

### Once more with Feeling: Rezension zu "The Emotions of Protest" von James Jasper

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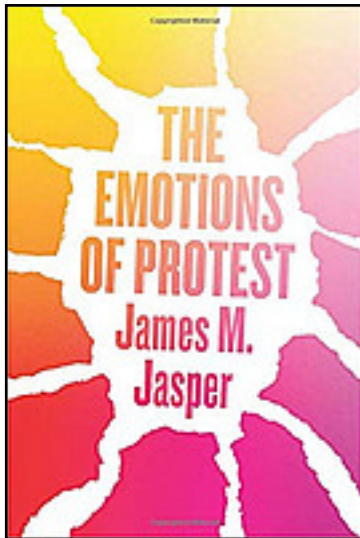
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Anne Nassauer | Rezension | 19.03.2019

## Once more with Feeling

### Rezension zu „The Emotions of Protest“ von James Jasper



**James M. Jasper**

**The Emotions of Protest**

USA / Großbritannien

Chicago, IL / London 2018: University of

Chicago Press

304 S., EUR 28,89

ISBN 9780226561783

James Jasper's "The Emotions of Protest" takes on the ambitious task of illuminating, debating, and systematizing the various types, forms, and manifestations of emotions that not just influence protests and politics but are also influenced by them. Further, despite a title promising only a study on "the emotions of protests," Jasper's work accomplishes a lot more. Building on the sociology of emotions, meaning, interactions, and culture, he develops a theory of action centered around human emotion that can be used to study protests as well as other types of human action and social life.

Instead of dwelling on a tedious and pointlessly endless discussion on "what emotions are," Jasper cuts to the chase quickly, delivering a definition of emotions in the book's introduction, before getting right to work. After classifying five distinct (while overlapping) types of emotions – (1) *reflex emotions*, (2) *urges*, (3) *moods*, (4) *affective commitments*, and (5) *moral commitments* – the author takes a closer look at each of them. He starts with (1) *reflex emotions*: emotions quick to appear and quick to subside, such as fear, anger, or disgust. These overlap strongly, but are not identical to, Paul Ekman's<sup>1</sup> universal emotions. (2) *Urges*, in contrast, are often bodily feelings implying a sense of urgency, such as lust or hunger – but pain and substance addictions also qualify as such for Jasper. (3) *Moods*, the

third category, include hope, happiness, depression, and emotional energy. They typically last longer than reflex emotions, but not as long as the two last emotion types, *affective* and *moral commitments*. (4) *Affective commitments* are normally stable parts of identity and activity, forming the core of protests and politics (e.g., love, loyalty, trust, or hate). These are more connected to cognition than the other forms of emotions discussed in the book. They create positive or negative feelings about other people or about objects and are therefore often tightly connected to us-them boundaries. (5) *Moral commitments*, the last category central to protests, refer to feelings of approval or disapproval based on moral intuition or principle. They include shame and compassion, pride and revenge. While *affective commitments* refer to attractions and repulsions, *moral commitments* are related to ideals of good and bad. Jasper summarizes: “we have affective commitments toward particular others, moral commitments toward general others” (p. 128).

Each chapter of the book includes rich examples, from US politics to social movement history to everyday life. Among many examples, Jasper discusses the role of lethargy and resignation underlying the lack of mobilization against climate change. He shows how tapping into the shame-pride battery helped social movements, including LGBTQ activists, turn “coming out” into a tactic that transforms shame into pride, or how people move from the *affective commitment* of loyalty to shock before finally becoming a whistleblower. The provided examples cover a wide range, both temporally and globally, including the Arab Spring uprisings, the nonprofit organization Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), activism under colonial rule in India, animal rights groups, and many more. These examples highlight emotions as a core category helping to understand a variety of social processes.

Although systematizing emotions in protest is a key goal of the book, Jasper does not lose focus on the complexity of emotions and their wide-reaching impact on all forms of social life. In line with recent research in the field, he demonstrates that emotions are often shared and reciprocal. They consist of constant interactions and a set of mutual adjustments among people’s internal states, as well as those among internal states and the external world. Jasper highlights how emotions motivate us, help us appraise our situation, communicate with others, and act. Emotions show us that people are embedded in many different contexts simultaneously, their actions emerging from these contexts and interactions with others. Thus, background and situational dynamics impact emotions and are impacted by them. At the same time, emotions show cultural and individual variations. Jasper discusses our biological foundation to feel-think, while acknowledging the cultural basis that forms how we use this capacity.

In developing his theory of action, Jasper notes that he sees “competing theories as cases of ‘both...and’ rather than ‘either...or’” (p. 115), each focusing on single mechanisms that may well be combined. This understanding of theories is put to use in the book, with Jasper making an excellent case for this theoretical eclecticism. He taps into approaches from sociology, neurology, and political science, as well as philosophy, linguistics, and beyond, highlighting how well these theories complement each other. In doing so, he provides a well-informed overview of the classics in emotions research, as well as lesser-known studies on specific aspects of emotions.

Consequently, one of the book’s most relevant contributions is a theory that unites a broad strand of research under one umbrella and refuses to buy into straw man dichotomies. Jasper freely combines situational and cultural, micro- and macro-, rationality and emotion-based approaches. He explains the emergence, dynamic, and impact of short-term and long-term emotions through one comprehensive approach.

In doing so, a key argument of the book is that emotions and rationality work together, in protest, politics, and beyond. Coining the term of “feeling-thinking-processes” to underline how emotions and rational thinking mutually impact each other, Jasper shows that emotions are not irrational processes, but rather that cognition and feeling, rationality and emotion, are parts of the same universe. Jasper acknowledges that the term “feeling-thinking-processes” is somewhat bulky. He mentions in the Preface that a colleague, Eviatar Zerubavel, suggested calling them “finkings,” but states a fear that the term would just not catch. “Finkings” is an odd term, for sure, but this may be exactly why it has stuck in my head, popping up whenever I think about the way these finkings arise through, as well as shape, our interactions. Jasper shows that finkings – I will therefore stick with the term – permeate our action and awareness, impacting our actions on every level. Emotions are bundles of these finkings.

With emotions and rationality, context and situation being seen as vital parts of the same larger picture, the book opens many lines of inquiry and will certainly inspire numerous readers to engage – whether related to hope, shame, loyalty, or fear. As an inspiring read, the book may provoke further research on the various connections Jasper mentions, such as online activism and emotions in protest, where dislike ends and hate begins, or how lethargy, depression, and low emotional energy relate. It provokes readers into thinking about the key dynamics that transform frustration into hope in order to mobilize protest, or how age and generation (e.g., younger versus older activists, different generations), race (e.g., Black Lives Matter activism), or gender (e.g., #me too activism) relate to emotions and

politics.

In showing the overwhelming complexity and impact of emotions, the book states early on that emotions are hard to disentangle, but that we must not give up in trying to do so. Referring to Jack Katz's<sup>2</sup> work on emotions, Jasper acknowledges that “emotions often express what we cannot articulate in words” (p. 66) – thereby underlining a fundamental challenge that the book faces, just like any other broad attempt at a comprehensive theory on emotions and social action. The complexity and scope of emotions makes them hard to systematize. This challenge also becomes visible in how conceptually fluid some of the established emotion types and discussed emotions are. Some parts nicely underline the boundaries of certain emotions, such as how shame is similar but different from guilt; but other parts underline how continuous, rather than dichotomous, and fuzzy rather than crisp, many of these concepts are (e.g., long-term versus short-term fears, empathy, and compassion versus sympathy).

While the book provides a number of overview tables that help sort its complex and extensive content, an overview table in the introduction that includes all emotions discussed per category, would have provided a valuable guide for readers early on – especially given the many emotions, theories, and real-life examples the book discusses. Such a table could also have included how some of the emotions spread across emotion types (e.g., from *moods* to *affective commitments*), or have close relatives in other emotion types (humiliation as a *reflex emotion* and shame as *moral commitment*). It could potentially also locate key theorists mentioned for each of the respective emotions in the book early on – e.g., Thomas Sheff for shame, Elaine Hatfield for contagion, Randall Collins for emotional energy, or Norman Mailer for lust. Such an overview and early systematization of things to come could have made it even easier for scholars to use “The Emotions of Protest” as a reference book. It would also have further underlined the magnitude of the task of, and the book's success in, meaningfully bringing all of these emotion types and theories together.

With “The Emotions of Protests” Jasper – one of the main figures in this field for decades – wrote a book that is useful for exploring recent emotion research across various disciplines, obtaining an informed overview of emotions in protest and politics, and finding inspiration for future research on protest, politics, emotion, and human action. In its ambitious scope the book promises an overview of emotions in politics, but the typology may also hold for many more processes and social actions. Thereby, the book successfully develops a perspective on emotions that is cultural and interactive, based on, and explaining, meaning and interpretation, micro- as well as macro-social processes. Due to Jasper's accessible

writing style and the many examples, the book makes for a good read and will be of interest to students, researchers, and non-academic readers alike.

## Endnoten

1. E.g., Paul Ekman / Wallace F. Friesen / Phoebe Ellsworth, *Emotion in the Human Face*, New York 1972.
2. E.g., Katz, Jack, *How Emotions Work*, Chicago 1999.

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