, whenever “a negative somatic marker is juxtaposed to a particular future outcome the combination functions as an alarm bell”; but when “a positive somatic marker is juxtaposed instead, it becomes a beacon of incentive” (1996, p. 174).

Now, while one might be inclined to hastily dismiss this account of decision-making as one which relegates the latter to a sort of automated process based on whim or mere “gut-feelings”, that is not the case here – nor does it amount to a Humean enslavement of reason by emotion. The somatic-marker hypothesis does not aim to replace reasoned deliberation, but simply to help understand what role the emotions play in it – for they undoubtedly do. In this sense, we could say that “somatic-markers do not deliberate for us”, but merely “assist the deliberation by highlighting some options (either dangerous or favourable)” (*Idem*, p. 174). There is always room for logical reasoning beyond the occurrence of emotions, but that is not to say that the latter are unable to influence the direction in which the former proceeds – be it overtly or covertly, advantageously or detrimentally. As I said earlier, my intention here is not to paint emotions under a flattering light, while casually overlooking all signals to the contrary. The fact that emotions necessarily

play a role in our decisions does not imply that such a role is always a *positive one*; indeed, if our emotions can do so both consciously and unconsciously, we ought to be careful about the sort of emotions we cultivate.

In order to fully grasp the significance of that latter sentence, we must consider the *origin* of somatic-markers. Damásio posits that most somatic-markers involved in decision-making were probably “created in our brains during the process of education and socialization, by connecting specific classes of stimuli with specific classes of somatic states” (*Idem*, p. 177). They are thus acquired from experience, generated in the interaction between our “innate regulatory dispositions” and *external circumstances* that include “punishment and reward in social interactions from an early age” (*Idem*, p. 179). The philosophical significance of these claims will not be lost on those familiar with Aristotle’s educational theory – which thoroughly emphasises the importance of habit and role-modelling in the education of young children towards (political) virtue. The argument is well known: since man’s alogical (*alogon*) dimension precedes his logical (*logon*) one (*Politics*, 1334b21-3), the education of children should be based on habit rather than on logical reason (*Idem*, 1338b3-5). Hence, at this stage of his life, man’s education should essentially be an education *of emotions*, that enables him to acquire the sort of dispositions – or somatic-markers – that would later lead his decisions in a virtuous direction. Simply put, “young people are at first habituated to love and hate correctly, so that later when they have acquired the ability to deliberate and reflect there will be a symphony between habituated preferences and what reasoning shows to be good” (Fortenbaugh, 1975, p. 49).

More should be said regarding this Aristotelian perspective on the education of virtues at a later point. For now, it would seem that the reason-emotion dichotomy is somewhat preserved, simply having its hierarchical order reversed in terms of temporal generation. That is, however, simply not the case. As pointed out earlier, Aristotle’s moral psychology is much more complex than what we sometimes give him credit for. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, for instance, he describes man’s rational part as divided in two: one part being rational since it is obedient to reason, the other *possessing* reason and being deliberative (1098a4-5). The first is what we previously dubbed man’s alogical dimension, while the latter is the logical one. Being two halves of the rational part of the soul, both these subdivisions could thus be

considered intelligent, insofar each partakes of human reason – albeit in a different manner. While the alogical half “is primarily the capacity for emotional response”, the logical half “is primarily the capacity for reasoned deliberation” – what makes both acts “intelligent, so that both capacities are cognitive” (Fortenbaugh, 2006, p. 54).

At this point, one should not succumb to the seemingly ubiquitous temptation to adjust *human* rationality to a preconceived *ideal* rationality. Instead, one should realize that the very notion of “human rationality” must simultaneously be broadened and individualized: broadened in the sense that it must actually be understood as integrating both reason and emotion; individualized inasmuch it must not be mistaken or constrained by the thought of an ideal rationality – a sort of pure, omnipotent rational potentate that is, in itself, essentially inhuman. The philosophical reading of the somatic-marker hypothesis enables us to do just that, and abandon the fiction that we are purely rational creatures. In fact, in light of Damásio’s research and all other considerations I have just presented, the very notion of a “purely rational” being – that is, one completely devoid of emotion and desire – is paradoxical if translated into concrete terms. Individuals who – like Damásio’s patients – were brought closer to such a state have actually proven to behave less “rationally” – not more. And the reason for it should by now be clear: emotions are a key aspect in the way we make our decisions. To our previous argument that emotions are cognitively grounded, we may now add that they are so because they constitute an *intrinsic part* of human rationality.

In what way, then, can emotions be incorporated into our concept of rationality? How are they able to skew our decision-making landscape towards one end or the other? While the notion of somatic-markers itself already provides us with something of an answer to these questions, further clarification is warranted. Through a combination of innate neurophysiologic mechanisms and the “emotional memory” constructed from our previous interactions with the world, somatic-markers may endow us with *seemingly* intuitive – albeit actually learned – response tendencies when faced with the need to decide. As such, our emotions narrow the field of response possibilities according to our past world interactions and learning experiences. Nevertheless, when presented in this manner, one might assume that emotions only come into play whenever a decision-prompting situation arises, and

hence we should not really speak of a requalification of human rationality, but perhaps only of a collaboration between it and emotion when circumstances dictate. This perspective is, however, still too narrow-minded. The reason why emotions come into play within the field of rationality whenever the need for a decision presents itself is due to the fact that they never were *outside* of said field to begin with. What I am urging here is not a merely convenient and sporadic association between human rationality and emotion, but a true rethinking of the former, thus reaching a concept of rationality that includes emotion not only when we make a decision, but that does so because it incorporates emotion in the very way that we *rationality experience* our *in-der-welt-sein*.

The notion of an *emotional rationality* is particularly fecund in this regard. De Sousa (1987) advances precisely such a notion, and does so in a way that is very much consistent with what we have argued up to this point. Emotions are not to be construed as mere epiphenomena of subjectivity: they are actually key factors in our experience of the world. Emotions, De Sousa claims, “apprehend the axiological level of reality” (1987, p. 303); they work on the grounds of a subjectively-based perception of the value of world objects. When it comes to the way in which we relate to the world, they control salience and attention, and in doing so they are able to essentially filter and reinterpret that very world. As De Sousa puts it, “logic leaves gaps” (*Idem*, p. 197). We can only reason about what we are made conscious of, and it is our emotions which determine what that is.

According to this perspective, human beings cannot experience a “rational existence” and an “emotional existence” separately: the two actually overlap. The relationship between rationality and emotion is hence much more tightly knit than what the traditional dichotomy might lead us to believe. Logical reasoning generally operates over a canvas painted by our axiological perception of the world and its events, which in turn depends on configuration of our emotional substrate. In a sense, then, if “language is the house of Being” (Heidegger, 1975, p. 5) – since the *logos* sets the boundaries of our existence as *in-der-welt-sein* – in akin fashion can be said that “emotion frames our possibility of experience” (De Sousa, 1987, p. 332). Our emotional repertoire works in conjunction with our *logos* to shape the way in which we perceive the world and our existence in it. And much like our emotions “provide a framework for our beliefs, bringing some into the spotlight and relegating others to

the shade” (*Idem*, p. 243), so too can our beliefs (and judgements) drastically affect the cognitive aspect of our emotions – ultimately determining whether we even come to experience some of them.

The mutual pervasiveness between logical reasoning and emotion within this novel notion of rationality is of crucial importance. If human reason and emotion find themselves so intertwined to form what we have referred to as an emotional rationality, what follows is that we surely will not only find the influence of emotion limited to the processes of deliberation and decision-making, but actually extending into the realm of what broadly constitutes the actualization of the two: *action*.

### **3. Emotion and Action**

Before delving into the relationship between emotion and action, we must reflect on the nature of the concept of “emotion” we have been – and will continue to be – working with. We have thus far deliberately refrained from presenting a clear-cut definition of “emotion”. The reason for this is simple: to do so, at the onset of a reflection on such a complexly nuanced subject, is an invitation to reductionism. Nor is it necessary, for our present purpose, to dwell tirelessly on the question of *what* emotions are, and subsequently attempt to posit a sort of “ready-made” idea of human emotion. Instead, we will approach the problem in terms of *how* they operate in our lives, and allow their nature to become gradually and deductively clear.

Emotion makes for a dauntingly broad topic of inquiry for any research endeavour – let alone for one that is not solely devoted to it. Under the umbrella concept of “emotion”, and depending upon nearly personal differences, one might find emotions with clearly defined conceptual borders – like anger, fear, hate or envy – alongside phenomena that are dubbed “emotional” almost solely for lack of a more accurate categorization – melancholia or grief being good examples. As such, the expectation to account for all of them in detail within this chapter would be quite unreasonable. Our purpose will hence not be to exhaust all that could be said on the subject, but to circumscribe it to what specifically concerns man’s political existence. Instead of attempting to comprehensively cover the subject of “emotion”, we will

focus our attention on the kind of emotions that have a greater sway in the processes that are conducive to action: *practical* emotions.

Although the terminology is borrowed from Fortenbaugh (1975, 2006), the notion of practical emotion is rather intuitive. An emotion is “practical” not because of its usefulness, but in the sense that it disposes to action – it is connected with *praxis*. A practical emotion is therefore an emotion whose experience somehow depends on or urges to action. A paradigmatic example of the latter is *fear*. Fear, Aristotle tells us, “makes men deliberate” (*Rhetoric*, 1383a5), and urges to action as to escape or avoid the perceived danger. Although some instances of extreme fear can seem to have the opposite effect – to thwart the ability to act (“I was *frozen* by fear”)<sup>12</sup> – the common experience of fear does indeed seem to have a action-inducing quality to it; if we perceive something as being potentially threatening, and thus begin to fear it, the natural tendency would be not to wait for it to make good on the threat, but to *act* in order to avoid it.

Another practical emotion worth mentioning is *anger*. The experience of anger is always accompanied by a desire for retribution, to such an extent that it can be said that “a kind of pleasure follows all experience of anger from the hope of future retaliation” (Aristotle, *Idem*, 1378b2-3). It is precisely from this desire to restore the balance of justice previously disrupted by the unjustified slight that anger’s practical nature stems. Contained in its very definition is the quality of an emotion that compels to action, thus making such quality inseparable from its normal experience.

The exemplary cases of fear and anger should serve to illustrate the fact that some emotions are *inherently* connected to action. And while some other relevant examples of practical emotions remain to be explored, I will suspend said exploration until it proves to be pertinent, and return to my previous point: to ascertain exactly how emotions can be said to influence action. For from the fact that some emotions are more easily construed as inherently practical does not follow that none of those which are not are unable to affect the course of our actions. Quite on the contrary, I would argue: they do, and significantly. Any action, in order to qualify so be so named – and thus meet the requirements of agential awareness and intentionality – is

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<sup>12</sup> Perhaps even in these extreme cases Aristotle may provide us with an explanation; for “no one deliberates about things that are hopeless” (*Rhetoric*, 1383a5-6), nor about things *perceived* to be so.

necessarily preceded by and founded upon the processes of deliberation and deciding. It is therefore unsurprising that something which significantly impacts upon the latter – as I have argued emotions do – should have an equally noteworthy implicit control over any actions those processes eventually lead up to. What I will be addressing here, however, is not merely the *indirect* influence of emotions on the way we act, but their actual presence in virtually every step of the mechanism of action – including the final one.

This mechanism of action, much like what happens with the processes of decision-making, tends to be traditionally thought of and described in excessively rationalistic terms. The anecdote is familiar: faced with a variety of alternatives, the agent rationally considers the situation, conducts a logical cost-benefit analysis of each possibility and thus concludes which is the more advantageous one, enabling him to then act upon that rationally informed judgement. Now, even if one chose to overlook all that has been previously argued regarding the role of emotions in these processes, one must still concede that this description, however neat and appealing it may sound, does not stand the test of empirical verification in a crucial way: it contradicts the experience of *akrasia*, or “weakness of the will”.

### 3.1. *Akrasia, motivation, and emotion*

*Akrasia* is important because it evidences aspects of the mechanism of action which we might otherwise come to conveniently disregard. Regardless of its philosophical roots, the everyday experience of *akrasia* was probably best captured not by a philosopher, but by a poet, Ovid: “*video meliora, proboque, deteriora sequor*”<sup>13</sup> he tell us, thus reflecting something which most of us have, one time or the other, been forced to retrospectively concede. This poetic description may, following Goldie’s characterization, be subsequently divided into the two main forms of the phenomenon: *last-ditch akrasia* – in “cases where, having deliberated, we decide to do something, and then either fail to do that thing or do something else instead” – and *impetuous akrasia* – in “cases where, without having deliberated, we rush into doing something which, if we had deliberated, we would not have done” (Goldie, 2000, p. 111). In both instances, however – be it prospectively or retrospectively –

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<sup>13</sup> “I see the what is better, and approve, but follow what is worse” (*Metamorphoses*, VII, 20)

there seems to be a gap between whatever rational assessment we make of the situation before us and the course of action we ultimately select. Even (hypothetically) conceding that the processes of deliberation and decision-making involved were completely rational (in the purely *logical* sense of the word), logic cannot be the one to bridge that gap – *akrasia* would not exist otherwise. Therefore, it is towards emotion – or rather, towards an emotional rationality – that we must look to find the answer to what happens between the time when we weigh the pros and cons of the available alternatives and the moment we actually follow through with one of the latter.

When it comes to the mechanism of action, that final stage we have been alluding to – the gap left to bridge after deliberation takes place – is intimately connected with *motivation*. That our actions are motivated is fairly obvious, and what they are motivated *by* is an essential component of their intelligibility – inasmuch our motives can be used to ascertain whether those actions were justified or otherwise. But in accepting the commonplace that all our actions must have reasons we seem to have mistaken the meaning of the sentence: although the term “reasons” here stands for “motives”, the wording has perhaps misled us into commonly assuming that they can only be *purely rational* ones. In truth, our reasons are not always rational – nor are they even guaranteed to be *reasonable*.

To understand what I mean by this, let us consider the notions of belief and desire. Both are usually perceived as key factors at the heart of intentionality, and are consequently considered to play a significant motivating role in our actions. A simple illustration of this would read as follows: faced with a situation X, I act in a manner A because my assessment of X has led me to *believe* that A is the more advantageous option and I thus *desire* to attain the benefits implicitly promised by A – or, to put it negatively, avoid the harm entailed by the remaining alternatives of B, C and D. This perspective on motivated action remains, however, not only reductionist but also somewhat naive. In order to fully capture the essence of intentionality and motivation, “feelingless beliefs and desires are not enough” (Goldie, 2000, p. 19); granted, beliefs and desires are normally involved in the mechanism of action, but not in such an exceedingly logical fashion. Even though their workings thus described may provide us with a rough outline of the structure of action, they also paint an inaccurate picture of *motivated* action. Successful motivation – not

necessarily reasonable or morally proper, but *effective* – I will argue, cannot occur in the absence of emotions<sup>14</sup>.

In order to justify this claim, let us retrieve the problem of *akrasia*, in the way it is ordinarily experienced. It would seem, on the grounds I have just expounded, that it is our misguided conviction that rational beliefs are sufficient motivating factors of action that grants the experience of *akrasia* its frustrating nature. When faced with a dilemma, and although we may indeed acknowledge option A as the logically preferable one, that rational acknowledgement can prove insufficient to make us ultimately choose option A – instead choosing option B, for instance, which we had just concluded to be less advantageous than A. The systematic verification of this kind of behaviour in our everyday lives is precisely what justifies the characterization of *akrasia* as a weakness of the will, in the sense that – in keeping with Ovid’s formulation – even though we may rationally acknowledge what is “best”, and thus will to do it, we end up doing what is worse. All things considered, it does indeed appear that our will is to blame here, for not making us to necessarily adhere to our rational assessment and otherwise allowing some sort of whim to lead us astray.

Regardless of appearances, however, there is an illegitimate logical leap inherent in this sort of reasoning: the fact that we rationally acknowledge something to be “what is best” – that we believe it to be so – does not necessarily entail that the latter shall be the object of our will<sup>15</sup>. Paraphrasing Kant, should human will be perfect, we would have no need for something like a categorical imperative founded upon pure reason; our will would simply be in perfect consonance with what is rationally best. But that is not the case. Our will is imperfect, essentially because it is, in part, cognitively impenetrable. Even though we can rationally determine what we should [ideally] will, we cannot likewise absolutely determine what we actually do. And if that is the case, then perhaps *weakness* of the will is not the most accurate description of the phenomenon, as opposed to a *misdirection* of the will – the

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<sup>14</sup> As Marni states, beliefs about what is rationally appropriate “do not exert any motivational force on decision-making unless they can trigger emotional feelings that motivate one to choose according to the content of these beliefs” (2004, p. 171)

<sup>15</sup> The issue at play here can arguably be subsumed into the debate between internalism and externalism concerning the motivation for action. Bernard Williams’ perspective on the necessity of internally motivating factors for action – and the insufficiency of external (or objective) factors such as beliefs or judgements – would constitute the correlate of our perspective within said debate. For a more in-depth discussion, see Williams, 1995, pp. 35-45, and Williams, 1981, pp. 101-113.

grounds for which can never be fully understood without first coming to terms with the nature of emotions and their pervasiveness within the mechanism of action.

Emotions, as previously argued, come into play not only in the decision-making process (controlling both attention and salience) but also – and significantly – in the space between our logical cost-benefit analysis of the problem and the very concrete action we are ultimately agents of. This space, as I also previously pointed out, is the locus of motivation, and hence the assertion that when time comes to take action, the role of emotions is an inherently motivating one. Recent studies on the relation between emotion and motivation have acknowledged the “special status of emotions as drivers of behaviour”, arguing that emotions motivate behaviour in the short and long terms, and that although cognitive appraisals are necessary to the process, “alone they are insufficient” – inasmuch emotions “have impact over and above the cold cognitions that accompany them” (Passyn & Sujana, 2006, p. 588). But what kind of insight does this – in conjunction with our brief analysis of the problem of *akrasia* – provide us regarding the nature of emotion’s relationship with action? Succinctly put: how exactly do emotions motivate our action?

Naturally, any attempt at an answer would be disingenuous unless it consequently followed what our previous exploration of the somatic-marker hypothesis. What the latter posits, basically, is that emotions – along with the bodily feeling of emotions – may cooperate with our memory of past life and learning experiences in order to prompt feelings of “comfort or discomfort toward evaluative propositions” (Greenspan, 1993, p. 14). This *projective* experience of either comfort or discomfort – in the sense that the actual feeling operates as a symbol of potential future pain or pleasure associated with the imagined actualization of the evaluative propositions in question – often operates at a subliminal level, be it because the experience of those feelings eludes full conscious awareness on the part of the agent or because the underlying and retrospective reasons for those feelings to be associated with that particular situation are also found at a subconscious level – or even both.

Emotions can hence be said to operate as motivating reasons for action, seeing as they may implicitly “serve as rewards or punishments for their agents [...] by ‘registering’ evaluations in positive or negative affect” (*Idem*, p. 80). Naturally, that is not to say that emotions fully replace beliefs and judgements within the

mechanism of action, but simply that any judgement or belief is made much more motivationally significant through its association with emotion. This association can then work in both a positive manner – connecting comfort with one alternative and thus endowing it with greater subliminal desirability – and a negative one – linking discomfort with another, therefore making it less prone to ultimately be selected.

The way in which emotion influences action can hence be divided it into two different modalities, one being positive and the other negative – or, in keeping with the mechanical analogy of the “push from behind” often used in these instances, the first being a “push *towards*” and the latter a “push *away from*”. Even though the two are not mutually exclusive, and often operate in consonance, the question may arise as to which one is most effective – and even more prevalent – in motivating our actions. Greenspan’s plausible answer to this is that the threat of continuing discomfort is the more powerful motivating force of the two. It is not that individuals lack a hedonistic urge – on the contrary, such an urge is very much present; however, as Schopenhauer puts it, between pain and pleasure the concern with the former often overwhelms the inclination towards the latter<sup>16</sup>. Following this line of reasoning, the *escape from discomfort* view of emotional motivation claims that it is precisely discomfort which “provides a *rational* ‘push from behind’ in the generation of action from emotion”, and that it does so “even if it is not on the tip of consciousness prior to action” (*Idem*, p. 154). This does not entail, as Greenspan admits, that all action is necessarily thus motivated; it does, however, aim to sustain that “action is commonly made more likely by a kind of subliminal reasoning from emotion, as a supplement to judgement” (*Idem*, p. 153).

Emotions claim much of their motivational influence due to their connection with often subtly experienced bodily feelings. That they are able to affect us in this acutely somatic and visceral way is certainly at the basis of the ambivalence that often causes them to be construed as anti-rational: despite the fact that cognitive factors are decisively found at their inception, the actual experience of emotions frequently operates on multiple levels of consciousness – including the deeper, subliminal ones. Undoubtedly, that their “power lies beyond the threshold of full critical awareness” makes them “loom the more threateningly over simplistic notions of

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<sup>16</sup> “Suppose that, with the exception of some sore or painful spot, we are physically in a sound and healthy condition: the sore of this one spot, will completely absorb our attention, causing us to lose the sense of general well-being, and destroying all our comfort in life” (Schopenhauer, 2007, p.7)

rational order” (De Sousa, 1987, p. 24). This, however, is no reason to forfeit our understanding of them – quite the opposite: regardless of our preference, emotions work in parallel to our will, and a genuine comprehension of our actions depends on the acceptance that many of them are a result of the interaction between both will *and* emotion. Nevertheless, and following what has been claimed so far, the observation could be made that, if our emotions are indeed able to operate surreptitiously to influence our decisions as often as I maintained above, perhaps we mistake what we here dub our “will” – or free will – for something else entirely; something which is found not within the realm of free spontaneous action, but rather of predetermined and near-instinctual reaction. Can a sort of *emotional determinism* presiding over our actions be the logical consequence of all that has been claimed so far?

Even though I can begin to understand its reasons, this is an implausible conclusion. To begin with, it is a conclusion that seems to carry an inherent misunderstanding between the notions of *influence* and *determination*. The two are definitely not synonymous; in this context, to influence would be to create [potentially strong] response tendencies. But tendencies are not certainties. Although emotional influence may significantly sway our actions by making some options more likely to be ultimately chosen, this does not amount to determinism – for determinism deals with certainties, not probabilities. Regardless of how strong the response tendencies set in place turn out to be, there will always be a gap between certainty and probability, and within that gap human will can still find room to operate.

Deeply connected with this misunderstanding is another, which likens emotionally influenced responses to instinctual ones. There are, however, ways in which the model of emotionally-motivated action that we have advanced decisively differs from the ordinary notion of instinct-based behaviour. First and foremost, there is a major operative difference between instinct and emotion: when time comes to act, instinct operates *directly* to produce “stereotyped responses to precise ‘releasing stimuli’”, while emotions fundamentally affect motivation; and motivation “can produce quite different patterns of goal-oriented behaviour in different circumstances” (*Idem*, p. 84). Even in biological terms, the connection between emotion and behaviour “cannot be entirely fixed and determinate” – otherwise,

emotions would “simply be reflexes without the flexibility that supposedly gives them their specific evolutionary advantage” (Parkinson, 2004, p. 122). The charge of determinism begins to unravel due to the fact that there is not a strict causal link between emotions and action, but rather an indirect influence of the former over the latter through the processes of motivation.

In addition to this, there is another crucial difference between instinct and emotion. Instinct is, by definition, something innate and immutable. We are born with instinctual dispositions to, for instance, flinch when startled, scratch ourselves when we itch, or withdraw from pain-inducing external phenomena. These instinctual dispositions are innate – they dispense with a process of learning – and are, for the most part, immutable and insuppressible – we can *force* ourselves not to scratch an itch, but we cannot avoid *feeling the urge* to do so. Now, while an argument could be made for the innateness of emotions themselves, the fact is that they appear to be at least in equal parts the product of nature and nurture. Obviously, the debate concerning the seemingly paradoxical nature of emotions as being simultaneously particular (to the individual) and universal (common to all human beings) is one whose length and pervasiveness presently impedes a full exploration. For that reason, we will restrain ourselves to argue for our own perspective on the subject, and assume the aforementioned debate as the theoretical background of the latter.

### *3.2. Paradigm scenarios and the development of emotion*

It is widely accepted, in the contemporary literature on emotion, that there exists a set of basic innate human emotions – or, perhaps more fittingly, innate *emotional dispositions* – such as the infant’s disposition to cry whenever discomfort is experienced or the disposition to exhibit the kind of behaviour that may promote an emotional attachment between child and caregivers (toddlers’ ability to smile and laugh, for one, fits the latter, as does the inclination to cling to familiar adults). These early emotional dispositions, however, can only be matured and refined into “emotions” in the full sense of the term through a process of learning interaction with the external world – inasmuch as the concrete and particular circumstances of that interaction play a decisive role in the way the individual later deems those emotions

to be *properly* experienced. In that sense, emotions can be said to be a product of both our natural genetic dispositions, present at birth, and the character of our subsequent life experience – thus making them markedly different from any kind of instinctual behaviour. Our emotions are partially constructed throughout the early stages of our life and hence can – and indeed should, I would argue – be the object of *education*.

The consequences of this conception towards the charge of emotional determinism mentioned above are significant: first of all, even if we hypothetically disregarded what was previously argued regarding emotion and motivation, and went on to consider the effect of emotion over action to be absolutely binding, there would still not be any kind of *a priori* determinism to constrain our actions – for emotions would still have to be learned before they could have any such effect, and it would be the character of that learning process to ultimately determine the virtuousness (or viciousness) of the subsequently developed emotional inclinations. As such, this would then leave us with a charge of *a posteriori* determinism, according to which our emotions – having achieved crystallization through the learning process – would still henceforth utterly and necessarily determine our actions. But even this hypothetical scenario can too be refuted within the conception of emotional development that we have just proposed: for if emotions can be learned, they cannot be closed to change throughout our life – at least, not absolutely.

To elaborate: as we have previously ascertained, despite being partially cognitive, emotions are not akin to beliefs. They are “not fully open to be developed ontogenetically, through culture and education”, inasmuch as they are, “to some extent, cognitively impenetrable” (the probable “evolutionary ‘price’ which is paid for speed of response”) (Goldie, p. 110). To change an emotion – that is, to change the way in which that emotion is experienced in terms of its opportunity, intensity and intentionality – is rather different than to change a simple belief. Emotions are neither verifiable nor falsifiable through the usual logical channels; indeed, they are “less malleable than beliefs in response to further evidence or to the recognition that further evidence is needed” (Greenspan, 1993, p. 88). None of this, however, means that emotions are *completely closed* to change.

To clarify this apparent contradiction, De Sousa’s aforementioned theory on the existence of paradigm scenarios that ultimately shape the way we experience

emotions may prove particularly fruitful. According to it, “we are made familiar with the vocabulary of emotion by association with *paradigm scenarios*” (1987, p. 182), which can be found in both the empirical dimension of our daily lives (more decisively, at a young age) and in the cultural manifestations we are eventually exposed to (folk stories, art, literature, and so on). By being exposed to the kind of emotional responses to situations in paradigm scenarios, he argues, the child would eventually start identifying and learning how to experience particular emotions.

Now, the Aristotelian influence on this conception is quite clear: what we are dealing with here is fundamentally the mechanism of emulation (*zêlos*) that Aristotle examines in his *Rhetoric*, albeit taken perhaps to new levels of psychological subtlety. Emulation, says Aristotle, “is pain caused by seeing the presence in persons whose nature is like our own of good things that are highly valued and are possible for ourselves to acquire” (*Rhetoric*, 1388a32-3), thus motivating us to attain those good things (e.g. character traits) for ourselves. Applying this reasoning to De Sousa’s theory of paradigm scenarios might help clarify the processes at play: we relate to the individual involved in the paradigm scenario, often attributing him the part of role-model, and emulation comes into effect. Now, looking back at the Aristotelian definition, and since much of this phenomenon takes place at an early age, it may appear unrealistic to assume that a child knowingly identifies the characteristics belonging to that individual and consequently *consciously* strives to emulate them; but that it not to say that it cannot happen at a subliminal level – concerning not only what we would logically deem to be desirable character traits and emotional responses, but all the instances of either of them that the child perceives as being significant to the scenario in question.

This subject will be developed in subsequent chapters. For the time being, however, we can already begin to understand how the nature of our emotional repertoire may feasibly be altered later in life. It now becomes clear, considering the psychological depth at which the process of emotional learning takes place, why emotions cannot be said to be open to change to the extent that beliefs are. Properly speaking, emotions cannot be refuted in the same way as the latter. Unlike propositions, an emotion cannot be falsified by evidence. And even if the cognitive aspect of an emotion is affected in that fashion, there is still no guarantee of actual change in the concrete experience of that emotion. In a sense, then, “[w]e have no

more direct control over the content of our emotions than we have voluntary control over the past situations in which we learned them” (De Sousa, 1987, p. 263). Nevertheless, we retain some measure of indirect control, as we are able to “*regestalt*” those original paradigms. As De Sousa puts it, “[a] paradigm can always be challenged” and even revised “in light of competing paradigms” (*Idem*, p. 186).

Naturally, this is no small feat; indeed, when it comes to the difficulty of significantly changing emotional responses there is little need to provide philosophical arguments, our own personal experiences assuredly bearing testament to the magnitude of the task. The weight of those early paradigms can frequently feel colossal, particularly since our approach to the problem is often originally flawed by the limitations of the method we choose to employ: reasoned argument. There is a culturally ingrained tendency to believe reasoned verbal argument to be effective in actually altering emotional dispositions and responses. Yet, “[a]t the level of the immediate content of emotions it doesn’t help much to repeat, like incantations, ‘This isn’t really frightening’ or ‘There is really no reason to be angry/jealous/depressed/envious/sad’” (*Idem*, p. 263). Indeed, some studies on the effect of emotion in the political process even point out an apparently paradoxical phenomenon: as “individuals mature, they develop a more complex understanding of emotions and endeavor more to integrate emotions and cognitions” (Williams & Drolet, 2005, p. 344). Thus, contrary to expectation, as we grow older we do not tend to rely more on reason, but on emotion to inform our [political] decision-making, and are particularly susceptible to “emotional appeals focusing on the avoidance of negative emotional outcomes” – which further contributes towards the added resilience of established emotional dispositions (*Idem*, p. 351)<sup>17</sup>.

These considerations, as one might have already realized, seem to lead us inexorably towards the contemplation of the necessity of an *education of emotion* and the manner in which such a thing could be accomplished in concrete terms. Following what was argued above – and borrowing Goldie’s words – it would seem

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<sup>17</sup> Perhaps this difficulty is not necessarily a bad thing in itself: considering the role played by emotions in motivation, the fact that they “resist qualification in light of the total body of evidence” (Greenspan, 1993, p. 87) may very well prove instrumental to their effectiveness, since their reduced malleability is only disadvantageous when the learning process that presided over their development proves had less than virtuous aims – and results. If the opposite happens – if the process of emotional learning was conducted in a virtuous manner – the greater inflexibility of emotions may actually prove to be a check against instances of “weakness of the will” whenever disruptive factors should arise.

that “emotions can be educated: we can be taught to recognise, and to respond emotionally, as part of the same education” (2000, p. 28). Indeed, in order to “serve their obvious variety of functions”, emotions cannot be absolutely determined *a priori* – and, if that is the case, “at least some of their structure must derive from the contingencies of the unfolding interaction” between individuals and the world around them (Parkinson, 2004, p 125). For now, however, and despite the importance they shall undoubtedly have in later chapters, let us withhold any questions to do with those issues to focus specifically on the matter at hand. In sum, what is the key conclusion that we may draw from what has been argued thus far in the present chapter?

Firstly, we established that emotions have a cognitive dimension, with cognitive elements being present in their inception and playing a significant role in emotional justification. Even though emotions are born out of a complexly woven net of personal and contextual factors, the fact that cognition features among those factors makes emotions ultimately intelligent and intelligible – thus contradicting the perspective that would disqualify emotional experience for being essentially chaotic and disturbing.

Secondly, and following the ransoming of emotions from the realm of pernicious irrationality, we undertook an analysis of the influence of emotion on the processes of deliberation and decision-making, subsequently reaching the realization that emotions play a pivotal role in those processes – not only because they are instrumental in narrowing the field of possibilities by endowing some of them with a greater salience, but because their ability to do so fundamentally stems from the fact that they should actually be construed as an *integral part* of human rationality.

The concept of an emotional rationality then led us to the consideration of the effect of emotion on action, the latter being the object of our labour in the present section. Concerning this, we surmised that emotion’s influence over the mechanism of action is as decisive as it was over decision-making processes, primarily due to its ability to control motivation – and consequently influence how we act or if we even act at all.

Ultimately, what must be retained is this: if, contradicting rationalistic prejudices, emotions actually incorporate cognitive elements, if they play a determinant role in the way we reach our decisions, if they are instrumental in

motivating us to act – as well as in influencing the way in which we ultimately do so – and being *deliberation* and *action* indisputably political phenomena *par excellence*, then there is only one conclusion can be drawn – that emotions are, in themselves and by nature, *inherently political*.

### Chapter III – Crowds, Publics, and Propaganda.

We have been concerned with the emotional phenomenon as it pertains to our existence as individuals. As it has already started to become apparent in the previous chapter – namely, following De Sousa's theory of paradigm scenarios and all ensuing considerations regarding the process of "emotional learning" – the influence of the social collective upon the way emotions are assimilated, interpreted, and experienced by the individual is far from negligible. In light of this realization, it would be disingenuous to attempt the (regrettably frequent) conceptual leap from individual psychology (wherein the individual becomes an artificially atomised unit, chiefly for the sake of theoretical convenience) and political psychology, assuming that all conclusions of the former are valid for the latter and disregarding the markedly different circumstances between the two. Instead of falling prey to this critical error, what we propose to do in the present chapter is to gradually bridge the gap between those two dimensions, building up our understanding of political behaviour by laying our findings on group psychology upon the foundations provided by our previous analysis of its individual counterpart. Only thus will we be truly able to understand the origin and full ramifications of the political problems that ensue from a limited conception of rationality which chooses to disregard emotion's role in general decision-making and [political] behaviour.

Before we begin in earnest, however, something must be said of transition that we ultimately intend to operate between group psychology and political behaviour, inasmuch as the two are sometimes construed as being theoretically independent. In essence, this is an issue that dates back to the Aristotelian definition of human essence as *zôon politikon*, posited in both his *Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, meant to signify a being which could only fully fulfil his primary function when existing in a community of his peers – of which the *polis* was the ultimate expression. This rightful interpretation of Aristotle's theory, ultimately rescued by Hannah Arendt's *Human Condition* (1998), was muddled by his interpreters (Cicero chief among them), who traded *zôon politikon* – political living being – for *animal socialis* – social animal. In doing so, they blurred the line between what were, in Aristotle's perspective, two different dimensions. It was a misunderstanding between what is human beings' ultimate goal and key element in fulfilling their function

(*ergon*) of acting virtuously – living in a political community which enables them to freely enact their virtues within the public sphere – and what is merely their natural starting point, in which they do not significantly differ from numerous other animals: the inclination to congregate with other individuals of their species, grounded upon a social (or gregarious) instinct.

Although the definition of human being as a “social animal” may fail to accurately convey the higher purpose of human existence as understood by Aristotle, the philosophical debate on this subject has produced a sort of polarization that eventually led to an exaggerated and surreptitious notion that *zôon politikon* and *animal socialis* are indeed conflicting and nearly mutually exclusive concepts. This, I would argue, is simply not the case. Those two concepts would in fact be better understood as reflecting the very same aspect of human nature, and differing only in degree – inasmuch they both seek to convey human beings' natural inclination towards communal life. Taking this into account, and on a first level of comprehension, human beings can indeed be said to be social animals, instinctually driven to congregate with their peers and thus form embryonic societies. Yet, they also hold the potential to become much more than part of a primitive social unit, formed on the grounds of that instinctual drive. Unlike other social animals – and because they are also, simultaneously and decisively, *zôon logon ekhon*<sup>18</sup> – human beings alone have the ability to introduce purpose in the social unit, transforming it into an actual community directed not only by instinct, but by a common intentionality that unfolds into a sense of shared goal.

Contrary to Arendt's analysis of the relation between the two (*Idem*), the notion of human beings as *zôon politikon* does not necessarily contradict their nature as social animals, inasmuch as the two are intimately connected: if the social nature of human beings marks the instinct-driven genesis of the human community, their political nature aims towards its consciously intended *perfection*. Simply put, although we all begin our life as *social* animals, we hold within ourselves the potential – and, in all likelihood, the desire – to evolve into *political* living beings.

Following these considerations, it is evident that one can coherently maintain a belief in the veracity of Aristotle's *zôon politikon* as a concretely significant political concept, while simultaneously acknowledging the existence of an

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<sup>18</sup> A living being capable of employing reason (and speech).

underlying social instinct capable of considerably influencing the behaviour of individuals – even in their role as political agents. With apparent disregard for this fact, however, much of contemporary research on political behaviour tends to focus exclusively on one of those aspects at a time, as if they were separate dimensions of human existence. On the one hand, we encounter studies inspired by economic theory, which assume the individual to be the atomic unit of analysis, and consequently employing individualistic models of explanation – cost-benefit analyses, maximization of utility, etc. On the other hand, studies based on political psychology, that focus on the social unit and the mechanisms of group influence, and are much more amenable to the idea of emotion’s influence upon the political process.

In reality, both are partially right: yes, emotions have a decisive effect on political behaviour, and that effect can be potentially heightened by group dynamics; but logical reasoning and cognitive intentionality also play a significant role – even if many of the cost-benefit analyses that presumably drive political decisions happen only as *ex post facto* rationalizations. Taken separately, however, these perspectives configure a bicephalous approach that tends to yield unsatisfactory results – insofar as the explanations of each are unavoidably incomplete.

The notion of emotional rationality that we developed in the previous chapter presents us here with the opportunity to understand our political existence in a manner that conjugates both its inherent dimensions, thus overcoming the unfruitful dissonance of current models. As citizens of contemporary democratic polities, we are taught to become, conscious and intentionally, political beings. We conceive of our relationship with political institutions as being grounded on logical reason, our responsibility being the reception, evaluation, and rational operationalization of factual information on relevant political issues. But we are also, and still, social animals, susceptible to the influence of group emotional dynamics. And thus we begin unveiling an apparent contradiction within our political condition: as a consequence of our inherited political rationalism, we not only want, but *need*, to behave “rationally” – that is, on the grounds of pure logical reasoning; our circumstances, however, render that desire highly improbable. Unlike the majority of political theorists, our political reality – as we will see – does not fail to reflect this fact, catering to our need with a variety of expedients to both mask and exploit its

unfulfillable nature. The pervasiveness of the dynamics of group influence provides the first of such expedients.

## **1. Group Dynamics and the Crowd**

In examining the issue at hand, there are two concepts one will surely come across, and which tend to be used rather indiscriminately: “crowd” and “group”. Although it could be argued that the semantic differences between the two are negligible, those differences are significantly amplified when one looks to employ these notions as philosophical concepts. Let us then begin by establishing a key distinction: while the word “crowd” represents a rather poorly organised and transitory gathering of people – its etymological origin in Old English (*crudan*, “to press, crush”) attests to this – we will henceforth take the word “group” to signify a congregation of people that is, at least to an extent, infused with some intentionality and implies at least the assumption of a somewhat continued existence. By thus understanding these concepts, it becomes apparent that, when dealing with the influence of the collective on the political action of an individual who is part of an organised and stable society, we should assume we are more closely dealing with a group than with a crowd. Yet, that distinction may not always be so straightforward. Consequently, even though we shall approach the problem by focussing primarily on the mechanisms of group influence, we shall likewise consider the dynamics of crowd behaviour, so that we may later attempt to deduce what the consequences of this combined exploration are for an organised political society.

In order to do so, we must necessarily begin by considering the extensive studies on group dynamics on the part of both psychology and sociology, and which increased in popularity and interest in two very particular time periods: the nineteenth century, following the events surrounding the French Revolution, and the twentieth century, in the wake of both the first and second World Wars. Regarding the first moment, it was the unpredictable and uncontrollable nature of the mob phenomenon that intrigued and concerned thinkers – “a crowd, it was argued, is never far from a mob and potentially very close to an overthrowing force” (Brighenti, 2010, p. 292); concerning the latter, it was the apparent manipulation of

an entire people by means of propaganda and suggestion that seemed to reduce the rationalistic view of the human psyche to tatters and warrant reasonable explanation. In both instances, what proved to be truly surprising, perhaps even shocking, was the fact that not only the ignorant and uneducated – those who could be plausibly excused for “not having known better” – took part in such events; indeed, even otherwise educated, cultured and “rational” individuals seemed to fall prey to the wave of enthusiasm generated by the group, completely forsaking their better judgement in the process. At first glance, it was the very edifice of luminous rationality, erected by the Enlightenment, which was frighteningly under threat. Ultimately, this sort of group dynamics presented an opportunity to challenge the rationalistic take on human nature, on the grounds of its limitations – and that is precisely why it should interest us.

There are, before we proceed, two caveats that must be made: firstly, it is obviously impossible to exhaust all that has been written of the subject of group psychology and on the study of the so-called “crowd mind” in this chapter<sup>19</sup>. As such, we will focus on those contributions which are clearly significant in light of our goal in terms of political philosophy, and intentionally forego the consideration of others which, despite relevant from the standpoint of psychology – such as Jacob L. Moreno’s contributions towards group psychotherapy, for instance – were not found pertinent within the scope of our analysis.

Secondly, even though group dynamics was a scientific hot-topic in the two time periods mentioned earlier, one whose relevance lasted well into the 1980’s (due, in part, to the interest around propaganda techniques during the Cold War), contemporary work on the matter has drastically shifted its focus. A review of the literature now being produced on the subject predominantly yields results which have little in common with the work of its pioneers – who were mainly concerned with the rationally regressive and contagious effects of group dynamics – and actually proceed in the opposite direction: the possibility of a *wisdom of the crowds*. This much more optimistic outlook, whose central argument is that the collective wisdom of reasonable individuals can (and often does) exceed that of purported experts on the matter being discussed, naturally proves much more palatable for an

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<sup>19</sup> For a more comprehensive and genealogical view of the subject, see Serge Moscovici’s *The Age of the Crowd* (1985) and Jaap Van Ginneken’s *Crowds, Psychology, and Power* (2006).

understanding of politics which strives to view the latter almost exclusively as a reasoned activity, and is perhaps thus justified in its contemporary prevalence<sup>20</sup>.

But despite this current trend towards an emphasis on the collective rationality of the crowd – which has found its way into common-sense knowledge through more mainstream sources such as James Surowiecki’s *The Wisdom of the Crowds* (2004), Cass Sustein’s *Infotopia* (2005), or Jeff Howe’s *Crowdsourcing* (2009) – I find at least two compelling reasons to take a step back and consider the alternative, and supposedly dated, approach to the phenomena of group dynamics: for one, the motion towards “crowd wisdom” seems to almost entirely disregard the kind of emotionally-charged and potentially dangerous effects of the crowd mind, by placing its focus somewhere else entirely – the purely epistemic and probability-based benefit of reasoned collaboration between large numbers of individuals; on the other hand, the same contemporary circumstances that proponents of crowd wisdom advance as the conditions for the latter’s great promise – mass media, widespread internet access, participation in social networks, etc. – can just as feasibly be construed as potentially widening the scale of the pernicious effects of group dynamics.

### *1.1. The nature of the crowd*

With these caveats in mind, if one were to recover the study of group behaviour prior to its shift towards crowd wisdom, Gustave Le Bon’s seminal work *La Psychologie des Foules* (1905) should be the starting point. In it, he begins by arguing that a crowd is not defined by the casual simultaneous coexistence of a certain number of people in a given place, but the fact that that group of individuals has somehow managed to develop a sort of “collective mind” (1905, p. 18). The participation of the individual in that transitory collective mind, which necessarily implies the “vanishing of conscious personality and the orientation of feelings and thoughts in a determinate direction” (*Idem*, p. 18), has significant consequences: his suggestibility increases exponentially, his intellectual abilities are diminished, his critical thinking is dimmed – and his credulity consequently increased. He becomes

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<sup>20</sup> Examples of this prevalence include Surowiecki (2004), Sustein (2006), Herzog & Hertwig (2009), Rauhut & Lorenz (2011), and Kremer, Mansour & Perry (2014), to cite a few.

less patient, more impulsive, quick to judge and even quicker to act upon those judgements. An abandonment of the individual's very individuality seems to take place, alongside a regression to a degree of rashness and lack of critical restraint that both Le Bon and Freud (1922) identified as akin to a more primitive evolutionary state. The former puts it bluntly: "Isolated, he may very well be a cultured individual, but in the crowd he is a barbarian" (*Idem*, p. 22).

Equally significant are Freud's thoughts on the subject, expounded in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1991 [1922]), particularly in what pertains to the crowd's potential relation with its perceived leader. The crowd, Freud argues, should be likened to a "revival of the primal horde", insofar as a human being is not so much a "herd animal" but "rather a horde animal, an individual creature in a horde led by a chief" (pp. 154-5). This leader of the primal horde (the father or the chief) represented for Freud a departure from group psychology into individual psychology, to the extent that he [the primal leader], "at the very beginning of the history of mankind, was the 'superman' whom Nietzsche only expected from the future" (*Idem*, p. 156). Following Freud's analysis, even in more complex and organized groups (such as the Church or the army, the examples provided by him) there is a remnant of the group dynamics of the primal horde: within the former, the "illusion that the leader loves all of the individuals equally and justly" is simply an "idealistic remodelling of the state of affairs in the primal horde, where all of the sons knew they were equally *persecuted* by the primal father, and *feared* him equally" (*Idem*, p. 157).

The depth of this analysis was furthered by Adorno's interpretation, driven and informed by the rise of fascist and totalitarian regimes leading up to the Second World War. In his essay *Freudian Theory and the Pattern of Fascist Propaganda*, Adorno notes that Freud, despite being "hardly interested in the political phase of the problem, clearly foresaw the rise and nature of fascist mass movements in purely psychological categories" (1991, p. 134). Freud endeavoured not to demonize the masses but to understand what binds individuals to constitute a mass (or a crowd) in the first place. This is the same kind of knowledge pursued by the fascist demagogue, "who has to win the support of millions of people for aims largely incompatible with their own rational self-interest", and "can only do so by artificially creating the *bond* Freud is looking for" (*Idem*, p. 135). That bond is, according to Freud, of a libidinal

nature, connected with the satisfaction of the primal desires of the horde. And in much the same manner as the latter, “fascist agitation is centred in the idea of the leader [...], because only the psychological image of the leader is apt to reanimate the idea of the all-powerful and threatening primal father” (*Idem*, pp. 138-9). This, according to Adorno, is “the ultimate root of the otherwise enigmatic personalization of fascist propaganda, [...] instead of discussing objective causes” (*Idem*, p. 139).

What thus becomes increasingly clear is that, despite the seemingly dated views of thinkers like Le Bon and Freud, there are some aspects of their analysis of the crowd phenomenon which undoubtedly retain their validity even when considering a more evolved political community. What William McDougall – another key author in the study of the crowd mind phenomenon – dubs the principle of “primitive sympathy” (1927, p. 25), is a good example of this. “In the crowd”, he illustrates, “the expressions of fear of each individual are perceived by his neighbours; and this perception intensifies the fear directly excited in them by the threatening danger” (*Idem*, p. 25). Now, this is certainly true regarding the experience of panic in a crowd faced with an impending disaster; but it is equally true concerning a nation’s perception of the danger posed by a nationwide terrorist threat or a looming financial crisis.

Another instance of the presence of crowd dynamics within contemporary political societies is the argument of the crowd’s intellectual inferiority. Le Bon’s original argument is that the crowd, inflicting a metaphorical evolutionary regression upon the individuals who comprise it, is always – and necessarily – “intellectually inferior to the isolated individual” (1905, p. 23). The reason for this “low order of intelligence”, McDougall argues, is that “that the ideas and reasonings which can be collectively understood and accepted must be such as can be appreciated by the lower order of minds among the crowd” (1927, p. 41). While this may at first sound like an excessively abstract description of the phenomenon, one can translate it into concrete political terms: practically and realistically speaking, the issues which the majority of the citizens of contemporary polities are able to comprehend and politically act upon are either few in number or have to be simplified to the point of nullifying the actual political impact of their public consideration. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the average citizen is unintelligent; more often than not, it simply means that the issue in question requires an in-depth specific

knowledge which is not widely available, and thus can only be fully understood by the experts in a given field – a problem to which we will return shortly.

In addition to these two aspects, there is a third one that has a direct effect over the interaction between emotion and logical reasoning. It is a consequence of group dynamics that the individual experiences a diminishing in his sense of personal responsibility. When taking part in a collective, “[t]he weight of responsibility that would be felt by any one man, deciding or acting alone, is apt to be divided among all the members of the group” (McDougall, 1927, p. 42). But this does not simply imply the more obvious consequences of an increased impulsiveness and decreased inhibitions – that “violence of feelings” (Le Bon, 1905, p. 33) so typical of crowd behaviour and found at the basis of that sort of rash collective actions for which no member of the crowd feels individually responsible, even though they undeniably took part in them. This decreased sense of responsibility – particularly when applied to the analysis of political action – also has a bearing over the very way in which the individual deploys his critical instruments.

Under these conditions – that is, when he feels part of a group – “the attention and care devoted by each man to the task of deliberation, observation, or execution, are less keen and continuously sustained” (McDougall, 1927, p. 43). Each individual in the groups trusts in the critical check provided by the judgement of the individual next to him, and thus decreases the incisiveness of his own consideration of the matter at hands. So long as the latter presents some degree of plausibility and does not seem to be rejected by the majority of the group, the individual feels inclined to add his assent to the general evaluation. It is easy to understand, however, that if every individual in the group does exactly that, the critical ability of the group as a whole is necessarily less than that of the isolated individual.

This phenomenon, discussed in abstract terms by classic psychologists such as McDougall, is corroborated by the famous social experiment conducted by Solomon Asch in the 1950’s (and by similar ones that followed it). Succinctly described, the experiment consisted in assembling a group of seven to nine college students and informing them that they will be comparing the lengths of lines. They are then showed two large white cards, one of which displays the single vertical black line whose length is to be matched, and the other three vertical lines of various lengths. They are then asked to choose the one that that matches the length of the line

on the other card. One of the three actually is of the same length, while the other two are substantially different (Asch, 1955). What makes it a social experiment, however, is the fact that all members of the group except one – the actual experimental subject – were previously instructed to provide unanimous incorrect answers at certain points. Being preceded by the realization of this unanimity, the answer provided by the subject could then be evaluated in terms of group influence. “Two alternatives were open to the subject”, Asch describes; “[h]e could act independently, repudiating the majority, or he could go along with the majority, repudiating the evidence of his senses. Of the 123 put to the test, a considerable percentage yielded to the majority” (*Idem*, p. 3). Despite the fact that subjects taking the same test under ordinary circumstances were shown to make mistakes in less than one percent of their selections, that percentage increased to an average of 36.8 when exposed to erroneous unanimous group responses – ranging from individuals that were “completely independent and never agreed with the erroneous judgments of the majority” to others who “went with the majority nearly all the time” (*Idem*, p. 4).

When interviewing the subjects upon the completion of the experiment – and after clarifying their true role in it – Asch collected some very interesting replies regarding the reasons for the subjects’ behaviour. Among those who consistently agreed with the error of the majority, there were some that simply came to the conclusion that they were wrong, and the group was right. Others rationalized their behaviour by claiming that they did not want to spoil the results with their disagreement. But the truly remarkable reply – at least, regarding our present purpose – was that of those who admitted to having concluded early on that the majority was either sheepishly following the first responder or simply being the victim to an optical illusion, but still found themselves unable to break the trend when prompted to decide. This is an eloquent illustration of how the influence of the group can widen the gap between logical reasoning and emotional response, with the latter prevailing over the former virtually in the same way it does in instances of akratic behaviour.

The replies provided by those who managed to remain independent from the majority’s direction of response are also of interest here. “The most significant fact about them”, Asch says, “was not absence of responsiveness to the majority but a capacity to recover from doubt and to re-establish their equilibrium” (*Idem*, p 4). It is

important to note that what set them apart from those who were utterly swayed is not that they were impervious to group influence, quite the contrary: that influence was clearly and almost palpably felt. Their confidence was admittedly shaken by the group's response. Self-doubt was introduced in the equation, and their judgement called into question. All those aspects of what is definitely a relatable human emotional experience were present: the insecurity produced by the realization of having a dissonant view of the matter, the discomfort caused by having to express that view to a group of people in blatant disagreement with it, and an eagerness to be accepted by the group that is a by-product of the human being's social instinct. In the end, what made a difference for those individuals was not the fact that they were in possession of more information or had a greater ability to logically reason about the problem – some of those who ultimately agreed with the group actually *knew* that the answer was wrong – but the fact that they had a greater ability to manage the emotions aroused by the interaction with the group. They had, to introduce a notion that we will return to later on, a greater *emotional vigour*.

### 1.2. *The invisible crowd and crowd symbols*

Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* (1978) remains perhaps one of the most philosophically significant works on the intricate and often unspoken relationship between group dynamics and the political sphere. Although it would be difficult to deconstruct here the myriad of symbolically pregnant notions employed by Canetti in the latter, there are a few aspects of his analysis that merit definite consideration. For one, and despite the fact that many before him had studied the phenomenon of the crowd in terms of its nature and how the latter unfolds, few had attempted to understand its origins at a causal level. Canetti's understanding of the *raison d'être* of the crowd, which famously opens the book, is therefore one of those aspects that deserve our attention: "[t]here is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown" (1978, p. 15). This nearly pathological albeit deeply existential fear of being touched – manifested in things like our need for the protection of clothes and secure housing, as well as our aversion to being touched by strangers when walking down a busy street – is, almost paradoxically, what motivates our inclination to congregate in crowds. It is "only in a crowd", Canetti states, "that man can become

free of this fear of being touched”, and the “only situation in which the fear changes into its opposite” (*Idem*).

In a dense crowd, where every individual body is pressed against the next, the fear of being touched transforms into the security of the feeling of physical communion, “as though everything were happening in one and the same body” (*Idem*, p. 16). This “reversal of the fear of being touched”, as Canetti puts it, “belongs to the nature of crowds”, and is at the heart of its seemingly magnetic appeal. Contrary to much of the work that preceded him, Canetti therefore allows us to begin understanding the crowd as something that is not simply the result of excitatory circumstances – a popular grievance, a political injustice, or even the work of a so-called rabble-rouser – but rather an answer to one of human beings’ more deeply-seated ontological anxieties. As such, the phenomenon of the crowd, along with the group dynamics it implies, should be regarded as a far more ubiquitous and intrinsically existential human fact than we are perhaps used to conceding.

Labouring under that assumption, and beyond providing us with an ontological argument for the prevalence of the crowd phenomenon, Canetti’s efforts allow us to understand the latter’s true political significance – something which was accomplished through the introduction of two concepts that should particularly interest us here: the *invisible crowd* and the *crowd symbol*. Concerning the first of the two – the “invisible crowd” – what is at stake is the understanding that an abstract notion of the crowd should not be regarded as some novel conception of modern political theory; in fact, the lives of human being have nearly always been marked by their coexistence with invisible crowds. In early human communities, mystical and religious belief commonly professed the existence of the “invisible dead” – the ancestors that had passed away and somehow persisted in a different plane of existence. In addition to being commonly considered a source of influence upon the living, they “were thought of as being together and generally it was assumed that there were a great many of them” (*Idem*, p. 42). This belief persisted throughout the ages and across many world religions, among them Christianity – which added to them the legions of invisible angels and demons. In a sense, these invisible collective entities thus constitute the primordial invisible crowds whose existence and impact is felt by human beings in their everyday lives.

Although some of these early invisible crowds have since disappeared in the wake of the evanesce of the beliefs that founded them, others exist which bear no relation to religion or mysticism and are nonetheless still *felt* by us to be present in a significant manner: the idea of *posterity*, for instance, the invisible crowd of those to come which has today “detached itself from our own progeny and transferred itself to the future of humanity as a whole” (*Idem*, p. 46). And an equally good example is the invisible crowd that came to replace demons in the age of science: bacteria. As Canetti puts it, only “a tiny minority of people have looked into a microscope and actually seen them there”; nevertheless, everyone “is continually aware of them and makes every effort not to come into contact with them” (*Idem*, p. 47). As such, it seems that the notion of the invisible crowd is not merely an abstract and theoretical concept, but rather a defining feature of human life in itself. There are indeed crowds which, despite their apparent intangibility, have a commonly acknowledged and therefore undeniable bearing upon our concrete existence. The question now is: can we, as concrete individuals, ever be part of such a crowd?

Now, although the notion of a crowd that extends beyond physical boundaries had already been touched upon by some thinkers before him, Canetti developed it to a much deeper level of significance. In order to answer the question we just posed, we must hence first consider the second of Canetti’s concepts mentioned earlier: *crowd symbols*.

The latter are defined by him as “collective units which do not consist of men, but which are still felt as crowds” – in the sense that each of them “comprehends some of the essential attributes of the crowd” and “stands as symbol for it in myth, dream, speech and song” (*Idem*, p. 75). Providing what is at first glance an unusual and almost poetic list of crowd symbols (Fire, the Sea, Rain, Rivers, Forest, Corn, Wind, Sand, the Heap, Stone Heaps, and Treasure), Canetti proceeds to derive from them the characteristics that make them effective crowd symbols not only in poetic and mythological sources but also – and consequently – in our own minds. We will not go into it in great detail here, but we may offer a few illustrative examples: *fire*, for instance, is “the same wherever it breaks out; it spreads rapidly; it is contagious and insatiable; it can break out anywhere and with great suddenness; it is multiple; it is destructive; it has an enemy; it dies” (*Idem*, p. 77). All this, Canetti states, is true of the crowd. Similarly symbolic of crowds, the *sea* is “dense and cohesive”,

constituted by individual drops of water that “only begin to count when they can no longer be counted, when they are part of the whole”, it “has a voice” and is “changeable in its emotions” (*Idem*, pp. 80-1). And so on.

The existence of these crowd symbols is significant in a twofold manner: on the one hand, they help validate and consolidate the crowd phenomenon in our shared imagination; images such as the sea or the treasure, where strength or value is dependent on a combination of multiple individual parts to form a more significant whole –surrendering individuality for collective existence – can just as easily motivate crowd formation as it does social and political cohesion. On the other hand – and more crucially – it allows us to understand how political entities such as *nations* may themselves function as crowd symbols, while simultaneously functioning as *invisible crowds* of which we, as concrete individuals, are a part.

According to Canetti, there are two common approaches to define a nation: an “objective” one, which attempts analytically identify the key characteristics of nations and thus produce a universally valid definition, and another, which we may call subjective by contrast, that focuses instead exclusively on one’s own nation. The latter – which is at the heart of much patriotic feeling and comes about more often than not – often implicitly harbours the “unshakable belief in the superiority of this one nation”, “prophetic visions of unique greatness, and a peculiar mixture or moral and feral pretensions” (*Idem*, p. 169). It is a view that imbues nations with an almost religious nature: the “germ [for nations to become something like religions] is always latent in them, becoming active in times of war” – their “faith” being precisely that “distinctive character of a nation” which cannot be pinned down by an objective description of “customs, tradition, politics, and literature” (*Idem*, p.170). No member of a nation, Canetti states, ever regards himself as being alone; as soon as he acknowledges himself as the former, “something more comprehensive moves into his consciousness, a larger unit to which he feels himself to be related” (*Idem*).

The nature of that unit and the individual’s relation to it is not founded upon those elements that are traditionally thought of as comprising a nation (geographical location, language, history, and so forth.). Instead, the “larger unit to which he feels himself related is always a *crowd* or a *crowd symbol*”, having many of the latter’s distinctive characteristics: “density, growth, and infinite openness; surprising, or very striking, cohesion; a common rhythm or a sudden discharge” (*Idem*). Nations are

determined by the crowd symbols that define them in the eyes of the individuals that comprise them and which, in turn, end up defining the political existence of those individuals as well. Every member of a nation, Canetti notes, “always sees himself, or a picture of himself, in a fixed relationship to the particular symbol which has become the most important for his nation” (*Idem*, pp. 170-1). As such, even in organized political structures such as the contemporary state, the crowd and its symbols may still play a significant role: on the one hand, it is upon the latter’s “periodic reappearance when the moment demands it [that] lies the continuity of national feeling”; on the other – and as a consequence of the first – a “nation’s conscience of itself” can only be changed when “its symbol changes” (*Idem*, p. 171).

All of the aspects of group dynamics that we have so far deduced from the work of some of the more eminent scholars on the subject should serve as a reminder that the potential for crowd behaviour is ever present – even in complex political collectives. To put it concisely, and once again borrowing McDougall’s words, it becomes increasingly clear that “[t]he peculiarities of simple crowds tend to appear in all group life” (1927, p. 48). Our analysis, therefore, should not cease here. As the modes of collective interaction increase in their level of organization and complexity, so does the pertinence of their exploration in what concerns our understanding of group dynamics within modern political societies.

## **2. Mediatised society and the rise of public opinion**

The most immediate image conjured by the word “group” is, in all likelihood, that of an actual gathering of people, united by some common purpose or circumstance. Much like what we have just discussed regarding Canetti’s notion of invisible crowds, however, a group does not necessarily have to be understood in this concrete fashion. Its nature can be much less palpable: a religious community, a political party, a professional association and so on, all constitute collectives which are able to create and maintain the dynamics of group influence without requiring the permanent coexistence of its members in the same physical space. By endowing individuals with a clear set of ideals to pursue, role-models to emulate, or expectations to meet, and by periodically reinforcing them, this kind of group has

always been – at least, to some extent – able to virtually reproduce the conditions and the outcomes of the group dynamics characteristic of their more concrete counterparts.

There is perhaps no other time in history where this has been more clearly demonstrated than our own. With the advent of mass media, contemporary society has managed to take the already significant political relevance of group dynamics to an even higher level. Marshall McLuhan's famed "Global Village" does not simply represent the approximation of people throughout the globe via immediate communication and information channels; it represents also the possibility to introduce group dynamics at a much greater scale.

This happened progressively, and in parallel with changes in the way in which the political elites of modern democracies reached out to the electorate. The impact of mass media such as newspapers on the interactions between individuals and political actors and institutions, for instance, had already been acknowledged by such early theorists of group psychology as Gabriel Tarde – namely, in his *L'Opinion et La Foule* (1916), which later came to deeply influence the work of Le Bon. At that point in time, and particularly later with the introduction of radio and the broadcasting of political speeches, citizens' political existence became increasingly dependent upon mass media. As this situation evolved to include even wider-ranging communication pathways – such as television and the internet – the politics of western democratic polities not only became mediated, but increasingly *mediatised*. The distinction is significant within political communication theory: *mediated politics* simply refers to a situation "in which the media have become the most important source of information and vehicle of communication between the governors and the governed" (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 230). In other words, "people depend on the media for information about politics and society [...], just as politicians and other powerful elites depend on the media for information about peoples' opinions and trends in society, and for reaching out to people" (*Idem*).

*Mediatized politics*, on the other hand, is a significantly more complex concept, and one that bears considerably greater political consequences. Perhaps one of the most currently debated topics in political communication theory, the notion of mediatization (or mediatization, as it is sometimes also spelled) is the subject of many significant contemporary studies in the field (McQuail, 2006; Strömbäck,

2008; Lundby, 2009; Deacon & Stanyer, 2014; Strömbäck & Esser, 2014; Veron, 2014) – all of which contribute to make it an “influential new concept that places the media at the centre of all kinds of important cultural, political, and social developments” (Deacon & Stanyer, 2014, p. 1032).

A complex process, the mediatisation of politics is notably defined by Strömbäck as encompassing four key phases: the *first phase* is accomplished when “the mass media come to constitute the most important source of information and channel of communication between citizenry and political institutions and actors” (2008, p. 236) – in other words, when politics become mediated; the *second phase* happens when media become “independent from governmental or other political bodies and, consequently, have begun to be governed according to media logic, rather than according to any political logic” (*Idem*, pp. 236-7)<sup>21</sup>; the *third phase* takes place when the media “have become so independent and important that political and other social actors have to adapt to the media, rather than the other way around” – rendering “media considerations an increasingly integral part of even the policy-making processes” (*Idem*, p. 238); finally, the *fourth phase* is attained when political and social actors “not only adapt to the media logic and the predominant news values, but also internalize these and [...] allow the media logic and the standards of newsworthiness to become a built-in part of the governing processes” (*Idem*, pp. 239-40). The mediatisation of politics can thus be succinctly described as the process through which the traditional view on the subservience of media to politics is gradually inverted, with the latter possibly coming to be dependent on the former, and even inherently shaped by its agenda and specific logic.

This phenomenon naturally bears significant consequences for the individual’s action and interactions with other political actors within the public sphere. For as the latter gradually comes to be dominated by modern media – and thus produces a society that is in itself mediatised – the classically pivotal concept of political persuasion is forced to reshape itself and give rise to an equally “mediatised

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<sup>21</sup> *Media logic* is defined here as the specific process through which the media present and transmit information, marked by the dominance of “news values and storytelling techniques the media make use of to take advantage of their own medium and its format, and to be competitive in the ongoing struggle to capture people’s attention”; *political logic*, on the other hand, focuses on “collective and authoritative decision making as well as the implementation of political decisions”, encompassing both a “policy dimension” – the attempt to address socio-political problems via political and legislative means – and a “process dimension” – the process of securing official and collective acceptance of the proposed program of action (Strömbäck, 2008, p. 233).

rhetoric” (Fidalgo, 2009). The latter, by adding the media to Aristotle’s triangular model of rhetoric – orator, message and audience – fundamentally alters the relations between its elements, and transforms it into a “communicational square” (*Idem*, p. 232). This, in turn, may crucially alter our understanding of what constitutes a political audience in the first place.

Whereas in most instances an audience would classically be understood and approached as a *crowd* – a physical gathering of individuals within hearing range of the orator, susceptible to phenomena of psychological contagion – the audience of most rhetorical processes has been conceptually transmuted by modern media from a crowd into a *public*. And while the latter notion may seem to invoke the image of a less concrete and therefore less psychologically vulnerable kind of audience – a collective of physically separated but somehow mentally or spiritually connected individuals, as it were – it would be a mistake to assume that to be the case. The perceived functional divide between crowd and public when it comes to political communication is, once again, merely apparent. In this regard, we do not find “watertight realities between crowd and public or a one-way path, but a commutable situation of collective ways to listen to a speaker”; in fact – and echoing McDougall’s earlier warning – “every crowd tends to become a public and every public can give birth to a crowd” (1927, p. 8). As such, the public is yet another budding invisible crowd.

The potential to foment group dynamics at a much larger scale, and in a much subtler manner than the one evidenced by the crude anecdotes of the rabble-rouser who spews incendiary appeals for revolution or the minister who manipulates the religious fervour of the desperate, obviously means that it becomes possible to drastically affect popular assent (or reprobation) regarding political players and events, public policies, and so on. But beyond that, it essentially means that the “public” – along with its “opinion” – therefore ceases to simply constitute the prime target of political mechanisms of persuasion to become a *key political instrument in itself*. Public opinion – the once rather amorphous and unpredictable force that democracies struggled to keep in check – has since been circumscribed and focussed by modern media and transformed into a political instrument of influence over the very public whom it supposedly belongs to. In an oddly symbiotic relationship that has been formed between the political institutions and the media on one hand, and

the public on the other, we find that the latter is simultaneously *influenced* and is itself *a source of influence* – all the while being subject to the same kind of group dynamics as those affecting conceivably smaller and less complex groups. This phenomenon is, I would argue, intimately connected to the concept of emotional rationality advanced earlier. In order to fully understand that connection, however, it is necessary to briefly consider the nature of what we call “public opinion”.

### 2.1. *Public opinion*

The prevalence of the notion of “public opinion” is commonly regarded as the result of the emergence, during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, of a public sphere “in which political life can be discussed openly in accordance with standards of critical reason” – the development of which was promoted by the bourgeoisie “in opposition to the traditionalist and hierocratic forms of authority of feudalism” (Giddens, 1977, pp. 204-5). Through that process, public opinion “becomes differentiated from mere ‘opinion’, prejudice, or habit”, inasmuch as the former “presupposes a reasoning public” (*Idem*, p. 205). Consequently, it is often viewed as one of the key socio-political aspects which marked the “division between civil society and the state characteristic of the emerging bourgeois order” – with the formation of a *rational* public opinion being assumed as an effective strategy to ensure successful mediation between the two dissimilar dimensions (*Idem*).

With this key socio-political role in mind, the study of public opinion has been a concern for social sciences ever since the development of the modern press, and even more so with the appearance of mass media – which were found not only to convey public opinion, but also to help shape it. Renowned interwar thinkers such as Edward Bernays and Walter Lippmann hence made public opinion the centrepiece of their reflections on human nature and communication, and there is, I believe, something to be gained from reconsidering their analysis in light of our contemporary reality. As Alan Chong puts it, “the advantage of reading interwar international theory lies in their eclectic appreciation of the power of public opinion and leadership without undue fixation with realist and idealist labels” (2007, p. 615). For Bernays and Lippman, public opinion – and particularly, its volatile nature – could not be simply understood as a consequence of the “public use of reason”, but

rather as a direct result of the combination between the nature of the relation that individuals establish with the world around them, and the very specific type of democratic mediatised society that gradually became the norm during the twentieth century.

Adopting an unidealized conception of individual epistemology, Lippman posits that what “each man does is based not on direct and certain knowledge, but on pictures made by himself or given to him” (1956 [1922], p. 25). While we have grown to believe that it is our analytical rationality which allows us to perceive and accurately interpret the world around us, there are actually more complex mechanisms at play. “[F]or the most part”, Lippmann elaborates, “we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see”. Faced with an often incommensurably complex and volatile external reality, “we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture” (*Idem*, p. 80). Regarding this, Bernays’ own analysis is very much in agreement: the majority of the judgements which constitute the “mental equipment” of the average individual, the main tools one employs in everyday life, come to be “not on the basis of research and logical deduction, but for the most part dogmatic expressions accepted on the authority of his parents, his teachers, his church, and his social, his economic, and other leaders” (1923, p. 62). Stereotypes work at the collective level much in the way in which we, in the preceding chapter – and following De Sousa (1987) – argued *paradigm scenarios* to function at the individual one, and the two are therefore necessarily intertwined.

In all likelihood, many of us would be inclined to deny this view – for reasons of intellectual pride, if nothing else. It seems implausible that one could be so blatantly influenced by preconceived notions and passively accept it. Like most truly significant influences to our behaviour, however, the question is that the phenomenon is not so evidently felt or identified by the individual affected by it. As Lippman puts it,

[t]he subtlest and most pervasive of all influences are those which create and maintain the repertory of stereotypes. We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception (1956, pp. 89-90).

Now, if this reliance on pre-established judgements – stereotypes, if you will – is prevalent in the [social] individual's general cognitive processes, it stands to reason that it should also be so concerning the particular instance of political deliberation. Indeed, both Lippman and Bernays argue that to be the case. "In so far as political habits are alike in a nation", Lippman states, "the first places to look for an explanation are the nursery, the school, the church" – that is, precisely the places where stereotypes are explicitly or implicitly fomented and perpetuated (*Idem*, p. 93). Once the latter come into play, political reasoning can no longer be perceived as fundamentally logical and rational exercise, but must instead be regarded as being *motivated* by non-rational sources; instead of seeking the relevant information on specific political issues, one is often motivated to seek information that supports one's pre-existing inclination or preference regarding that issue (Nir, 2011).

Lippmann's vision is also very much in line with what has been more recently proposed by social sciences researchers such as DeMarzo, Vayanos and Zwiebel, who advanced a model of opinion formation which relies on the notion of "persuasion bias" (2003). This persuasion bias is created via three interconnected phenomena: repetition of information (the amount of times a given idea or political perspective finds itself echoed in the media), social influence (the fact that one's influence on group opinions depends "not only on accuracy, but also on how well connected one is in the social network according to which communication takes place"), and unidimensional opinions (the tendency for multidimensional individual opinions to be reduced to a narrow "left-right" spectrum) (*Idem*, pp. 909-10).

As we can surmise, all of the factors – repetition, social influence and unidimensionality of opinions – that underpin the persuasion bias that DeMarzo, Vayanos and Zwiebel identify are predictable effects of the prevalence of certain stereotypes over political thought and public opinion in a given polity. If social thought-processes are determined by a set of stereotypes, there is bound to be a repetition of stereotypical answers to political questions and issues. Furthermore, the more in line one is with the prevailing stereotypical view, the greater the chance of one being well-considered and respected by the social network which is already determined by that view to begin with – and, consequently, the greater one's potential influence over that network. Finally, the prevalence of a given stereotypical

view means that any dissenting ideas will necessarily tend to be interpreted in light of that view and subsequently assimilated by it, by translating them into its familiar language – e.g. anyone concerning themselves with environmental issues is necessarily “left-wing”, while any advocate of patriotism is indubitably “right-wing”.

We can now recover the idea which we hinted at previously: in a political sphere where the crowd-mind is easily summoned and stereotypical shortcuts made to answer deliberative challenges become commonplace, the involvement of emotions in the decision-making process seems to be unavoidable. But more than merely unavoidable, the involvement of emotions in this process is made necessary by the specific circumstances of contemporary society and the nature of the stereotypes that pervade it. The latter are not essentially rational elements; indeed, if they aim to provide a virtually immediate and efficient answer to questions that may arise in our collective existence, they cannot be of a rational nature. Pure rational deliberation, the exhaustive listing and evaluation of pros and cons leading up to a decision, as it is usually conceived of, is already exceedingly time-consuming at the individual level, let alone multiplied by the multitude of individuals that constitute the public. There is good reason for thinkers such as Kahneman (2011) and Evans (2001) to equate emotional responses to a sort of fast, “quick-and-dirty” modality of thought-processing – even though this perspective often seems implicitly to subscribe to the sort of reason-emotion dichotomy we have been striving to deconstruct.

A cursory glance at contemporary western societies should prove sufficient to reveal a simple truth: there is too much information, simultaneous events and urgent matters, and not enough time for the average – or even the above-average – voter to assimilate and examine them all under the light of “cold reason”. Emotional responses – or rather, rational responses which rely upon certain emotions – are indeed often the most time-effective way to meet a deliberative challenge. It therefore makes sense that the stereotypes mentioned by Lippman must have the ability to beckon that very kind of reasoning – and thus once again evidence the true nature of human rationality as an *emotional rationality*.

### 3. Democracy, propaganda and emotion

In addition to the need for celerity and efficacy in deliberation processes within contemporary democratic states whose citizens commonly number in the millions, there is another characteristic of the latter that motivates an increased reliance upon emotions in instances of political deliberation. Political questions seem to be ever-increasing in their complexity and level of specialization, rendering anyone not an expert in the particular field that they concern unable to truly comprehend them – even if allowed a reasonable amount of time for deliberation. Despite all this, citizens of a democratic polity are necessarily pressed to decide on those matters, or at least on the most suitable political representative to do so in their stead. As such, contemporary democracy often – or even as a rule – seems to implicitly warrant citizens to forego careful rational deliberation in place of an almost intuitive decision regarding what appears to be the “best” course of action or, at the very least, what is the most trustworthy source to inform us regarding the latter decision. As Lippmann puts it, “[e]xcept on a few subjects where our own knowledge is great, we cannot choose between true and false accounts. So we choose between trustworthy and untrustworthy reporters” (1956, pp. 222-3).

Since our knowledge is not likely to be “great” – that is, *specialized* – on many subjects, it would seem that, for the most part, we tend to rely on those who purportedly possess that specialized knowledge to inform our thoughts and decisions. The acknowledgement of our [over-]reliance on “experts” is further emphasised in a time when, in the wake of the 2008 economic collapse, notions such as technocratic governments and the priority of economics over politics have become commonplace. All around the world, media outlets make a common practice out of presenting so-called experts on the most varied of subjects, from domestic politics to international crises, from air travel accidents to natural disasters. The world around us appears to increasingly corroborate Giddens’ description of the workings of what he famously called *expert systems*<sup>22</sup>. The latter, he posited, are one of the key “disembedding mechanisms” that define modern social institutions, mechanisms that cause social relations to transcend their immediate context. In the case of expert systems, that

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<sup>22</sup> Defined as “systems of technical accomplishment or professional expertise that organise large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today” (Giddens, 1996, p. 27).

disembedding is accomplished by “providing ‘guarantees’ of expectations across distanced time-space” (1996, p. 28). This apparently complex phenomenon can be illustrated in very concrete and straight-forward terms; as Giddens exemplifies,

[s]imply by sitting in my house, I am involved in an expert system, or a series of such systems, in which I place my reliance. I have no particular fear in going upstairs in the dwelling, even though I know that in principle the structure might collapse. I know very little about the codes of knowledge used by the architect and the builder in design and construction of the home, but I nonetheless have “faith” in what they have done. My faith is not so much in them, although I have to trust their competence, as in the authenticity of the expert knowledge which they apply – something which I cannot usually check exhaustively myself (1996, pp. 28).

This description leads us to another key aspect of expert systems, in terms of how they exist and operate concretely: they imply a significant degree of trust. It is only by *believing* that they are indeed able to provide guarantees of expectations across time and space that they are legitimized – after all, one very rarely has the possibility to verify the knowledge and supervise the work of either the architect or the builder of one’s home as its design and construction takes place. If those guarantees exist, they must lie on the impersonal and independent nature of the tests applied to evaluate expert knowledge, the existence of regulatory agencies mandated to enforce that testing, and public critique. Nevertheless, as Giddens states, for the lay person “trust in expert systems depends neither upon a full initiation into these processes nor upon mastery of the knowledge that they yield. Trust is inevitably in part an article of ‘faith’” (*Idem*, p. 29).

Now, what is true for our relation with expert systems regarding life in the concrete space of our home, is logically just as true concerning the abstract space of the public sphere; much of our political existence is conducted through faith that [trustworthy] expert systems are in place to address complex questions and, when necessary, to simplify them to the extent that they become comprehensible to the non-specialist who is called to intervene in them – either by voting or simply by participating in the formation of public opinion. As such, if any true “veil of ignorance” were to exist in our political lives beyond Rawls’ famous thought experiment, it would be located between the average citizen and many of the most

significant questions pertaining to economics, science, politics, and so on. Behind such veil of ignorance, our opportunity for “pure” rational deliberation concerning the answer to any of those questions does not proceed directly – for no conclusion can be reached if none of the premises are understood – but rather indirectly – in deciding *what experts* we lend credence to<sup>23</sup>.

This “choice of the expert”, while it may appear to be “a great deal easier than the choice of the truth”, may however still prove “too difficult and often impractical” (Lippmann, 1956, p. 223). Here too the process does not tend towards rational deliberation of the purely objective kind: the choice on who or what constitutes a reliable source of expert advice remains as liable to be influenced by pre-existing emotional paradigms as any other that we have previously considered – it is a process that ultimately involves *faith*. What we may hence come to pessimistically realize is that, in most instances of our political existence, the “utmost independence that we can exercise is to multiply the authorities to whom we give a friendly hearing” (*Idem*, p. 224).

From the other side of the spectrum – that is, on the side of the political agents in positions of power – comes another equally uncomfortable realization: the fact that “the traditional democratic view of life is conceived, not for emergencies and dangers, but for tranquillity and harmony”, and that whenever “masses of people must cooperate in an uncertain and eruptive environment, it is usually necessary to secure unity and flexibility without real consent” (*Idem*, p. 238). In other words, whenever an urgent situation arises that would require the majority of citizens to possess specific or expert knowledge in order to be able to quickly perceive the best course of action, there is not even enough time for the dissention that might arise from allowing each citizen to choose their preferred expert; as Lippmann pithily puts it, “[t]here is no time during mutiny at sea to make each sailor an expert judge of experts”, for “education is a matter of years, the emergency a matter of hours” (*Idem*, pp. 413-4). What this implies is that, even in democratic polities, political institutions and decision-makers may be faced with what appears to be a practical need to circumvent that particular tenet of democracy – the importance of popular consent

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<sup>23</sup> Further illustration of this phenomenon is provided by Burstein (2006), who demonstrates that the reason why estimates of the impact of public opinion on public policy are often exaggerated is that many issues that are the subject of the latter are too obscure and specialized for the average citizen – and thus become essentially *invisible* as far as public opinion is concerned.

regarding the political decisions of the state – without openly abandoning it. This results in a tendency to engage in what Lippmann calls the *manufacture of consent*<sup>24</sup>: the creation and direction of popular consent top-down, using the means available to the state to ensure that public opinion follows what political decision-makers have already identified as the optimal course of action – thus circumventing not only the danger of a time-consuming process of “spontaneous” formation of public opinion, but also the need for the state to appear tyrannical (if the latter is found to be mistaken and must be contradicted).

As a consequence of this perceived need to manufacture consent, democratic politics are faced with two of its most dangerous temptations, whose danger ensues precisely from the fact that they too tend to be *implicitly* regarded as inherent necessities of democracy: the systematic use of propaganda, and the abuse of the state of emergency as a political instrument. Both aspects are umbilically connected to – and therefore relevant for the study of – the involvement of emotions in political decision-making processes and the kind of group dynamics we have been analysing. But let us defer an examination of the state of emergency to the following chapter, and focus presently on the phenomenon of propaganda in democratic states.

### *3.1. Propaganda and democracy*

When one thinks of propaganda, chances are that the first thing that comes to mind is the notion of a tool of manipulation exclusively employed by totalitarian regimes in order to either maintain domestic political docility and numbness, or to foster unwarranted and exacerbated feelings of hostility that justify political persecution and military engagement. Now, out of all the assertions that make up such a spontaneous attempt at describing propaganda, the one that should interest us the most for the time being is the first: that propaganda is the exclusive domain of totalitarian states. It should come as no surprise to the most attentive political observers among us that this is simply not true. The use of propaganda is not restricted to totalitarian states; it is actually a fairly commonplace practice in

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<sup>24</sup> A key notion in Lippmann’s work – later appropriated by Herman and Chomsky (1988) – which he tellingly describes as a “very old [art] that was supposed to have died out with the appearance of democracy”, but which “has, in fact, improved enormously in technic, because it is now based in analysis rather than on rule of thumb” (1956, p. 248).

democratic ones as well. One may even argue that citizens of contemporary western democracies are in many respects – and largely due to the specific characteristics of the latter – surprisingly exposed and susceptible to propaganda. In order to accurately understand what the ensuing discussion of this complex relation between democracy and propaganda entails, we must elaborate briefly on the nature of the latter – bearing in mind that it is not our intention presently to provide an exhaustive definition of propaganda, but rather examine some of its key features as they appear and operate within a democratic polity.

Throughout the years, propaganda has been the subject of many well-known studies, stemming from the most varied fields of knowledge. The need experienced by countries such as the United States to counteract what leading officials perceived to be extremely effective propaganda machines on the opposite side of the trenches during the I and II World Wars – and the Cold War that followed – was one of the key motivators of the study of propaganda not only as a social phenomenon but also, and primarily, as a considerable tactical asset in times of war – open or otherwise. The so-called “seven-devices framework of propaganda analysis”, which first achieved widespread attention in the USA around November of 1937 (Sproule, 2001) was one of the visible results of this effort to understand, mitigate – and eventually harness – the power of propaganda. According to Sproule, “in the second issue of Propaganda Analysis, the bulletin of the newly chartered Institute for Propaganda Analysis (IPA)”, readers were advised to acknowledge – and thus resist – propaganda’s power of influence by becoming “familiar with the seven common propaganda devices” (*Idem*, p. 136).

The latter were indexed as *name-calling* (to attach repelling labels to individuals, groups, races, etc.), *glittering generalities* (to associate the propagandist’s program with “virtue-words” like “truth”, “freedom”, “honor”, etc.), *transfer-here* (to carry over the authority, prestige or sanction of something we respect to something the propagandist would have us accept [e.g., reverence for national or religious symbolism]), *testimonial-here* (to link an idea or program to some specific favoured person or institution), *plain-folk* (persuaders and leaders presenting themselves as “just plain folk”, in touch with the ordinary individual’s goals and concerns), *card-staking* (the use of repetition and over-emphasis of ideas or proposals to obscure the true nature of the programme being advanced), and *band-*

*wagon* (the appeal to group psychology and dynamics, intended to make individuals accept ideas or plans because “everybody is doing it”) (*Idem*).

Upon a quick consideration of this list of “propaganda devices”, two things should strike us as particularly noteworthy: first of all, there is a clear predominance of emotional appeals in what is considered by the propagandist to constitute effective persuasion devices. The attempt to attach emotionally charged symbols and figures to certain ideas and proposals in order to bypass logical reasoning, to “make people form a thoughtless judgement under the influence of an emotional impression” (*Idem*, p. 136), is a clear example of it, as is the effort to conjure the sort of group emotional dynamics we have been focussing on in this chapter. The identification of the persuader with the persuaded (*plain-folk*) and the reliance on pre-existing paradigms and stereotypes (*name-calling, glittering generalities*) fits equally well with our previous analysis of the phenomenon.

Secondly, when examining the nature of the devices being pointed out it is possible to perceive an already clear and foresighted concern not only with preparing citizens for the dangers of propaganda arriving from foreign sources, but also the dangers of propaganda *from within*. In other words, what could conceivably be applied to a foreign propagandist trying to persuade (in this case) the American people, could perhaps even more aptly be said to apply to a domestic propagandist with a similar agenda – inasmuch the latter has better means and opportunity than the former, without being subject to any of the natural mistrust and wariness that an external source might. Here was hence an already serious concern regarding the sustainability of the democratic political system and way of life, in an era when it started becoming apparent that, even domestically, propagandistic “charges and counter-charges were placing democracy itself in peril” (*Idem*, p. 136).

In order to understand how one might speak of the danger of a democratic pervasiveness of (and even increased openness to) propaganda, our comprehension of the latter must transcend dated notions of it amounting to little else than lies and tall-tales, immediately transparent to the keenest minds among us. Moralistic considerations should also be suspended and replaced with a deeper understanding of how the frequent involuntary involvement in crowd-mind phenomena such as the ones mentioned earlier in this chapter affects our contemporary openness to propaganda – regardless of whatever cognitive dissonance we may experience in face

of that latter realization. It is with considerable irony that one might realize that, as Ellul puts it, despite being unavoidably subject to group dynamics that regularly render his discernment “sub-human”, the “mass man [...] pretends to be superman. He is more suggestible, but insists he is more forceful. He is more unstable, but pretends he is strong in his convictions” (*Idem*, p. 8).

As “mass” men and women, our susceptibility to propaganda ensues not only from that aforementioned misconception and overestimation of human rationality, but also the effects of a political existence often led behind a veil of ignorance whose fabric is provided by the intricate weaving of expert systems. Ursprung’s statistical study on political propaganda in democracies illustrates this clearly: “[a]lthough the voters are rationally uninformed due to their negligible influence”, he concludes, “they still attempt to reach as ‘well-founded’ a decision as possible”, and are thus “receptive to the free information supplied by interest groups about the consequences of the ‘political decision’”. Their decision is then ultimately the result “of their opinion and the parts of the information they received in which they have confidence” (1994, p. 279). Now, if we reconsider Giddens’ theory of expert systems it should be possible to perceive an inherent (and critical) difficulty on the part of the average citizen in distinguishing between impartial and trustworthy experts, and those who – despite *presenting themselves as such* – are actually veiled representatives of interest groups. The latter, whenever they manage to gain credence with the public, exponentially increase our vulnerability to whatever political agenda it is in their interest to promote, and should therefore be viewed as propagandists – in both theory and practice.

Furthermore, contemporary propaganda will likely be broadcast via a media system increasingly involved and determined by the very economic and political powers it could theoretically serve to regulate. One of the most notable studies of propaganda of the latter half of 20th century (Herman and Chomsky, 1988) focused precisely on how the media consorts with those in positions of political and economic power through relationships of ownership and funding, to create a widespread system of propaganda that enables the former to surreptitiously – or otherwise – advance their goals. In our times, this tendency is exacerbated by the rise to near-monopoly positions of certain media conglomerates, thus making it increasingly difficult to recover (or discover) “a public purpose of news”, in which

the latter provide a forum for “meaningful public information, discussion, and debate in order to advance democracy” – to such an extent that the “only hope” appears to lie in a “protective response” from independent regulatory instances that proves able to counteract the “market-dominated mass media’s systematic propaganda and power” (Jackson & Stanfield, 2004, p. 481).

In light of this gloomy scenario, and in face of our current situation – when technological progress has made information omnipresent and ever updating at pace none of us can hope to accompany – it makes sense to recover Ellul’s assertions regarding the psychological type of what he dubs the “‘current events’ man”: because “he is immersed in current events”, he is “a ready target for propaganda [...]”; lacking landmarks, he follows all currents” (1973, p. 47). Contrary to what might be expected, Ellul argues, the individual who is “better informed” is thus revealed as one of the most permeable to the effects of propaganda. The reason for this has to do with two critical distinctions regarding the nature of contemporary propaganda. Firstly, the one between *propaganda of agitation* and *propaganda of integration*: the former, “being the most visible and widespread”, is “led by a party seeking to destroy the government or the established order”, and its blunt and unrefined character makes it relatively ineffective towards educated and well-informed individuals (*Idem*, p. 71); the latter – which ordinarily follows any revolutionary attempt successfully accomplished by the former – is a “propaganda of conformity”, aimed at “stabilizing [...], unifying, and reinforcing” the social body, and grounded upon the sentiment that individual fulfilment is optimally achieved through one’s integration into the social collective – by becoming a “member of the group” (*Idem*, pp. 74-5).

Secondly, and intimately connected with this first distinction, comes the one between *rational* and *irrational propaganda*. As Ellul remarks, “that propaganda has an irrational character is still a well-established and well-recognized truth”; it is what grounds the common difference traced between propaganda and information, according to which “information is addressed to reason and experience – it furnishes facts”, while “propaganda is addressed to feelings and passions – it is irrational” (*Idem*, p. 84). Although, as Ellul also points out, there is some truth to this, the reality of the matter cannot be so simplistically put: “there is such a thing as rational propaganda, just as there is rational advertising” – that is, advertising which

essentially consists of enumerating the factual and technical characteristics of the product, and yet still manages to thus elicit some sort of emotional disposition or desire to acquire the latter (*Idem*). The more our society becomes mediated and mediatised, the more propaganda does the same<sup>25</sup> – thus becoming increasingly “rational and [...] based on serious arguments, on dissemination of knowledge, on factual information, figures, and statistics” (*Idem*, p. 85).

This rational nature is the hallmark of propaganda of integration: *irrational* propaganda – purely “emotional and impassioned propaganda” – is gradually disappearing, as contemporary democratic polities tend to become increasingly stabilized in their status quo; the citizen of the latter “needs a relation to facts, a self-justification to convince himself that by acting in a certain way he is obeying reason and proved experience” (*Idem*). As such, the content of propaganda tends to become increasingly muddled with information. Whereas excessively passionate and shock-provoking propaganda may actually repel the (theoretically) well-informed citizens of contemporary democracies, the same message will probably gain significant traction if presented in a more “informative” (mediatised) and reasonable manner. Because we are accustomed to regarding factual information as a purely objective (because unemotional) appeal to “pure” reason, our “critical powers decrease if the propaganda message is more rational and less violent” (*Idem*, p. 86). This is corroborated by current studies on the subject, which demonstrate that, despite the general importance of “elite cues”<sup>26</sup> in shaping the public opinion regarding political matters, “at least for the more politically knowledgeable and sophisticated segments of the public, the influence of raw facts can be substantial” (Gilens, 2001, p. 392).

As such, it would seem that even the most well-informed and cultured individuals – those who would theoretically be almost immune to the blatantly emotionally-charged propaganda of agitation – can fall prey to the influence of this rational propaganda of integration. Indeed, given their greater permeability to mass-media sources of information, as well as culturally established stereotypes and

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<sup>25</sup> In light of our previous discussion of the concepts of *mediation* and *mediatisation*, this means that propaganda becomes disseminated primarily through mass-media, and adopts the inherent media logic of the latter. Consequently, it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between propaganda and “mere” information.

<sup>26</sup> Roughly defined as explicit indications concerning the appropriate course of [political] action, provided by trusted individuals or entities of reference – such as experts, political leaders, and interest groups.

paradigms scenarios, the latter are perhaps even more likely to do so; as Ellul prosaically puts it, “intellectuals are more sensitive than peasants to integration propaganda” (1973, p. 76). At the root of this phenomenon there is an aspect that must be observed, inasmuch it is deeply and intrinsically connected with the notion of emotional rationality. As stated earlier, a rational form of propaganda based on facts operates much in the same manner as, for instance, an advertisement for a car which focuses on technical details: is it likely that the average viewer will truly understand the mechanical and technological intricacies of the surface-sensitive anti-lock brake system, the variable valve timing engine, or the magnetic adjustable suspension? No. All the technical descriptions, however, will contribute to form a general image which is “rather vague but highly coloured”, and liable to motivate an affective pull towards the vehicle in question (*Idem*, p. 86).

It is exactly the same, Ellul argues, with “all rational, logical, factual propaganda”: despite the rational nature of its arguments, what lastingly remains with the individual affected by the latter “is a perfectly irrational picture, a purely emotional feeling, a myth. The facts, the data, the reasoning – all are forgotten, and only the impression remains” (*Idem*). This seeping of factual information into emotional disposition, simultaneously demonstrative of and made possible by the fact that emotion and reason coexist in human rationality, is ultimately what is intended by the propagandist. After all, as we too claimed in the previous chapter, “the individual will never begin to act on the basis of facts, or engage in purely rational behaviour. What makes him act is the emotional pressure, the vision of the future, the myth” (*Idem*). As such, propaganda in contemporary democratic polities – which chiefly consists of a rational propaganda of integration – remains not only a strong influence upon the political behaviour of individuals, but, in many instances, one whose power is amplified by its paradoxical ability to elude rational control *in virtue of* presenting itself as rational. Masking itself as information, and exploiting common misconceptions concerning the purity and prowess of human rationality, “rational propaganda thus creates an irrational situation, and remains, above all, propaganda” (*Idem*, p. 87)

### 3.2. *The democratic need for propaganda*

The fact that propaganda manages to survive – or even thrive – within democratic states is only partially explained by an increased susceptibility to it, stemming from the reasons that we have just expounded. To paint a complete picture of the phenomenon we must consider not only that susceptibility but go beyond it, and consider whether the situation in contemporary democratic states has evolved to the point where we may even speak of a *need for propaganda*. Granted, to speak of democratically necessary propaganda will immediately strike most of us as a contradiction in terms. The opposite view – that propaganda is antithetical to democracy – is much more likely to garner the approval of most current political theorists, whose key concern regarding propaganda is usually the fact that “if an issue is distorted or muted in the press due to corporate pressure or government propaganda, as it is often the case, [...] the democratic process cannot accurately assess society’s problems or prescribe a solution” (Jackson & Stanfield, 2004, p. 476). This view, however, has historically been accompanied by a somewhat contrary tendency – and still often reflected in contemporary studies – that advocates for a more pragmatic view of propaganda on the part of democracies, presenting it as instrumentally indispensable in the panorama of competitive international relations – and particularly when that competitiveness degenerates into all-out aggression (Kaylan, 2007).

Dispensing with consideration of this Machiavellian argument of the necessity of propaganda as a instrument of external politics on the grounds of familiarity, one might move on to the argument that contemporary democracy is liable to degenerate to the point where propaganda becomes just as necessary *internally*. The latter notion could in fact already begin to be perceived among the substantive implications of our earlier remarks concerning the demands faced by contemporary democratic polities: on the one hand, the latter generally cannot afford to call for public deliberation of the majority of the key issues at hand, and especially so when confronted with emergency situations – neither time nor practicality allows for it. It is a realization which, read in light of the sheer dimension and complexity of the contemporary democratic state, arguably presents one of the key justifications for its representative nature.

On the other hand, it remains vital for democratic states that the official decisions made by its highest agents of executive and judicial deliberation are – or at least *appear* to be – reflective of what Rousseau famously dubbed the “general will” (*la volonté générale*) of the people being represented. To achieve a genuine consent that might be regarded as amounting to that general will, however – proceeding through purely “rational” means, the sort of “communicative rationality” proposed by Habermas and endorsed by many following him – often seems impractical if not impossible. Therefore, the temptation is to *manufacture* that consent, and thus ensure that there exists a harmony between the decisions of the State and what the public considers to be the best course of action. It is at this point that propaganda begins affirming itself as a *necessity* in a democratic polity.

As Ellul puts it, the requirements posed by contemporary democracy and the technological civilization that it is inextricably linked to have made propaganda “an inescapable necessity for everyone” (1973, p. XV). To call it “necessary”, however, should not legitimize it. To “say that a phenomenon is *necessary*”, Ellul elaborates, “means, to me, that it denies man; its necessity is proof of its power, not of its excellence” (*Idem*, p. XV). If anything, then, the existence of propaganda within a democratic state might be – and indeed, I would argue, often is – regarded as a sort of pragmatically “necessary evil”. And herein lies the principal difficulty of its study as such: the fact that it is regarded as an “evil” almost inevitably entails that it cannot – or rather, it should not – exist in a system that most of us have become accustomed to regard as the most virtuous among all the alternatives.

The view that propaganda is the work of “a few evil men, seducers of the people, cheats and authoritarian rulers who want to dominate a population” must be overcome if we are to understand the true depth of the phenomenon (*Idem*, p. 118). In contemporary democratic states, propaganda is largely the result of the specific circumstances and conditions of collective life within the latter that we have been discussing. Succinctly put, the conjugation between a pervasive misrepresentation of human rationality, the mediatised nature of our society, the magnification of the crowd behaviour phenomenon that the former entails, and the technological and political reality provided by contemporary democratic polities – the veil of ignorance associated with expert systems, for instance – means that propaganda is an ever-present and influential aspect of our (political) lives. In fact, and although we have

only just briefly alluded to the democratic need for propaganda on the part of the State, this confluence of factors might lead us to consider a sort of symbiotic relationship between the latter, citizens and propaganda – to the extent that one might even pose the controversial question of whether there is similar *need for propaganda on the part of the individual being subjected to it*.

That is precisely what Ellul posits: the notion of propaganda as an *active* power, employed by the state or those in positions of power against the *passive* masses who are victimized by it, is one that must be dispelled in order to understand the phenomenon at hand. For “propaganda to succeed”, he claims, “it must correspond to a need for propaganda on the individual’s part”; without that need – which is “strictly sociological”, with “roots and reasons in the need of the group that will sustain it”, and “experienced by practically *every* citizen of the technological age” – propaganda “could not spread” (*Idem*, p. 121). As such, we are faced with a two-fold need, on the part of both the state that ordinarily produces propaganda, and the individual who seemingly surreptitiously requires it. In order to explain this controversial proposition, we will begin with the first part – the need of the state – and subsequently attempt to deduce the reasons for the second – the need of the individual.

On the part of the contemporary democratic state, the need for propaganda has a number of causes. First and foremost – to reiterate – the citizens who comprise it feel compelled to act politically and entitled to be consulted regarding political matters (the notion of the sovereign “general will”), but are generally not found to be up to the task – be it due to lack of interest, political knowledge, or plain epistemological impossibility (one cannot be an expert on all subjects that pertain to the governing of a modern state). As such, even in a democracy, “a government that is honest, serious, benevolent, and respects the voter *cannot follow* public opinion. But it *cannot escape* it either”. Thus, only one solution remains: “as the government cannot follow opinion, opinion must follow the government” (*Idem*, p. 126). Thus, a democratic state invested in preserving public opinion, “precisely because it believes in [its expression] and does not gag it, must channel and shape that opinion if it wants to be realistic and not follow an ideological dream” (*Idem*). The endemic limitations of public opinion and the possibility of it falling prey to dissenting interests might otherwise pose a significant threat to the maintenance of that state.

In addition to this aspect that we had already referred, Ellul cites another two which may be used to justify democratic states' need for propaganda: the competitive nature of international relations, and the danger posed by an eventual disintegration of national identity and civic duties. The first of these aspects essentially refers to that need for propaganda as an instrument of foreign policy that we mentioned above. In a world where genuinely ideological international conflicts – which would emphasise the importance of propaganda – tend to become scarce (with the so-called “war on terror” perhaps providing the notable exception), one might doubt the current pertinence of this alleged need. That sceptical attitude does not, however, take into account that which has become the most prevalent form of international conflict since the time of Ellul's writing: *economic* conflict.

Political ideology, as we have previously argued, has become increasingly replaced by economic considerations. And on the field of economic “battle”, propaganda is still regarded as a much needed and powerful weapon. If one simply considers the manner in which different European states have reacted to the recent economic crisis which has severely affected countries like Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Spain, the involvement of propaganda in the process is quite obvious: the governments of northern European nations tend to paint a picture of economic and fiscal irresponsibility on the part of the affected countries, and argue the latter to be abusing the good-will of the European Union as a whole; southern European nations, on the other hand, often portray their (generally) more economically sound northern counterparts as exploiting the economic crisis for their own gain, and profiting from the suffering of “the people”. Both dissenting views are commonly imbued with a clear propagandistic intent, patent in the widespread use of such things as stereotypes (the lazy southern European and the calculating northern European), tales of culturally-ingrained vices, and even the appeal to international resentments dating back to the World Wars.

The second aspect – the concern with national identity and civic duties – provides further reason for what we previously dubbed the *internal* need for propaganda in democratic states. The latter's evolution into increasingly globalized, cosmopolitan, and multicultural states tends to lead to the effacement of what were traditionally well-defined and strong national identities. With this comes the concern that the patriotic sentiments which constitute the base of the individual desire for

civic involvement will eventually disappear as well – a significant problem for a democratic polity whose political health and legitimacy depends on it. At this point, democratic governments are confronted with a pragmatic question: the safekeeping of those indispensable elements might be achieved purely through “information and good example” if there were enough time and resources available; in today’s fast paced and highly competitive international panorama, however, the latter is simply not the case. Action “must be fast, with few educators at hand; therefore, only one way can be taken: the utilization of the most effective instruments and proved methods of propaganda” (Idem, p. 137). The latter thus comes to be seen as *sine qua non* to ensure the psychological and ideological reconstruction of the nation.

It is now time to move away from the perspective of the state and consider the democratic need for propaganda on the part of the individual. That need, of course, is not explicit or even truly conscious; on the contrary, most citizens of democratic polities will wholeheartedly declare that they abhor propaganda at least to the same degree that they consider themselves to be immune to it. In reality, however, due to the particular circumstances of their political existences, propaganda surreptitiously establishes itself as necessary means to “ward off certain attacks and reduce certain pressures” (Idem, p. 138). Firstly, citizens ordinarily want to perceive themselves as being involved in the political life of the state, but simultaneously feel that they are unable to genuinely do so. As it should be immediately obvious, this is the flipside of the argument that we have used above regarding the state’s need to use propaganda to shape public opinion (or to manufacture consent); that need is actually shared by citizens, albeit from their own particular perspective: since they are effectively unable to become experts in all – or indeed most – issues that arise, propaganda is what provides them with a way to overcome any disturbing feelings of inadequacy or incompetence.

Secondly, contemporary individuals are called upon to make what Ellul characterizes as “enormous sacrifices which probably exceed anything known in the past”: albeit they pride themselves on being free, circumstances force most to lead lives in which work is so all-consuming that it almost equates to slavery; they are expected to pay ever-increasing taxes to levels that further dehumanize that work; they are expected to risk their lives in wars waged for increasingly dubious reasons; and even their overall living conditions – the working hours, the low wages, the

noise, the pollution, the housing shortage and living costs, etc. – are near intolerable. In all those instances, they *need* propaganda to justify their sacrifices; it alone insures that they are “given strong enough impulses as well as good enough reasons” for the latter (*Idem*, p. 143).

Thirdly, and as we have said before, the individual who tries to keep informed lives today in a constant whirlwind of information, determined by rapid and often unintelligible changes. Consequently, “[he] needs a framework in which all this information can be put in order; [...] he needs coherence. And he needs an affirmation of his own worth” (*Idem*, p. 146). Propaganda presents itself as uniquely able to satisfy all those needs, providing almost immediate explanations for all new developments and promising simple solutions for seemingly insoluble problems – while simultaneously providing a unifying world-view into which they can all be integrated and explained away.

Fourthly, contemporary individuals, being part of ever-growing mass societies, are faced with an equally increasing difficulty in perceiving themselves as just that – autonomous and valuable individuals. This poses a serious psychological problem: as Ellul puts it, “man cannot stand being unimportant; he cannot accept the status of a cipher. He needs to assert himself, to see himself as a hero” (*Idem*, p. 149). Once again, it is propaganda which allows us to do so, by providing us with a tempting political mythology in which each of us can reassert our individual authority and independence, trivialize our non-political daily struggles, overcome the passivity into which we find ourselves increasingly forced, and thus become its heroes.

Fifth and finally, the contemporary individual is plagued by an idiosyncratic anxiety which ensues from all the specifically democratic and modern limitations that we have been discussing. That overall feeling of anxiety “is irrational, and any attempt to calm it with reason or facts must fail” (*Idem*, p.154). The only thing capable of assuaging it is neither rational nor irrational, but *simultaneously both*: propaganda. By understanding the emotional nature of human rationality – and adjusting both medium and message to it – propaganda provides the individual with assurances equivalent to those previously provided by religion. As Ellul states, it offers a simple explanation of the world, both obvious and satisfying, through which all worldly [political] phenomena can be explained and made unthreatening. At the

same time, it endows the individual with a world-view and a sense of finality that can be used to contextualize present events into past history, bringing coherence to the otherwise incoherent. The “propagandee” thus “experiences feelings of mastery over and lucidity towards this menacing and chaotic world, all the more because propaganda provides him with a solution for all threats and a posture to assume in face of them” (1973, p.159).

Ultimately, propaganda feeds into what we have thus far been attempting to expose as the hubris of our rationality. Because of our almost hereditary difficulty in accepting the true scope and nature of our rational ability, we are willing to take shortcuts that allow us to feel that the world around us is absolutely intelligible and even controllable through its powers. In doing so we are inviting propaganda into our lives, because then it truly becomes a psychological – nearly existential – necessity. It artificially dispels fears and anxieties of which many are caused by our unwillingness to acknowledge the fact that emotions play a part in our reasoning in the first place, and its ability to influence is amplified by the perpetuation of this very attitude. Unless something is done about the latter, the presence of propaganda cannot be regarded merely as an accident or the unscrupulous design of some obscure political figure. After all, under this circumstances the “politician who uses it is not a monster; he fills a social demand”, and he has a “close accomplice” – the very individual who is being targeted (*Idem*, p. 160).

## Chapter IV – Rationalism, Emotion, and the Exception

In light of the analysis developed in the preceding chapters, we now find ourselves better able to understand that which is arguably the most significant (and dangerous) of the consequences of the kind of political rationalism that we have been criticising: the use and status, in most contemporary democratic states, of what is known as the *state of exception* [or emergency]. The reasons for delaying an examination of this crucial problem until now should be made clear throughout the present chapter. In essence, however, we might say that it is because the circumstances surrounding the use, scope, and legitimization of this particular political expedient arise not only from the relation that each individual citizen is culturally predisposed to establish between reason, emotion, and the political process, but also from the further complexity afforded to that relation by the phenomena of group influence and dynamics identified in the previous chapter.

In a sense, then, the problem surrounding the contemporary existence of the state of exception represents the culmination of the politically perilous road that our work so far has endeavoured to shed light upon and extract consequences from. A philosophical examination of that problem and its implications must therefore constitute the necessary next step in our critique: what exactly defines a state of exception, who decides on it, who acknowledges its legitimacy and why, and how this entire process is affected by political rationalism's disregard for emotion, are the questions that must now be answered within the scope of what has been argued so far.

Let us begin the aforementioned examination with a truism that lies at the heart of the problem and its politico-philosophical framing: decision-making is one of (if not *the*) key components of political action. What is meant here by decision-making, however, warrants further clarification. At first glance, “good” political decision-making essentially reflects the political actors’ ability to accurately ascertain a given situation and subsequently select the most advantageous course of action. The accuracy of this description notwithstanding, there is, in addition to this deliberative process, yet another equally crucial (and obvious) element of decision-making: actually *making* a decision. The difference here – as made clear by our analysis of emotion's role in the mechanism of action in chapter II – is between a

process of fundamentally rational calculation which produces a logical conclusion, and the motivational pull that drives us towards selecting one of the alternatives at our disposal – thus resulting in concrete action<sup>27</sup>. This latter aspect actually represents what is at the heart of a true political decision. Analytical and calculative prowess is, after all, of little political worth if even our most detailed examination of a given problem ultimately proves unable to materialize itself in an actual decision. The ability to overcome the psychological obstacles which often stand in the way of making a political decision – the uncertainty of success, the fear of unforeseen consequences, the anxiety felt over the public evaluation of implemented policies, and so on – is what allows for the transition between deliberation and decision, and ushers in the attainment of a true political decision.

When speaking of the decision in the political sphere – and particularly, as we intend to do, of the decision on what constitutes an *exception* – one must turn to a thinker who devoted unparalleled attention to the issue: Carl Schmitt. Despite all the muddling controversy (and even repulsion) stemming from his political affiliations, Schmitt, in such works as *Political Theology* and *The Concept of the Political*, stressed the importance of both the political aspect of human existence and political decision-making (albeit of a very specific kind), at a time which he felt was characterized precisely by the increasing depoliticization and dehumanization of everyday life.

Schmitt's relevance to contemporary political philosophy is undeniable; in recent years, alongside the perhaps most famous renaissance of Schmittian ideas promoted by Giorgio Agamben's *State of Exception* (2005) and *Homo Sacer* (1998), Schmitt has been present in discussions ranging from international law and human rights (Roach, 2005; Vincent, 2009; Criddle & Fox-Decent) to theology and religious studies (Yelle, 2010). His presence in debates within political science and philosophy, often focussing on issues such as legality, legitimacy, and sovereignty (Norris, 2007; Shapiro, 2007; Vatter, 2009) is – albeit more predictable – equally noteworthy.

Recent attention devoted to Schmitt's political theory has meant that his ideas gradually found their way into mainstream political theory. That is certainly the case

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<sup>27</sup> Yet another reflection of emotion's role in decision-making, perhaps best summarized by Donald Calne: "[t]he essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action, while reason leads to conclusions" (2000, XII, para. 1).

with the Schmittian notions of the [state of] exception and the friend-enemy distinction. But despite their now relative familiarity in political parlance, they are often understood superficially at best. They can only be genuinely comprehended when incorporated in a broader scheme of political thought, one which – as we have just stated – regards political existence as an inalienable determination of what it means to be human. Our intention here is thus not only to contribute towards that comprehension, but to do so in a novel fashion, exploring what seems to be a critically neglected area in the study of Schmittian theory: the relationship between liberalism, rationalism, and emotion, and its consequences towards the establishment of a state of exception.

## 1. The Decision on the Exception

“Sovereign is he who decides on the exception” (Schmitt, 2005, p. 5). This laconic sentence introduces the key argument of *Political Theology*: that the decision on what constitutes an exceptional state of affairs is the sort of phenomenological moment when political sovereignty is revealed<sup>28</sup>. No other instance in the life of the State, Schmitt argues, can express with this utmost clarity just how political authority is actually structured within the latter. Consequently, any attempt at constructing “a philosophy of concrete life must not withdraw from the exception and the extreme case, but must be interested in it to the highest degree” (Schmitt, 2005, p. 15). Regarding our concrete political existence, the exception is actually more significant than the rule, insofar as “the rule proves nothing”, but “the exception proves everything: it confirms not only the rule but also its existence, which derives only from the exception” (*Idem*).

As is apparent from these brief considerations, the exceptionality of the exception manifests itself in a crucial way as far as legality is concerned: it evades

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<sup>28</sup> The title “Political Theology” is justified by Schmitt with the assertion that “[a]ll significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts”, not only because they were historically “transferred from theology to the theory of the state” (the “omnipotent god became the omnipotent lawgiver”, for example), but also because they impart a certain “systematic structure” on the latter – which, among other things, makes the “exception in jurisprudence [...] analogous to the miracle in theology” (Schmitt, 2005, p. 36). For a more in depth exploration of this matter, and its relation with Schmitt’s thesis on sovereignty in the same book, see Franco de Sá (2003).

complete codification in legal norm. It is the very definition of “exception” that a “normal” situation has – at least momentarily – ceased to exist. When such a situation arises, therefore, there remains no norm from positive law which can be applied, since such norms are conceived to function within a normal – and normalized – legal framework. In face of *abnormality*, the sort of decisionism advanced by Schmitt “assumed that order was being produced from disorder by means of a ‘decision’ that at the same time made the one making it sovereign” (Norris, 2007).

The decision on the exception is thus a *true* decision and, consequently, the ultimate expression of that which is the fundamental political act: to decide. It is a decision which, as Schmitt puts it, “frees itself from all normative ties and becomes in the true sense absolute” (2005, p. 12). Simultaneously – and crucially – it also reveals who the sovereign is: he who decides not only whether there is an exceptional situation at hand, but also what must be done to restore normality. Sovereignty, then, should not be understood simply as “the monopoly to coerce or to rule”, but – and essentially – “as the monopoly to decide” (*Idem*, p.13).

Schmitt’s chief criticism of influential jurists of his time, such as Krabbe and Kelsen – whose normativist theory of State features prominently across his work as a decisive cause for his pessimistic view on the politics of the Weimar Republic – arose from their seeming intention to remove the decision from the realm of politics – to “conceive of law (*Recht*) devoid of the realization of law (*Rechtsverwirklichung*)”, thus “rendering that law something purely ideal, not only situated outside the plane of existence, but deprived of the power, that is, the decision which, by applying it to a given situation, would grant it effectiveness” (Franco de Sá, 2003, pp. 93-4)<sup>29</sup>.

The emphasis placed by Schmitt on the crucial importance and almost absolute power of the decision – especially in such stark contrast to the more normative focus of liberal theories – is definitely something which clearly challenges the rationalistic view which we have argued has become predominant in contemporary politics. Indeed, Schmitt’s very use of the “analogy of the miracle to illustrate the state of exception, in which the sovereign decision suspends the norms

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<sup>29</sup> We understand *normativism* here as a legal theory that holds that law must be considered in “pure form” independently of social, economic, and political conditions – such as Kelsen’s “pure theory of law” (1934).

of statutory liberalism, just as the miracle suspends natural law” (2010, p. 192) feels like a clear declaration of intent, when it was evident that, in the intellectual history of ideas, “Deism and Enlightenment rationalism had prohibited the miracle together with the sovereign exception” (*Idem*, p. 196).

Schmitt insisted that a rationalist approach to politics fails to deal with the exception, and indeed that the latter is incommensurable with the former. The exception, he claims, “confounds the unity and order of the rational scheme” (2005, p. 14), constituting a sort of impurity which must be purged from the rational ordination of politics, lest it corrodes the formal perfection which the latter seeks to attain. This discomfort seems to be, at least in part, at the root of the antipathy that the scope and nature of Schmittian notion of exception motivated among proponents of legal normativism, who perceived in it an element of dangerous and potentially unbound irrationality. Both Krabbe and Kelsen, Schmitt’s frequent interlocutors *in absentia*, sought to “avoid the binding of sovereign power to a subjective and arbitrary will, free from commitments and determination”, thus preventing the legal realm from being “contaminated” by something alien and pernicious (Franco de Sá, 2003, pp. 92-3). The exception, along with the implications of the decision concerning it, represented a real danger in that sense.

The key to fully understand the true nature of the conflict between Schmittian decisionism and legal normativism lies indeed, I would argue, in the fundamentally non-rational nature of the decision Schmitt is referring to. The usage of “non-rational” in this case, however, should not be taken as a synonym of “irrational”, but rather as symbolizing something which does not conform to the reductionist notion of rationality that we have been criticising, and which was often employed by jurists and constitutionalists such as Krabbe and Kelsen (who was a professed Kantian). The seemingly absolute faith of the latter group in the possibility of achieving a “pure theory of law”, from which any semblance of subjectivity or particularity would be utterly removed – thus making it “universally valid for all times and all situations” (Strong, 2005, p. xvii) – struck Schmitt as not only amounting to a blatant misunderstanding of the reality of law and the act of legislating, but of human nature itself.

As Franco de Sá puts it, Schmittian decisionism – “the thesis that sovereignty resides not in the law, but in the decision that realizes that very law” – finds “its basis

not on an irrationalism, but on what we might call an alternative rationality to normative rationality” (2003, p. 100). This *alternative rationality* lies, in a first instance – and the one that explicitly concerns Franco de Sá – in “the right of the State to its self-preservation” (*Idem*, p. 101), which justifies and legitimizes the decision on the exception as a means to safeguard the very legal constitution which is suspended in a state of emergency. Read in light of Schmitt’s assertion that all political concepts are essentially “secularized theological concepts” (Schmitt, 2005, p.36), this means that the Schmittian defence of sovereign power ultimately consists “in avoiding the consequences of fanaticism, consequences that necessarily result from the destruction of the political mediation of the theological” (Franco de Sá, 2003, p. 109).

In a second instance, however – the one which concerns our purpose here more specifically – the alternative rationality implied by Schmitt’s theory also represents an enlarged and enriched version of the purportedly pure, instrumental rationality which often seemed to inform legal normativists’ conception of human reason. The rationalism of liberal theorists – going as far back as Locke – struck Schmitt as promoting “technological, formal, or instrumental reason”, a “kind of ‘aesthetic’ rationality, which is concerned with the production of artifacts, above all with the state as an artifact” (Kahn, 2014, p. 71). In contrast, Schmitt’s conception implicitly denies the assumption that it is possible to fundamentally reduce our political existence to a pre-established system of norms and regulations, which would in turn entail that human beings are either rationally determined automatons or that they *should* at least behave as such for the most part.

It is then perhaps understandable that Schmittian decisionism is frequently regarded with suspicion or repulsion by liberals, whose view is conceptually and historically much closer to a normativist conception of State, and consequently often embraces a conception of rationality in line with the latter’s. Despite some more recent reinterpretations of Schmitt as an ally rather than an opponent of liberalism, motivated by the aforementioned revival of his ideas and the attempt to read them under a new light, the prevailing view of most liberal thinkers on Schmitt tends to be one of uneasy coexistence, coupled with vigorous disagreement.

Indeed, read as a whole, Schmitt’s ideas seem to stand diametrically opposed to at least two of the most often cited tenets of liberalism: that a polity must be

completely ordained by a rationally determined set of rules and legislations, and that any political decision must not be reached through a spontaneous and absolute act of sovereignty as such, but mediated by rational consideration and discussion. Schmitt himself was not oblivious to this conflict. In fact, he embraced it, setting his own theory against the prevailing – and, as he saw it, deeply flawed – liberal tendencies of some of his contemporaries. In advancing his own perspective on the political, Benhabib comments, Schmitt attempted to pursue “the rationalistic fallacies of liberalism until its ‘limit concepts’ – *die Grenzbegriffe* – were uncovered”, concepts which “constituted the secret and *unthought* foundations on which the structure of the modern state rested. Sovereignty is one such limit concept; government by discussion, and the assumption that all opinions will eventually converge through deliberation upon a rational outcome, are among the other unquestioned presuppositions of liberalism” (Benhabib, 2012, p. 689).

A consideration of the arguments he employs in this attempt to deconstruct liberal thought and expose its frailty as a potential foundation for a political system should now also prove helpful towards understanding the limitations of liberalism’s rationalistic assumptions.

## **2. Norms and Exceptions**

Schmitt’s negative view of liberalism was fundamentally motivated by what he perceived to be its inability to provide a truly political theory of the state (one that transcends normativism) and, therefore, its unsuitability to constitute the theoretical basis of any concrete form of government: “[t]here exists a liberal policy of trade, church, and education, but absolutely no liberal politics, only a liberal critique of politics” (2007, p. 70). Liberalism is, for him, a negation of the political rather than a manifestation of it. Thus the process of “rationalization” of politics promoted by liberals entails goals whose direction is not only politically counterproductive, but often even *anti-political*. For Schmitt, according to Kahn’s interesting analysis, the development of capitalism and the indifference of technological production to its material “found an analogue in the indifference of aesthetics to ethics and politics, or at least in the aesthete’s inability to come to a decision about any concrete course of

political action” (2014, p. 68). The political equivalent of that indifference was liberalism, and thus “the modern age of technology, liberalism, and aesthetics was antithetical to any genuine conception of ‘the political’” – since “the genuinely political involves a decision about an exceptional state of affairs, and sovereignty must accordingly be defined as the power to decide the exception” (*Idem*).

Liberalism’s aversion towards the notion of the exception is, therefore, one of the aspects in which it fails to grasp what Schmitt deemed *genuinely* political. Political [co]existence, liberals would argue, is only possible in any desirable form if the former is fully regulated according to rational tenets. But human society, as Strong (2005) points out, can never be made to rest solely on the determination and application of rules to individual situations; *decisions* and judgements are always necessary. Since the decision is regarded, in Schmittian terms, as the quintessential political act, to assume the contrary – that is, that the decision should be removed from the political sphere – would be to amputate the political of its most essential quality.

The motives for liberalism’s stance concerning this matter warrant clarification. Liberal theory, as we have already mentioned, seeks primarily to foster the *normative* conditions, conditions subsequently necessary to allow for not only peaceful coexistence but also a just and free society. That remains clear in the work of thinkers such as Habermas and Rawls, who, philosophically speaking, are perhaps the most preeminent contemporary representatives of this intention. Habermas, for instance, tells us of political action resulting from the application of his communicative rationality that one can “only speak of communicative action in a strong sense as soon as reaching understanding [*Verständigung*] extends to the normative reasons for the reflection of the [social] goals themselves (1999, p. 326). What Habermas came to call “strong communicative action” thus first implies a conception of human rationality which is “proportionate to his [the individual’s] expressing himself rationally and to his ability to give account of his expressions in a reflexive stance” (*Idem*, p. 308) – a conception whose scope is the rough equivalent of the one employed by legal normativists such as Kelsen. In addition to that, it also points to the acknowledgement of normative reasons as a obligatory frame of reference for political action, providing the latter with motives which are not

necessarily the individuals', but rather "intersubjectively shared value orientations that – going beyond their personal preferences – bind their wills (*Idem*, p. 326).

When it comes to Rawls' conception of political liberalism, on the other hand, it too is one which "has been frequently criticized for suggesting a normative idea of politics, which considers only the possibility of deep-seated consensus instead of radical antagonism, rational deliberation instead of political decision, and justice instead of power" (Vatter, 2008, p. 240). And even though it can be argued that the later Rawls redirected the focus of his attention to the *political*, advocates of Rawls' position tend to understand the term "as a synonym for 'the reasonable', that is, as a universally shared faculty or moral sense of justice aimed at seeking 'neutral' normative conditions around which everyone could come to stand in agreement" (*Idem*). Generally speaking, there seems to be a generalized discomfort regarding the act of political decision within contemporary liberal theory – a discomfort regarding any political decision which might generally evade the established normative framework, being significantly (and understandably) magnified when the decision in question implies the manifestation of a sovereign *potestas* capable to completely suspend the legal norm itself.

Schmitt's criticism of liberalism would appear to be originally rooted in the latter's primacy of the norm to the detriment of the decision. For liberalism, the norm, ideally devised to be valid in all instances, ultimately plays – in addition to responding to whatever demands a particular situation might present – a crucial role: it curbs the danger entailed by the State actually making a decision whose magnitude is liable to structurally compromise the very foundations it purportedly rests upon. By establishing complex overarching legislative structures, liberal theory essentially seeks to dilute the notion of State sovereignty by restricting the latter's ability to make a "true" political decision, according to Schmitt's standards.

Another reason for Schmitt's radical disagreement with the political project of liberalism is that the Schmittian idea of democracy "ultimately relies on a 'principle of representation' that he finds in the political tradition of Roman Catholicism" – in which "the omnipotent sovereign 'represents' an entire people as well as every individual member of this people" (*Idem*, p. 251). In *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* – whose central thesis is that "the technical-economic rationality of modern capitalism and its dominant political expression,

liberalism, stood at odds with the truly political power of the Catholic Church” (Kelly, 2004, pp. 114-5) – Schmitt developed a concept of representation which assumed that the political form embodied by the Catholic Church (namely, the unity in the relation between divine authority and the interests of humanity, along with the simultaneous representation of both by the Pope) was the “true heir of Roman Jurisprudence” (Schmitt, 1996, p. 17). That formal nature of the Church, Schmitt claimed, is “based on the strict realisation of the principle of representation”, which he regarded as antithetical to “the economic-technical thinking dominant today” (*Idem*, p. 8). The historical evolution of liberalism was regarded by Schmitt as a motion away from the true nature and political significance of representation, to the extent that Hobbes’ Leviathan “had been transformed by liberalism and capitalism into a simple machine” (Kelly, 2004, pp. 117-8) devoid of any truly representative character.

The genuine nature of representation, according to Schmitt, relies not on the political actors and institutions’ ability to act as emissaries or agents on behalf of the represented, but rather on the capacity “to ‘make present’ the true nature of something by ‘representing it’” (*Idem*, p. 115). Furthermore, he claims, the meaning of representation as a political principle

is that the members of Parliament are representatives of the whole people and thus have an independent authority vis-a-vis the voters. Instead of deriving their authority from the individual voter, they continue to derive it from the people. "The member of Parliament is not bound by instructions and commands and is answerable to his conscience alone". This means that the personification of the people and the unity of Parliament as their representative at least implies the idea of a *complexio oppositorum*, that is, the unity of the plurality of interests and parties. It is conceived in representative rather than economic terms<sup>30</sup> (Schmitt, 1996, p. 26).

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<sup>30</sup> The notion of *complexio oppositorum*, employed by Schmitt in this passage – which translates into a unity (an embrace) of opposites – is a philosophical notion famously (and slightly differently) employed by Heraclitus and Nicholas de Cusa, but which Schmitt adopts following its particular use in Catholic theology. Within the latter, it is commonly meant to represent the coincidence between the One and the Multiple (the unity in the wholeness of God coincides ontologically with its apparent opposite of the multiplicity in Creation). As Kam Shapiro (2010) notes, this coincidence of opposites “does not involve a rational or logical mediation, but a kind of catechretic unity whereby diverse individuals and qualities remain copresent in God” (p. 26). For Schmitt, the Catholic Church assumes an analogous function through its ability to “‘represent’ diverse values and positions at different times while maintaining an overarching unity” (*Idem*), thus exhibiting a model of representation that

Quite the contrary is true, as far as Schmitt is concerned, of contemporary liberal parliamentarism, since the latter negates the “necessarily personal or eminent character” (Kelly, 2004, p. 117) of an idea of representation which “is so completely governed by conceptions of personal authority that the representative as well as the person represented must maintain a personal dignity” (Schmitt, 1996, p. 17) – and, in doing so, empties it of its political substance and usefulness.

Standing in stark opposition to this Schmittian view on political representation – whose process of legitimization is arguably liable to be misunderstood as proceeding “top-down”, due to its emphasis on personal authority – one usually finds the liberal democratic ideal, which operates inversely: sovereignty is placed at the level of the citizens, who, by collaborating via a free and reasoned pursuit of political consensus, build the legitimacy of the State “bottom-up”. Further deepening the scission between both views, Schmitt’s conception is predominantly regarded from the liberal side of the equation as one which also “disempowers citizens by giving the state the monopoly of interpretation over its own strategic interests of survival in the *multiversum* of states” (Benhabib, 2012, p. 706). A limitation of sovereignty – at least, of the kind of sovereignty Schmitt has in mind – through careful and comprehensive legislation is therefore justified as a necessary check against the power of the State, which would otherwise be liable to succumb to the temptation of limiting critical individual liberties.

Now, while this stance seeks to address a crucial issue of political jurisprudence – the potential abuse of sovereign power by the State – it may also entail some unexpected and politically relevant pernicious consequences: first and foremost, as we have already emphasised, it chooses to ignore the concrete reality of the exception and how it is impossible to legislate for a truly exceptional situation; secondly, by attempting to remove (or at least lessen) an element of [genuine] decision-making from the political sphere, it may paradoxically negate the political utility of politics, and leave in its place a void which must necessarily be filled by an alternative notion.

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Schmitt deems substantially political, insofar as it is independent from external constraints (namely, of the economic kind).

Let us now address the latter issue. If liberalism – as Schmitt sees it – does indeed neutralize and hollow out our political dimension of its genuine content, what does it seek to employ as a substitute? According to his analysis, liberalism sees in this opportunity the potential to realize the depoliticization of the political sphere, a process which it presents as amounting to “the creation of a neutral sphere—initially modelled on the natural sciences instead of theology—in which parties could reach agreement through discussion and consensus” (Kahn, 2014, pp. 67-8). In order to achieve such a goal, it seeks to carry into the political sphere philosophical and scientific concepts free from the kind of pre-existing political charge that characterizes those which form the basis of ideology – a dogmatic and archaic vulgarity which must be purged to make way for rational politics. But although the notions it calls upon are essentially non-political, the latter's adoption as frames of reference for political behaviour still bears political consequences capable of rivalling with the some of most pernicious consequences of ideological partisanship. Let us examine, for instance, the notion of *morality* in this regard.

When considering the position of liberalism in the ideological debate concerning the inherent moral inclinations of human beings, one can easily realize that it is one of anthropological optimism. The moral perfectibility of human beings, along with the assumption of an intrinsic willingness to engage in the pursuit of that moral perfection, is one of the cornerstones of liberal thought. And it makes sense that it is so: after all, if we conceive of human beings as ideally rational creatures, then all their ethical failings must amount to either a lack of knowledge of universal moral imperatives or a misunderstanding of how they should be applied to particular circumstances.

This highly debatable view has significant political ramifications. As Schmitt points out, for liberalism this belief in “the goodness of man signifies nothing more than an argument with whose aid the state is made to serve society” (2007, p. 60). For if the individual is inherently good, then the cause of evil deeds must be found elsewhere. In an unexpected turn of the idea of the “noble savage” usually attributed to Rousseau, however, it is not civil society, but rather the political entity of the State which is found to blame. What follows from this reasoning, in fact, is precisely the conclusion that in an ideal liberal polity, *civil society* – the entity most immediately constituted through the aggregation of private individuals – “determines its own

order and that state and government are subordinate and must be distrustingly controlled and bound to precise limits” (*Idem*, pp. 60-61).

The resonance of this diagnosis, it is worth noting, cannot help but be heightened when we consider the horror that contemporary advocates of libertarianism visibly experience concerning state intervention in everyday life, and how anathemas of “police” or “nanny state” become commonplace on that side of public debate whenever the state threatens to exceed the “precise limits” mentioned by Schmitt<sup>31</sup>. Incidentally, it is also a by-product of the bourgeois civil society of the modern era – the so-called “economic interests” – which seems today to play the key role in determining the political fate of states all over the globe.

To borrow the felicitous analytical framework employed by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1998), it seems that liberalism ultimately promotes a substitution of the political (public) sphere with the private one – or perhaps the image of an absorption of the former by the latter is a more accurate illustration. It is not that public interests disappear entirely; they are simply replaced by private interests, as the latter become gradually construed as having a public dimension. And with the elevation of the dynamics of the private sphere to a public dimension comes the other great political ramification of the depolitization of politics, the origins of which we have just alluded to: the adoption of economic theory as an explanatory and structural basis of political existence.

Through the negation of the political, which is “inherent in every consistent individualism” (Schmitt, 2007, p. 70), liberalism has not “radically denied the state”; it has, on the other hand, “neither advanced a positive theory of the state nor on its own discovered how to reform the state, but has attempted only to tie the political to the ethical and to subjugate it to economics” (*Idem*, p. 61). As a corollary of the excessive rationalization of politics, “[j]ust as the sciences are governed by instrumental reasoning, so liberal democracy [...] [comes to involve] a purely instrumental conception of politics as the instrument for harmonizing conflicting interests”. And thus “liberal democracy amounts to ‘political relativism’” (Kahn, 2014, p. 71)

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<sup>31</sup> Although in international politics it is perhaps the U.S.A. which systematically provides us with vociferous examples of this kind of behaviour, many others could be cited.

## 2.1. *Economicism and the negation of politics*

Continuing this movement towards the neutralization of politics, we are once again faced in economic theory – which, as we argued previously, can widely be regarded as the purportedly de-ideologized consequence (or continuation) of liberalism – by the overwhelming prevalence of a reductive account of human rationality, with perhaps one key difference: the laws of economics are admittedly and unremorsefully apolitical. Whereas within liberalism there would be a comprehensible degree of compunction regarding not being able to provide what Schmitt terms a “positive theory of the state” – a theory which is politically substantial and constructive, rather than simply analytical and deconstructive – in economics we find no such qualms. States are as subject to the laws of the market as individual citizens – or consumers – and the market has no political (and therefore intrinsically human) concerns; it stands above them. As Schmitt puts it, “[t]hat production and consumption, price formation and market have their own sphere and can be directed neither by ethics nor aesthetics, nor by religion, nor, least of all, by politics was considered one of the few truly unquestionable dogmas of this liberal age” (2007, p. 72).

The prevalence of economic theory in the political sphere, along with its essentially apolitical nature, impacts on how the political existence of states and their citizens unfolds. When Francis Fukuyama’s much discussed book *The End of History and The Last Man* (1992) postulated that the growing ubiquity of western liberal democracy represented the culmination of a long process of sociocultural and political evolution, its implicit announcement of the death of political ideology[ies] seemed, for some, to hold the promise of the end of “dirty” politics and the ushering in of a new era of politics based on *reason*. The merits of Fukuyama’s conclusions notwithstanding, western liberal democracy has indeed, generally speaking, become globalized – and alongside it, western capitalism and economicism. Far from a politically irrelevant fact, it has become increasingly clear that it is the *de facto* ubiquity of the latter and not the former which is responsible for any effacement of ideology – consider, for instance, the reinvention of Russia and China as fundamentally *economic* (albeit therefore ultimately “political” by contemporary standards) superpowers. Should the goal to replace politics with economics be

ultimately achieved, however, the results may very well not be the purportedly desired end to the ideologically fuelled partisan conflict and the protection of individual civil liberties from a potentially overbearing state, but rather something else entirely.

As the worldwide economic crisis of 2008 and the events leading up to it have served to demonstrate, the ascendancy of the economic over the political (under the guise of a cold, objective rationality and promises of a world where freedom and prosperity become globalized commodities), entails serious implications concerning the motivations presiding over the decision-making processes and subsequent accountability for decisions “made” – the quotation marks warranted here because, under the economic paradigm of politics, no real decisions are actually *made*; simply systemic (and apolitical) occurrences that take place, and must be reacted to. As Schmitt puts it, “[a] domination of men based upon pure economics must appear a terrible deception if, by remaining non-political, it thereby evades political responsibility and visibility” (2007, p. 77). It thus becomes possible to perceive how such a political arrangement may actually prove more undesirable than an alternative in which the political and the decision still prevail – even if it entails the possibility of a state making *wrong* decisions.

One of the most significant consequences of this rising prevalence of the economic paradigm in politics, coupled with the generally rationalistic perspective adopted by liberalism, is the negation of another critical aspect of Schmittian political theory: the *friend-enemy distinction*. The latter is, according to Schmitt, not only an essential element of the political life of a given people – it is the one *specifically political* antinomy of human existence – but it also provides the most accurate measure of the political health of that people. A people which “no longer possesses the capacity or the will to make this distinction”, Schmitt argues, “ceases to exist politically” – for “[t]herein resides the essence of its political existence” (*Idem*, p. 49). The political importance of the friend-enemy distinction is further emphasised by the fact that it is not arbitrary or normatively determined, but rather something much more philosophically rich: “[t]he political enemy is [...] existentially something different and alien”, he is an adversary who “intends to negate his opponent’s way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one’s own form of existence” (*Idem*, p. 27). The nature of the distinction is, thus,

*existential*; on a meta-political and quasi-ontological level, the enemy is the background against which the foreground of our *own political identity* stands in stark contrast, and consequently becomes clearly defined.

To deny the friend-enemy distinction would thus be tantamount to denying the very foundation of our political existence. Yet, that is exactly the consequence of the rationalistic [non-]ideology derived from liberal theory and the economicism which often accompanies it today. If one aims to make the human world conform to an idealized universal rationality, it stands to reason that any instances of irrationality – even if they are not actually *irrational*, but a deviation from the pre-established narrow notion of rationality – must be regarded as pebbles in an otherwise well-oiled machine. And the friend-enemy distinction is certainly one notion which does not fit in the scheme carefully woven by liberal theorists. For that reason, liberalism has tried to conceptually neutralize it, thus rendering it safe under rational control. In order to do so, it has “attempted to transform the enemy from the viewpoint of economics into a competitor and from the intellectual point into a debating adversary” (*Idem*, p. 28).

Now, one may certainly ask why such an intention should be construed as harmful. Indeed, it would seem that, by neutralizing the friend-enemy distinction, one would be in a position to potentially efface the key underlying cause of political conflict and therefore enable reasoned discussion to take place in its stead. This, however, may prove to be a naive and pernicious understanding of human nature and of how decisively politics is an intrinsic part of it. If the political is crucial to the essence of human existence – in the sense of Aristotle’s conception of human being as *zôon politikon*, which Schmitt indirectly emulates – the friend-enemy distinction is, in turn, an equally decisive element of the essence of the political. Furthermore, negating that distinction does not remove political conflict and use of force from the plane of human existence; it merely induces it to assume a *seemingly subtler* form.

The universalistic origins and aspirations of liberalism, coupled with a political agenda guided by the dictums of economics, Schmitt argues, produces a kind of “economic imperialism” which retains the instrumental use of force – “a stronger, but still economic, and therefore (according to this terminology) non-political, essentially peaceful means of force” (*Idem*, p. 79). The reality of politics is not significantly changed by this conceptual shift: “[w]ar is condemned but

executions, sanctions, punitive expeditions, pacifications, protection of treaties, international police, and measures to assure peace remain”. And since the rationalistic universalism of liberalism is present, the “adversary is no longer called an enemy but a disturber of peace and is thereby designated to be an outlaw of humanity” (*Idem*, p. 79). The purported intent to neutralize and rationalize the political hence falls prey to the same kind of dynamics of power it was seemingly set to challenge. It does not negate of the political, but subverts it and retains it in a more precarious variety.

### **3. The Exception as Norm**

So far, we have been examining how the application of Schmitt’s conception of the political can be used to bring into light the potential failings of the establishment of liberalism as the preferred foundation for our political system. We have, however, yet to establish a connection – at least explicitly – between that assessment and the main issue at hand: how is it exactly that the Schmittian discussion of the political and the exception come into play regarding the problem of emotions’ place in politics? In order to fully grasp the scope this essential question, we must engage in a twofold analysis: to begin with, the true nature and place of the exception in contemporary *realpolitik* must be made clear; concurrently, this progressive unveiling of the political reality of the exception must be systematically related to – and explained by – the very limitations of liberal rationalism that it previously helped expose.

When discussing the concrete political existence of the exception in contemporary politics, a consideration of the work of Giorgio Agamben – in both *Homo Sacer* and, even more so, *State of Exception* – seems unavoidable. One of Schmitt’s most eminent contemporary interpreters, Agamben is a leading theorist of the exception, taking it upon himself to test not only the theoretical boundaries of the concept made famous by the German philosopher, but its practical ones as well. And the exception, for Agamben, has today become a supremely practical concept.

Far from mere philosophical whim or legal oddity which deviously eludes constitutional codification, a careful examination of the political world around us

might very well lead us to the realization that the [state of] exception has gradually assumed the role of “the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics” (Agamben, 2005, p. 2). But how was it that the state of exception, theoretically intended to represent only what its name entails – a political tool to be employed solely under an exceptional set of circumstances – managed to become the norm?

Without delving into an extensive genealogy of the concept and its practical application, it should suffice to say that the declaration of a state of exception has – albeit to varying extents – been a political expedient available to the State since the times of the ancient Roman republic. The proclamation of a *iustitium*, a feature in Roman law, represented the legal culmination of the acknowledgement of a situation which severely threatened the life and preservation of the State. By proclaiming a *iustitium* – which Agamben tells us was etymologically constructed in the same manner as *solistitium* (when the sun [*sol*] stands still [*sistere*]) – the State essentially proclaimed “a ‘standstill’ or ‘suspension of the law’”, a suspension “not simply of the administration of justice, but of the law as such” (*Idem*, p. 41). This then allowed for a concentration of power that, while not being inscribed in the law, ultimately aimed to preserve it, by removing the source of threat and therefore protecting the integrity of the State.

Presented under this form – which the subsequent legal figures of state of exception throughout history have essentially mirrored – the state of exception defined by the Roman *iustitium* appears to harbour an inherent and inescapable paradox. On the one hand, the [political] acts committed under a *iustitium* “seem to escape all legal definition”: they “are neither transgressive, executive, nor legislative”, and thus “seem to be situated in an absolute non-place with respect to the law” (*Idem*, p. 51). On the other, while they are situated outside normal law – which it has, by definition, been suspended – they still retain the legitimacy and *force of law* of the latter, inasmuch as they are intended to preserve it and insure the eventual creation of the conditions for its reinstatement. As Agamben puts it, it is a state of law “in which, on the one hand, the norm is in force [*vige*] but is not applied (it has no ‘force’ [*forza*]) and, on the other, acts that do not have the value [*valore*] of law acquire its ‘force’” (*Idem*, p. 38).

This paradoxical nature of the state of exception concerning the law understandably raises major questions regarding the true scope and legitimacy of the actions taken under its umbrella. But it also entails an additional and equally significant problem: the one concerning the *criteria* for its proclamation. If we return once again to the Roman notion of *iustitium*, it is possible to ascertain from historical sources that the criterion for its proclamation was the declaration of a “*tumultus*” by the Senate. The definition of *tumultus*, however, is the real issue at hand. Generally speaking, it signified an emergency situation which threatened Rome; but it was not necessarily the equivalent of *bellum*, war. Cicero tells us that “there can be a war without tumult, but no tumult without a war” (*Phillipics*, 8.1, apud Agamben, 2005, p. 42), thus further emphasising the rather ambiguous nature and degree of the emergency which warranted a *iustitium*.

As one can easily surmise, the problem regarding the criteria of proclamation of a state of exception or (emergency) is related to the possibility of the abuse of the powers granted by the latter via the declaration of a fictitious or feigned emergency. Historically speaking, there are two particular instances of sovereign decisions which are frequently cited as examples of this phenomenon. The first of them pertains to the so-called Ship Money crisis of the 1630’s, when King Charles I of England attempted to enforce extraordinary taxation upon the country during peacetime without Parliamentary approval, by resorting to an obscure legal expedient that allowed the monarch to levy taxes for the Royal Navy in times of war. Exploiting a naval-war scare, Charles I “claimed both that he as sovereign must have the power to raise military forces to defend the nation and that the Crown must be the sole judge of whether such a threat existed” (Norris, 2007, p. 44). This was met by heavy Parliamentary resistance and eventually became one of the reasons for the ensuing English Civil War.

The second example is provided by the Napoleonic decree of December 24, 1811, which “provided for a state of siege that the emperor could declare whether or not a city was actually under attack or directly threatened by enemy forces” (Agamben, 2005, p. 4). This decree allowed for the bolstering of both numbers and powers of the military police whenever circumstances required it – the latter being *legally* defined, with the unusual political forthrightness of a man whose ego had reached its pinnacle, as any moment when the emperor so desired it. As with the

previous case, this issue at hand does not merely concern the legitimacy of the criteria for the declaration of a state of emergency, but also – and much more decisively – *who* should be allowed to decide upon that legitimacy and, therefore, enforce the exception. It is, as Schmitt accurately perceived it, a moment when “sovereignty” ceases to be a philosophical and legal notion to assume a very concrete political existence.

### *3.1. Perpetual war and the tyranny of the exception*

Contemporarily, the problem of the legitimacy (in positivistic terms, the “veracity”) of the exception being declared is still very much alive in the discussion concerning Schmitt’s work and its application to concrete politics. Politically speaking, emergencies are moments which “may compromise legal order by generating political pressures to augment executive power at the expense of legislative and judicial institutions”, insofar “courts often dial down the intensity of judicial review during emergencies in deference to the executive branch, enabling the executive to sidestep ordinary legal restraints” (Criddle & Fox-Decent, 2012, p. 46). As such, they constitute a real danger for the existence of individuals not only in the most immediate sense – whatever physical threat to their biological survival they may entail – but also in political terms. If the declaration of a state of emergency is allowed to be employed as a political tool for the convenience of those who hold positions of authority, there is a chance that “emergency powers can become permanently entrenched, facilitating the further abuse of public powers long after the crisis has passed” (*Idem*).

The political aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001 in New York City is regarded by several sources – Agamben among them – as providing us with the clearest example of the contemporary materialization of that danger, while simultaneously enlightening us on the true scope and status of the state of exception today. Parallels with the examples we have previously mentioned are, in fact, clearly visible. According to Norris, for instance, there were (and still are) similar debates in the post-9/11 world to those surrounding the actions of King Charles I, both in the USA and abroad. Writing in 2007, he adds that although “the Bush-Cheney administration does not claim to be making Schmittian decisions, but rather regularly

traces its supposed *legal* authority to the September 2001 congressional Authorization for Use of Military Force (Public Law 107-40 [S. J. RES. 23]), it does repeat claims such as Charles's" (2007, p. 44).

Referring to the same issue, Agamben emphasises the attempt on basic human rights and civil liberties ensuing from the "military order" issued by the president of the USA in November 13, 2001, "which authorized the 'indefinite detention' and 'trial by military commissions' [...] of noncitizens suspected of involvement in terrorist activities" (2005, p. 3). This military order, Agamben notes, expanded perversely on the powers granted by the USA Patriot Act of October 26, 2001, that already allowed for the lawful imprisonment of any alien suspected of activities which posed a threat to national security, but forced authorities to release that individual within seven days if he or she had not been charged for any violation or criminal offence.

Further deepening the problem made clear here, the evolution of the so-called "global war on terror" which ensued after 9/11 served as justification for additional limitations of civil right and liberties which bear even greater *political* consequences than the ones cited by Agamben. Acting under the initially consensual perception of the necessity of conceiving and implementing "exceptional measures" to preserve the safety of citizens, governments were legitimized in turning those exceptional measures against the very citizens they were presumed to protect. In addition to the powers we have just mentioned, the USA Patriot Act of 2001<sup>32</sup> enabled the Federal Bureau of Investigation to access private information (telephone, e-mail, and financial records) of citizens and non-citizens alike, further granting law enforcement officers the permission to search a home or business without the owner's knowledge or consent, and expanded access to business records.

In 2011, ten years after the beginning of the "war on terror", and twenty four days after the reported death of Osama bin Laden, the PATRIOT Sunsets Extension Act was signed by president Barack Obama, extending the provision of the original Act in matters like the use of roving wiretaps, access to business records and wide-ranging surveillance of suspected terrorists. In September of the same year, Anwar al-Awlaki and his son Abdulrahman al-Awlaki – both of whom were legal American

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<sup>32</sup> An act whose title, despite its common transliteration, is actually an acronym for "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act" – a formulation remarkably pregnant with ideological and moralistic zeal.

citizens – were killed in separate drone strikes conducted by the USA military and sanctioned by the president, with Anwar al-Awlaki thus becoming the first USA citizen to be targeted and killed using such an expedient. This was viewed by many as essentially amounting to an execution of American citizens by the government without granting them their constitutional right to judicial process. In a previously classified memorandum issue by the United States Department of Justice, released in 2014, the killing of both men was presented and justified as an unavoidable yet “lawful act of war”, despite the fact that the country was not officially at war with any party – Yemen, for instance, where the strikes took place – in a conventional sense. It was still the “war on terror” being used to legitimize depriving citizens of their rights in the most essential of senses.

The “war on terror” that has more or less explicitly been evoked as the linchpin of the legitimacy of exceptional measures such as wiretaps and drone strikes – and which is beginning to bear an uncanny likeness to an Orwellian state of “perpetual war” – served equally as the rationale behind more mundane instances of limitation of individual liberties like the growing ubiquity of CCTV surveillance (particularly visible in the UK) or the airport security officers’ prerogative to conduct comprehensive searches. And in addition to the successive emergencies caused the terrorist threat that are systematically invoked by governments worldwide in order to justify exceptional situations (and claim exceptional powers), there is the threat posed by economic and medical emergencies, such as the aforementioned global economic crisis of 2008 (the pretence behind several “exceptional” and unpopular political measures in countries like Portugal, Spain, and Greece) and the seemingly cyclical pandemic alerts concerning swine flu, avian flu, cholera, and so on. We seem to be surrounded by emergencies of all sorts in today’s world, all of which serious enough to justify the temporal and political extent of the state of exception which – as Agamben recognized – thus seems to have indeed become the most paradigmatic form of government of our time<sup>33</sup>.

If, paraphrasing Cicero’s formulation, there can be wars that do not warrant the implementation of a state of exception, but no state of exception that can be declared without reference to a war, then it would seem that contemporary states go

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<sup>33</sup> On the role of the economic emergency in the establishment of a state of *permanent political emergency*, see Žižek, 2010.

to great lengths to find “wars” that allow them to justify their preferred means of government. The “war” on terror, the “war” on impending economic collapse, the “war” on disease; this successive recourse to the analogy of war has become a hallmark of contemporary political discourse – it is present, as Agamben points out, as early as in Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s presidential addresses regarding the necessity to assume extraordinary powers in order to cope with the Great Depression, by asking the Congress for “broad Executive power to wage war against the emergency, as great as the power that would be given to me if we were in fact invaded by a foreign foe” (Roosevelt, 1938, 14-15, apud Agamben, 2005, p. 22).

The prevalence of this analogy provides us with a clear picture of the understanding of politics being fostered today. In no other situation is a strong and clearly defined leadership more important than in matters of war – the very notion of dictatorship, in fact, was in the Roman Republic originally used to represent a transient state of concentration of powers most often deemed necessary in face of the threat of war. The nature of the exception is one which does not easily coexist with our democratic ideals, but whose urgency feels enough to warrant the (partial) suspension of the latter. As Lippmann puts it, “every democrat feels in his bones that dangerous crises are incompatible with democracy, because he knows that the inertia of the masses is such that to act quickly a very few must decide and the rest follow rather blindly” (1956, p. 272).

At this point, perhaps a caveat is warranted: it is absolutely not our intention here to suggest that any contemporary democratic state endeavours to produce situations which facilitate or legitimize the establishment of a state of exception – a notion that would bring us haplessly close to certain forms of conspiracy theory, far removed from any serious consideration of the matter at hand. Conversely, what we maintain is that such exceptional situations, when they spontaneously occur, awaken what appears to be a somewhat latent *temptation* in democratic politics: the temptation to gradually represent everyday politics as the equivalent of their wartime counterpart, and thus benefit from an widening of executive powers that allows governments to shed some of the restrictions inherent to most democratic constitutions. By its very nature as an political expedient intended to streamline executive action, the state of exception appears to intrinsically tend towards making itself permanent – something which can be interpreted either critically, as a

materialization of a yearning for [greater] political power on the part of elected officials, or benevolently, as a genuine desire to prevent any future exceptional situations from ever taking place. In either case, the transubstantiation from the exceptional into the status quo is usually pursued via juridical provisions which contemplate the eventual necessity to temporarily suspend certain individual liberties – regardless of those provisions being pre-existing or put into place by the proclamation of a state of emergency itself. That was the case, as Agamben points out, with one of the most infamous political regimes in the contemporary western world: Hitler’s Third Reich. As Agamben notes,

[n]o sooner did Hitler take power (or, as we should perhaps more accurately say, no sooner was power given to him) than, on February 28, he proclaimed the Decree for the Protection of the People and the State, which suspended the articles of the Weimar constitution concerning political liberties. The decree was never repealed, so that from a juridical standpoint, the entire Third Reich can be considered a state of exception that lasted twelve years (2005, p. 2).

In accepting the political legitimacy of the declaration of a state of exception, the key political problem regarding it becomes not its use, but its abuse – whether the latter is manifested in the attempt to declare a state of exception unjustifiably or, even if it was originally justified, to prolong it beyond what circumstances warrant. It is this abuse which, in essence, poses a threat to democratic precepts: when the exception becomes permanent, it is no longer the exception, but the norm. And as Agamben adds to the above considerations, since the precedent set by Nazism and other totalitarian regimes, “the voluntary creation of a permanent state of emergency (though perhaps not declared in the technical sense) has become one of the essential practices of contemporary states (including democratic ones)” (*Idem*). The danger unveiled by taking the analysis of the contemporary application of Schmittian thought to its final consequences is hence that of the surreptitious establishment of a *pseudo-tyranny of the exception*.

#### 4. Exceptional Emotions

What should strike us as the most significant aspect of our political landscape today is not the fact that most states seem to abuse the expedient of the state of exception as a means to increase the breadth and autonomy of their powers<sup>34</sup>, but rather the fact that this abuse appears to be generally regarded as legitimate by citizens of those states. Most of us today are citizens not of dictatorships but of – at least *de jure* – democracies. The inflation of executive power and the subsequent waning of certain individual liberties are hence not imposed on us, but rather something that we – either willingly or unwittingly – allow to happen. If we regard citizens as rationally-driven calculators of costs and benefits, however, this phenomenon seemingly defies all logic. Granted, one could argue that the safeguarding of life and physical integrity is in itself a benefit worth any cost, and therefore rationally justifies the limitation (or even the abdication) of some individual rights and liberties. But if that choice clearly harbours the potential to lead us to a political situation in which caused the very “public use of reason” that made it possible in the first place to be abolished, should it still be rationally desirable?

Agamben’s theory regarding the true status of the exception in today’s politics – which, as himself acknowledges, echoes Walter Benjamin’s earlier assertion that “the state of exception [...] has become the rule” (Benjamin, 1942, 697/257, apud Agamben, 2005, p. 6) – appears to be, in light of all that has been discussed, a fairly accurate diagnosis of the situation. But something can – and should – be added to this idea, for although the end result may be clearly perceived, the causes of the process leading up to it still warrant further clarification. How exactly did the exception managed surreptitiously become the norm? What were the political, sociological and psychological conditions that made it possible? In order to properly answer these critical questions, I would argue, one must take the issue beyond the realm of conventional political theory and take into account the key role played by emotions in politics.

The tacit choice, made by a majority of individuals, to accept the dubious legitimacy of the political status quo embodied by the permanent state of exception –

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<sup>34</sup> Essentially promoting an “abolition of the distinction among legislative, executive and judicial powers”(Agamben, 2005, p. 7) or, more succinctly, an absorption of legislative power by the executive branch.

along with everything the latter entails concerning individual rights and liberties – thus appears to be the result of a combination of the factors that we have been discussing in the preceding chapters. First and foremost, the citizens of today’s western liberal democracies are the (often) unsuspecting heirs to currents of political thought – such as liberalism, cosmopolitanism and economicism – that are deeply permeated by markedly rationalistic conceptions of human nature and politics, which are therefore systematically fostered and reinforced in the minds of individuals.

Secondly, and partially caused by this first aspect, there is generalised ignorance regarding the true nature of the processes of deliberation, motivation and decision-making, which are commonly regarded as being essentially (or even exclusively) based in cognition and logical reasoning, despite a wealth of scientific evidence to the contrary stemming from the fields of neurology and neuropsychology. This evidence demonstrates that emotions not only exert a decisive influence – both potentially beneficial or detrimental – upon such aspects of our mental life, but that the latter are actually not even possible in the absence of a healthy and fully-functioning emotional processing system.

Thirdly, because human beings are essentially social animals, the processes of deliberation and decision-making do not occur *ex-nihilo* in the mind of the individual, but actually exist – and must therefore be understood – as phenomena inscribed in a socio-political context which both influences and is simultaneously influenced by them. The psychological dynamics of life in a social unit and their effect on our perception of the world around us, our pre-conceptions, our prejudices, and even our inclination towards certain opinions, decisions and actions, must therefore be acknowledged as a key component of our political existence. The fact that it commonly is not, and that hence each of us tends to operate under an excessively optimistic evaluation of our own critical prowess, enhances the efficacy of mechanisms of political influence which can be encompassed by the umbrella notion of propaganda, and which are made ubiquitous and inescapable by the scope of contemporary mass media.

Finally, the fact that most states are today grounded upon some form or derivative of liberalism renders their citizens ill-equipped to comprehend the nature of the exception – its “topological structure” in regards to conventional law of “*being-outside and yet belonging*” (*Idem*, p. 35) – and its relationship with the

manifestation of sovereignty as a concrete political reality. Our difficulty in properly evaluating the legitimacy and extent of the state of exception is also the result of a normativist conception of politics that itself struggles to incorporate it into its rigid and formalistic schemata.

What is it then that makes us so receptive to the state of exception today? The answer, I would argue, is intimately connected with our inability (or unwillingness) to acknowledge the rightful place of emotions in our decision-making processes and, consequently, in our political lives. This claim is not only supported by the theoretical analysis that we have undertaken thus far, but also by the contemporary instances when the state of exception becomes political practice. The latter exhibit a distinct pattern regarding the tactic commonly employed to assure public acceptance of its justification – albeit not necessarily of its legitimization: an appeal to emotion. Specifically, it is an appeal to what Aristotle categorizes as *practical emotions*, emotions such as fear and anger which, by definition, are intrinsically connected with and conducive to certain patterns of action. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, the American government arguably instrumentalized the events themselves and others that followed them – the so-called 2001 anthrax attacks, for instance – by calling upon sentiments of fear (regarding additional attacks) and anger (against the presumed authors of the attacks) in order to justify not only the military intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq – along with the loss of American lives it would necessarily entail – but also the limitation and revocation of civil liberties we mentioned above<sup>35</sup>. In fact, according to Moïsi (2009), it is both possible and plausible to regard fear as a key element in shaping and determining the contemporary political culture of the USA and Europe, along with the latter's position in terms of global politics – thus further elucidating the prevalence and effectiveness of a political instrumentalization of that specific emotion in those cases.

In addition to these examples, we might cite others whose external appearance may seem different, but which coincide in essence: in the economic crisis of 2008, for instance, the paradoxical appeal to provide significant financial aid to banking institutions – some of which were directly responsible for causing the crisis itself – at the expense of public funds, all while enforcing austerity measures upon

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<sup>35</sup> David Altheide's *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear* (2006) and Thrall & Kramer's *American Foreign Policy and Politics of Fear: Threat Inflation since 9/11* (2009) provide interesting and thought-provoking accounts of this phenomenon.

common citizens, was justified by exploiting the fear of an even greater danger posed by the purported imminent collapse of the entire financial system. To the time of this writing, that very fear is still being harnessed as the driving force behind the manufacturing of consent regarding the implementation of “exceptional” economic measures by several western states, measures whose immediately perceptible effect consistently is the gradual diminishing of individual economic and political self-determination. As we pointed out earlier, economic “emergencies” have come to be understood as tantamount to political emergencies in terms of both consequence and urgency, and perhaps today’s most globally and consensually acknowledged instance of a permanent state of emergency can even be said to be one of an *economic* nature (Žižek, 2010)

In all of the instances when the exception becomes a political instrument of dubious legitimacy, the common denominator is provided by an exploitation of the emotional frailty of individuals – with causes of the latter being, with tragic irony, found in the beliefs of those very individuals. As logically consistent inheritors of a rationalistic conception of human reason, we believe that we are above such lowly attempts at political manipulation. When we decide on the best course of action in face of a given political crisis or imminent threat, we do so subconsciously heeding the old adage that one should not decide on the ground of emotions. We believe that we have managed to completely exclude emotions from the process. We believe that we are responding rationally. Indeed, even when emotions are present we truly are, because they are an inextricable part of rationality. But in not acknowledging our emotions, we are allowing them to be manipulated and being led to believe that we are responding *purely* rationally. Our response, whatever it may be, is therefore endowed with the *absolute certainty* of logical truth. A truth which is not open to challenge and that renders all of its logical consequences logically necessary – even if among them are the concession of illegitimate powers to the State and the renunciation of individual liberties.

This emotional frailty, resulting from the overestimation of logical reasoning and a misconception of human rationality, is then amplified by a belief that our permanent access to information provided by mass media provides us the necessary knowledge to clearly perceive and evaluate everything involved in a given political issue. In truth, the complexity of contemporary politics effectively creates a veil of

ignorance – to borrow Rawls’ term – between the reality of the problem and our understanding, placing the former beyond our ability to accurately comprehend it and forcing us to lend credence to experts on the subject. Ironically, though, this does not preclude our prejudices from influencing our decisions, but actually reinforces their effect, with the choice of experts being made more often than not on the basis of their political alignment with our preconceived notions on the issue. And if this is true even for more conventional political issues, it is even more so in the case of exceptional ones; paraphrasing Lippmann’s quote from the previous chapter, during a mutiny at sea there is no time to make each sailor an expert judge of experts

In the end, the ignorance of emotion’s place in decision-making contributes decisively towards the creation of what Jacques Ellul dubs the “political illusion”, an illusion “destined, as always, to hide a reality that haunts us and that we do not know how to master” (2004, p. 30). We wish to believe that, with methodical and surgical use of our pure rational ability, we can accurately read political problems, make consistently “right” political decisions, and ultimately control the workings of the State. The truth, however, is that the opposite is much more often the case. The political illusion of our time is thus one grounded on the overestimation of our ability to rationally control the political system, while ignoring that, by ostracising emotion from the process, we are actually creating the conditions for that system to control us. As far as our autonomous political existence is concerned, this is “an illusion which [...] presents a mortal danger” (Idem, p.190).

## Chapter V – Political Virtue and Liberal Education

Thus far we have argued – and endeavoured to demonstrate – that our perceived ability to rationally control the political sphere constitutes one of the most dangerous political illusions of our times. That danger is materialized in a clear opportunity for political agents and institutions to exploit our disregard for emotion’s role in (political) decision-making processes, leading to such phenomena as the potential establishment of the state of exception as “the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics” (Agamben, 2005, p. 2). This possibility, which critically threatens the very foundations of western liberal democratic politics, is ironically provided by our (either explicit or implicit) adherence to what we argued to be one of the founding tenets of liberal theory: the belief in the primacy of rationality as the defining human faculty, to the detriment of all other dimensions of human existence – emotion in particular.

At this point in our work, having identified the problem that we set out to unveil, we find ourselves before a significant choice regarding its continuation. There are, indeed, many routes open to us: we could focus, for instance, on other dimensions of the political sphere where the consequences of the dissonance between the expectations of political rationalism and their frustration by *realpolitik* are particularly obvious and significant – such as party politics, economic policy, political communication, voter behaviour, and so on. It is a choice that would be not only valid, but perhaps even expected, considering all that has been argued and expounded upon so far. At a meta-critical level, it is also, however, a choice that would represent a desire to emphasise the aporetic dimension of the problem, uncovering and examining it in its different incarnations. While undoubtedly interesting and still politically worthwhile, this route nevertheless strikes me as the less arduous – and, crucially, less fruitful – out of the two now before us. Philosophy demands us to take any perceived aporia to its final consequences, thus reaching the place where its actual insolubility can best be ascertained. In what pertains to the matter at hand, despite its undeniable and – given our present cultural and political circumstances – almost ontological complexity, I am not yet convinced of the impossibility of a solution.

It is therefore a conscious and fully intentional choice that we make to proceed down an alternate path, the one which urges us to conduct a deeper examination of the roots of the problem in search of its possible solution. What we might almost instantly find following this choice, however, is that the first step towards a clearing in that seemingly winding and obscure path has already been taken for us, considering the nature of the problem itself and the political reality it inhabits. To put it concretely, the conjunction between the factors conducive to the state of affairs identified in previous chapters and the political entities that regard it as politically useful – and therefore become complicit with it – configures a political problem which, in *democratic* terms, can only entail one route towards its solution: education. These two dimensions – politics and education – are, after all, umbilically connected: a philosophy of education can always be deduced from a philosophy of the political, in the same manner that a specific ethical and political conception can invariably be extracted from the former. And particularly in democratic politics – where such problems cannot be unilaterally solved by decree, under penalty of undermining the very foundations of the political process – education presents itself as the sole means to significantly affect change at the wide and deeply seeded level demanded here.

Our subsequent efforts will henceforth follow a twofold approach, through which the problem will be simultaneously addressed at the level of a political philosophy and a philosophy of education – insofar as its solution should conceivably be found in a politically involved and relevant form of education. If the latter is true, however, the question may arise of how it has not happened yet, given that comprehensive and compulsory formal schooling is virtually universal in contemporary western democracies, and often explicitly embraces the cross-disciplinary aim of *educating citizens*. The only plausible answer to this seems to be that formal schooling under the moulds adopted by those polities, as well as the educational theory that underpins it, are inadequate regarding the issue at hand. And given that, as previously argued, a great number of our choices and beliefs within the realm of the political are informed by a form of political rationalism promoted by liberalism – and often even by the political economicism which stems from it – one may suspect the same to be true of our conception of education. Whether there can

be said to exist a specifically liberal theory of education and, if so, what might its key features be, thus become pressing questions.

Upon preliminary inspection, the answer to the first of those questions is affirmative. Not only are educative concerns clearly present in many of the foundational texts of liberalism – Locke’s *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, Mill’s *On Liberty*, and Rawls’ *Political Liberalism*, to name a few – but a considerable amount of significant research on the subject has been produced in recent years (Callan, 1997; Brighouse, 2000, Levinson, 2002; McDonough & Feinberg, 2007; McLaughlin, 2012). Reflecting what is perceived as the specific contribution of liberalism to educational theory (and practice), most of these authors focus on what is known as “liberal education”. Yet, the notion of liberal education, while often perceived as self-evident when taken at face value, is infused with a degree of philosophical and pedagogical complexity which certainly warrants further consideration.

The current discussion around liberal education focuses almost exclusively on either attempting to promote its benefits for the political education of the future citizens of increasingly globalized and multicultural states, or on the criticism it merits from proponents of theories like *communitarianism*, who regard its purported commitment to political and philosophical individualism as inimical to the sense of community indispensable for a healthy democratic society (White & Callan, 2003; McDonough & Feinberg, 2007; Williams, 2007). A critical examination of liberal education, informed by a deeper understanding of the political role of emotion, and taking into account all the significant challenges to the democratic process that ensue from the latter, is however something that has yet to be attempted. By pursuing it, we will not only be adding something new to the ongoing debate, but also contributing for a clearer comprehension of the nature and possible limitations of liberal education.

## **1. Liberalism and Liberal Education**

Liberal education is a concept which – as made evident by the variety of approaches that its discussion presently harbours – entails an inherent difficulty of

definition: is *liberal* education an education conducive to the formation of citizens endowed with the ideal abilities and characteristics *required by a liberal polity*, or rather an education aiming to *foster liberty* in the most deeply ontological sense – of an individual who is liberated from contingent sentimental attachments or pre-existing political allegiances, and therefore free to lead a truly autonomous existence?

On the one hand, there are liberal theorists who maintain that “liberalism is not perfectionist, in the sense that it does not aim to shape the citizen to a vision of the common good” (Appiah, 2007, p. 59); according to the former, the very conception of an umbilical connection between the educational and the political mentioned above – which hinges precisely on the establishment of an ideal model for citizenship and the acknowledgment of education’s duty to contribute towards the “common good” – should be regarded as incompatible with liberalism.

On the other, there are also those within liberalism who argue in the opposite direction, proposing that “[j]ust as liberal political theory has important political ramifications for the aim, structure, and content of education, so education has important ramifications for liberalism in both theory and practice (Levinson, 2002, p. 4). As such, and while “there is disagreement about exactly what abilities citizens should possess” – ranging from Rawlsian “capacity for democratic citizenship”, a respect for difference, to the “capacity for autonomy” – “all contemporary liberal theories require that adults have some opportunities and capacities provided for by education” (*Idem*).

This apparent internal contradiction of liberalism regarding its perspective on education and the latter’s role in political terms is essentially motivated by many liberal theorists’ discomfort when dealing with a pedagogical operative concept which John Dewey dubs “direction”. Dewey – who, despite being often characterized as “the liberal philosopher of education par excellence”, produced a body of work decisively marked by “deep communitarian currents” which attempted to “construct communitarian theory of democracy and democratic education that absorbs important liberal elements” (Callan & White, 2003, p. 104) – presents direction as one of the forms of the “general function of education”, and equates it with “guidance” and “control” (Dewey, 2008, p. 27). Ultimately electing for direction as the more felicitous of the three notions – because it better conveys the idea of an

orientation which is neither tyrannical nor dehumanizing in the sense of Kantian instrumentalization – he goes on to define it as a “guiding of activity to its own end”, an “assistance in doing fully what some organ is already intending to do” (Dewey, 2008, p. 27).

Dewey’s caveat notwithstanding, to conceive education as an inherently directive activity is a view still regarded as untenable by many liberal theorists of education. Traced back to its origin, this aversion finds its roots in Book I of John Locke’s *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, where he “formulates a central credo of the Enlightenment and in doing so crafts a classic definition of liberal autonomy: ‘Men must think and know for themselves’” (Burt, 2007, p. 179). Albeit not explicitly employing the notion of autonomy itself, Locke’s arguments in paragraph 24 of Chapter IV still reflect the essence and central importance of the latter in the Enlightenment’s conception of liberalism. In the pursuit of truth, Locke states, we must not “[take] up another’s principles without examining them” and “give up our assent only to reverend names”; rather, we “should employ our own reason to understand those truths which gave them reputation”. It is not a “small power it gives one man over another, to have the authority to be the dictator of principles, and teacher of unquestionable truths”, he adds in paragraph 25, further emphasising the importance of the use of our “own reason and judgement”.

What explains the apparent contradiction regarding liberal education mentioned above is thus the fact that, in spite of their reluctance to adhere to a closed notion of “ideal citizen” (and all that the latter entails) contemporary liberal theorists still largely acquiesce in Locke’s portrayal of autonomy as a character trait which is *ideal* – not only in the pursuit of scientific and philosophical truth, but also in what concerns the erection of a just and equitable polis. Expanding on Locke’s arguments, “[c]ontemporary liberal theory” has come to associate “autonomy with the willingness and ability to distance ourselves critically from the roles or ends we have been raised to value” (Burt, 2007, p. 182). The ability to fully determine the nature of our own existence in an independent fashion has become the hallmark – and requisite – of contemporary liberalism: “autonomy is the ability to control our lives by reasoned choice”; people are “autonomous rather than heteronomous, to the extent that they choose the principles by which they live” (Dagger apud Burt, 2007, pp. 200-1).

Translated by liberalism into educational terms, the notion of autonomy retains its central importance. Liberalism's project of education is, in fact, philosophically founded upon the concern to foster individual autonomy in the pursuit of knowledge, not only in the scientific field, but also in all other facets of human existence – including ethics and politics. As Appiah argues, “[t]he key to a liberal education is the development of an autonomous self” (2007, p. 64). Liberal educators should thus embrace the “need to prepare children with the truth, and the capacity to acquire more of it” (*Idem*, p. 68). Here too – or rather, here especially – Locke's original idea of the opposition between autonomy and the “dictatorship” of external authority bears considerable fruit, and provides the rationale for liberals' distrust regarding any pedagogic conception which affords theoretical credence to the importance of direction. There is in liberal education a marked aversion for directive methodologies and any pedagogic approaches that presuppose an ideal model of character or behaviour to which students are expected to conform, inasmuch as it is assumed that these things unavoidably represent an encroachment upon individual liberty and autonomy.

With this philosophical substratum nourishing it, liberal education has grown to express itself concretely with increasing diversity. Its historical connection to the medieval liberal arts, while still bearing some vestigial effects on the general program of liberal education today, has to a large extent been abandoned and replaced with the more inclusive perspective inherited from the Enlightenment – which emphasises individual autonomy, and is therefore suited to be applied to any discipline that can be argued to advance an individual's knowledge and the ability to adapt that knowledge to any given situation (the now familiar and ubiquitous notion of “transferable skills”). Liberal education has thus gradually adapted to the demands of a socio-political situation brought about, in great part, due to the political influence of liberalism itself. Traditionally viewed with suspicion in the late-modern industrial society due to its lack of “practical” application, liberal education has since evolved to not only include some of the very disciplines that previously represented its opposition, but also adjusted its original content accordingly. As Blitz puts it, subjects that appear to offer something “useful” – such as the sciences – are favoured, while others like “psychology, government and economics” are “pushed to make their more useful elements their dominant ones” (2004, p. 47). Liberal subjects

which are deemed of little utility, on the other hand, “either ossify or are overwhelmed by their technical elements”: language skills replace literature, art becomes graphic design, music and philosophy gradually fade away from prominence, and so on (*Idem*).

Considering this actualization of liberal education in light of the demands of contemporary society, the very promise entailed by the former is bound to change. What then, might we ask, are presently the main aims of its educative project? In other words, what educational and political advantages can we then expect to derive from liberal education today? Based on an overview of the literature on contemporary liberal theory, the benefits of the latter are especially significant in four key areas: civic education, global politics, social justice, and economic competitiveness. Let us now succinctly examine the claim of liberal education’s contribution to each of them.

### *1.1. Civic education*

As Levinson argues, “civic education is essential to any coherent program of liberal education”, inasmuch as the former “is critical to ensuring the stability and sustainability of the liberal state” (2002, p. 100). Despite the divergence between the proponents of what Rawls differentiates as the “comprehensive liberalism” of Kant and Mill – which seeks to “foster the values of autonomy and individuality as ideals to govern much if not all of life” (Rawls, 1996, p. 199) – and his own “political liberalism” – which focuses on conveying the political knowledge required to make effective and just citizens – there is still agreement on both parts regarding the necessary overlapping between liberal and civic education<sup>36</sup>. And if the kind of knowledge regarding the political sphere prescribed by Rawls is immediate and evidently a pre-requisite of democratic citizenship, an equally persuasive case can be made concerning the relationship between citizenship and autonomy: children must “learn to evaluate the arguments made in a democratic and political world, as well as to put forth such arguments themselves”; in practice, “this means that children need

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<sup>36</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of comprehensive and political liberalism in educational terms, as well as the possibility of their convergence, see Callan (1997), Burt (2007), and Davis & Neufeld (2007).

to develop many of the same skills as those [involved in] their development of autonomy” (Levinson, 2002, p. 102).

To further reinforce the symbiotic connection between the two, liberalism is often presented as the only viable inspiration for a project of civic education able to cope with the unique challenges of contemporary multicultural states. On the other side of the spectrum, conservatism – or, worse even, nationalism – with its excessive valuation of ultimately contingent aspects such as tradition, culture, and nationality, is viewed as a dangerous and unacceptable alternative. According to Nussbaum, an “education that takes national boundaries as morally salient too often reinforces this kind of irrationality, by lending to what is an accident of history a false air of moral weight and glory” (2002, p. 11). Being based on rational and universal principles, a civic education derived from liberal theory will enable citizens to distance themselves critically from those contingent aspects and thus foster a peaceful and fruitful coexistence between the ethnic and cultural differences which unavoidably share the same space within the contemporary democratic state. A civic education founded upon the key liberal virtues – comprised of the “toleration, mutual respect and deliberation” of political liberalism and the “individuality and autonomy” of comprehensive liberalism – is thus what “supports the widest range of social diversity that is consistent with the ongoing pursuit of liberal democratic justice” (Guttman, 1995, p. 579).

## *1.2. Global Politics*

Intimately connected with the previous point comes liberalism’s claim regarding its singular ability to educate citizens for life in an increasingly globalized world. For reasons that we have expounded on a previous chapter – and whose repetition we will hence forego – liberalism is inextricably connected with cosmopolitanism. As such, because of the latter’s universalistic nature – underpinned by an equally universal notion of human reason – liberal theory naturally tends towards the effacement of nationalistic political divisions. In doing so, it provides an opportunity to transcend national politics and reach wide-spanning consensus on key political issues which international relations. As Robert Audi expresses it, in “the plausible versions of cosmopolitanism, it is people who have *basic* moral status;

nations have derivative moral status” – that is, they “derive their value from their role in serving people” (2009, p. 372).

By endowing potential citizens with a cosmopolitan worldview, liberal education is assumed to foster the kind of political mind necessary to deal with the challenges that contemporary – and globalized – citizenship entails. It aims to prepare citizens to conceive of and understand their political action at a meta-national level, thus indirectly allowing states to effectively address global issues (e.g. environmental problems, humanitarian crises, pandemics) on the grounds of a primacy of *human* interests over those of any other kind. Furthermore, that same cosmopolitanism worldview imparted through liberal education might even allow for an enhanced ethical understanding of our political existence, by providing a moral framework which permits the introduction of issues such as the necessary political and moral responsabilization of multinational corporations in our increasingly interconnected world, particularly in “matters of human rights, social and environmental justice” (Maak, 2009, p. 361) – although it remains dubious whether this is a desired effect in light of the economic liberalism that often accompanies its political counterpart.

### *1.3. Social justice*

A third aspect towards which liberal education is often argued to positively contribute is the promotion of social justice. As a caveat, we will dispense here with a direct consideration of Rawls’ (1999) now widely-familiar arguments ensuing from his philosophical exploration of the original position and the “veil of ignorance”, along with his reflections on the principles of justice. Instead, we will employ for the purposes of this summary those arguments which, albeit certainly often animated by Rawls’ work, are specifically concerned not with the general scope of political liberalism, but with a liberal theory *of education*.

Incorporated into pedagogic practice, liberalism’s central axiological trinity of reason, individuality, and autonomy results in a commitment to foster the rational capacity of individuals in a manner conducive not only to an increase in true knowledge, but also to the development of the ability to later recognise and acquire that knowledge on their own. Equally crucial in the process of fostering individual

autonomy is the development of critical reason, to an extent that promotes the rational examination of our own beliefs and sentimental attachments. Due to all these factors and their effect in socio-political terms, it is argued, liberal education can feasibly act as the guarantor of social justice not only in contemporary democratic states, but also in what concerns the latter's relation with the globalized world around them:

[t]he justice we need under pluralism requires us to think for ourselves in a much more radical way than we must when all can take for granted the same conception of the good and right. To give the respect due to ethical viewpoints in deep conflict with our own, we must learn to enter them imaginatively and to understand that much of the pluralism that permeates our world is a consequence not of evil or folly but of the inherent limits of human reason (Callan, 1997, p. 43).

By liberating the individual from ingrained prejudices concerning heterogeneous ethical, cultural, and political perspectives, liberal education brings about the possibility to think about justice in a purely rational and balanced manner – a manner which is, therefore, *just in itself*. Diverging views may thus cease to be hurriedly perceived as evil or wrong to be better understood as simply mistaken – and therefore ransomable from error through reasoned argument. To this outcome contributes not only the rational development promoted by liberal education, but also the latter's fostering of autonomy: a “good civic education” includes “encouragement to reflect independently on the strengths and weaknesses of the existing social and political order”, inasmuch as “good citizens must be able to challenge the community's dominant understanding of justice” (Burt, 2007, p. 195).

Also significant regarding liberal education's claim of advancing social justice are its arguments concerning equality. Although it may be argued that equality in itself constitutes a political aim at odds with autonomy – at least in the sense that different conceptions of liberalism may exclusively adopt either one as the *telos* of liberalism's political project – a persuasive case can be made for their compatibility in matters of education. This is the position adopted by Levinson (2002), who nevertheless warns that, in order to ensure that compatibility and avoid enforcing an “equality *as such*” which would render it “tyrannical”, the “political

value of equality must be circumscribed” by a liberal state: it “must choose a particular good or goods to equalize, such as opportunity, resources, outcome, or welfare” (*Idem*, p. 141). Out of all those possible goods, and in light of the demands of liberal education, “it makes more sense to talk of equality of *opportunity* – where opportunity refers [...] both to the opportunity to develop autonomy and the opportunity to exercise it” (*Idem*, p. 142).

Equality, one of the key principles of liberalism, is thus qualified and integrated into a theory of education. Neither “the liberal education ideal nor, more generally, the theory of liberal education [...] needs to be modified in response to egalitarian concerns” (*Idem*, p. 143). Furthermore, “insofar as the same question about aims must be answered for equality of opportunity (‘opportunity *to do what?*’) as has to be answered for equality itself (‘equality *of what?*’), autonomy provides a promising object for liberal egalitarianism” (*Idem*). As such, it can be argued that a liberal education finds itself in an ideal position to foster not only the acknowledgement of equality as a foundational political principle of contemporary democratic polities, but also the kind of understanding of equality required by the specific educative demands of the latter: an equality in terms of the acquisition of autonomy and the opportunity to act autonomously, on the grounds of critical judgement.

#### *1.4. Economic competitiveness*

We finally reach what is, *prima facie*, perhaps the most unexpected of all claimed contributions of a liberal education to the life of contemporary democratic states: economic competitiveness. The reason for its unexpected nature, indubitably, is the subliminal persistence of the aforementioned understanding of liberal education as being focussed on the liberal arts – and, therefore, standing in stark opposition to the inclusion of any kind of economic considerations in the educative process. That incarnation of liberal education, however – and as argued above – has since been forced to evolve in order to accommodate the demands of a market-based economy.

In the case of the UK, for instance, the “application of market principles to education in the Thatcher/Major years” became increasingly clear (Bridges &

Jonathan, 2003). According to the same authors, who followed the phenomenon rather closely throughout its development (Jonathan, 1983, 1989, 1990, 1993, 1997a, 1997b; Bridges, 1994; Bridges & Husbands, 1996), many educators at the time supposed its “cause to be a particular feature of the Anglo-American liberal conservatism”, an “approach to social policy [...] that might be overthrown, in some countries at least, with a swing to the left in their politics and a change of government” (2003, p. 126). Contrary to this view, Jonathan argued that “the competitive individualism which legitimates a quasi-market in education” was in fact an “unacknowledged feature of that form of liberalism that informed both the social expansion of liberal education from the mid-twentieth century and the liberal philosophy of education” of that time (*Idem*) – a perspective corroborated by the chronological evolution of the phenomenon, which now leads us to the realization that policies pertaining to the application of market principles to education are indeed “more deep-seated and more widespread than some expectations might have suggested” (*Idem*). As such, even in countries where a political shift to the left did in fact take place – in the case of the UK, with Tony Blair’s “New Labour” – left-leaning governments tend to exhibit “no less a passion for market principles” than their predecessors (*Idem*).

Alongside the more perceptible and politically determined application of market principles to the organizational aspect of education, theorists of liberal education have endeavoured to demonstrate the inherent suitability of the latter’s educational goals with the demands of a market-driven society<sup>37</sup>. Dealing with this topic in *The Demands of Liberal Education* (2002), Levinson begins by advancing a somewhat critical view of the contemporarily widespread “subordination of education to economic concerns (often termed ‘economic imperatives’)”, which is materialized by an increased involvement of businesses in education, a renewed interest in vocational education, “and especially an increased comparison – to almost

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<sup>37</sup> That application of market principles being manifested, in terms of concrete policy, by five key stipulations: i) The dismantling of state monopolies on education to allow a choice of service provider for “customers” and competition between providers; ii) The creation of real opportunities for choice among consumers, and an appreciation for that choice (diversification into private schools, technological institutes, religious schools, vocational training, and so on); iii) The provision of reliable and quantifiable data to inform consumer choice (independent assessments, league tables, etc.); iv) The encouragement for educational providers to be independent from state funding, by becoming entrepreneurial and generating alternative sources of income; v) The enabling of consumers to secure the option of their choice, whether from a public or private provider (Bridges & Jonathan, 2003, pp. 127-8).

an obsessional level – of one’s educational system with those of other countries deemed economically successful or competitive” (2002, p. 135). The nature of her initial consideration notwithstanding, Levinson goes on to adopt a pragmatic approach to the problem: given that economic concerns are a seemingly unavoidable presence in educational policy today, rather than bluntly refusing their legitimacy, the liberal theorist of education should strive to demonstrate the potential compatibility between the former and liberal education.

Levinson thus asserts that, while whenever the development of autonomy clashes with economic competitiveness it is the former that should take precedence – because “individuals’ development and exercise of autonomy is a more fundamental interest” – such a thing would only occur in a state whose “economic order will likely be illiberal”, and therefore undesirable (*Idem*, p. 136). In a desirable liberal democratic state, on the contrary, an “education for autonomy [such as the one promoted by liberal education] will create an economically competitive workforce” (*Idem*). And it will do so for a number of reasons; firstly, the development of children’s autonomy implies teaching them self-sufficiency, which “must in turn include teaching children the skills, knowledge, and habits necessary to find (preferably fulfilling) employment” (*Idem*).

Secondly, in our “modern, information-based economy”, there is often an overlapping between the capacities required by autonomy and those needed in the workforce: contrary to what happened in the early stages of industrial society, economic success “now relies on flexibility, creativity, adaptability, an ability to learn new skills quickly, and self-reliance” – which are exactly the characteristics “which one learns in the process of developing one’s capacity for autonomy” (*Idem*, p. 137).

Third and finally, the development of an autonomous workforce, comprised of individuals who are able to live authentic and fulfilling lives and according to the prescriptions of their reason, is a pre-requisite for the kind of freedom demanded by the overall success of the liberal democratic state’s political project. If education for economic competitiveness is found to be incompatible with education for autonomy, then that state (along with its economic success) ceases to represent a worthwhile aspiration – and “we should therefore be unconcerned if education for autonomy does not support such an economy” (*Idem*, p. 138). As such, there is seemingly good

reason to conclude not only on the compatibility between educating for autonomy and underlying economic concerns, but also on the clear benefits of liberal education towards economic competitiveness (and success) within a *truly liberal* democratic state.

## **2. The Limitations of Liberal Education**

Following this brief outline of liberal theory of education – or, in roughly equivalent terms, of the theory of liberal education – we are now in a better position to perceive its shortcomings. This, in turn, allows us to ascertain the extent to which the latter can be deemed responsible for problem at hand: the pervasiveness of an emotional frailty – and consequent permeability to political expedients fuelled by emotional appeals – on the part of citizens of contemporary democratic states. Before doing so, however, we must begin by stating the immediate necessary condition for that hypothesis to be true: the current pervasiveness of that liberal theory of education itself within our educational systems. Obviously, regardless of its shortcomings, the former can only be legitimately held responsible for the limitations of the latter if it is found to underpin its more fundamental principles and practices. The reasons for believing this to be true are, I would argue, quite convincing. Without any aspiration (or possibility) to exhaust them here, suffice to say that simply by looking at the fundamental principles of liberal education – including those pertaining to the application of a market-deduced rationale to educational policy – and comparing them to what we know in practice to be true of formal schooling today, one may easily conclude that a liberal theory of education is indeed what informs most contemporary systems of compulsory, state-mandated education within western democratic states.

The qualification of the kind of education we are referring to is also essential here, for even within what we may generically term “formal education” one finds a myriad of pedagogic conceptions that may sit well outside the lines of what is stipulated by a liberal theory of education. The moral and social education of children by primary caretakers, religious education, artistic education (comprising musical, plastic, and performance arts), and even physical education, are all

examples of pedagogic activities which can still be considered as “formal” (depending on our criteria), but nevertheless often take place under fairly different educational assumptions and aims than those set forth in liberal education. For the purpose of this analysis we will try to evade any such confusion by focussing our efforts on the dimension of educational practice endowed with a purportedly greater political significance, both because it explicitly expresses the goal to contribute to the formation of (virtuous) future citizens, and because it is deemed indispensable (ergo compulsory) through the binding policies of democratic states. As such, for the remainder of the discussion, whenever we refer to “education” in general terms, it will be with the notion of formal schooling in mind – the latter being defined as the educative practice within western democratic states that comprises the common categories of pre-school, primary, secondary, and higher education, taking place in light of a pre-determined curriculum to be followed and educational standards that must be met.

### *2.1. The rationality of liberal education*

With this caveat being made, we may now devote our attention to the limitations of an education determined by liberal principles, which – according to what was argued above – is largely the case with contemporary western democracies’ educational systems. We begin with its most evident limitation considering the problem at hand, the one which grounds most of the others and the point whence the latter can be logically deduced: *a liberal education is foundationally grounded upon rationalistic assumptions.*

This aspect, which many would consider a virtue rather than a limitation, is in truth perfectly coherent with – and perhaps even, to an extent, necessary for – the main aim of liberalism’s educational project. The latter, after all – as we have seen above – can be said to have been founded upon the singular demand that individuals “think and know for themselves” (Locke, 1979, p. 30). In essence, Locke’s appeal to the autonomy of thought in the pursuit of knowledge called upon liberation from the commonplace acritical assent given to sources of Scholastic authority, as well as – graver still – unexamined prejudices and preconceptions. And at a time like Locke’s, this appeal – mildly revolutionary in nature – would have been both justified and

necessary, as a means to evade the intellectual stagnation represented by a yet enduring Scholastic education.

Out of this original concern for the liberation of individuals from the stifling effect of heterogeneous and dogmatic gnosés – be this religion, tradition, culture, ideology, or whatever other alternative – evolved a conception of education which proceeded in the opposite direction. Recognizing both the ability and intent to excite irrational passions – and thus elicit blind partisanship – as key factors in the successful implantation of many of those gnostic monoliths, liberalism came to regard the former as a critical threat to individual liberty. Hence, instead of encouraging unreflective adherence to any pre-existing truth, worldview, or anthropological ideal – regardless of how true or virtuous they might appear – liberal theorists of education elected for themselves the “‘neutral’ aim of fostering rationality and autonomy” (Bridges & Jonathan, 2003, p. 141). Armed with this “liberal neutralism”, as Jonathan puts it, liberal philosophers of education were able to pursue an “apolitical analysis grounded in a universalistic Kantianism” with which to ground their pedagogic prescriptions, comfortable in the assurance that an education erected on those grounds would safeguard individuals from being exposed to any pernicious influences to their free development (Idem, p. 138). And out of all the relatively neutral (politically relevant) principles possible for a liberal education – justice, equality, liberty – autonomy and the development of reason are perhaps the most neutral of all – therefore meriting their place within liberal education as the most commonly accepted key pedagogic aims.

If the privilege of reason and a critically rational autonomy finds itself thus justified within the edifice of liberal education, the question is when such a privilege ceases being an advantage to become a limitation or a problem. The answer to this, as one might already have surmised from all that has been argued in preceding chapters, lies in the moment when the emphasis on reason comes at the expense of distinct – and equally significant – dimensions of human existence. In what pertains to the dimension that specifically concerns us – emotion – the pedagogic approach prescribed in general terms by liberal education either assumes the submission of the

latter to rationality<sup>38</sup>, or simply removes it from the process altogether – on the grounds of its concerns with the preservation of individual liberty mentioned above.

This prevalence of reason – and the resulting tendency towards cognitivism – in liberal education bears significant consequences for the problem at hand. First and foremost, it is it that promotes and sustains the reductionist view on the requirements for civic political competence found at the root of our widespread emotional frailty regarding political action. Due to either overly cautious liberal reluctance in contemplating emotions explicitly as a serious educative concern or the outright refusal of the latter’s pertinence in moral and political terms, formal education in western democratic states – informed by a liberal theory of education – has largely contributed to the current state of affairs. In fact, its concern with the neutrality of the educational process, resulting in the prescription of the development of reason and autonomy as key aims and rejecting adherence to any crystallized model of ideal individual or citizen, has – despite being arguably successful in achieving its proposed liberation from the intellectually oppressive gnoses of the past – created problems of its own.

## 2.2. *Emotion and liberal education*

These problems can be perceived even regarding the aforementioned socio-political advantages promised by liberal education. In terms of *civic education and global politics* – and as explained in Chapter I – the model of cosmopolitan citizenship, promoted by the concrete application of the precepts of liberal education, has often been called into question for deliberately neglecting a broad swathe of communitarian and patriotic sentiments – which can be said to constitute indispensable motivational aspects for any viable conception of democratic citizenship. Indeed, the pertinence of this criticism is patent not only in the ongoing debate about it between advocates of cosmopolitanism and those of patriotism, but also in the fact that relevant theorists of liberal education – such as Yael Tamir (1995), Walter Feinberg (2000) and Eamonn Callan (1997) – have advanced

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<sup>38</sup> Namely, via the assumption that the education of emotion, whenever morally relevant, proceeds indirectly from the education of reason. This assumption, in turn, is usually grounded on cognitivist theories of emotion which liken emotions to judgements – of which Robert Solomon’s (2003), Jerome Neu’s (2000) and Martha Nussbaum’s (2001) are good examples.

something akin to what the latter terms “liberal patriotism” (Callan, 1997, p. 96), in an attempt to reclaim the political value of national and communal commitments from insalubrious nationalist ideologies.

Regarding liberal education’s intent in promoting *social justice on the basis of equality*, something can also be said – particularly when that equality is read in light of the concern with neutralizing (and thus render it safe) any sort of political content within educational practices. The liberal values of equality and openness (to differing views), seen by liberalism as indispensable towards the goal of advancing social justice and harmony – and therefore constituting cornerstone aspects of its pedagogical project – can actually become political disadvantages. As Allan Bloom points out in his cogent analysis of the USA’s educational system, *The Closing of the American Mind* – written from the point of view of an advocate of liberal education who is trying to rescue it from its critical mistakes – equality and openness can, and often do, degenerate into indifference and relativism. This, as he sees it, is a direct consequence of the evolution of liberal thought, in whose earliest beginnings “there was a tendency in the direction of indiscriminate freedom”, which was often palliated by a concern with natural rights (Bloom, 1987, p. 28). When “openness eventually won out over natural rights”, aided by an historicism largely inspired by Marx, liberal thought (and education) progressed towards an emptying of socio-political values – the latter now viewed as historically contingent, and devoid of the objective certainty of scientific facts (*Idem*, p. 29).

At the same time, “Liberalism without natural rights [...] taught us that the only danger confronting us is being closed to the emergent, the new, the manifestations of progress (*Idem*). Any notion of fundamental principles or desirable moral virtues found itself removed from the educational process, inasmuch as their very nature ran contrary to true openness and equality. No specific moral virtue or positive principle can be required by education, for they are products of the worldview of a historically circumscribed culture or polity, and therefore rationally contingent. The only principles that can satisfy the criterion of universality demanded by liberalism are those – like autonomy, equality, and openness – whose nature is simultaneously neutral and neutralizing. As such, with its turn from natural rights to openness and equality, “liberalism is what prepared us for cultural relativism and the fact-value distinction” (*Idem*, p. 30). With that, terms like

ethnocentrism and moral superiority were imbued with negative connotations, and adopted into common parlance as antonyms of the kind of openness required to be a citizen of a progressive state. In pedagogic terms, our intention becomes “not so much to teach our students about other times and places as to make them aware that their preferences are only that – accidents of their time and place” (*Idem*). *Indiscriminateness* thus becomes, within liberal theory and education, a moral imperative in its own right – for “its opposite is discrimination” (*Idem*).

Moving on to the *application of market principles to education*, it is perhaps more immediately understandable here how the same things that were presented as advantages can as easily be regarded otherwise. As Levinson states, “[e]ducation has long been seen as a means for increasing both society’s and individual’s economic competitiveness” (2002, p. 135). Barring some qualification of the term “long”, as well as “education”, we can assent to the accuracy of the proposition. And although the latter can already suffice to motive the discomfort of many educators, the real problem, however, arises when education comes to be regarded *solely* as a means to increase economic competitiveness. This, unfortunately, seems to be the case with formal schooling in most contemporary liberal states: the growing effacement of so-called classical disciplines (ironically, those which comprised late-Medieval liberal education) to the detriment of disciplines deemed economically advantageous, the growing number of vocational schools and pedagogic pathways, the proliferation of the MBA, and – on the part of students as well as parents – the widespread belief that the ultimate purpose of education is to ensure gainful employment, all constitute symptoms of a view on education which utterly subordinates it to economic “imperatives”.

Now, one might consider it unfair to blame this situation on liberalism’s theory of education. The latter, however, does indeed produce the necessary conditions for the former. On the one hand, it does so because of its indirect association with economic liberalism and the liberal theory of the market, along with its willing assent to allow the principles of the latter to influence educational organization and policy-making; on the other, and at a much deeper level of analysis, it does so also due to the nature of its foundational principles. Succinctly put, the same *universal rationalism* that sits at the heart of liberal education can, after all, be used to justify the shift from a political level of decision-making to an economic one:

politics are liable to be imbued with irrational ideology and partisan bias, while economic analysis seems to lay upon purely logical principles. Freedom – particularly *freedom of choice* – requires choices to be available, and a liberal market economy brings about a proliferation of competing options which consumers may choose from. And *individual autonomy*, in a society such as the one born out of the contemporary liberal state, is inextricably connected with *financial* autonomy: if one is not in a position of financial autonomy, then one’s fundamental right to self-determination finds itself in check. Ergo, education must foster not only intellectual autonomy, but also provide the means for that of the financial kind.

Finally, a word regarding the limitations of liberal education concerning the matter of emotions. As we have stated, the former tends to either disregard the latter as something that does not warrant explicit attention – inasmuch as it should occur as an indirect consequence of intellectual development – or deny it as an intention that entails the illegitimate imposition of some contingent set of moral virtues, deduced from an equally arbitrary ideal model of citizen or individual. In both instances, but in the latter case in particular, the crux of the argument against an education of emotions seems to be that such a thing would represent an untenable offence against individual liberty, as well an impediment to the development of true autonomy – and therefore be not only illiberal, but ultimately dehumanizing. However, if we accept – as I believe there to be good reason to – the truth of what has been argued and demonstrated in preceding chapters concerning the legitimate role of emotions in decision-making, we must conclude that – contrary to the expectations conveyed by much of liberal education theory – any education that disregards emotions does not lead to individual liberty and autonomy, but merely to *an illusion of liberty and autonomy*.

An education able to cope with the challenges posed by such a political environment must necessarily embrace the demand to endow citizens with the kind of emotional fortitude that stems not only from an awareness of the role played by emotions in their decision-making processes, but also from an education of those emotions in a direction conducive to virtuous political behaviour. The question we now face is whether that problem represents an insoluble *aporia* – in which case we would be left with a work of a tragic nature – or an issue that can be addressed in a concrete manner. It is my conviction that the latter is the case. And if that is so, the

sort of emotional frailty that we have systematically found at the core of our permeability to such political instruments as the exploitation of group dynamics, propaganda, emotional appeals, and the state of exception, might feasibly be mitigated through education – if not reversed.

### 3. The Problem of Virtue

At this point, one might rightfully inquire whether adopting such a stance would not simply amount to the replacement of one *aporia* by another. After all, by inquiring whether it is possible to educate individuals towards political virtue – and regardless of such an educational project focussing on emotion or otherwise – we will ultimately be asking a question which Plato himself appears to have left unanswered: *is virtue teachable?*

Tracing the issue back to Platonic ethics, there is a definite ambiguity regarding whether the query was satisfied. To summarize the arguments of *Meno* – one of the two key dialogues that Plato devotes to the subject – Socrates begins by undertaking an examination of whether virtue is teachable at all and, more specifically, whether the Sophists can rightfully be considered its teachers, as many of them seemed to claim. Meeting the latter possibility with reserve, Socrates implicitly surmises that if virtue was indeed to be teachable, none would be better suited to be its teacher than an individual commonly recognised as being virtuous himself (93b). However, upon careful consideration of some of the most notable names in Athenian history, such as Pericles, Themistocles and Thucydides, it becomes clear that none of them seemed to be able to imbue their progeny with the same sort of virtuousness for which they were famed. Furthermore, it is not even possible to establish that those virtuous men had themselves been taught to be so in the first place. From all this it is concluded that virtue does not appear to be teachable but is rather the result of some sort of divine inspiration, and that being virtuous comes to be roughly in the same way that we say someone has an “innate talent” for any other area of human activity, such as poetry or music.

Yet, Plato apparently contradicts himself and this very conclusion in his later dialogue, *Protagoras*. Engaging in debate with a more formidable interlocutor than

usual (in the figure of the sophist Protagoras), Socrates is confronted with the claim that sophists can indeed teach their students how to be good citizens. Once again, Socrates' rebuttal includes the argument that even those commonly regarded as virtuous men were unable to make their own children just as virtuous, but Protagoras's argumentative prowess, skilfully employing both myth and logic, seems sufficient to make him concede the point. Following a lengthy discussion in which Socrates' dialectic is often at odds with Protagoras' stirring rhetoric, the dialog ultimately arrives at the conclusion that virtue is in fact teachable (391b).

This brief summary appears to give us reason to criticise these Platonic dialogues for failing to clearly answer the very question that they raise – “Can one educate for virtue?”. This assertion, however, may prove premature. And even if it was true, Plato's line of reasoning in both dialogues would still undeniably serve to illustrate and emphasise a critical point of the issue: before even considering the question of whether – and how – it is possible to educate for [political] virtue, one must first answer the question of what virtue *is*.

Delving once more into the conclusions of *Meno* and *Protagoras* with this concern in mind, one can begin unveiling the reasons for their apparent dissonance. Towards the end of *Meno*, Socrates leads us through a dialectical examination of the difference between true opinion [or belief] (*doxa alêthês*) and knowledge (*epistêmê*), stating that these are the only two things able to guide an individual's action correctly (99a). But since it had already been indirectly demonstrated that virtue cannot be teachable since there are no teachers of it (98e), the only conclusion left is that virtue cannot be knowledge, and must therefore amount to true opinion.

What makes individuals come into possession of that true opinion in matters of virtuous political action, remains nevertheless mysterious, and is likened by Socrates to the manner in which oracles and prophets often say true things when inspired, but still have no real knowledge of the things they say (99c). This ultimately leads to the conclusion that virtue is the result of divine inspiration and that it hence cannot be taught. These are not, however, Socrates' closing words in the dialogue. To them, he adds that we will only fully comprehend the issue at hand when, “before considering in what way people acquire virtue, we first attempt to search for what on earth virtue is, in and of itself” (2010, p. 40 [100b]).

It is in the open space created by this final remark that *Protagoras* becomes meaningful. Even though the question of whether virtue is teachable provides the overarching theme and teleological bearing of the dialogue, the matter of the true nature of virtue is a critical issue within the discussion. After opening the dialogue by questioning Protagoras' presumption to have educated Hippocrates in matters of politics and citizenship – on the grounds of the apparent impossibility to teach virtue (320b) – and having received the sophist's rebuttal, Socrates moves immediately into the question of whether virtue is essentially a single thing which manifests itself in different ways (acting virtuously in a just, temperate, or courageous manner), or rather something comprised of many distinct attributes of character (justice, temperance, courage, etc.) (329c-d).

This line of questioning eventually leads to the notion – now familiar within Platonic Idealism, albeit not yet as refined in *Protagoras* as in later works – that all those attributes are essentially knowledge, and therefore there is a unity of the virtues. One may only properly speak of virtue in the singular, for all virtue is knowledge. More specifically, and following a similar logic to the one later echoed by Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Socrates presents virtue as a knowledge “of measurement”, which enables us to gauge excesses and defects, and accurately calculate the gains and losses implied by a given action – not only in terms of immediate worth, but also in reference to potential future consequences of that action (356a-358a).

Thus, Socrates states, were it not for a lack of knowledge, no one would willingly do evil or harmful things, or even pursue a course of action that would lead to anything other than a virtuous goal. The immediate consequence of this adoption of a “cognitivist” or “intellectualist” ethics, as it is sometimes termed, is that virtue must indeed be teachable. Going beyond the indirect reasoning displayed in *Meno*, where it is assumed that virtue cannot be knowledge because there does not seem to be anyone able to teach it – which there would if it was – the argument presented in *Protagoras* proceeds conversely: virtue is logically demonstrated to be knowledge, therefore it *must* be teachable.

At this point, it should be easy to surmise that the answer to the question of whether it is possible to educate for virtue invariably hinges on the definition of “virtue” being used. As far as Plato is concerned, and especially in light of his theory

of anamnesis as it pertains to the attainment of knowledge, virtue and its exercise are essentially derived from human intellect. In his conception, he unequivocally “wishes to rise above base emotion to the highest realm of rationality” (Lines, 2009, p. 41). The political project entailed by his philosophy aims at the establishment of “a strong aristocratic state” and his concept of virtue – precisely because the cultivation of the latter is understood as tantamount to a dutiful pursuit of knowledge – “requires strict discipline among citizens” (*Idem*).

The principles laid forth in *The Republic* regarding the education of individuals for citizenship are quite clear regarding the place of emotion in the process. Perhaps most notoriously, Plato essentially argues that poetry – “a term that encompasses Greek drama, the Homeric epics, music, the plastic arts and all the creative works of his day” (*Idem*, p. 44) – are to be censored. The reason for this is, for Plato, almost self-evident: poetry “clouds the understanding, appeals to base emotions and overrides reason” (*Idem*). The fact that Homeric heroes are presented as susceptible to fits of uncontrolled emotional outbursts, for instance, is viewed with great concern for Plato, who would rather have those “lines of wailing and anguish” attributed to “craven men and women – for “no stouthearted child would want to imitate such models” (*Idem*, p. 45). Poetry, with its ability to excite passions and imagination, is fundamentally regarded as the antithesis of that intellectual exercise of unveiling and progressive retrieval of the realities which only exist unadulterated in the Eidetic world. But the fact that Plato’s proposed model of civic education is so hostile towards the emotional phenomenon is no accident. Rather, as we have seen, it is the necessary and coherent result of his conception of virtue as knowledge, along with the conviction that true knowledge cannot be formed in the disruptive presence of emotions.

In summary, then, both the answer to the question of whether it is possible to educate for virtue and the method by which that education is to take place are determined by one’s conception of virtue. Plato’s original answer to those challenges is markedly intellectualist and hostile towards anything other than pure reason being established as the focus of any legitimate project of civic education. In light of what we have expounded upon in previous chapters, it should be easy to understand how Plato’s perspective regarding these issues has more or less remained a significant part of the basis of the prevailing paradigm of political education – particularly that

advanced by liberal education theory. The very notion of “political literacy” – familiar in both common parlance and the contemporary literature regarding education for citizenship – reflects an enduring conviction that the essential demand of political education is that “citizens must be taught about their civic rights and duties, as well as the political world around them, if they are to be ‘good’ citizens” (De Brito Serra, 2014, p. 97).

This knowledge of the political sphere, however, cannot be legitimately considered as the equivalent of political virtue. In fact, “considering the ubiquity of contemporary media, one could reasonably argue that citizens have access to more information on public affairs than ever before” and thus a greater opportunity to consolidate knowledge about them (*Idem*). Nevertheless, the problem remains that contemporary civic and political action are often exposed in their shortcomings, be it in a lack of interest for the political life and its most basic requirements – such as simple participation in acts of suffrage, for instance – or in the aforementioned permeability to manipulation by possibly pernicious instruments of persuasion.

Once again, if what we have previously argued regarding the unavoidable and legitimate involvement of emotion in the political process is true, then our concept of political virtue – and consequently, of civic education – must be reconsidered. Our understanding of political virtue can no longer be equated to a pursuit of knowledge accompanied by systematic indexation of facts; it must evolve beyond that to include a heightened comprehension of how emotions condition those phenomena and – perhaps even more importantly – where we subsequently decide to proceed from there in terms of concrete political action. Political virtue, under these terms, must include not only an awareness of emotions’ role in the political process, but also an ability to manage and eventually even employ those emotions in a virtuous manner. As such, instead of simply echoing Plato’s question of whether it is possible to educate for virtue, we should now take the query a step further and ask: can emotions become a part of political virtue?

#### **4. *Phronesis* and Emotion**

The Enlightenment's conception of reason and the pervasiveness of what we might dub the rationalistic inclination of liberalism have historically led us to assume that a balanced individual – one who, in political terms, is best suited to manifest and employ what Aristotle called *phronesis* – is someone who necessarily keeps his or hers emotions in check, maintaining a nearly constant state of apathy and clear-mindedness.

But Aristotle, though he postulated *phronesis* as constituting the hallmark of a virtuous political being, had a very different stance concerning emotions than the one patent in our contemporary understanding of the demands of political life. On the one hand, he understood *phronesis* (often translated as *practical wisdom*) to be “an intellectual virtue (virtue of thought) that serves the moral virtues; for while the moral virtues make ‘the goal correct’, *phronesis* ‘makes what promotes the goal [correct]’” (Kristjánsson, 2007, p. 17). *Phronesis* alone – pure intellectual virtue standing separate from its moral counterpart – would be insufficient, inasmuch it would degenerate “into a mere cunning capacity: what Aristotle calls ‘cleverness’” (*Idem*). Simply possessing the ability to rationally calculate the best means to reach a certain goal does not make an individual virtuous, which is why “both the *phronimoi* (persons exhibiting *phronesis*) and the unscrupulous can be called clever” (*Idem*).

On the other hand, Aristotle's virtue theory operates under “the assumption that emotional reactions may also constitute virtue” and that, much like actions, emotions and their experience too can have a virtuous median point (*Idem*). Such a conviction is clearly evidenced in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, when he states that “the person who is angry at the right things and toward the right people and also in the right way, at the right time, and for the right length of time, is praised” (1999, p. 61 [1106b21]). An assessment which is, in fact, shared by a number of contemporary researchers in the field of developmental psychology, and who have posited the notion of *emotion regulation*<sup>39</sup> as a fundamental aspect of human beings' socio-political existence – precisely insofar as “[i]n emotion, a selected response or set of responses can be too intense or not intense enough, they can be of the wrong quality in a particular context, or they can be in violation of a social norm, again in certain contexts” (Campos, Frankel & Camra, 2004, p. 382).

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<sup>39</sup> Defined as “the modification of any process in the system that generates emotion or its manifestation in behavior” (Campos, Frankel & Camra, 2004, p. 380).

Following this contemporary corroboration of Aristotle, political virtue – or even *phronesis* – should not to be understood as the absence of emotion; on the contrary, emotional experience is an inextricable part of it, so long as it occurs in a proper and balanced fashion. Ergo, emotions must not be suppressed, but rather trained to properly coexist with cognition, aiding in the evaluating and providing an adequate response to the deliberative challenges posed by our experience of life – political and otherwise.

Any attempt at instruction in this matter should thus consist “not in a stoic program of disciplining the mind and strengthening the will to resist the supposedly corrupting influence of emotion on judgment” (Kahan, 2008, p. 764), but go beyond it into the effort of positively moulding emotional responses – a goal whose importance in the political sphere can hardly be exaggerated. As Donald Arnstine puts it, “where schools are found in which the education of the emotions is ignored, so also will be found adults whose emotions are undisciplined – that is, either suppressed or uncontrolled” (1966, p. 45). And the reason behind this “endless alternation between emotional suspension and emotional regression” is again none other than supposition that “rational thought needs to be taught and that an education of the emotions can safely be ignored” (*Idem*, p. 46).

The task entailed by this view is a demanding one. For many experienced educators, the challenge of educating individuals under exclusively cognitive precepts is strenuous enough; to educate the latter’s emotions, however, would probably be regarded by most as an near impossible and absurd task. The largely cognitivist approach to education in general – despite the occasionally occurring moments of enlightened dissidence from that paradigm, arising from the work of thinkers such as John Dewey – is clearly the main reason for the scepticism of educators and legislators regarding this point. As it stands, education is still largely understood as a matter of transmitting knowledge and fostering technical competence, while the extent of the involvement of emotions in pedagogy is commonly restricted (at best) to their use as tools to facilitate cognitive learning – allowing the teacher to effectively beckon the students’ interest and motivation. Emotions, thus, while occasionally acknowledged as relevant to education, are commonly regarded as means to achieve certain educative goals, but very seldom as goals themselves.

Emotions, one might even object, should rightfully dispense with the need for education, inasmuch they are essentially innate, and will hence take place regardless (often in spite) of it. This argument is, however, fundamentally flawed. The chief concern regarding the education of future citizens, even when focused solely on cognitive development, “is not that they will not think, but that they will do it badly” – that their reasoning will fail them in the most decisive moment and lead them astray from the truth of the matter or the correct choice (*Idem*). But considering what we know about the preponderance of emotion in decision-making, the fact that emotions are *inevitably* experienced should not preclude us from concerning ourselves with *how* they are experienced. As Arnstine succinctly puts it, “[j]ust as people left to follow their own devices will think badly or inappropriately, so also will they feel – that is, make emotional responses to the world – inappropriately. If cognitive experience needs the benefit of education, so does emotional experience” (*Idem*).

In contemporary western democratic states, the stage at which emotions customarily assume a greater relevance in the formal education of individuals is also one of the earliest: pre-school. Generally speaking, while the cognitive development of children is still a priority of pre-school education, an equally great importance is awarded to the development of social abilities. This latter aspect essentially entails that educators will be focussing on moderating social interaction and – as a part of it – modulating emotional responses to levels deemed appropriate according to prevailing social standards. This concern is patent in a number of commonly employed pedagogic strategies at this level: conflicts among children are often addressed via self-referential questions of clear emotional focus (e.g., “how would you feel if someone else did that to you?”); frequent group activities insure that children develop the ability to self-regulate their emotions as a means to coexist productively within the group; fables and stories imbued with moral lessons are used to implicitly foster proper models of behaviour, emphasising emotionally unpleasant consequences for certain actions and pleasant ones for others.

As a further testament of the predominantly cognitive nature of our educational system, it is only at the age when an individual’s cognitive ability is considered too incipient to constitute the fulcrum of the educative process – and when the aforementioned liberal educational principles of autonomy and critical

reasoning cannot yet be truly achieved – that emotions assume a greater preponderance. As the child’s rational ability develops, however, that preponderance is gradually effaced from the process until it simply vanishes altogether, under the veiled assumption that the emotional development of individuals is either essentially finished by that time or outside the realm of the responsibility of educators. As such, in subsequent levels of formal education – even those taking place during developmental stages such as adolescence which, being characterized by considerable emotional upheaval, would sensibly warrant its presence – the education of emotions is completely removed from curricular considerations.

In light of this fact, the reasons behind the seemingly widespread inability to acknowledge and cope with the emotional content of political expedients which – like the state of exception – present themselves as necessary responses to emergency situations, gradually become clearer. Emotions, after all, play a critical and well-documented role in risk assessment and the overall framing of decision-making processes when perceived risks are involved (Druckman & McDermott, 2008; Kahan, 2008; Brader, 2011). Experimental data resulting from studies in this area unambiguously points towards the conclusion that “emotion clearly affects risk propensity in ways previously unappreciated”, while simultaneously moderating “framing effects in particular contexts” (Druckman & McDermott, 2008, p. 317). And while cognitive biases can partially explain the way in which individuals make decisions pressed by a sense of urgency or emergency, a serious consideration of emotions is necessary to fully understand “the intertwined processes by which humans make judgments and choices about the world around them” (*Idem*, p. 318).

When the emotional education of citizen is left unattended – as we have argued is often the case, as a result of the application of liberal education theory – this phenomenon translates into the political sphere with significantly amplified effects. Even in “normal” circumstances, whenever a political issue is presented where considerable risk is present in most or all available choices, the prevalence of emotional reasoning over decision-making processes increases exponentially; but when the citizens called upon to make those decisions are left lacking in emotional resilience and awareness by serious limitations of our educational system, the danger that they will incur serious errors in judgement rises in an equally exponential fashion. The conclusions drawn from such experimental studies of political

behaviour are therefore not only consistent with our own claims in previous chapters, but also sustain the importance of directing our attention towards the possibility to educate emotions. Exactly *how* such an education of emotions might be reasonably conceived and realized is what now must be answered.

## Chapter VI – The Political Education of Emotion

In the history of pedagogic ideas, the concept of an education of emotions is something whose predominance has greatly varied, depending on the particular zeitgeist of the moment that one chooses to consider. In contemporary educational practice, the concern for an education of emotion is most often found associated with what we might call “artistic education”: music, poetry, painting and other plastic arts, are fields of activity where the education and refinement of the individual’s emotions is commonly seen as a crucial pedagogic outcome. Beyond the realm of the development of aesthetic sensibility required by artistic endeavours, however, one struggles to find a true commitment to the education of emotions in contemporary pedagogic research. To find it linked to any sort of political or civic education, on the other hand, constitutes an even harder task.

The notable exception to this state of the art may perhaps be provided by the debate around the notion of *emotional intelligence*, which even the more casual follower of current research on education is likely to have come across. Largely driven by the promise of a higher degree of happiness and success in interpersonal relations of both a personal and a professional nature (Goleman, 1996, 2004), emotional intelligence proposes to rehabilitate emotion through a program of education specifically tailored to foster a sort of emotional competence. In light of this, it is perhaps understandable that much contemporary research on the possibility to educate emotion follows the precepts laid down by the theory of emotional intelligence. Instead of doing the same, however, what we will try to do in this chapter is demonstrate why the latter falls short of the task at hand – a politically worthwhile education of emotions – and propose an alternative which is not only philosophically richer, but also genuinely able to endow individuals with the sort of emotional resilience that our political reality demands.

### 1. The Theory of Emotional Intelligence

As we have just stated, much has been made in recent years of the notion of “emotional intelligence”. Widely popularized by Daniel Goleman’s book *Emotional*

*Intelligence – why it can matter more than IQ* (1996), the concept has come to be a part of common-sense parlance regarding emotional development and the importance of emotions in our lives. Presented as an alternative conception of intelligence to the one purportedly quantifiable through *Intelligence Quotient* tests – whose legitimacy and validity are highly questionable – emotional intelligence has essentially spearheaded a contemporary attempt to call into question the establishment of the ability for logical reasoning as the sole measure of human intelligence. Proponents of emotional intelligence have emphasised different aspects of the latter which contribute decisively for the success of individuals in a social medium, most of them being fundamentally subsumed into the ability to be aware of one's (and others') emotions and the capacity to beneficially employ that emotional knowledge as a guide for behaviour and action.

The particular model of emotional intelligence advanced by Goleman – which has all but become standard outside academic circles – has experienced a considerable rise in popularity as a result of its identification with an ability for effective leadership, marketed in books and seminars on emotional intelligence as the indispensable tool for the savvy businessperson looking to better manage subordinates, and thus maximize profit margins. Understandably, since it is a kind of intelligence (or emotional knowledge, as it were), Goleman mirrors Plato's argument of earlier and sustains that emotional intelligence can be taught. Indeed, since the key components of emotional intelligence (*self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill*) are “ingredients that leaders ‘need to have’”, it “is fortunate [...] that emotional intelligence can be learned” – for “the benefits that come from having a well-developed emotional intelligence, both for the individual and the organization, make it worth the effort” (Goleman, 2004, p. 12).

### *1.1. Aristotle's challenge*

The reasons for the celebrity of Goleman's own model of emotional intelligence notwithstanding, we must consider here its philosophical value – an exercise fully legitimated by the fact that he often cites the Socratic interpretation of “Know thyself” as justification for the importance of emotional intelligence's conception of self-awareness, and Aristotle's considerations in the *Nicomachean*

*Ethics* as inspiration for his work. Indeed, one might even ask, following Goleman's explanation of the scope and benefits of his proposal, whether emotional intelligence can rightly be considered as a direct response of what Goleman terms "Aristotle's challenge" (1996, p. 6) – thus becoming a direct descendant of Aristotle's unique perspective on the place of emotions in our ethical and political lives.

This premise, albeit generally assumed to be true by Goleman and some advocates of his model, does not stand up to scrutiny. Borrowing Kristjánsson's (2007) comprehensive analysis of the key aspects of both emotional intelligence and what he dubs "Aristotelian emotional virtue", one can easily realize the underlying differences between the two: the "general aim" of emotional intelligence, for instance, is [professional] success, while Aristotle's is the much more comprehensive and conceptually rich *eudaimonia*. As a consequence of this, the "characteristic mode of thought" presiding over emotional intelligence is defined by "cleverness" but Aristotle's perspective is rooted in *phronesis* – which, as we have seen, he purposefully distinguishes from mere cleverness. In terms of "emotional scope", emotional intelligence chooses to focus almost exclusively on so-called "positive" emotions, unlike Aristotle – who asserts that both positive *and* negative emotions can be a part of emotional virtue. Furthermore, emotional intelligence's approach to potential arguments or disagreement is fundamentally focussed on "conflict resolution", while Aristotle's prescribed attitude before any such situation is necessarily one of "truth-seeking". Finally – and unsurprisingly – the "desired emotional end-state" of the two perspectives does not match: emotional intelligence, for one, seeks to foster a kind of "emotional tranquillity", build upon the essential skill of emotional self-restraint; Aristotelian emotional virtue, on the other hand, does not advocate the *apatheia* of the stoic sage, but rather a deliberate appropriation and education of our own emotions, resulting in what Kristjánsson aptly calls "emotional vigour" (2007, p. 93).

Let us now briefly examine some of the more significant among these aspects. Starting with the general aim of both models, there is a clear intention on Goleman's part to portray emotional intelligence as something *useful* for the contemporary individual – particularly, the one who delves in the world of business. To build up one's emotional intelligence is desirable inasmuch it allows one to become a more effective leader and more successful overall. Indeed, Goleman

claims, when analysing the “ingredients of exceptional performance [such as technical skills, IQ and EI], emotional intelligence proved to be twice as important as the others for jobs at all levels” (2004, p. 5). Emotional intelligence, therefore, presents itself nowadays as a sort of universal instrument for *professional* success. As Kristjánsson puts it, postulating a sort of “slide from success *qua* happiness to success *qua* profit” has been the hallmark of Goleman’s “gradual shift of focus from individual EI to the collective EI of business organizations” (2007, p. 88).

This focus on instrumental usefulness in service of material benefit, however, does not match Aristotle’s view. For the latter, the aim of any endeavour in moral development, be it at the level of either intellectual or emotional virtuousness, is always to be found in *eudaimonia* – which we can provisionally translate as “happiness” or “good life”. But *eudaimonia* does not amount, for Aristotle, to a life of financial success or even idle contentment; nor is it a simple tangible goal to be achieved, in the way that a promotion or a raise in salary is. It is, on the contrary, an *activity*, an ongoing process of striving towards virtuousness in all aspects of life, conducted in accordance with human beings’ specific *ergon*. Furthermore, unlike emotional intelligence’s notion of “success”, *eudaimonia* is necessarily a “moralized notion”, the hypothetical attainment of which would prove impossible for an individual who was not “(morally) good” (*Idem*).

Moving on to a second aspect – intimately connected with the first – we find emotional intelligence relying on a mode of thought fundamentally determined by what we might call “cleverness”, and which can be defined along the same lines of Max Horkheimer’s notion of *subjective rationality*: a mode of thought that concerns itself solely with the rationality of the means, while assuming that the ends are “self-explanatory” – inasmuch as “it takes for granted that they too are reasonable in the subjective sense, i.e. that they serve the subject’s interest” (2004, p. 3). This is, according to Horkheimer, a mode of thought which ultimately subverts reason by declaring it “incapable of determining the ultimate aims of life” and imposes upon it the limited usefulness of “reducing everything it encounters to a mere tool” (*Idem*, p. 63.), thus founding the worldview inherent in the allegory of the boy “who looked up at the sky and asked ‘Daddy, what is the moon supposed to advertise?’” (*Idem*, p. 69).

Aristotle's *phronesis*, on the other hand, rejects the amoral instrumentality of cleverness and, as we have argued above, defines itself as an intellectual virtue in service of moral virtues. Existing somewhere in between these two dimensions – that is, mere rational calculation and moral conscience – *phronesis* combines within itself the ability to reason about both means *and* ends: the wisdom of the *phronimos* is that of determining the best means to achieve the most virtuous ends, with the nature of the latter being as much a source of concern as the former. By contrast with subjective rationality, *phronesis* incorporates what Horkheimer dubs *objective* rationality, which, though it “never precluded subjective reason, [...] regarded the latter as only a partial, limited expression of a universal rationality from which criteria for all things and beings were derived” (*Idem*, p. 4). As such, it concerns itself essentially with ends rather than means, and determines that the “degree of reasonableness of a man’s life could be determined according to its harmony with this totality” (*Idem*).

Thirdly, when one considers the emotional scope of Goleman’s model of emotional intelligence it is possible to realize that only emotions deemed “positive” are found deserving of valuation as integral components of an emotional intelligence. Negative emotions, on the contrary, may more likely constitute a sort of emotional imbecility: from introductory stages of his seminal work on the subject, Goleman warns us about the danger of “toxic emotions” which “put our physical health at as much risk as does chain-smoking” (1996, p. 11), and goes on to subsequently reinforce such qualification numerous times; however, he tells us, if “emotional distress in its many forms is toxic, the opposite range of emotions can be tonic” (*Idem*, p. 201). This notion comes across even clearer in more recent works, where we are “told in no uncertain terms that ‘negative’ emotions ‘powerfully disrupt work’ and make people ‘less emotionally intelligent’” (Kristjánsson, 2007, p. 91). In sum, Goleman’s emotional intelligence model succumbs to the fallacious dichotomy of good “rational” emotions versus bad “uncontrolled” ones: it is acceptable to “feel” some emotions, provided they fall entirely within rational control – in a sort of rationally sterilized and mediated experience; but the emotional experience *per se*, unmediated and genuine, finds itself ontologically excised from the “emotionally intelligent” individual.

As we have previously argued, Aristotle stands in stark contradiction to this perspective. His conception of emotional virtue is one which includes both positive and negative emotions, the most evident example of the latter being his aforementioned exploration of justified anger. Not only positive emotions but also negative ones can allow for a virtuous golden mean. In fact, the very distinction between “positive” and “negative” emotions constitutes a rather anachronistic notion as far as a discussion of Aristotelian philosophy is concerned: Aristotle’s notion of emotional virtue “straddles any ready-made distinction between ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ emotions” and, in fact, does not even seem to take any notice of it (*Idem*, p. 90). Aristotle’s point regarding “negative” emotions such as anger is not that we should invariably aim to repress or suppress them, but rather experience them in the right proportion at the right time. As such, from the educative standpoint which concerns us, the implicit aim of the two perspectives is completely divergent: in light of Aristotelian emotional virtue, the focus of emotional education should be to educate *the emotions themselves*, not – as emotional intelligence seems to imply – to educate our *reason* in order to maximise its ability to restrict and control them.

Fourthly, let us consider the differences in what Kristjánsson characterizes as “perspective on conflicts”. Goleman’s emotional intelligence model, encouraged by perceived successes of the application of a curriculum of “Self Science” at the Nueva Learning Center, advocates the inestimable value of an approach to conflict resolution based fundamentally on cooperation, negotiation, and compromise. This approach, the requirements for which are self-awareness, the ability to manage emotions and a capacity for empathy, can be applied to a scope of conflicts ranging from the playground to the workplace, and will aid us in becoming “better friends, students, sons and daughters – and in the future [...] better husbands and wives, workers and bosses, parents and citizens” (1996, p. 312).

Regarding this view, Goleman ventures, “[w]ere he alive today, Aristotle, so concerned with emotional skilfulness, might well approve” of this (*Idem*, p. 294). There is, however, good reason to be sceptical. Aristotle, though he was assuredly and unavoidably concerned with the resolution of intellectual and political conflicts, was more devoted still to achieving a resolution in accordance with the truth of the matter for each case. He would, as Kristjánsson puts it, favour “compromise over

conflicts when a compromise could be negotiated based on correspondence with the truth”; but if not, “the conflict would have to remain” (2007, p. 92).

Furthermore, its viability notwithstanding, the benefits of an approach to conflict resolution such as the one proposed by Goleman are not always straightforward. Conflicts, even moral ones, often arise out of an emotional response to what we perceive to be a rationally valid motive; if we promote compromise just for the sake of it, and thus a neutralisation of the emotions associated with the experience of rightful outrage or indignation, this can amount to a falsification rather than an enhancement of human existence. If we consider the example provided by Kristjánsson – the moral conflict of a student who experiences jealousy due to a belief that the teacher discriminates against her in favour of another pupil – the Aristotelian approach to the situation would likely be to “discover if the belief in question is warranted and to arrange one’s emotions accordingly, rather than encouraging the pupil to resolve the emotional conflict just for the sake of compromise” (*Idem*, p. 93). After all, *amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas*<sup>40</sup>.

Finally, we come to the matter of the desired emotional end-state of the two perspectives. As Kristjánsson points out, it would be a mistake to simply equate Goleman’s proposal with “a Buddhist call for the annihilation of all emotions, painful as well as pleasant, or with their exaltation to an unpassionate state of universal benevolence” (*Idem*). There is, nevertheless, a clearly identifiable inclination towards philosophical concepts associated with the Buddhist aspiration for nirvana: self-awareness, self-control, harmony and freedom from sweeping passions. In a word, then, “tranquillity” is what we may consider constitutes the desired end-state of Goleman’s emotional intelligence. This tranquillity, which translated essentially into a state of harmony between our rational and emotional dimensions, comes about when individuals develop an awareness of their emotions (ergo Goleman’s emphasis on “self-science”) and, subsequently, the ability to dial down the “emotional chatter” hitherto muffling reasoned internal monologue. This goal, however – and despite declarations to the contrary – still very much seems to preserve at its core a dichotomy between reason and emotion, wherein the former must regulate and constrain the latter from the outside.

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<sup>40</sup> Plato is a friend, but a greater friend is truth.

In Aristotle's conception of emotional virtue, one might argue, it is indeed possible to perceive a similar concern for fostering harmony between reason and emotion, manifested perhaps most clearly in the *phronimos*' conscious acknowledgement of the virtuous mean between extreme [emotional] dispositions. The desired end-state of Aristotelian emotional virtue, however, is not the sort of tranquillity or *apatheia* latter advocated by the stoics, but rather one in which "creativity, originality and assertiveness have crucial roles to play, unencumbered by the self-imposed policing of 'pure' reason", being best described as a sort of "emotional vigour" (Kristjánsson, 2007, p. 93). It entails a conception of reason and emotion which conceives them in constant and unavoidable interplay, inasmuch as not only emotions have a rational component, but reason – human reason, that is – cannot be genuinely be understood in the absence of emotion. Furthermore, Aristotle's desired emotional end-state is "driven, first and foremost, by moral considerations" rather than the "therapeutic or health-related matters" of the kind which – as we have previously seen – are often employed by Goleman as key justifications for the merits of his emotional intelligence model (*Idem*).

### *1.2. A new challenge*

Following our examination of the nature of Goleman's emotional intelligence model, as well as the validity of its claim to be virtual inheritor of the philosophical interpretation of emotions conducted by Aristotle, we come to a clear conclusion: emotional intelligence – perhaps contrary to expectation, considering its contemporary ubiquity in certain social and pedagogical circles – does not provide us with a suitable model upon which to base an education of emotions, or even to fully and genuinely understand the nature of the relationship between reason and emotion. In fact, in many respects it seems to represent a clear regression from Aristotle's ideas which, albeit sometimes coloured by an almost incommensurably different socio-political context than our own, are still imbued with conceptions of human reason and emotional virtue potentially more fertile as far as our present intentions go.

As indicated towards the end of the previous section, Kristjánsson's chief concern regarding the educational implications of emotional intelligence is the fact

that the latter seems to be lacking in moral concern. The link between emotional intelligence and morality is ostensibly based in the emotion of empathy, but the latter – Kristjánsson claims – is not actually an emotion, nor is it necessarily moral: though it may be “a precondition for moral concern (such as compassion)”, that same capacity to discern or even identify with another’s suffering “is also a necessary condition for taking pleasure in, rather than bemoaning, that suffering through pure malice or *Schadenfreude*, for example” (*Idem*, p. 94). Translated into political terms, an emotional education based on emotional intelligence’s tenets may prove equally problematic. A focus on empathy and emotional tranquillity, seeking conflict resolution simply for the sake of restabilising harmony and disregarding the truth of the issues, ideal though it may seem from a diplomatic standpoint, leaves much to be desired in terms of concrete political action.

Anger and fear, for example, are eminently political emotions – that is precisely why many of the emotional appeals in the political sphere target those emotions specifically. Emotional intelligence’s intent to [partially] neutralize them, rendering them “safe” from the perspective of conflict resolution through cognitive control, albeit advantageous at first glance, may prove to be catastrophic. First and foremost – as we have repeatedly stated – this intent seemingly ignores the fallacious dichotomy which surreptitiously grounds it, and thus further promotes the schizophrenic conflict between “pure” reason and emotion in the mind of individuals, perpetuating the illusion of control that so often leads us to wonderment over seemingly inexplicable political phenomena of decision-making.

But in addition to this problem, and perhaps more decisively, being rightfully angry – angry at the right thing, in the right amount and for the right reasons, to paraphrase Aristotle – is crucial in politics, with the same being valid for being justifiably afraid. The fact that those emotions are often uncontrolled and hence easily manipulated by less scrupulous political actors should not lead us towards the unattainable goal of repressing them completely – which represents an utter falsification of our own human nature – but rather towards the concern of making sure that they are experienced in the right measure whenever circumstances warrant it. Any program of emotional education that views either anger or fear essentially as destructive influences on reasoning, and even on physical or psychological health, is yet ill equipped to provide us with an unbiased understanding of emotions’ legitimate

– and potentially beneficial – effect on political behaviour. Only the latter will allow emotions to find (or perhaps to retrieve) their legitimate political usefulness, and cease to be regarded as mere political influences often employed in favour of less than virtuous political intentions.

## **2. Emotions: From Theory to Practice**

In order to pursue an alternative model of emotional education to the one provided by emotional intelligence, we must first find a different theoretical framework which allows us to understand the nature of emotional experience *within* the political sphere – shedding light over the latter’s ability to shape both the origins and the subsequent form of that experience. In light of this demand, as well as our previous considerations regarding the nature of emotional experience in Chapter II and III – namely, Damásio’s somatic marker hypothesis and De Sousa’s theory of paradigm scenarios – an approach that seems to be particularly suitable (and promising) is the one provided by what is known as *practice theory*.

Although, as Schatzki (2001) states, practice theory can be regarded as the product of a more or less accidental collaboration between a number of thinkers across different disciplines – such as Wittgenstein, Foucault, Lyotard, and Giddens, for instance – its contemporary expression is greatly influenced by Pierre Bourdieu’s approach to the subject, simultaneously sociological and philosophical in nature. Despite the difficulty in achieving a univocal definition of “practice theory” given the multiplicity of its sources and interpretations, we might nonetheless succinctly represent it as a theoretical approach that seeks to explain the ontological significance of practices for human beings that exist in a social context, simultaneously moulding and being moulded by it. Practices, in this context, can be loosely defined as “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding” (*Idem*, p. 11). They are “competent performances”, “‘doings’ or routines of action [...] that carry specific meanings within particular cultural, historical, and material space” (Mattern, 2011, p. 70). In an ontological sense, practices are embodied activities which are not merely acted *out* by the agent but that also simultaneously act *on* the latter: the enacting of the activity

itself, the practical understanding required for it, its material conditions and constraints, its impact on the world around it, all of these aspects make affect the substance of the individual and make practice theory “a theory of how humans ‘do’ their very being-in-the-world” (*Idem*).

Understood in concrete terms, practice is essentially action. It can “encompass intentional, deliberate action”, but “it also includes, and indeed stresses, habituated behaviour executed without much cognitive attention paid” (Scheer, 2012, p. 200). As a way to account for (and expound on) this form of habituated behaviour, Bourdieu introduces the notion of *habitus*, derived from Aristotle’s use of *ethos* (habit) and its revival on the part of the Scholastic tradition<sup>41</sup>. And much like Aristotle’s, Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* is established as a complex concept operating at different levels. In the first-instance, its scope and effect may be understood in purely biological terms: the “skilful use of the body in automatic movements, impulses, and activations is a learned practice, acquired through mimesis, making lasting changes in the body and brain”. Physiologically, habitual motions and postures “build up muscle tissue, innervation, and blood vessels in one area and not another, shorten some tendons, lengthen others, affect bone density and shape, and induce specific development of brain tissue (*Idem*, p. 202).

Beyond this first level of effect, however, *habitus* proves equally able to affect our action and behaviour. It does not do so, however – contrary to what might be erroneously expected – under the simplistic terms of any kind of operative conditioning. Instead, Bourdieu espouses the perspective that individuals “behave according to the patterns that their community (class, milieu, subculture) requires, but not just in the sense of learning the rules of ‘appropriate’ behaviour [...] and obeying them”; in truth, they commonly employ a form of “implicit knowledge” imparted precisely by *habitus* and that which it helps develop – what Bourdieu terms *practical sense*. This practical sense can be defined as kind of “feel for the game” (the game analogy being commonly employed by Bourdieu regarding social practices and interactions), informed by a practical knowledge which, being “based on the continuous decoding of the perceived – but not consciously noticed – indices

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<sup>41</sup> It is worth noting that Aristotle’s use of the notion already entailed the argument for the formative effect of habit, patent not only in his claims to that effect in the *Politics* and the *Rhetoric*, but also in the philosophical exploration of the similarity of the Greek words for habit (*εθος*) and character (*ηθος*) – thus implying that character is formed essentially through habituated action.

of the welcome given to actions already accomplished”, constantly carries out the necessary checks and corrections to conform the individual’s practices and expressions to social expectations (Bourdieu, 1995, p. 10).

The habitus does not therefore “dictate the exact course of action in practice, but rather provides a ‘feel’ for the appropriate movements, gestures, facial expressions, pitch of the voice, and so on”. It escapes narrow behaviouristic determinism by allowing space for behaviours which are not “entirely and always predictable”, and which can actually “instantiate change and resistance” instead of predetermined reproduction (Scheer, p. 204). And despite the fact that – as evidenced by Bourdieu’s description – it often operates subconsciously, habitus is not *irrational* or unreasonable, but rather the consequence of a type of rationality and knowledge that elude conventional parameters. Understood as “body knowledge”, habitus is indeed contrasted with “conceptual knowledge” and intended to stand opposed to “rationality in rational-choice theory that [Bourdieu] so assiduously combated” without, however, being irrational – inasmuch as “it follows a *practical logic*” (Idem, p. 205).

Bourdieu's approach, on the other hand, proceeds on the grounds of a conception of human reason which refuses to be equated with mere logical reasoning, but certainly does not reject it; instead, it builds on it and – much like the emotional rationality we have been positing – attempts to enlarge our understanding of human behaviour and action beyond the scope of possibilities provided by a narrow rationalism. As he puts it,

[a]gents may engage in reasonable forms of behaviour without being rational; they may engage in behaviours one can explain, as the classical philosophers would say, with the hypothesis of rationality, without their behaviour having reason as its principle. They may conduct themselves in such a way that, starting with a rational evaluation of their chances for success, it seems that they were right in doing what they did, without one being justified in saying that a rational calculation of chances was at the origin of the choices they made (1998, p. 76).

The existence and significance of a practical sense, governed by a practical logic, is – as Bourdieu argues – demonstrated by the contemporary attempts at developing “expert systems” and artificial intelligence: in practice, social agents –

“whether a doctor who makes a diagnosis or a professor who grades an examination” – possess “extremely complex classificatory systems” whose translation into practice can never be understood on purely cognitive and rational (in the narrow sense) terms, and thus can only be logically replicated through extraordinary programming effort – if at all. A true understanding of practice requires the realization that the latter is defined by “a logic that is not that of logic”, and therefore to apply “practical logic” to “logical logic”, or vice-versa – that is, to presume to understand one solely on the grounds (and through the means) of the other – is to “run the risk of destroying the logic one wants to describe with the instrument used to describe it” (*Idem*, p. 82).

### *2.1. Practice theory and political action: emotions as practices*

Given the nature of habitus and the implied understanding of human rationality that conceptually underpins it, we find ourselves now better able to appreciate why Bourdieu practice theory appears to be exceptionally well-suited for the task of examining the nature of emotional experience in a socio-political context. Indeed, a significant amount of contemporary research in the field of political science and international relations argues that it may provide an opportunity to overcome a chronic inability to legitimately integrate emotion in the political process. As Mattern points out, even though few serious scholars in the political field “would deny the importance of emotion to world politics”, until recently “only a few have endeavoured to understand the ways in which this is so” (2011, p. 65). And even those among the latter group, for lack of adequate theoretical substantiation, often “end up belying their own arguments about how emotion matters” – to the point of “ironically indicating that emotion per se does not have a distinctive impact on world politics” (*Idem*). In light of this scenario, it has been argued that practice theory – which has had a “significant impact in sociology, anthropology, and cultural history in recent years” – has also “begun to provide a framework for thinking emotions” (Scheer, 2012, pp. 193-4), and one that “embraces, rather than assumes away, the ontological complexity of emotion” (Mattern, 2011, p. 63).

Practice theory seems to be particularly useful for studying emotion “because it elaborates most thoroughly the infusion of the physical body with social structure, both of which participate in the production of emotional experience” (Scheer, 2012,

p. 199). More to the point, the assumption of practice theory as a framework to understand emotion provides us with an understanding of the latter that transcends the limitations of the more common perspectives on emotion – such as the ones we might dub biological (emotions are simply materially determined phenomena that affect the individual) and cognitive (emotions are but different kind of cognitive judgement). Instead, practice theory may be used to provide a more fertile account of emotions as something which, like habitus, follow a "practical logic embedded in social relations" (*Idem*, p. 205). In this context, emotions would not be viewed as "passions" – in the sense of things that render us involuntary *patientes* (those who suffer or endure) – but rather as being both active and passive, inasmuch as they "can be a more or less voluntary sentiment, but they can also emerge from the receptiveness that [acquired] dispositions create" (*Idem*, p. 206).

That emotions can be expressed by our actions is obvious. The singular opportunity provided by practice theory is to go beyond that truism and regard emotions *themselves* as practices; we should not merely consider how "beings express emotions through practices", but rather "how beings acquire the competency to 'do' a given emotion" and "how the doing of that emotion affects (literally) the social orders from which the emotional practice emerged in the first place" (Mattern, 2011, p. 77). If we are able to provide a satisfactory answer to those two questions on the grounds of practice theory, we will find ourselves in the position to appropriately meet the problem of whether it is possible to educate emotion – and how.

An understanding of emotions as practices faces a number of key challenges. The first is precisely to overcome the ingrained view that emotions simply "happen", and replace it with the realization that, more often than not, they are actually done. To understand emotions as practices or acts would thus provide "a way of counterbalancing the dominant language of emotions as always and essentially reactions, or triggered responses" (Scheer, 2012, p. 206). The crux of this challenge, I would argue, lies in the willingness to expand our comprehension of what constitutes action to include practical action (action through embodied practice) – which, as stated earlier, is a competent performance that entails varying levels of cognitive control. Current research on emotion would suggest a great deal of similarity between practical action and the process through which emotional experience takes place: "just as practical action (even that which is cognitively

mediated) is ultimately rooted in the unreflective “Background,” so are emotions”; emotions, both of the “cognitive and cognitively unmediated sort, ‘happen’ only as a result of a series of physiological bodily doings.” (Mattern, 2011, p. 77).

Furthermore, one might argue that the ability to experience genuinely and fully – or to enact, to *do* – a given emotion is not innate; in effect, the “the biological capacity to create a particular emotional experience” is something that we develop “as the open biological system traditionally called ‘the body’ interacts with the environments within which the being is positioned” (*Idem*). In this respect, Mattern provides the example of fear: the emotional experience of the latter seems to be determined by a number of contingent factors, namely those of a cultural nature (what feeling and sensations are acknowledged as amounting to fear), a biological nature (the particular collection of physiological and/or cognitive processes involved in the formation and expression of fear), and those concerning the environment (what kind of stimuli activate the biological processes). In conclusion, “a being *learns* how to experience, understand, and recognize fear”, which essentially demonstrates that “emotions are not *just* doings” but “competent ones” (*Idem*).

The second key challenge in understanding emotions as practices has to do with acknowledging the former’s socio-political scope and how it relates to the former aspect in terms of the origin, development, and effect of emotional practices. According to Bourdieu, practices are essentially defined by the two-way relation they establish with their social context. Likewise, emotional practices – although they “can be carried out alone” – “are frequently embedded in social settings” (Scheer, 2012, p. 211).

The aforementioned constant interplay between emotional practices and social context bears decisive consequences going both ways: on the one hand, as with “all competent performances, the practical actions that ‘do’ emotion carry social meaning and have social effects” (Mattern, 2011, p. 78); since “emotional practices, like all practices, express one’s way-of-being human”, they are an integral part “of what constitutes human social order” (*Idem*, p. 79). As such, emotional practices are thus one of the key constituting elements of the social context within which they take place. More than that, they are equally key constituting elements of the *social identity* of the person responsible for them: to enact and express an appropriate emotion in an appropriate context “not only makes one’s individual way-of-being

present but, to the extent that one's performance is intelligible, emotional practices 'surface' their practitioners as belonging to, or foreign to, a given social space" (*Idem*).

On the other hand, there is – to reiterate – a “mutually reinforcing dynamic between emotional practices and the structures from which they emerge” (*Idem*, p.78). The very nature of this formulation makes it plain that the effect of social context on emotion is at least as great as its contrary; emotional practices – their structure, content, and opportunity – are, to a large extent, determined by the social context that surrounds individuals. After all, practice theory tells us that “practical competence is learned in and through social engagements within a particular social structure” – such as habitus (*Idem*). There is hence an organic process at play, in which “physiological systems become integrated with, or entrained to, the rhythm of social interactions” – to such an extent that the latter often dispense cognitive reflection in provoking “the activation of a particular complex or flow of sensations and feelings” (*Idem*).

In light of practice theory, emotional practices – like all other practices – appear to be fundamentally learned from the social context in which they are integrated – and which they, in turn, affect. The nature of that learning process, however, is still to be clarified. To say that they are learned socially still does not contribute a great deal to advance our understanding of it; in a sense, one might argue, all learning happens “socially” – even the student sitting through an expository lecture does so from within the immediate social structure of his class, and plays a commonly acknowledged wider social role (precisely, that of a “student”). What matters here is to ascertain the exact extent to which the learning alluded to by practice theory is social. Is it a process that simply takes place *within* social structures and dynamics, or rather one that takes place *because* of them? Following what we have said so far, it should be fairly easy to surmise that truth lies in the latter option.

From very early on in our lives, we are provided with one of the clearest corroborations that emotions can indeed be regarded as practices, when individuals – faced with the realization that “emotions do things in social contexts” (Scheer, 2012, p. 214) – begin using them in communication. We then come to employ them as a discourse beyond – or within – the discourse, using their enactment to convey and

emphasise certain aspects that would otherwise not be present or clear. The simple example of the average political speech and how its persuasiveness varies depending on whether it is delivered by an emotionally competent speaker – or the even more marked difference between it being delivered in person or simply conveyed in a pamphlet, for instance – should be enough to demonstrate the importance of emotional practices in a socio-political context. Even in everyday communication, we learn that our emotional performance can determine the degree of importance of the message, by indicating “how important it is for the recipient to decode the expression in the way it is intended” (*Idem*).

In the process of emotional education, the “expectations of the group are implicated in learned habits of feeling and stored in the habitus”; as such, “the acquisition of the sensibility, or emotional style, of a group proceeds via tacit socialization as well as explicit instruction: boys are specifically told not to cry, girls to swallow their anger” (*Idem*, p. 216). If, following recent scientific advances, we can indeed perceive the neural correlates of emotions in MRI scans, they “must be read as images of a ‘used’ brain, [...] molded by the practices of a specific culture”, and the “variations between scans of members of different social groups [as] meaningful data” (*Idem*, p. 220).

The education of our emotions happens not only through the unmediated relationship we establish with our social context, but also – especially in our time – in a mediated manner. In this regard, “[l]istening to music, visiting a museum, attending a theater performance, watching a film or TV show, playing a video game, or reading a novel, for example, can modulate our feeling to a greater or lesser degree” (*Idem*, p. 210). All of those media demand our emotional involvement and, in doing so, transform their respective narratives into the very kind of paradigm scenarios (De Sousa, 1987) that we mentioned in a previous chapter. They excite our imagination and lead us to subconsciously enact the emotional practices being portrayed and interiorize their consequences as lessons that later shape our own emotional responses. As such, emotional education entails not only a autonomous effort – in the sense that “emotional practices are habits, rituals, and everyday pastimes that aid us in achieving a certain emotional state”, including “the striving

for a desired feeling as well as the modifying of one that is not desirable”<sup>42</sup> – but also an heteronomous learning that takes place as a result of our integration in a social context which challenges the construction of individual identity from the very onset of life. Social life “is a constant struggle to construct a life out of the cultural resources one’s social experience offers, in the face of formidable social constraints” (Peterson, 2010, p. 140). Simply by existing in a society “structured by such constraints, and organised by the successful practices of those around you, one develops predispositions to act in certain ways” (*Idem*).

This idea that agency and emotional competence (in both the private and political spheres) are developed partly on the basis of heteronomous sources is something that, while being familiar to philosophical traditions of thought descending from Plato or Aristotle – for whom in order to learn how to rule [oneself], one must first learn how to obey [heteronomous sources of authority] – still causes some discomfort to theories of education and political behaviour which, such as the ones that prevail in our case, are marked by cognitivism. In terms of emotional education, and specifically regarding the development of virtuous emotional practices during the earlier stages of life, it is, however, an aspect of the pedagogic process which cannot be disregarded. Whether it is possible to purposefully harness and direct the process of social learning that leads to that development, is what we will now seek to ascertain.

### **3. Emotional Education and Emulation**

As we have just postulated, a great deal of our education of emotions – or emotional practices – is fulfilled via an exposure to the emotional practices of others, as well as their subsequent perceived success or failure within the social context. An emotional education erected upon the basis provided by practice theory must therefore take into account that emotional practices are learned not solely – or even primarily, we might argue – on the grounds of explicit instruction regarding how we ought or not behave, but rather through our exposure to the exemplary emotional

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<sup>42</sup> Being thus part of “what is often referred to as ‘emotional management’ and the ongoing learning and maintaining of an emotional repertoire” (Scheer, 2012, p. 209)

practices of others. The pedagogic phenomena involved in this latter instance must, nevertheless, be qualified before proceeding any further: is emotional education to be understood simply as a matter of mindless imitation of heteronomous behaviour? The answer is unequivocally “no”. Emotional education should not be viewed as a matter of repetitive imitation – for that would inaugurate an even more reductionist model than the ones we have previously deemed unsuitable – but as a process involving the far richer phenomenon of *emulation*.

At the core of the Aristotelian model of emotional education – or, rather, his conception of how the latter may come about, since he does not really provide us with an explicit educative program – one finds precisely the concept of emulation. As far as Aristotle is concerned, emulation (*zêlos*) is essentially a painful emotion which can be explained as a distress caused by perceiving valuable and desirable qualities in individuals who are of a similar nature to our own – which therefore means that those qualities would be attainable by us. It should therefore not be confused with envy (*phthonos*), which can more accurately be defined as distress caused by the realization that someone has something we do not, and our desire of them not having it.

The concept of emulation plays a nuanced role in Aristotle’s work. Despite being categorized in the *Rhetoric* as a painful emotion, it is nevertheless presented by Aristotle as “a good thing and characteristic of good people”, inasmuch it motivates the emulous to strive towards achieving those “good things” that they do not possess, but might yet do (2007, p. 146 [1388b1]). Given that only “honoured goods” are the object of emulation, Aristotle argues, virtues must necessarily be counted among the latter. And if the distress which characterizes emulation serves as a driving force towards achieving the good things within our grasp, then it should necessarily drive us towards virtue more than anything else. Understood in this fashion, emulation may actually be perceived as amounting to a virtue itself, in a twofold sense: a *moral* virtue, for it embodies an aspiration towards (morally) “good things”; and a *pedagogic* virtue – a virtue in the pursuit of virtue, as it were – inasmuch as many of those good things are virtues themselves, and achievable only through the purposeful betterment of the individual. Thus, Kristjánsson tells us, for Aristotle emulation is not a virtue of the “fully virtuous” but “of those on the way to virtue” and hence “characteristic of the young” (2007, p. 106).

Adopting a position later echoed by practice theory, Aristotle places a clear emphasis on the importance of habit and role-modelling. To recapitulate our previous deconstruction of the argument, he starts off from the question of whether the efforts of the educator should be focussed on the logical or alogical (*alogon*) part of the soul. Since the latter precedes the former, he concludes that much as “the training of the body must precede that of the mind”, so too must the training of appetite (*orexis*) precede that of the intelligence. Reinforcing the analogy, he adds that the education of appetite should be undertaken “for the sake of the intellect [*nous*]”, exactly in the same measure that the training of the body is done “for the sake of the soul” (1959, p. 617 [1334b25-30]).

An individual’s education at an early age should essentially focus on shaping desires and emotions, attempting to foster the sort of dispositions or subconscious inclinations towards what educators regard as virtuous modes of emotional experience. Recalling Fortenbaugh’s account of this process, we might say that “young people are at first habituated to love and hate correctly, so that later when they have acquired the ability to deliberate and reflect there will be a symphony between habituated preferences and what reasoning shows to be good” (1975, p. 49). The issue now, in light of what we have learned from practice theory, is ascertaining how the habitus can be directed towards fostering desirable emotional practices, and through which means can emulation be operationalized in service of that goal.

A first answer to the question at hand is provided by the didactic use of paradigmatic tales (in the sense of De Sousa’s theory of paradigm scenarios). The role of such paradigmatic tales derived from myth and poetry in education was, in fact, already widely recognised in the Ancient world – as attested by the foundational socio-cultural significance of the epic of Gilgamesh or the works of Homer and Hesiod, for instance. Imbued with a performative effect, they make the consequences – both positive and negative – of the hero’s actions salient, thus implicitly fostering specific models of behaviour. They are responsible for shaping the individual’s perceived legitimate expectations regarding the consequences of possessing a given character trait or electing a certain course of action, and as such modulate not only conscious thought processes, but also subconscious emotional practices.

In this sense, they provide us with one of the clearest examples of the dynamics of emulation employed in the service of education: for all intents and

purposes, the story's hero and secondary characters operate as role-models, and do so regardless of the laudatory or cautionary nature of their tale. Even at a young age, the child's mind is at work absorbing the implicit lessons in the hero's example, in a fashion almost cognitively indistinguishable from the lessons he or she derives from concrete experience. Through emulation and imagination, both the positive and the negative consequences of the hero's character and behaviour are effectively integrated into concrete emotional practices, to such an extent that the confrontation with the catastrophic result of the former's jealousy, for instance, can be endowed with a similar educative effect to the concrete punishment imposed on the child unwilling to share with a sibling.

A brief caveat concerning this matter: it is precisely due to this performative effect of myth and poetry – grounded on emulation – that Plato's aforementioned caution against the irrationalism of those media arises. But even though we have characterized his view as being hostile to the potential for emotional exaltation that they hold, Plato nonetheless acknowledges their undeniable and irreplaceable effect in the education of citizens. After all, as Lines explains, "effective learning engages the imagination. We pay attention to and remember what excites or disturbs us. Myths emerge from uncertain origins and grow more compelling as storytellers hone their tales to enthral listeners" (2009, p. 47).

Rather tellingly, Plato himself considers that, under ideal circumstances, the political education of individuals must begin precisely by "supervising the makers of tales" and enforcing a careful selection of which stories reach the ears of children. Then, one must "persuade nurses and mothers to tell the approved tales to their children and shape their souls with tales more than [they could ever shape] their bodies with hands" (*Republic*, 1991, p. 55 [377b-d]). Despite considering that one must purge the old tales – including those of Homer and Hesiod – Plato nevertheless acknowledges their power, and thus "invents new 'myths'" whose performative effects are specifically political, and in line with the overarching purposes of the *Republic*: his myth of the metals "aims to persuade people to accept their place within the state"; the story of Er "promises heavenly rewards for good behaviour"; and the allegory of the cave "implies that most citizens are in the dark and should trust in the decision of the philosopher-ruler" (Lines, 2009, p. 47).

### 3.1. *Emulation and role-modelling*

Obviously, the educational reach of emulation is not restricted to the fictional heroes of mythological and literary sources, nor is its acknowledgement as a legitimate and powerful pedagogic instrument limited to Plato or Aristotle. On the contrary, there is significant contemporary research on the educational value of emulation (or role modelling, as it is often termed), understood primarily as a source of moral or character education (Lickona, 1991; Rose, 2004; Cruess, Cruess & Steinhert, 2008; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012). This latter perspective focuses greatly on employing real-life personages of historic and cultural significance – religious and political leaders, civil rights activists, athletes, actors, etc. – as role models whose exemplary conduct should be emulated by students as a means of character education. Not only that, we are told that teachers themselves should be aware that they too are a target of emulation on the part of students and thus act accordingly – educating them not only through conventional means, but also through mentoring and example.

Contemporary proposals for education via role-modelling stand in contradiction to the prevailing view on education, which widely regards moral or character development as a sort of by-product of cognitive development and biological maturation. In the eyes of the latter, role-modelling is inherently flawed by being grounded on “an emotionally (as opposed to rationally) driven, extrinsically (as opposed to intrinsically) motivated and heteronomously (as opposed to autonomously) formed morality” – untenable in light of the Kantian heritage that still determines much of contemporary pedagogic theory in these matters (Kristjánsson, 2007, p. 99). Obviously, this criticism ignores both the natural didactic progression from habit to reason cited by Aristotle and the plain concrete inability of “conventional” education to provide a valid alternative for a morally and politically valuable education of emotion. The fact that this objection is questionably biased does not mean, however, that role-modelling is without significant conceptual and methodological problems; in fact, one could point out at least three issues on whose resolution hinges the validity of the approach: an “empirical problem of *why* this method is needed”, a “methodological problem” of how to motivate students to

emulate the prescribed role-models, and a “substantive moral problem” regarding what exactly should be taught through role-modelling (*Idem*, p. 100).

Regarding the first of these issues – the empirical problem of why a purposeful attempt at role-model education should be necessary – the question seems to be related to the perception that role-modelling is something that occurs regardless of any educational efforts in that direction. Children naturally and implicitly seem to adopt those adults closer to them in the rearing process – parents, grandparents, older siblings, teachers – as de facto role-models for their own character development. Why then should we, as a society, waste time and resources in promoting role-modelling at the level of formal education?

The answer to this question is perhaps easily predictable: first of all, in today’s mediatised society it is impossible to circumscribe the roster of individuals eligible by young people as potential role-models to the aforementioned close circle of individuals; the sort of control demanded by Plato’s ideal polis over the transmission of tales is today made virtually impossible by the sheer amount of mediatised stimuli present at any given time. And in light of the impossibility of fully isolating children from the latter, there is no guarantee that their role-models will be parents and teachers, rather than some less recommendable movie character or reality TV personality.

Secondly, even if it were possible to exert tight control over this kind of possible influences on the individual’s character development, limiting them to sources like parents and teachers, there would still be no guarantee that the latter would necessarily prove to be ideal role-models in light of our pedagogic intentions if we do not foment their awareness of the impact that their behaviour and emotional practices have upon children and students. One might realize that one teaches by example, but still be uncertain as to what kind of example to provide in order to truly benefit those learning from it.

In light of this twofold answer to the empirical problem, it would thus seem that there is indeed cause for a greater emphasis on role-modelling from the part of educators – which, unlike children, are in a position to apply valid criteria to the

selection of individuals, real or fictional, as sources of emulation conducive to proper emotional and moral development<sup>43</sup>.

Moving on to the more complicated methodological problem, one finds at its core a question which must necessarily be asked following what we have just said: given that role-modelling requires students to adopt certain individuals as role-models –subconsciously at an early age and consciously later on – how can role-modelling be achieved in concrete terms? In other words, how can an educator insure that students are motivated to emulate the example of a given individual?

This is a problem whose relevance increases proportionally to the cognitive development of young people. In the earliest stages of a child's life, it may actually seem irrelevant, inasmuch as children possess a well-documented innate instinct towards mimicking the behaviour of their primary caretakers – which accounts, among other things, for the development of language and non-verbal communication during that period. As the child's consciousness develops, however, more complex processes come into play, and we are faced with something that is no longer mere imitation, but a precocious form of emulation: specific individuals are targeted as sources of emulation, based not only on their proximity and familiarity to the child, but also on the latter's perception of them as occupying a desirable and achievable social role. Same-sex parents and older siblings are especially salient at this stage, as are certain individuals in both real-life and fiction which are perceived as socially well-regarded (e.g. "popular" playmates, the seemingly omniscient and well-respected teacher, the acclaimed hero in a favourite cartoon or comic-book, and so on).

With the further maturing of consciousness, a greater involvement of cognitive assessment in deciding whom to emulate becomes apparent, and the methodological problem hence achieves its full expression. Much of the literature on the subject seems to implicitly assume that simply because an individual exhibits

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<sup>43</sup> This may perhaps be read by some as amounting to a defence of some sort of quasi-totalitarian model of education, advocating control and manipulation over the defenceless minds of children. The fact remains, however, that emulation and role-modelling unavoidably take place in a child's development, irrespective of any external action to that effect. The issue then becomes one of minimizing risk: is it preferable to allow the process to occur uncontrolled and thus chance entering a dynamic of social reproduction of emotional disability and moral shortcomings, or to try and direct it towards an arguably more virtuous end-goal, to the detriment of our liberal sensitivities? It is my conviction that, despite our frequent reluctance to admit it, any and all education implies a measure of control – some might even call it tyranny – of the educator over the educatee; the best we can hope for is that such control is employed to the benefit of the latter's development.

qualities that the educators recognise to be good and desirable, the students will share that assessment, and thus feel almost unavoidably drawn to emulate the individual in question. Outside absolutely ideal circumstances, however – the correct role-model, for the right group of students, at the appropriate moment of their lives and psychological development – this simply is not the case. In truth, many of the subconscious processes that underpin emulation in previous stages of development remain equally decisive at this stage, and must therefore be subject to serious consideration on the part of educators.

It would be impossible, within the scope of this work, to undertake a comprehensive answer to the methodological problem – an effort of a similar scale, solely devoted to the philosophy of education, would likely be required. But following what we have said so far, we can nevertheless advance a necessary condition for its solution: in order to be an effective complement to the learning of emotional practices that ensues from the individual's interaction with the social context, an emotional education based on role-modelling would require the ability to present prospective role-models as *affectively* appealing. In other words, their importance or merit cannot simply be presented matter-of-factly but in a manner in which it can be emotionally experienced, so as to elicit some sort of affective attachment – the latter being indispensable towards the motivation processes associated with emulation.

Taking once again a step back towards Aristotle's account of emulation – which Kristjánsson argues to be able to solve this methodological problem – we realize that it should be comprised by *affective* (“the kind of pain at the relative lack of a desired quality possessed by the role-model”), *conative* (“the motivation to acquire such quality”), *cognitive* (an understanding of why that quality is of a moral value and how to reasonably attain it) and *behavioural* (“the actual striving for this quality”) elements (*Idem*, p. 108). While contemporary proposals of character-education through role-modelling commonly emphasise the conative and behavioural elements, they often “display an unfortunate lack of concern for the emotional prerequisites of (Aristotelian) emulation, and more or less disregard its cognitive component” (*Idem*) – and thus lack the very aspects that underpin the potential of role-modelling as an effective pedagogic strategy.

The methods for a prospective education of emotion must be of a simultaneously emotional and cognitive nature – in line with our conception of human rationality as an *emotional* rationality. We must not allow emulation and mere imitation to be understood as synonymous; if they are, we risk simply replacing “copycat vice for copycat virtue”, by grounding our efforts on “an unsophisticated, undemanding and uncritical – almost infantilizing – model of emulation, essentially devoid of cognitive content” (*Idem*, p. 102). Unlike imitation, which is an inwardly unreflective activity – its subject clay to be moulded to the shape of its object – emulation is meant to decisively involve a component of self-reflection. The assumed model is not to be merely copied, but rather serve as the spark that ignites a moment of self-realization regarding individuals’ aspirations and their potential to fulfil them. This cognitively justified demand for self-transformation must, however, be emotionally driven: the students’ pain at the lack of a desired (and ultimately achievable) quality is a pedagogic tool for the educator, who must therefore endeavour to demonstrate to “the learners how such pain could only be alleviated by their taking reasonable and realistic steps themselves to acquire the quality in question” (*Idem*, p. 111).

Following this, we now arrive at the substantive moral question regarding role-modelling, which had already been perceived by Aristotle himself: do we emulate someone because they possess qualities which are morally good and hence desirable, or are those qualities only deemed to be so precisely because they are found in those whom we elected to emulate?

It seems immediately clear that at a very early age – when emulation is not so much a conscious choice as it is the fulfilment of a biological instinct – the latter case is true: any salient character traits and behavioural patterns of those closer to the child will likely be the object of emulation, and thus decisively shape subsequent emotional practices and models of behaviour. The difficulty of the problem becomes evident, however, when we realize that “[m]any accounts of role-modelling seem to personalize the method beyond good measure”, implicitly sustaining that “[m]oral qualities become important because they are displayed by the role models, rather than [...] because they are – substantially and independently – important” (*Idem*, p. 109). This view not only entails rather obvious and considerable ethical issues, but once again stands in contradiction with Aristotle’s own perspective. According to the

latter, Kristjánsson argues, the *phronimos* – who is the “final arbiter of moral correctness” – follows the standards for proper action and emotion “because they are morally appropriate, and not the other way around”; his knowledge of what is morally good is not a consequence of a “divine” or “blessed” nature, as it were, but rather from his understanding of “the intrinsic value of the virtues” (*Idem*).

Now, there seems to be a paradox at play here: if young people are engaging in emulation in order to learn how to be [emotionally] virtuous, it stands to reason that, at the onset of the process, they have no way of recognizing what constitutes virtue other than deducing it from what is displayed and enacted by the role-model. While those qualities should, in principle, be recognizable as such independently of the role-model, in concrete terms they are only acknowledged as worthy of emulation because of their connection with the latter. How then can we postulate that, in the process of emulation, virtues must be regarded independently in light of their own moral (and political) importance?

The answer to this is intimately connected with Aristotle’s implicit solution to the aforementioned methodological problem. An emotional education based upon emulation understood in Aristotelian terms would seek to emphasise the moral and political virtuousness not only of the role-model *per se*, but also of his or her emotional practices and dispositions; it would highlight the reasons why the latter are both morally commendable and conducive to overall human well-being, and thus regard exemplary role-models “as representative, rather than constitutive” of virtue (*Idem*, p. 111). At this level, the solution of the paradox ensues from the multi-faceted nature of emulation, which evolves alongside the development of the individual’s consciousness and cognitive abilities: initially, following the example of a virtuous role-model is the main path that young people may follow towards learning emotional virtue; but subsequently, an understanding of why certain emotional practices are worthy of emulation is gradually developed, leading to the appreciation of emotional virtue independently from role-models. While the latter may still be employed as pedagogic tools, they are so only because they exhibit and enact virtuous practices, not the other way around – and this is “precisely what is meant by taking account of the cognitive element of emulation” (*Idem*).

#### **4. Emotional Virtue in Practice**

We are now in a position to translate the question posed earlier – “is it possible to educate for virtue?” – into a more accurate formulation: is it possible to educate our emotions to the extent that they become closer to virtues rather than vices, in both ethical and political terms?

The answer is, as it is often the case, beyond the comfortable certainty of a binary calculation. First and foremost, on the grounds of Bourdieu’s practice theory and Aristotelian philosophy – as well as developmental psychology – it seems clear that, at an early age, it is not only possible to educate emotions, but actually unavoidable to do so. *Habitus* is a strong formative force, and most irresistible at the time where critical awareness of its effect is absent. The social context of children provides them with innately determined role-models, whose emotional practices will inexorably shape their own, and create in them certain dispositions which will later be difficult to contradict even under conscious control.

The truly challenging nature of the question arises, however, when one begins considering the possibility of educating the emotions of individuals at a later stage in life, when those very emotions are commonly perceived as being more or less permanently stabilized. At this point, one might raise some possible objections to the pedagogic model we have examined – legitimized by practice theory and based on Aristotelian emulation. Firstly, it may appear to be feasible only at an early age, and even then imply significant (and implausible) control over the environment in which the child’s education takes place. Secondly, there is the issue of social reproduction, and whether it is possible, in educative terms, to contradict the myriad of influences that individuals are exposed to within the social context.

Without repeating ourselves, and taking into account the aforementioned impossibility to present here detailed methodological approaches to the problem, it is possible to answer most of these objections by emphasising the multi-faceted nature of emulation as a pedagogic instrument. An emotional education based on the latter not only seeks to educate emotions, but also employs them as the driving force behind the pedagogic process. If educators are able to endow prospective role-models with sufficient affective pull, they should become salient in the mind of learners to a degree that is enough to surpass other sources of influence. On the other

hand, because the educative process ultimately aims at the cognitive acknowledgement of the inherent moral and political value of the qualities being emulated, it transcends the mere education through habit which is only suitable at the earliest developmental stages, and thus becomes applicable throughout an individual's instruction.

For the sake of argument, let us however now suppose that the aforementioned objections were completely valid and that we, as citizens of a given polis, generally reach the end of the educative process as political agents whose emotional practices are often more vicious than virtuous. Would there still be any hope for a politically beneficial education of emotions at this point?

The difficulty of the endeavour notwithstanding, I argue that there would – and I do so precisely on the grounds of practice theory. Naturally, we cannot simply will ourselves into having a different emotional response than the one elicited by a given situation, and – despite our misguided best intentions – we are even less able to force ourselves to have none at all. But when we understand our emotions as practices – which, in light of my earlier examination, I maintain there is good reason to do regarding many of the more politically relevant ones – we realize that an education of emotions becomes an ultimately feasible practical activity. In the same manner in which one learns other embodied practices (e.g. driving a car, sculpting a vase, playing a musical instrument, etc.) through observation, reproduction, and repetitive enacting, so can one acquire new emotional practices and modify pre-existing ones. Emulation is obviously a key aspect of this process: one of the most effective methods through which we can educate our emotional practices is precisely by recognizing the virtuous practices of another, and subsequently striving to emulate them. Through successive emulation, habitus is formed; through habitus, emotional practices are gradually embodied and thus become our own.

The importance of aesthetic education, mentioned by Arnstine (1966), is also paramount to this process. Friedrich Schiller, one of the great advocates of the former, and a critic of the Kantian conception of reason that later informed much of liberalism's theory of education, argued that the key for political freedom lay not in the suppression of emotion by reason, but in the education of emotion to the extent that the latter becomes harmonious with virtuous action (2004 [1794]). Even when such a point is conceded in principle by liberal theorists of education, what the latter

often fail to realize – and Schiller did not – is that the education of emotion is not a merely cognitive affair. Believing it is, and failing to achieve it on those grounds, is what actually underpins our perceived impotence concerning it.

On the contrary, as made clear by Aristotle's account of emulation, an emotional element is always involved. In a somewhat paradoxical fashion, we *need emotion to educate emotions* – that is, if the pedagogic process is not able to summon our emotional involvement, then it will prove unable to effect any significant change on our emotional practices. An education of emotion, even that proceeding on the basis of emulation and practice theory, must thus be aesthetically engaging. We emulate those whose example stirs our emotions and our imagination. If we are emotionally neutral regarding a given potential role-model, our cognitive approval of their perceived qualities will not be enough to motivate our desire to emulate them and thus develop their salient emotional practices.

In conclusion, what we propose is not an outright rejection of the principles of liberal education – for liberty and autonomy should definitely constitute key pedagogic goals – but that we acknowledge the necessity to achieve a broader understanding of those principles and of how it is possible to include emotions in the process while still preserving – and actually enhancing – them. To endow individuals with *true* liberty and autonomy, as we previously argued, are illegitimate – and unrealistic – aims for an education that neglects emotional education, for emotional virtue and fortitude are inextricable parts of what it means to be (politically) free and autonomous.

The education of our emotions is a possible, if considerably difficult, endeavour. At an early age, it depends heavily on the quality of the role-models with whom we interact – and towards whom we are emotionally drawn. In subsequent stages of development, emotional education becomes something which, in order to be successful in, we must not only become emotionally involved in, but also willing to undertake as a conscious and constant practical activity. Due to the multilayered nature of the process, the kind of emotional vigour that, as we have argued, our political existence critically requires is considerably easier to attain if our involuntary influences at its earlier stages are already conducive to that result. The eventuality that they are not, however, does not excuse us from our political responsibility in this regard.

Contrary to what we might feel, our early emotional education is not a form of determinism; while the latter certainly establishes a strong inclination, it does not equate to inescapable determination. One of the consequences of acknowledging an emotional rationality, rather than the customary irrational emotionality, is precisely the conviction that we are able to educate our emotional practices to the same extent that we educate our intellect. As we have said, the difficulty of the task may be considerable; but even if that is true, that difficulty is still greatly surpassed by the severity of the political consequences of ignoring it.

## Conclusion

In our efforts to deconstruct the overly rationalistic conception of politics characteristic of our times, and thus better comprehend the political role of emotion, we often found ourselves challenging the tenets of liberalism. In light of that fact, one might assume the existence of a thinly veiled political agenda animating our work. Yet, nothing could be further from the truth. While our overarching motive is definitely political, it is not subordinate to any specific conception or brand of partisan politics. In advancing a critical view of liberalism, and particularly of the mistaken conception of human rationality that informs much of liberal theory, we have not intended to discredit or call for the abandonment of its political project. The core values of the latter – autonomy, equality, justice – are values which we too regard as indispensable in democratic politics. Our critique is hence not directed against liberalism per se, but rather at a crucial error of liberal theory, that hinders the former in its pursuit of the concretization of such values in political practice.

The problem of the political role of emotions, which liberal theory has generally been unable or unwilling to address with true philosophical openness, has wide ramifications. Some of the latter are, to reiterate, directly connected with the possibility to genuinely foster the autonomy of citizens of contemporary democratic polities, which provides the *sine qua non* for equality, justice, and a number of other systemic prerequisites of democracy. This results in the critical contradiction of our current political reality: our political theory, which we employ not only to understand and predict behaviour, but also to direct policy-making and political action at the highest instances, is predominantly rationalistic; our political reality, on the contrary, is determined by mechanisms – group dynamics, propaganda, expert systems, the state of exception – that either presuppose or rely upon the insufficiency of individual reason, and the surreptitious pervasiveness of emotion in the processes of reasoning and decision-making.

The “politics of rationality”, which can be found at the heart of that contradiction, should not be construed as a synonym of *rational politics*, but of a political conception ensuing from the application of the limited and reductionist notion of rationality that we endeavoured to deconstruct. Obviously, politics – and especially democratic politics – *must* be rational. But they must be so in a fuller

sense, oriented by a reason that is not artificially monolithic and isolated from other dimensions of human experience – “pure” reason – but by *phronesis*, practical wisdom.

This critical paradigm shift in political thought begins with the acknowledgement of human rationality as an essentially *emotional rationality*, and of the latter’s emotional dimension as an inevitable influence upon political behaviour. That inevitability is, to reiterate, the result of two seemingly distinct but concurrent phenomena: on the one hand, as neurological and experimental evidence demonstrates, emotions are inextricably linked to processes of decision-making, action, and motivation – all of which are key elements of political behaviour. On the other, the demands and constraints of contemporary democratic polities routinely place political decisions beyond the scope of logical calculation, thus forcing individuals to rely on the very dimension of rationality whose legitimacy in the political process they have systematically been led to dismiss – emotion.

The fact that our political existence is decisively influenced by emotions should not, however, degenerate into fatalism. While that influence can be potentially misleading – being no different than an erroneous logical calculation in that regard – it remains nonetheless legitimate and *potentially beneficial*. Emotion has a rightful place in the political process, as much as it does in human rationality. As long as properly educated, it can constitute political virtue rather than vice. *Phronesis*, the practical wisdom that we have just said to be the proper guide for political action, is – in traditional terms – comprised by both logical and emotional virtues, acquired through emulation, contemplation, and experience. Read in light of this description, the model of emotional education grounded upon emulation, role-modelling, and practice theory that we have advanced, holds the potential to not only educate emotions, but also to prepare and predispose individuals towards an autonomous pursuit of *phronesis*.

If such a goal is attained, if the political education of citizens comes to contemplate more than facts and figures, moving towards a concern with fostering practical wisdom and emotional vigour, we will have taken an invaluable step in the right direction. Not only will we have guarded ourselves against the danger of the political exploitation of a rationalistic prejudice that blinds us to a considerable dimension of the political process, but we will also have moved decisively towards

ensuring that the key democratic values of autonomy, equality, transparency, justice, and truth remain living and breathing components of the political – as opposed to mere hollowed-out remnants of what was once a radiant idea of democracy. Schmitt’s concern with the effacement of the political, the *genuinely* political, is now, more than ever, a problem that faces us. The barren rationalization of politics and its subordination to the logic of the markets, which Schmitt had already envisioned, has only increased since the time of his writing – being perhaps even, rather ironically, precipitated by the political and philosophical consequences of what he inexcusably appears to have perceived as a welcome reaction to such phenomena: the advent of Nazism.

The aforementioned contradiction between the rationalistic character of our political thought and the inherent emotionality of our political reality is not just misleading for individual citizens – who are increasingly presented with the overwhelming rationality of technocratic politics, austerity measures, and various other categorical imperatives of the economic kind – but also a serious risk to the sustainability of democratic politics, when that purported rationality is consistently refuted by the unforgiving reality of concrete results. In a seemingly paradoxical manner, the door for *irrational* politics – the kind that is antithetical to the very foundations of democratic politics – is being opened by the [sterile] rationalization of the political process, which poses a serious threat to genuinely rational politics. It is a phenomenon which, in Europe, has resulted in the rise in popularity of extremist and secessionist parties which were, until recently, little more than fringe political phenomena. Thus, something becomes evident: if we do not guard ourselves against the inevitable failure of the politics of rationality, the alternative forced upon us can prove quite pernicious.

The reprehensible nature of his political affiliations notwithstanding, Schmitt’s appreciation was correct in one regard: ideologically, the politics of the Nazi party did indeed represent a reaction against the consequences of the rationalization of politics, prevalent in a Germany still attempting to cope with the impositions of the Treaty of Versailles; legally, on the other hand – as Agamben notes – those same politics were legitimized through the expedient that was constitutionally available then, and increasingly pervasive in political practice now – the state of exception. The parallels should be enough to make us wary regarding our

own political situation. The possibility of establishing the exception as political paradigm is indirectly provided by the politics of limited rationality, and the first steps towards it seem to have already been taken. To counteract that ongoing process, the acknowledgement of the political role of emotion and the effort to insure the virtuous nature of the latter will be instrumental. Much like the Weimar Republic in post-war Germany, contemporary western politics find themselves at a crossroads: either we acknowledge the rising winds, and brace our foundations, or we allow ourselves to be swept away by the storm. It is unclear when – or whether – we would be able to recover from the latter.

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