

## Moral Disagreement & Political Emotions

Many pluralistic Western democracies are experiencing drastic political polarization characterized by deep moral disagreements and accompanied by rising *affective* polarization, or the antipathy and distrust that citizens feel for their partisan opponents. To address this apparent threat to democracy, some theorists argue that individual citizens need to improve how they do political engagement via cultivating their dispositions like empathy and love, or their skills like listening and deliberating. On a more structural level, other theorists argue that the realization of certain values like civic friendship, relational egalitarianism, or fraternal love are foundational to the theoretical justification for democracy, and that these values ought to inform the design of democratic institutions. These theories broadly share an approach. First, they identify something that is intuitively essential for flourishing in personal relationships, like empathy, love, or friendship. Then, they call for that value to be expanded or extended beyond the personal realm to guide interactions in the public and political civic realm.

In this paper, I push back against these calls for doing politics using the norms that serve our intimate lives by arguing that there is a deep asymmetry between personal and political relations when it comes to the norms we ought to use for navigating emotion about moral disagreement. The limits of human moral psychology combined with the differing purposes of personal vs political relationships mean that we shouldn't extend intimate practices on the scale and scope required to encompass highly contentious political life with strangers. Personal interactions aim at developing and sustaining a kind of "moral alignment," of sharing values and applying them to shared life projects, while building up a shared history and mutual understanding. Whereas political interactions aim at developing and sustaining mutually tolerable circumstances for living together, often under deep moral disagreement with strangers. And human psychology appropriately uses different strategies for emotion in both contexts.

Therefore, it is not a suitable strategy to advise citizens to cultivate distinctly political virtues of gentleness, nor to predicate our political theories, practices, or institutions upon people having those virtues. And, it'll be costly and harmful for citizens to face the toll of living under pernicious moral disagreement, without ways to navigate it successfully. The norms we have for interpreting, responding to, and negotiating emotion in politics are and ought to remain different from the ones we use in our personal lives. Norms for functional civil discourse erode when we import the personal norms for navigating emotion about conflict and disagreement into our public lives. This suggests that shoring up the boundary between the two is perhaps an avenue for alleviating polarization and for increasing democratic health.