

Krause, S.R. *Civil Passions: Moral Sentiment and Democratic Deliberation*. (2008). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

### Review By Timothy J. Shaffer

What is the appropriate role of passions in democracy? Sharon Krause's *Civil Passions* adds to the debate on this highly contested question in democratic theory. Faculty and other professionals whose work includes deliberative forums or related forms of engagement will find this book to be an important contribution addressing the critical question of how to reconcile impartiality with passions.

While many would contend that deliberation within a liberal democracy must leave out passions so rational judgments can be made, Krause contends that passions can and should contribute positively to the process. She argues that passions and moral sentiment are already involved in practical reasoning and should be acknowledged as such.

Krause situates her argument between those who hold a neo-Kantian position stating that reason alone motivates individuals to act or make decisions, and those who perceive the role of passion and emotion in motivation and decision-making. She states that "our theories of moral judgment and democratic deliberation have been caught on the horns of a dilemma: they have either been too rationalistic to motivate action and decision, or they have been too indiscriminately rooted in the passions to carry normative weight" (6). Krause argues for a notion of impartiality that takes seriously the role of moral sentiments in democratic practice. This "middle way" of moral sentiments shaping impartiality ends up being a fine line to walk that offers questionable likelihood of success. Nevertheless, engaged scholars who work in and with communities in decision-making capacities should wrestle with this question. The struggle for determining what should shape democratic practice in communities that seek equal justice and voice for citizens is at the heart of what Krause engages.

The starting point for her argument is based on Hume because of the "fruitful way in which his theory of judgment combines impartiality with affective engagement" (14). From this starting point, however, Krause moves well beyond the limitations of the eighteenth century to questions Hume could not answer. Chapter 1 focuses on Rawls and Habermas as exemplars of the rationalist position, specifically on the topic of justice. The most important

point in this chapter rests on the neo-Kantian rationalistic position on the motivations for practical reasoning and the need to go beyond Rawls and Habermas—among others—on how sentiments could potentially contribute to impartial judgment about justice. Chapter 2 explores alternatives to rationalism drawing on sources such as Gillian, Nussbaum, Damasio, and Young. The failure of these authors, for Krause, is their belief that impartiality must be cast aside for sentimentality. The rationalists too quickly dismiss passions; conversely, those who offer alternatives based on passions fail to find a proper balance with rationality.

The foundation for Krause's argument comes from Hume's conception of moral sentiment. In Chapter 3, she notes that the Humean approach to deliberation contrasts with the Kantian model because it "is not devoid of intellect, but . . . involves more than merely intellect. The process of practical reasoning is a holistic one, in which cognition and affect are deeply entwined" (103). Impartiality and equal respect matter in our liberal democracy, but recognizing these values requires a moral sentiment theory that "go[es] beyond Hume" (109). As Krause notes, "judgment and deliberation cannot do without the passions, [so] the best hope for impartiality lies not in trying to transcend the passions but in reforming the political context that helps shape them" (110). Expanding our horizons of concern and our sympathies to the sentiments of others is essential to reforming the political world. Doing so moves us beyond the "familiar terrain of our families and social groups" (110). The political context must include diverse groups and individuals, and we must allow ourselves to be open to experiencing sympathies for those unlike ourselves.

In Chapters 4 and 5 Krause attempts to bring sentiments into democratic politics, particularly for the individual engaging in public deliberation. Krause argues that deliberation requires cultivating the capacity to "feel with the widest range of others" and not to simply have a familiarity with the *other* (135). Gay rights is highlighted as an example issue for challenging individuals' views in order to elicit a sympathetic imagination, thus bringing about a change in perspective on an issue. Although this example might seem too political, many less political community issues can likewise be approached in this way. Thinking about how to address divisive or contentious community issues (e.g., lack of jobs, racial tensions, or wildlife management) offers an opportunity to reflect on the difficulty of *feeling* for those in a situation different from our own. Krause's argument is that we need a normative account of affective deliberation that can specify between "right

feeling and wrong in the deliberative context and that supports the ideal of impartiality” (156). Sentiments play more than simply a motivational role; they have a central function in reconstructing what we mean by *reciprocity*. If deliberation takes sentiments into account, it cannot simply be cognitive. Rather, the affective concerns of others must become our own or “at least they must connect up with concerns that [we] have” (164). This is difficult work, especially when communities face deep divisions and value differences. Krause concludes that we need a new politics of passion based on justice, having a “holistic—and therefore more realistic—account of practical reasoning, in which affective and cognitive modes of consciousness are deeply entwined” (201).

Although laudable as a contribution to the literature, *Civil Passions* remains weak in some areas. First, Krause writes about a tension found in Western thought reaching back to Aristotle. However, the bibliography is focused almost entirely on contemporary thinkers. Second, the work is targeted at an audience interested in the theoretical debate about deliberative democracy. Consequently, the empirical examples feel disconnected. They remain topics of theoretical debate rather than being contextually rich examples of moral sentiments playing out in deliberative forums. Krause’s examples feel removed from many of the settings on which engaged faculty members might reflect as they read this book.

Third, the question of moral sentiments in democratic deliberation seems to be framed as a discussion about the role of passions in a liberal democracy rather than about the politics of communities. Chapter 6, “The Affective Authority of Law,” highlights this focus. Although the book offers many insights, it would be better placed with works on democratic theory for national politics than with those on topics of democratic practice.

Fourth, while it is easy to say that Rawls, Habermas, and others conceptualize deliberation as purely rational discourse, Spragens (1990) seems to be the only scholar who wants to eradicate passions from politics. This lack of support in the scholarship leaves the rational position as something of a straw man. This book recognizes the need to focus on why and how citizens are to engage one another, but it remains at a level for discussion among scholars—not for practitioner-scholars.

*Civil Passions* makes a serious contribution to the literature on democratic theory, adding to the chorus of scholars who highlight the need for conversation about the role of passions and emotion

in deliberative democracy. Although this literature may exaggerate the pure rationality of real-life deliberation, it marginalizes passions all the same. The exclusion of emotion from scholarly discussion of democratic theory is very real. Krause adds to the literature by trying to reconcile passions and impartiality. *Civil Passions* is an important book, and it adds a great deal to this growing literature.

## References

Spragens, T. A. (1990). *Reason and democracy*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

## About the Reviewer

**Timothy J. Shaffer** is a Ph.D. candidate studying adult and extension education at Cornell University. His research focuses on historical and contemporary examples of higher education's public purposes and work. Specifically, he is interested in questions about democracy, expertise, knowledge, and passion—both for academic professionals and for citizens.

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