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## Review of Victoria Kahn, Neil Saccamano, and Daniela Coli, eds. *Politics and the Passions, 1500-1850*.

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**Victoria Kahn, Neil Saccamano, and Daniela Coli, eds. *Politics and the Passions, 1500-1850*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006. vi + 314 pp. ISBN 0691118620 (paper).**

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The recent enthusiasm for the passions in early-modern studies grows out of a number of scholarly trends, including the psychoanalytic appreciation of the irrational, the feminist desire to recover early-modern women's experiences, and the postmodern fascination with the body. Although an appreciation of the passions is not completely new—Albert O. Hirschman's classic study, *The Passions and the Interests*, remains indispensable—studying them has provided new ways of understanding early-modern experience and how it both differs from and shapes modern and postmodern experience (for example, see James; Paster, Rowe, and Floyd-Wilson; and Paster). Looking back at the early modern period as a pivotal moment in which reason became the heart of modern politics and the public sphere, a number of scholars have analyzed and criticized modern liberal humanism and individualism by exploring ways in which the pre-modern self and body experienced and understood the passions. Nonetheless, these studies, though "political" in certain senses of the word, rarely have taken politics properly construed as their subject. When the privileging of public over private, male over female, and reason over passion is challenged, public politics is often pushed to the margins of academic discourse.

Victoria Kahn, Neil Saccamano, and Daniela Coli bring politics back in their new collection, *Politics and the Passions, 1500-1850*. Politics here means *politics* in its basic, even Aristotelian meaning: the lives of people as they come together in the public sphere of the city or state. The new volume is thus concerned less with the social construction of emotion (the subject of much recent discussion) than with the philosophical understanding of the emotions and their place in modern political institutions. The essays cover a crucial time period, charting the development of ideas about the passions from the civic humanism of the Renaissance through to the liberalism of Victorian Britain. That it bridges the (artificial) divide of "early modern" and "modern" is one of the book's many virtues. Indeed, in many ways this volume, though diverse in approaches and disciplines, develops a more coherent narrative than other published collections on the passions. These essays explore the various ways early modern writers rethink the place of the passions in politics as philosophical discourse abandons the humoral body in favor of understanding the self as a free, autonomous agent capable of political agency. This book allows scholars working on the history of the body and emotion to begin a conversation with those writing on the history of republicanism and early modern political theory.

Following a useful introduction to the subject by Kahn and Saccamano, John P. McCormick provides a provocative reading of Machiavelli's *Discourses on Titus Livy's First Decade* (reminding us first of the book's proper title) that attempts to reconstruct Machiavelli's intentions by examining his audience. Although any exercise in reconstructing authorial intention must remain speculative, McCormick's account of Machiavelli's vexed relationship with the young noble *grandi* makes a convincing case for reading the *Discourses* as an argument for tempering an oligarchic nobility's "appetite to oppress." The troubling sense that a political agent's actions are shaped by passions that must be redirected or rechanneled belongs to the traditional understanding of the body and its humors, where actions are governed by the ebb and flow of

passions, and Machiavelli's *Discourses* show a place where that older discourse is intersecting with the new political science. Timothy Hampton next charts Montaigne's response to the political crisis of the French Wars of Religion, one shaped by Stoicism's ideal of standing above and aloof from the passions. Hampton takes as his starting point Montaigne's fear that "public service"—the very mark of a gentleman—"threatens autonomy." And the meeting point of autonomy and service is the province of the passions, since the passions both shape selfhood and motivate action" (32). Hampton argues, "...for Montaigne the crisis of French politics is brought on by the injection of private interest, powered by passion, into the public sphere. It's not only that the passions are political, but that the political, during the French religious wars, is the passionate" (33). Although the Stoic response would, it seems, be to divide the private and public and wall off the passions from a rational consideration of the public interest, Montaigne recognizes that such a wall is an impossible ideal. Instead, Hampton finds in Montaigne Machiavellian *virtù* translated into "psychological flexibility" (43), the public self adapting dispassionately to shifting political circumstances. If the results are uncertain and subject to the (passionate) judgments of others, it points back to the inherent problem of all political orders, which are charged with regulating passions like the *grandi's* appetite to oppress.

If Montaigne is a private man striving to be an effective actor in the public sphere, Francis Bacon, in John Guillory's essay, is a disgraced public actor forced to reimagine his career in the private sphere. Guillory argues that Bacon's *New Atlantis* contains a highly personal defense of his life choices, one that centers on an ideal of philosophical bachelorhood that allows the natural philosopher to have charity for all instead of being chained to a particular love for family.

In a pivotal essay, Daniela Coli presents "Hobbes's Revolution," his dismantling of the opposition between reason and passion that would shape the Continental philosophical tradition from Descartes to Hegel. For Hobbes, passion guides the imagination and thus defines the rationality of what is desired. While Machiavelli puts the success of the republic in the competition among citizens for the fulfillment of their passions, Hobbes sees such competition as a return to the chaotic state of nature unless the subjects recognize that they must give up some of their passions for power in order to enjoy the (stronger) passion for survival, a passion that, when gratified, makes other pleasures possible.

In Coli's linking of Hobbes to Hume's famous formulation of reason as the slave of the passions, we can see the contours of the fault line between Anglo-Scottish and Continental philosophy, an underlying theme of the volume. Several reappraisals of major figures, however, work to complicate the divisions between passions and reason and between British and Continental. Victoria Kahn explores such a fault line in her essay on "Baroque Politics in Descartes's *Passions de l'Âme*." In this late work, Descartes examines the passions as the contact point between his disembodied soul and the physical body and, Kahn argues, thereby opens up a way of examining political order. The theater becomes the model for thinking about this problem, "a way of reflecting on the irreducible embodiment of human beings and on the project of strategically manipulating the passions in order to secure social and political order" (93). For Kahn, baroque politics essentially means the cultural and political project in which the state and its servants are using reason to uncover methods of moving the passions of subjects, and this concept becomes a unifying thread in the book, running in different permutations from Machiavelli's *virtù* through to Bentham's liberalism. (Some of the other essays that use the term "baroque politics," however,

could benefit from clearer expressions of what it means in the context of their analyses.) Kahn notes that Descartes's account of how we can control our emotions expresses wonder at human freedom while simultaneously exploring mechanistic ways of manipulating the passions. She thereby relates him to the seventeenth-century shift in perceptions of the function of the theater, from ones that emphasize it as a means of ethical education to ones that celebrate sheer delight in the stimulation of the emotions.

Judith Butler investigates another problem created by the modern creation of the liberal individual, how to ground the ethical bond between an individualized self and the other, by reexamining Spinoza's account of the desire to live: "The striving by which each thing strives to persevere in its being is nothing but the actual essence of the thing" (Spinoza; quoted on 112). Reading Spinoza against and with Freud, Levinas, and others, Butler presents a Spinozan "ethics under pressure," which recognizes the interdependence of self and other. In the background is the pressure of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the search for a leftist Jewish answer to the murderous and suicidal impulses of individualism and tribalism, just one of many contemporary resonances and potential applications of the essays in this volume.

Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse remind us that Locke's first great influential achievement was not his *Second Treatise of Government* but his reconception of the mind as a blank slate in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. By wiping the mind clean of its innate and bodily contents, Locke sets the mind above the passions. Passions no longer originate in the body but in the mind, as responses to our ideas of pleasure and pain. The mind's control over the passions is necessary for political agency and thus provides the grounding for Locke's theory of government, the irony being that Locke's political ideas reached their greatest sway after his psychology had been largely abandoned.

Rousseau brings the passions back into his theory of government, and in his simultaneous cultivation of and anxiety over emotions we can sense the dual nature of passions as being born both of the self and of the self's relation to the other. Patrick Coleman explores "Rousseau's Quarrel with Gratitude," for him one of the troubling places where "the emotional intersects with the social, and in which the reciprocity of gift-giving shades off into contractual exchange" (151). Rousseau gives voice to some peculiarly modern anxieties, on one hand jealously protecting the integrity of his individual sentiments as he enters into communication with the larger society, and on the other hand striving to protect society from the distortions of individuals' self-interested emotions. Hume, by contrast, is far less anxious about the role of passions in social bonds. Neil Saccamano explores Hume's sense of how sentiment ties individuals together by analyzing primarily his essay, "Of the Standard of Taste." For Hume, aesthetics is a model for human sociability, a human being's sympathetic responses to art providing a point of contact between the individual and the other. Reflection upon the experience is necessary for Hume's aesthetics, but it is marked by few of Rousseau's anxieties about sympathetic emotions. Hume sees the aesthetic as a place to depart from oneself and the particularities of one's prejudices through a reflection upon what is universal in an experience; in the failure of the aesthetic can be identified the outlines of particular national or historical identities.

The final three essays of the volume each investigate different responses to what had, by the end of the eighteenth century, become an underlying anxiety of liberal society, the restraint or direction of the passions. Riccardo Caporali sees Vico basing his history of political order on a contrast between tenderness and barbarism. Tenderness toward the other begins with love for children—which is not natural since it is only produced once parents begin to reap benefits, material and emotional, from their offspring. Societies that maintain these feelings of tenderness toward others, which work to ensure benefits toward all, can (perhaps) help stave off the collapse into barbarism that history threatens. Howard Caygill begins with Kant's initial rejection of the passions, which he traces to his embrace of Newtonian physics: a theory of motion where every action has an equal and opposite reaction requires abandoning a psychological model built on the ebb and flow of action and passion. When Kant does discuss the passions, he portrays them as pathologies of the will, not momentary sensations but persistent inclinations that distort our reason and thereby impede the free action of will. However, Caygill sees Kant in his late writings making steps toward imagining a positive role for the passions as forces that do not enslave but shape the will. His work on this issue, though left incomplete at his death, provides a point of departure for the romantic re-valuation of the passions. Frances Ferguson ends the collection by using Bentham's account of the place of emotions in the formation of belief to provide a strong rebuttal to Stanley Fish's use of an equation between beliefs and emotions to attack liberal politics. Although I'm not sure that she fully proves her opening position that Bentham presents law as "not merely a general will but a collective emotion" (234), her account of passions, and thus beliefs, as mutable and responsive to historical change makes an effective counter to the claim that liberalism's political ideals are impossible, or even a sham, since they supposedly rest on an unquestioned faith in reason. Reason is not, and has never been, the sole decider of political questions in the liberal public sphere, and passions do not make public dialogue impossible.

This excellent volume's emphasis on political philosophy does, of course, lead to some blind spots. Kahn's account of "baroque politics" could, for instance, benefit from a parallel essay investigating what seem the most powerful emotional expressions of baroque politics, the art and architecture of the Counter-Reformation. The book also contains very little about women, perhaps not surprising given its public focus. For the most part, men and only men feel these passions in the early-modern public sphere. Rousseau's heroines do make a brief appearance in the volume, but how the rethinking of the passions affected women's relationship to the public sphere is an issue that needs exploration in another essay, or perhaps another book.

Read together, these essays raise important questions for contemporary political life by showing how the founders of liberal democratic thought both created and responded to the difficult problems posed by the passions in politics. Emotional experiences are built upon a paradox: They occur fully within one's own body and mind and are fully of one's own self, and yet they are frequently responses to what is wholly outside the self, in the world of the other. Emotions and passions thus concern not just the private, interior experience of a self but how that self relates to and communicates with the broader human community. Passions are what pull human beings together and bind them in communities, but also what drive them, often violently, apart. In examining how early-modern writers explore humane and human answers to the dilemmas posed by modern political institutions, these essays raise valuable questions for helping us think about our own relationship to the modern liberal system we have inherited.

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