

Not Everything Is Political

Many readers have probably heard, and a few may even have used, the slogan: “the personal is the political.”

Though its original source is unclear, it first cropped up in the late 1960s and early 1970s ([see this paper](#)) within “second-wave” feminism. Back then, it had a legitimate point: women’s personal experiences and choices are strongly influenced by a political *status quo* which, in some respects, needed reforming to secure greater justice for women.

But now that we’ve achieved many of those reforms, the slogan seems to have more currency than ever. Taken in one sense, it’s become a broader truth; taken in another, however, it’s an insidious lie.

The broader, true sense is well expressed by [this author](#), with whom I disagree about many other things:

“That which you believe to be right and good and true in the world, those values that you hold most dear, your conception of what it means to live the good life, everything that is important and meaningful to you, make up part of your political landscape.”

That’s true even of people who give little thought to politics. For politics is the activity by which a people orders its collective life, and thus constitutes itself as a people. How that gets done depends in part on the factors cited by the author.

But does it follow that *everything* personal is political? Of course not.

My loving the people I love, and the ways I love them, are not political. My using the bathroom is not political. Not even my preferring Baroque music to hip-hop is political; it’s an

aesthetic thing. Like most people, I inhabit some spheres of life that aren't political—at least not in any clear or direct way—and that I don't want to be politicized. But in certain circles, ideology has reached the point where that very attitude, so common and so human, is now seen as political, too. And not in a good way.

You probably know at least one person for whom everything has political implications to be approved or disapproved, ranging from trivial matters like one's choice of coffee brand to important matters like how and with whom one has sex. For such people, politics functions as a religion: a narrative template through which they interpret virtually all of life.

One most often finds this attitude on the hard Left, focused as it is on the narrative template of oppressors vs. oppressed, with the latter always having to fight the former for greater freedom and justice (or at least needing other people to bring the fight on their behalf). Everything in their lives is interpreted in terms of that power dialectic. And if you aren't willing to play that interpretive game, you're viewed as part of the problem: either a privileged oppressor yourself, or an oppressed person who needs their consciousness raised.

This point of view is especially prevalent on college campuses and in the academic literature produced by humanities professors. (See [here](#) and [here](#) for brief analysis and commentary.) By elevating power over love—often unwittingly—it poisons relationships as well as education. And yet, while it often isn't true and shouldn't be true, the more it's believed the truer it tends to become.

So don't let the personal become entirely political.

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