

Emotion, politics, and cooperation *Foundations of modern civilization*

Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *A Cooperative Species: Human Reciprocity and Its Evolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 262 pages. ISBN: 978-0691151250. Hardcover \$42.00.

W. Russell Neuman, George E. Marcus, Ann N. Crigler, and Michael MacKuen (Eds.), *The Affect Effect: Dynamics of Emotion in Political Thinking and Behavior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 432 pages. ISBN: 978-0226574424. Softcover \$27.50.

Michael S. Latner

Political Science Department
Center for Public Policy at Cal Poly
California Polytechnic State University
San Luis Obispo, CA 93407
mlatner@calpoly.edu

Embracing the situation, is our only chance to be free. . . I'll side with you, if you side with me.

– Jeff Tweedy, “Side with the Seeds”

We are generally an emotional bunch, and it is a good thing, because our emotions are one of the foundations of modern civilization. This is one of several key insights gained from two important contributions to the emerging synthesis of the behavioral and life sciences, *A Cooperative Species* and *The Affect Effect*.

In *A Cooperative Species*, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis draw on decades of their own work and that of others to explore the existence and origins of what they call “strong reciprocity”: social preferences for rewarding cooperation at a personal cost and punishing noncooperation (free-riding) even when no immediate gain can be expected from the punishment. Along the way, they provide one of the best summaries of social evolutionary theory available today, reviewing models of altruism, punishment, information processing, gene-culture coevolution, and cultural-institutional

coevolution as well as the evolution of guilt, shame, and related social emotions. For those familiar with formal modeling of genetic and cultural traits, this is a fairly accessible yet comprehensive set of arguments and analysis. Key formal concepts are only as complex as necessary and details are kept in appendices.

The Affect Effect brings together some 30 scholars, ranging from philosophers and political scientists to psychologists, sociologists, and at least one professional consultant, each of whom approaches the study of emotion from a variety of perspectives. Readers are treated to analyses and reviews that draw on a variety of methods including experiments, surveys, content analysis, aggregate historical data, dynamic tracing, facial electromyographics, and fMRI measurements of brain activity. The book is organized in micro-macro fashion, providing readers with a holistic vision of the channels through which emotions shape political decisions and outcomes, from the level of the individual cell to large-scale political systems across time.

Both books make important contributions to our understanding of the nature and function of emotions in politics, including the evolution of emotion and cognition and their linkages to democratic governance. At the same time, gaps in our understanding of emotions and cognition are revealed, gaps that demand further attention. While the game-theoretic modeling employed in *A Cooperative Species* and parts of the statistical analyses in *The Affect Effect* will be a challenge for the uninitiated, the substantive results and narratives of these works are accessible to any readers who have been drawn to previous scholarship on topics ranging from cooperation and trust to deception, coalitional psychology and collective action, and the emergence and performance of political institutions. Both the contributions and the unresolved dilemmas should be of interest to anyone with sufficient background in the behavioral or life sciences.

The notion that we engage emotions in political decision making goes back to the Ancients, yet in recent decades, the dominance of rational choice models of utility maximizing, self-regarding behavior in political science put the study of emotion on the

doi: 10.2990/32_2_126