Danielle Hanley

Draft prepared for 2016 Meeting of WPSA: Please do not cite or circulate

**Chapter 2 Part 1: Crying, Emotion and Affect**

**Introduction**

In *Vibrant Matter,* Jane Bennett begins by describing her philosophical project as one that attempts to “think slowly” a fairly common and fast-moving idea. This method, of thinking slowly, enables her to reconsider the common view that matter as passive and ultimately allows Bennett to put forward her provocative view that matter is indeed vibrant. By thinking slowly, I take Bennett to mean that she wants to fully consider and evaluate the common view, as well as examine the ways in which the instantaneous surfacing of this common view might obscure other ways to think about matter. This method allows Bennett the room to dismantle the common view of matter and piece together her own, distinctive interpretation of matter as vibrant. In many ways, this is precisely what I seek to do in this project. I want to think slowly the commonly held view that crying represents a disturbance, one that should be quickly overcome and suppressed. I take the common view of crying to be one laced with anxiety around tears. And so, thinking slowly enables this analysis to probe the potential sources of anxiety and explore additional dimensions of crying that might offer an opening for the recovery of tears that are overlooked in the common view.

This chapter thinks slowly the relationship between tears and emotions, or more specifically, crying as emotional expression. This relationship seems so obvious that it seems necessary to decelerate and take stock of the very obviousness or ordinariness of the views associated with crying. Ultimately, the purpose of this chapter is two-fold. First, I argue that crying induces anxiety because it is seen as emotional and thus irrational. This reinforces another commonly held view that emotions and rationality exist in an antagonistic. Thinking slowly helps to reconsider this antagonism, with the assistance of the emerging literature on affect. This literature also aids in explaining the idea of affective regimes, which helps to explain the way in which crying comes to be regulated. This connects to the second purpose of this chapter, which is to argue that crying is an important mode of relation between people. It has linguistic and affective dimensions, both of which are worth exploring and both of which emphasize the relationality of tears, which helps towards the recovery of tears. Only by thinking slowly through the relationship between crying and emotions, and exploring crying’s affective dimensions can we begin to move beyond the conventional dismissal of tears.

**Thinking Emotions Slowly**

Emotions represent perhaps one of the quickest associations we make with tears. Imagine you encounter someone crying on the street. One of your first thoughts is probably, why is this person crying? Are they sad? Are they grieving? Did someone die?[[1]](#footnote-1) The impulse to uncover the cause of crying is closely related with trying to decipher the emotion connected to the tears. Often, though not exclusively, these questions are punctuated by a certain aversion also engendered by tears. This section sets out to think slowly about the relationship between tears and emotions. In particular, I pick up on the palpable anxiety around tears, demonstrated through the manifestation of aversion, or the impulse to suppress one’s tears, to consider the unease generated by emotional expression. I argue that the unease we experience with regard to others’ emotional expression is related to the way emotions are often juxtaposed to rationality. As such, emotions are often cast as irrational, and thus dangerous. Though there has been a proliferation of work that seeks to disprove this association, the anxiety around crying can be traced to an association between irrationality and emotional expression. This section lays the groundwork to move into some of the literature on affect to help problematize the distinction drawn between rationality and emotions, which is intended to offer a way to move beyond the anxiety engendered by tears.

Many thinkers have advanced theories of emotions, which range from a dualistic model that distinguishes between the mind and the body, to cognitive theories of emotions that blur the distinction by positing a kind of emotional rationality, to theories about emotions as subjective or authentic.[[2]](#footnote-2) This extensive literature has many useful insights in thinking about crying, emotions and rationality. In particular, to push against the dualistic model, I draw on the work of Martha Nussbaum to demonstrate that it is possible to blur the strict distinction or antagonism between emotions and rationality. Nussbaum’s work highlights the way in which emotions can be important to the process of judgment. To be sure, though I deeply respect Nussbaum’s project, I am unsatisfied with her conclusions. She works to fold emotional expression into the rational framework. In doing so, I think she misses an essential, and productive, dimension of emotions, which is their non-rationality.

Drawing on the teachings of Stoic philosophy, Nussbaum explains that the Stoics thought emotions to be unintelligent because they are related to the body, whereas choice rests in the rational faculties of the mind.[[3]](#footnote-3) The Stoic view offers a useful illustration of the main tenets of those thinkers who subscribe to a dualism between the mind and the body, in perhaps its most extreme form. The mind is associated with intelligence and rationality, whereas the body is linked to emotions, which are decidedly not rational. Though Stoic thought provides much of the foundation for Nussbaum’s work, similar ideas are apparent in the writings of Plato and Rene Descartes.[[4]](#footnote-4) In particular, the Stoic thinkers were concerned with judgment, considered a manifestation of man’s rational faculties. For example, Epictetus placed substantial value on right judgment, which considered a function of man’s rational capacities. Emotions represent challenges to right judgment in various respects. First, emotions are not associated with rationality; they are associated with the body and therefore juxtaposed to rationality. Emotions are associated with attachments, which were seen as dangerous to right judgment.[[5]](#footnote-5) In this view, attachments lead to faulty judgments.

In his *Handbook*, Epictetus describes a scene in which a man is crying on the side of the road.[[6]](#footnote-6) Here, he advises the aspiring Stoic not to be carried away by the appearance of tears.[[7]](#footnote-7) He instructs his student to make a distinction in his mind between what has happened to the man and the opinion of the man about what has happened to him.[[8]](#footnote-8) The man cries, then, because of his opinion about the events that transpired, not because of the events themselves. Epictetus describes the man as weeping in sorrow, and postulates that it is because his child has left or died. The tears, then, are a result of the attachment the man developed to his child. Epictetus is warning the student of Stoic philosophy not to be enamored with attachment to anything, even one’s child. The attachment is associated with emotions, referring to the bond itself as well as the tears shed with its severing. This attachment has engendered faulty, irrational judgment, which is problematic. In its most extreme form, Epictetus’ Stoic teachings liken emotional attachments to slavery, which presents a formidable obstacle to human fulfillment.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Nussbaum does not fully accept the antagonism between the mind and emotions as illustrated in Stoic philosophy. In fact, she pushes against this antagonism, searching for a way to understand a productive relationship between emotions and judgment. She searches for a way that emotions might enhance judgment.[[10]](#footnote-10) She ultimately argues that emotional responses can be intelligent and intentional, even though they can also cause us to be partial.[[11]](#footnote-11) Emotions do indeed produce attachments, but in doing so, they link us to items we regard as important to our well being, even though we might not fully control the attachments nor the emotions they engender. Nussbaum effectively argues that emotions help produce judgment, albeit a qualitatively different judgment than the solely rational form advanced by the Stoics.[[12]](#footnote-12) In this view, rationality and emotions complement each other, working together to produce a form of judgment. Further, Nussbaum’s account relaxes the premium placed on control, which is another important aspect of rationality often emphasized in Stoic thought.

In many ways, Nussbaum’s view on the relationship between emotions and judgment is a major departure from the strictly rational form of judgment presented in Stoic philosophy (which I take to be a demonstration of mind/body dualism). Emotions are not simply dismissed as bodily or irrational, but instead, seen as aids in the process of reaching right judgment. Instead, attachments can be productive, insofar as they can help humans live a virtuous life, a goal held in common by Nussbaum and the Stoics. In fact, Nussbaum goes even further to say that emotions enhance the judgment process. The lack of emotional responses can hinder our attempts to act correctly in the world.[[13]](#footnote-13) In this sense, she agrees with the Stoic ideas that emotions are subjective, but this subjectivity actually helps the evaluation of situations.

I appreciate Nussbaum’s work with regard to emotions. I see her as someone who pushes against the idea that emotions are inherently irrational.[[14]](#footnote-14) There is immense value in the attempt to rescue emotion and emotional expression from the banishment incurred in this irrational categorization. There is also value in challenging mind/body dualism. Yet, Nussbaum’s view entails serious limitations that are frustrating, and worth highlighting before moving forward. Nussbaum’s rescue of emotions entails arguing that emotions can be part of the judgment process. While this process, in her view, is no longer exclusively dictated by rationality, judgment is still a predominantly rational process. Nussbaum offers an account of how judgment and argumentation can and should be supplemented by emotional attachment; emotional responses can be intelligent and even intentional.[[15]](#footnote-15) It seems that Nussbaum is concerned with making emotions useful within a paradigm that privileges rationality. By considering how emotions might be part of or might enhance intelligent processes, like that of judgment, she argues that emotions can make sense within this paradigm. This is limited because it fails to consider how emotions might be valuable in themselves. Even Nussbaum’s line on subjectivity is ultimately deferential to the dominance of rationality.

Nussbaum is not the only thinker to fall victim to this line of argument. That is, she is not the only thinker to offer an argument for emotions that ultimately supports the rational faculties of the mind. In *Civil Passions*, Sharon Krause also attempts to challenge the strict dichotomy between the body and the mind. Specifically, she attempts to confront the way this antagonism plays out between ‘the passions’ and reason.[[16]](#footnote-16) Krause calls this a “false opposition,” and invokes David Hume’s notion of “calm passions” as a way to introduce emotions and affects into the conversation. Traditionally, the passions/emotions were understood to cause disorder in the soul.[[17]](#footnote-17) Hume contends that the ‘calm passions’ cause no disorder in the soul, and in fact, are often mistaken for reason. This gestures towards the idea that some passions should not be understood as antithetical to reason. For Krause, calm passions act as important correctives to the staunch rationalism espoused by prevailing liberal and democratic theories.[[18]](#footnote-18) Krause seeks to fold emotion into discussions dominated by reason, but it should be noted that her treatment of emotion here is quite narrow. Emotions, specifically those characterized as calm passions are useful in enhancing the functioning of reason, but they are not understood as separate from it, with redeeming characteristics all their own. Redemption comes only through the relationship with reason.

Like Nussbaum, Krause’s work seeks to rehabilitate emotions by arguing that they are not dangerous to reason. Both argue that emotions enhance the way we use our reason. In effect, both put forward slightly different versions of a similar argument, but the same limitations befalls both arguments. I want to pause to recognize some similarities and differences between the argument that I advance here and the arguments these authors put forward. They approach emotion through the lens of reason. That is, both seek to recover emotions as legitimate subjects of inquiry by arguing that emotions are not necessarily dangerous to reason, as some arguments might suggest. I appreciate this attempt to engage with emotions. However, I view it as inherently limited. This approach presupposes the dominance of reason. I am not advocating that we ignore the role of reason in our society, but instead that we explore additional modes of relationship and expression as a means to enrich additional dimensions of collective life. I will return to this point in turn, but I introduce it here to help illustrate the limitation I view in both Krause and Nussbaum. If we continue to consider the ways in which emotions enhance reason/rationality/rational judgment, then we remain confined to the same paradigm, the same questions, and the same solutions as those who came before us.

Until this point, I have attempted to think slowly the way emotions exist within the lexicon of political theorists, and the attempts to alter the common view that have occurred in recent years. While these projects have many admirable qualities, their deference to reason represents a substantial limitation of these works. The next section of the chapter proceeds in a slightly different direction, thinking slowly crying as emotional expression, and the implications of this idea. In particular, I endeavor to consider crying as a way people relate to each other. It is a specific mode of relation, which corresponds to emotions and emotional expression. Crying carries with it certain characteristics and dimensions that do not fit neatly within a paradigm that presupposes the dominance of rationality. It is not articulate speech[[19]](#footnote-19), and so attempting to understand crying as it enhances our reasoning capacities is misguided in my view. While I think the question about the relationship between reason and emotions is an important question, and one that is ultimately at the heart of this inquiry, my goal is not to offer an argument as to how crying can be seen as reasonable or rational. Instead, I approach crying as a complex, inarticulate, meaningful, non-rational, and expressive mode of relation. Hopefully, by doing so, I can both delve further into the anxiety around tears, as well as theorize the way in which crying should be seen as a valuable form of relation between people.

**Crying and Emotions, a Closer Look**

Crying is a form of emotional expression. Psychologically, it falls into the same category as smiling, scowling, or laughing.[[20]](#footnote-20) It is a vehicle through which various emotional states are conveyed to others around us. In part, I think the anxiety around tears is related to their role in emotional expression. Returning for a moment to the dichotomy posed between rationality and emotions, crying as emotional expression is already somewhat uncomfortable, if we privilege rationality over emotions. But viewing crying as emotional expression is only one way of conceptualizing the root of anxiety around tears. There are additional aspects of the relationship between crying and emotion that also might be linked to this anxiety. In particular, crying expresses multiple emotional states. We might cry when we are sad, when we are happy, when we are angry, when we are afraid, when we are anxious, when we are frustrated, when we are elated…the list could go on and on. Babies cry when they are hungry, when they are uncomfortable, when they are overwhelmed, to add to the list. Tom Lutz, in his monumental work that explores the social and cultural history of tears, poses an interesting and ultimately useful question to this inquiry. He asks, referring to tears, “What does it mean that at times of victory, success, love, reunion and celebration, the outward signs of our emotional interiority are identical to our most profound experiences of loss?”[[21]](#footnote-21) Though the language of interior and exterior is problematic in my view, I think this question expresses a sentiment that I see at the core of the anxiety around crying: if crying can express so many emotional states, how is it possible to discern the message that the crier broadcasts?

In many ways, the potential confusion promised by tears, and the resultant anxiety, coheres. I understand this anxiety as connected to crying’s emotional element. Building off some of the ideas presented in the previous section, emotions already suggest anxiety to the extent that they diverge from rationality. Some consider emotions as dangerous to morality and rationality.[[22]](#footnote-22) How are they dangerous? Again, they are thought to detract from our rational faculties, such as judgment. While I am frustrated with the conclusion of Nussbaum’s arguments about emotion, I admire her attempt to push against the view of emotions as inherently dangerous or antagonistic to reason and morality. Nussbaum is not afraid of the potential confusion engendered by tears, but offers a way to make sense of it. I do not necessarily want to make sense of it, but engage with the confusion and complexity crying generates. Yet, I do follow Nussbaum, insofar as I am not deterred from crying as a result of what I understand as its association with emotionality, and further, its conceivable convolutedness.

Returning to what I call the ‘polyvocality of crying’, that is, their capacity to signify multiple emotional states, I want to recognize that this might seem confusing, and perhaps confusion represents an insurmountable obstacle. Of course, in a culture that places a premium on comprehension, it is easy to see how the confusion implicit to crying as a form of expression might engender anxiety. Here, I think the advice to ‘think slowly’ might be particularly helpful. There is a general impulse to try and comprehend the meaning underlying one’s tears.[[23]](#footnote-23) To slow down is to perhaps avoid this impulse, and consider what we miss when we endeavor after meaning in tears. Crying is not necessarily easily understood. But I think by trying to understand tears, by trying to make sense of them, we ask the wrong question. The value of crying rests in its polyvocality, in its capacity to communicate many emotions. But this value is not realized in trying to fully understand what one’s tears might mean; instead, the value of crying is found in the feelings it engenders in those around you. It is found in how it affects you, the crier, and those around you, who observe your tears.

If asking what tears mean in a given moment is the wrong question, then we might ask instead, what kind of responses do tears engender? How do someone else’s tears make you feel? What effect does crying have on you? In particular, I am interested in understanding what work tears do and what work they can do in relation to other people. Once we stop trying to understand their meaning, what dimensions of crying become visible, and how might these be productive of human relationships? As a form of emotional expression; crying might communicate what an individual is feeling at a given moment.[[24]](#footnote-24) But more important than understanding precisely what feeling is broadcast through one’s weeping, I think our collective relationship to tears could benefit from de-emphasizing comprehension, and focusing on the non-rational or even non-cognitive dimensions of tears. I turn now to work on affect to help flesh out these ideas.

**Crying and Affect: Boundaries and Relationality**

Let us slow down once more and take stock of crying until this point. Crying is a mode of relation between people. It is a vehicle of emotional expression that can convey multiple emotional states (i.e.: sadness, grief, happiness, frustration, anger, etc.). This might produce anxiety in a variety of ways, including the general unease that emotions engender in a rationality-driven paradigm, in addition to the confusion engendered when trying to decipher the meaning of one’s tears. The drive for comprehension draws the focus on crying into the crier. I argue that this drive overshadows other important dimensions of tears, in particular the non-rational, non-cognitive, affective dimensions of crying. By viewing crying as a mode of relation, I want to relax the impulse to understand the meaning of tears themselves, and instead engage with these others dimensions [of relating] that get overlooked in the quest for meaning. In effect, the focus on crying’s affective dimensions helps challenge the boundedness of bodies.

In the previous chapter, I considered how crying becomes abject, by examining how femininity is written onto tears. This line of reasoning is always related to boundaries of the body and the self, and is itself anxiety-inducing. Its abject status is one way to observe how crying troubles boundaries.[[25]](#footnote-25) Building on this abject status, crying makes evident the fictiveness of corporeal integrity. Corporeal integrity is important to theories that that privilege the individual, including theories of liberal democracy. However, I think that it is possible to view the challenge to corporeal integrity as a source of productivity, instead of a source of danger. However, this means that the individual fades from prominence in the resulting theory of political community. Crying’s challenge to corporeal integrity, then, functions to prioritize the relationships between bodies, as opposed to the coherence or unity of the bodies themselves. Crying blurs the boundaries between individuals.

When we cry, tears fall from our eyes and trace infinite paths down our bodies. They meander the peaks and valleys inscribed by the years on our faces. They pool and puddle, flow and gush, dribble and drip until they are reabsorbed by the skin’s thirst or fall over one of the many precipices punctuating our bodies. They are simultaneously inside and outside, of us and on us, mine and ours. On the visual plane, tears draw boundaries but challenge them as well. Yet crying is not only about tears, and these other aspects also serve to enhance the ways in which crying troubles the fiction of corporeal integrity. When we cry, we sob, we heave, we moan. The aural elements of crying are critical parts of the phenomenon itself. Similarly, these elements—the moans, the sobs, the heavy breathing—challenge corporeal integrity, but in a different way. Though they emanate from the body, calling out to others, calling attention through non-articulate expression, like the tears, these other elements are released into the surrounding environment. Taken together, these visual and aural aspects of crying blur the boundaries of the body. And further, they blur the significance of those boundaries. Recent work on affect furnishes theoretical language with which to describe this relaxation.

There are many strands of affect theory that have proliferated in recent years. Broadly, much of this work takes the insights of Baruch Spinoza as their starting point. Spinoza defines a body by its affective capability, where affects are not just produced by bodies but define and ceaselessly constitute the nature of the body.[[26]](#footnote-26) However, affects do not solely belong to anyone; they are intercorporeal, and always social in nature. There is a certain fluidity apparent in Spinoza’s rendering of the body, as a result of his interest in the relations between bodies. Spinoza sees bodies as receptive to the transmission of affects, as capable of being affected in addition to affecting others.[[27]](#footnote-27) Further, affect is always an element of an encounter, attending more to the relations between bodies and objects[[28]](#footnote-28) as opposed to a kind of corporeal integrity that underscores much liberal political theory. In this vein, according to Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth, affects often emerge in the encounters between bodies, referring to the transformations that happen when bodies meet.[[29]](#footnote-29)

The image of a crying child might help clarify the relational aspects of crying, in an effort to consider the various relevant dimensions at work here. In the first place, the crying child introduces the trope of maturity that swirls around tears. Further, as crying is commonly recognized as an initial form of communication, the figure of the child helps to draw out this dimension of tears, precisely because it is the child whose tears are eventually silenced. The child allows us to momentarily suspend the layers of regulation around tears to consider what work they do. This is a familiar image, and I think helps relate multiple aspects relevant to the affective dimension/power of tears. In part, the crying child represents a moment in which we can observe the work of tears and the burgeoning anxiety, but the work of tears has not yet been overshadowed by this anxiety. We can see the beginnings of the impulse to suppress tears, an idea that underlies this entire project. Related, the exchange of crying for articulate speech over the course of development once again brings us back to the figure of the child. The ability to cry does not disappear with the acquisition of language and its expression in articulate speech. Yet, the latter seems to overshadow the former. Only in the child can we easily view the inevitable mixing of these two modes of relating.

At the beginning of life, crying is accepted and even the primary mode of relation, at least between babies and full-grown adults. Yet, over time, crying loses its prominence. Language becomes the privileged and dominant mode of relation (particularly articulate speech).[[30]](#footnote-30) Affective regimes are erected around tears, which function to bolster the use of articulate language instead of inarticulate emotional expression as the preferred mode of communication. These regimes suppress tears by casting them as undesirable and eventually improper, inappropriate, and even harmful. The crying child gestures towards a strong link between crying and language. Both function, in part, to communicate one’s state-of-being to others; both function to blur the boundaries between the self and others; both function to breed relations between people. I think we are quite familiar with the critical stance on tears (they are immature, undesirable, unhelpful), that we often forget the way in which crying can act as a kind of magnet. The well-ingrained critique casts a shadow over crying’s capacity to draw people together.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Imagine that a baby begins to cry in her crib. Upon hearing the whimpers, her caretaker enters the room, and lifts the baby from the crib, patting her back and making soothing ‘shhhh’ing sounds. The caretaker also sees the baby’s tears, and maybe even moves to wipe them and any dripping snot away. Many transformations have occurred within this space, and both bodies are affecting and being affected in different ways during this encounter. The baby’s moans initially draw the caretaker into her room. The caretaker’s embrace quiets the baby’s cries and may eventually bring an end to the flow of tears (I highlight this not in an effort to assign causality but instead to demonstrate the array of effects and affects present in this encounter). The same might be true of the soothing sounds emanating from her mouth, which are not part of articulate speech, but communicate a message nonetheless.

The two bodies present in this encounter are connected on a variety of levels. Their interactions span visual, tactile, aural, and oral dimensions. The transformations also span a similar array. If we approached this interaction through language alone, we learn much less, and potentially miss the transformations engendered by crying’s affects. Neither language nor the bodily integrity of each actor is central to the story here. Instead, it is the mingling and even blending between them that is of interest. Crying engenders a set of relations, an excuse for interactions, and a space for potential transformation. It connects bodies, however fleetingly, before pushing them apart, allowing each to settle back into their respective spaces before the next obvious encounter.

The baby here not only serves as an obvious example of someone crying, but also helps trouble the role of consciousness as related to affect. There are many theorists who consider affects social, as evident in the previous example. In addition, there theorists, such as Brian Massumi or Eric Shouse, who consider affects as pre-personal. This pre-personal conception of the phenomenon considers affect in contrast to feeling and emotion, two ideas that are often bundled together. Feeling is personal, insofar as each person has a distinct set of previous experiences that animate their feelings. Emotion is a display of feeling, which is broadcast to the world. Affect is more abstract in this rendering; it is a non-conscious experience of intensity, a moment of unformed or unstructured potential.[[32]](#footnote-32) Importantly, affects are not fully realizable in language because there is a way in which they are always somewhat prior to or outside of consciousness. To return to the infant example, because infants have no language, they rely more heavily on intensities and affects, though they are not necessarily conscious of this process.[[33]](#footnote-33) The non-conscious aspects of this interaction are part of what the affective regimes stamp out. Because these aspects are not necessarily cognizable, they are not privileged forms of relation. When we suppress tears, we limit these dimensions on which we relate to others. As the baby grows, so too does the emphasis on limitation and suppression of crying.

In adults, affect still animates the intensity of feelings, the quantity of a quality in Shouse’s language. It is also the background intensity of our everyday lives.[[34]](#footnote-34) Affect is importantly inarticulate. In adults, this is slightly more complicated, insofar as the capacity for articulate forms of expression is more fully developed in adults than in babies or children. However, the inarticulacy of affect refers to the more emergent and unfixed aspects of human emotion; affects can be the non-conscious and unnamed, yet registered experiences of bodily energy.[[35]](#footnote-35) Yet, language and gesture are often employed to capture affect, efforts which many theorists think delimit the full potential of affect.[[36]](#footnote-36) Notably, affect allows us to move away from the linguistic meaning-making practices of social life, and consider additional, related, lived dimensions therein. Taken together, these ideas decenter the individual body, and push us to view the environment with its proliferation of agents. The buzz between often-recognizable units sometimes blurs the boundary between each body. As the buzz reaches its fever pitch, at moments of particular passion/intensity, the bodies cease to encase, and are overtaken by a swirling of affects between one another. Crying can play an interesting role here. It engenders a pull between bodies, and a whole set of interactions between those bodies, but it is also, crucially, not only of either of the bodies. It is the basis of their blurring.

Throughout this section, I have focused on the transformational potential contained in affects. The crying child helps demonstrate the transformative potential of crying’s affects. This image also provides a platform to engage with the pre-personal, non-conscious and non-rational characteristics of crying’s affect. The baby’s lack of cognitive individuality makes her the perfect actor through which to focus on these qualities. The tears of a baby also serve to remind us of how quotidian, how ordinary crying is. The baby also reminds us that the suppression of tears is a constructed reality, perhaps one in need of reevaluation. It is easy to overlook how crying might be productive because their suppression is familiar and habitual to us, even those of us who cry on a regular basis. Further, crying’s ordinariness is also valuable. Now I want to build on the ideas introduced thus far to theorize the benefits of affective interaction. The remainder of this section will move away from an inquiry into of what work crying *does*, and instead focus on what work crying *can do*. In particular, I consider what can crying’s affective dimensions do in the way of relationships between people.

I turn to affective solidarity, a term I take from Clare Hemmings, in an effort to further theorize the benefits of affective interaction engendered by crying, though often overlooked. Further, I think this idea in particular aids in articulating the way in which certain emotions might be employed in the recovery of crying. Hemmings’ affective solidarity concentrates on some emotions that are conventionally understood as negative. It is my hope that by paying attention to these ‘negative’ emotions and the way affective solidarity renders them productive, it will be possible to move beyond this negative categorization (and any anxiety associated to it—I will return to this idea). Hemmings is attracted by the focus on being as a mode of knowing within the realm of feminist theory.[[37]](#footnote-37) Affect offers a way to theorize the intertwining of embodied with intersubjectivity and relationality.[[38]](#footnote-38) Crying is also as embodied, intersubjective, and relational. Hemmings’ work, puts a premium on knowing differently, in part through affect. This refers both to the ability to appreciate the other, as well as different modes of knowledge. Affect offers an opening into a different kind of knowledge than the type that is rationally discerned. Further, affect offers a way to move beyond individualized knowledge. To affect and be affected is already to be part of a relationship, is already to operate in an intersubjective manner. Crying, to the extent that it operates on affective registers, generates this type of experience, and in turn, this type of knowledge. It does so by drawing us together and pushing us apart. Both are important parts of the generation of affective solidarity.

I have focused primarily on crying’s affects that bring people together, in particular through the image of the crying child. However, this project is predicated on the idea that there is an anxiety around crying that leads people to overlook its usefulness and reject it as a legitimate form of behavior or expression. If crying only generates affects that draw us towards one another, then this line of argument would seem slightly misguided. Of course, crying does not always pull us towards one another; sometimes it repels. So too is the case with various other affects. Hemmings discusses what she calls ‘affective dissonance’ as the basis of some connection to others. By this she means that there must be a gap between self-narrative and social reality.[[39]](#footnote-39) Feminist standpoint theory acknowledges the value of knowledge created through the struggle that this gap engenders. Marginal subjects produce this kind of knowledge. Affective dissonance refers generally to the judgment that arises from the distinction between experience and the world; this can be suppressed, harnessed, or even mobilized. Hemmings advocates taking the experience of the gap, the experience of the struggle, and using the frustration, disappointment, or shame to propel one forward. Affective solidarity becomes the end-goal produced in the experience of struggle.

Affective solidarity opens up a new direction of inquiry. As I work towards the recovery of tears (from the suppression imposed by affective regimes), there are many obstacles, but affective solidarity offers a way to reconsider and re-conceptualize these impediments as benefits. Further, affective solidarity does not require that we ignore the negative aspects of crying, conventionally understood. Instead, this idea provides a way to move beyond these impasses. Negative emotions, experiences, and affects engender their own knowledges that can help bring people together. The general unease produced by tears becomes an asset in this regard. This is not the end goal of my project, but it does serve to demonstrate what work crying *can do* amidst an effort to break down the affective regimes that function towards its suppression.

**Conclusion**

Following Jane Bennett, I have attempted to think slowly the relationship between crying and emotion in an effort to lay the groundwork to recover tears as a legitimate form of behavior and expression. Thinking slowly revealed a set of anxieties related to crying, linked to its status as emotional expression. Crying is not rational, and therefore, troubling in a society that privileges rationality and rational expression. Further, crying is complicated, complex, and often confusion. The privileging of rationality extends into an impulse to comprehend as much as possible. However, not only is crying a form of emotional expression, but it also functions to express multiple emotions, and even multiple emotions simultaneously. It can be difficult to understand precisely what emotional state crying is meant to express. As such, inquiring after the meaning of tears is not the most productive approach to crying. This does not mean that we should ignore the meaning of tears, but that we should not be hindered by an obsession to uncover meaning. Doing so obscures additional useful dimensions of crying, in particular the affective dimensions which can serve to bring people together, and blur the boundaries between bodies. Finally, thinking slowly revealed the potential utility of crying’s affective dimensions by enabling us to consider the role of crying in generating a kind of affective solidarity. This works towards the loftier goal of this project, which is to consider the alternative kind of political community generated through work that tears can do, in particular towards communicating vulnerability. In particular, this goal draws heavily on the work of Lauren Berlant, Michael Warner, Ann Cvetkovich and Jane Bennett to construct a notion of a public that corresponds to an affectively generated political community, based on shared vulnerability.

1. Of course, these are not the only questions that one might ask, nor are these the only emotional states associated with tears, but they are common emotions that are often seen as connected to crying. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Paul Ekman offers a useful overview of some of these ideas in “An Argument for Basic Emotions,” *Cognition and Emotion* 1992, 6(3/4), 169-200. Allison Jaggar also gives a helpful summary of many of these views in “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” *Inquiry*, 1989, 32(2), 151-176. In particular, Jaggar argues that by construing emotions as epistemologically destructive, the Western tradition has tended to obscure the vital role emotion plays in constructing knowledge. See also Elster (1999) for further discussion of the relationship between emotions and rationality. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Martha Nussbaum. *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. In the *Phaedo,* Socrates juxtaposes the body with the soul. Socrates dismisses Crito’s suggestion that he should engage in bodily pleasures before drinking the poison that would bring about his death. He also laughs at the suggestion that his body is the site of his real ‘self’. For Socrates, as a philosopher, his real ‘self’ existed in his soul, and in particular, in his mind. This is an early manifestation of mind/body dualism, and one that is often understood as influencing the Stoic view on the relationship between the mind and the body. Descartes’ most famous pronouncement is ‘I think, therefore, I am.’ This illustrates the idea often attributed to Descartes, that our minds and our bodies are two distinct substances and thus exist apart from one another. Broadly, this idea rests on the claim that the essences of the mind and body are different (thought and extension, respectively), and the duality of essences corresponds to a duality of substances. There is, of course, an element of continuity between the views espoused by Socrates and Descartes, as well as with those of Nussbaum and the Stoics. I introduce them all here to illustrate the prevalence of the dualistic and even antagonistic view of the relationship between the mind and the body, and by extension, reason and emotions. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Epictetus. *Handbook*. Chapter 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Epictetus. *Handbook*. Chapter 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Epictetus also says that the Stoic observer is permitted to cry with the person he encounters. This is curious. I think this demonstrates a recognition of the affective force of crying, as well as hints at the benefits of engaging with this dimension. I return to this idea towards the end of this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Epictetus. *Handbook*. Chapter 16 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In Epictetus’ work, it is possible to see this theme arise in many places in the *Handbook* and the *Discourses.* Further, we see a similar teaching in Seneca and Cicero, though it manifests slightly differently in either case. See also: Julia Annas (1993) or John M. Cooper (2003) for further discussion of these ideas. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In particular, see the discussion that dominates Chapter 1 of Nussbaum (2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Nussbaum 2001 56 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. This point is articulated in the work of many thinkers, philosophers and cognitive scientists alike. For example, see: Nussbaum (1990), Eckman (1972) or Elster (2003) for examples of this array of work. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Emotions often regarded as dangerous threat to morality and rationality, but it seems worth noting that in the romantic tradition, emotions were actually placed in center of human individuality and moral life. Related, it is also interesting to note that some key virtues are also the names of emotions. However, in today’s society, emotion is still undervalued. For example, prudence/fortitude and temperance are largely defined by the capacity to resist the motivational power of emotions. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Martha Nussbaum. *Political Emotions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013)261 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Sharon Krause. *Civil Passions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008) 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Looking at the work of Plato or Descartes illustrates this point nicely. However, both Krause and Nussbaum push against this idea in different ways. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Krause 2008 16. In effect, Krause is criticizing Habermas and Rawls, and deliberative democratic theory and liberal democratic theory. She understands these theories of democracy as relying much too heavily on reason. This sentiment is one I share, though I do not feel as though she goes far enough with her critique. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Note: in the longer version of this chapter, I explore the relationship between crying and language in more detail. Along with articulate speech, the longer chapter examines the relationship between crying and writing, as well as other vocal elements of crying. I understand language traditionally is more closely associated with reason, but the current section of the chapter seeks to move away from this categorization. I introduce articulate speech in the current paragraph in an effort to juxtapose crying to something traditionally seen as the manifestation of the reasoning capacity (see Aristotle, Plato, Rousseau, etc.). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. I take this definition from the American Psychological Association. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Tom Lutz. *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1999)19 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This is the way that I read the Stoics in their discussion of attachments. This is also reflected in the work of Nussbaum (2003), John Deigh (1994), and Jon Elster (1999, 2003). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Of course, this is a broad generalization. However, let us consider both the liberal democratic paradigm and the deliberative democratic paradigm. Both, in different ways, rest on the idea that we can and should understand what our fellow citizens are thinking and use that shared understanding to exist in society together. Further, my argument here is not that the impulse to understand is problematic, writ-large, but that perhaps it overshadows other questions and ways we might think about crying. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. I do not mean to suggest that emotions and feelings are the same. Following Eric Shouse in “Feeling, Emotion, Affect,” published in *M/C Journal* in December 2005, I define feeling as personal, insofar as each person has a distinct set of experiences that animate their feelings. Emotions are a display of feelings, as they are broadcast to the world. In this section, I move between feeling and emotion with relative ease. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. In the previous chapter, I examine the way the sexual specificity of female bodies is linked to its constitutive fluids. For Luce Irigaray, fluidity marks the inherent excess of the feminine that is uncontainable with binary sexual difference. Women’s corporeality is often inscribed as a mode of seepage. Elizabeth Grosz, building on the work of Irigaray along with Julia Kristeva, considers female bodies to culturally echo themes of seeping liquids and formless flows. These characteristics construct the female body in particular as one that evades control, and as such, stands apart from the male body, which effectively serves as the neutral norm. In relation to my project, if women’s corporeality is expressed and understood through teaming liquids, then the link between tears and femininity becomes clear. If the female body is seen as open in contrast to the closed male body, then any flow that suggests corporeal permeability can potentially be employed in the construction of this notion of femininity. My purpose here is not to argue for a particular notion of femininity, but note the connection between flows and femininity, femininity here being a mark of lesser status, not some essentialized version of gender or sex. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Baruch Spinoza. ‘Ethics’ in *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994 [1677]). See also Robert Seyfert. “Beyond Personal Feelings and Collective Emotions: Toward a Theory of Social Affect,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 29(6), 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Spinoza’s account of affect deals especially with the relations between bodies. Work by more recent theorists, including Jane Bennett (2010) and Donna Haraway (2008), examine the affective qualities of matter and objects as well, expanding Spinoza’s insights. This work that moves beyond the solely human body has been helpful to me while theorizing the affective dimensions of tears. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth. ‘An Inventory Shimmers’ in Gregg and Seigworth (eds.) *The Affect Theory Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010) 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Again, the longer version of this chapter explores this relationship more thoroughly. I have cut it out of this draft because I wish to receive feedback on the affect component of my work at this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. In theoretical texts, interlocutors such as Plato’s Athenian stranger and John Locke present what I consider to be the conventional view of crying. In the *Laws*, the Athenian stranger acknowledges that the human infant starts crying, that he is “given not only to screaming but to tears” [791e]. He recognizes that during the first three years of a newborn’s life, crying is employed as the main form of communication. He moves on, however, to prescribe a method for minimizing the production of tears. Locke takes a harsher stance on crying. The Athenian stranger first recognizes the role of tears in the beginning of life, before moving to limit them in the temporal and physical senses. In contrast, Locke expresses disdain for crying from the outset. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, he writes, “*Crying* is a fault that should not be tolerated in children…Their *crying* is very often a striving for mastery and an open declaration of their insolence or obstinacy.” Of course, there is much more to say about the role of crying in each of these works. I introduce these passages here to demonstrate that there is a constant recognition of and association made between children and tears. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Shouse 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Kathleen Stewart. *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007) [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Deborah Gould. ‘On Affect and Protest’ in Janet Staiger, Ann Cvetkovich and Ann Reynolds (eds.) *Political Emotions* (2010) 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Ibid. 27 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Clare Hemmings. “Affective Solidarity: Feminist Reflexivity and Political Transformation,” *Feminist Theory* 13(2), 2012. See also Jaggar’s “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology” for development of a similar idea. Further, this question was raised in my first chapter, which looks at the relationship between crying and the body on a more microscopic level. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Hemmings 2012 151 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Hemmings 2012 155 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)