

The Rise of the ‘Politics of Feeling’

The Claremont Review of Books has long been one of my favorite literary pleasures. For years, it was one of the few print publications I’d read cover to cover.

A [recent article](#) published there, written by [Charles U. Zug](#), details what Zug describes as the rise of “the Politics of Feeling.”

The cause of this, Zug says, is news programming designed around partisan themes and the rise of social media, which fans our ideological narcissism by inundating our feeds with content “calculated to flatter our prejudices.”

Technology aside, there is a deeper psychological trend at work, he says.

“At its root, the Politics of Feeling has ascended because more and more we preface our political opinions with ‘I feel.’ This habit, benign enough on the surface, reveals that we conceive of political disagreements as based not on arguments of contradictory logic, but on moods or dispositions constituted by differing feelings.”

This is a dark development for a nation whose democratic functions require reasoned deliberation. One cannot, after all, craft an effective argument against one’s feelings. And where deliberative politics breakdown, the fiends of civilization—revolution, tyranny, and despotism—often lurk not far behind, Zug points out.

“...politics in a world without the duty of persuasion ceases to be democratic, and quickly becomes despotic and tyrannical. As ordinary experience confirms, someone who

enters a conversation convinced that the political opposition is unpersuadable has no incentive to deliberate: their only incentive is to use animal passions to humiliate the intractable opposition, and then to act."

[The ascent](#) of emotionalism is a topic we've touched on before at Intellectual Takeout. As my colleague Annie Holmquist pointed out, self-command over one's emotions was once considered a virtue. Today, I'm not sure this hold true.

One could argue that we live in an age whose philosophy can be summed up by "Let it Go." The message is from a song in the popular Disney movie *Frozen*, but it's a theme that runs throughout our culture. According to this worldview, the passions burning inside us are true and can make us whole if we only release them by shrugging off the shackles of reason and convention.

It's a powerful idea, and it fits neatly—exquisitely, actually—with moral relativism, the postmodern philosophy which holds that universal truth does not exist. After all, what primacy does reason hold over passion in a universe in which objective truth does not exist? None. What matters is that it comes from inside *you*.

The Politics of Feeling, the philosophy of "Let it Go,"—one could argue that these are merely a symptoms of a larger problem: "the crisis of truth." It's a phrase Pope John Paul II used in [Veritatis Splendor](#) to describe the collapse of truth in the West, and he suggested it could lead to the death of reason.

America's experiment was launched by a people who had a general consensus regarding the purpose of government and the nature of truth.

Can social democracy survive in a civilization bitterly divided over not just politics but the nature of truth? We may

soon find out.