

Toward a “strong” normativity of fear in Hans Jonas and Aristotle

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Abstract

What does it mean to say that one “ought” to undergo an emotion? In *The Imperative of Responsibility*, Hans Jonas provocatively asserts that twentieth-century citizens “ought” to fear for the well-being of future generations. I argue that Jonas's demand is not straightforwardly reducible to claims about the fittingness, expedience, or aretaic desirability of fear, and I present an interpretation of its content and coherence using Aristotle's moral psychology of fear in the *Rhetoric*, *Politics*, and *Nicomachean Ethics* as a framework. Aristotle's account of fear as an anticipatory, imaginative stance that alters perception and judgment helps to clarify that Jonas's demand concerns acts of affect-laden, imaginative reflection through which one might revise one's affective sensibilities with regard to future persons. I conclude by considering several objections to Jonas's first-order argument, and indicating several clarifications and caveats that are important for formulating strong normative assertions about political emotions more generally.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Emotions are commonplace objects of normative appraisal. Parents sometimes tell children not to fear monsters under the bed. Upon receiving bad news, a friend might emphasize that it is okay to feel upset: “Don't keep it bottled up.” Jealousy might strike one as the “wrong” sort of emotion to feel about a sibling's achievement. These judgments about one's own and others' emotions can each be expressed in everyday language in formulations of “ought” or “should.”

On closer examination, however, they admit substantial differences. The case of a child's fear involves a claim about the *fittingness* of fear in light of the fact (one hopes) that there are no monsters under the bed. Encouraging a friend to “let it out” and not hold back

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from expressing sadness involves a claim about *expediency* based on the assumption that excessively suppressing one's emotions does not lead to good outcomes. And discomfort over one's feelings of sibling jealousy involves an *aretaic* claim about the kind of person one hopes to be, and whether jealousy in this situation speaks highly of one's character. These simple examples illustrate that the information that is relevant for buttressing normative claims about emotions varies widely.

In recent times, a different flavor of normative assertion about emotion has emerged in political rhetoric and advocacy, particularly in debates over climate change and environmental justice. These “strong” or “blunt” normative assertions, as I will call them, are not reducible to claims about the fittingness, expedience, or aretaic value of an emotional episode. Rather, strong normative claims about emotion appear to be *demands to feel* an emotion. As a representative example, consider Greta Thunberg's widely cited remarks at the 2019 World Economic Forum in Davos:

Adults keep saying: “We owe it to the young people to give them hope.” But I don't want your hope. I don't want you to be hopeful. *I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day.* And then I want you to act. I want you to act as you would in a crisis. I want you to act as if our house is on fire. Because it is.

(Thunberg, 2019; emphasis added)

Thunberg's remarks express a demand for others to undergo an emotional episode, as if to say “you ought to panic” or “you ought to fear.” What kind of “ought” is this? By “you ought to fear,” one might mean that panic is or involves an apt evaluative response to its intentional object (in this case, the threat of climate change); or, panic will most reliably galvanize quick and effective action toward valued ends; or, panic is what a good, moral, or otherwise well-formed person would feel in this circumstance.

I take Thunberg to advance a normative assertion about emotion that goes beyond these considerations. At least part of her demand appears to be for others to *undergo* fear, and not only that fear is rationally acceptable, evaluatively accurate, expedient, or virtuous. The aim of this article is to offer an interpretation of the content and rhetorical usage of this kind of strong normative demand about emotions by examining a prominent twentieth-century formulation from Hans Jonas. In terms of content, I propose that strong normative claims about emotions can be understood as demands to perform acts of affect-laden, imaginative reflection through which one might catch sight of and revise one's emotional intuitions and affective sensibilities. Though I acknowledge that assertions of the form “one ought to undergo [an emotion]” might reasonably strike one as implausible—largely because they appear to run afoul of “ought implies can,” a principle that still holds sway among many value theorists—I ultimately argue for their coherence so long as they are qualified to demand purposeful acts of imaginative reflection. In terms of their rhetorical usage, I also argue that strong normative claims pressure others to bring their affective sensibilities and expressions into alignment with in-group affective norms. On this view, strong normative claims about emotions provide *prima facie* reasons to critically examine one's emotional outlook through standard normative rubrics (e.g., fittingness, appropriateness, expedience, virtuousness) with a view toward shared and valued ends.

My focus will be on strong normative claims about fear as they appear in Jonas's 1979 book *Das Prinzip Verantwortung*, published in English as *The Imperative of Responsibility* in 1984. One reason to focus on fear is that normative claims about fear feature prominently in contemporary advocacy and public discussion about the environment (e.g., ridicule of climate fears, advocacy to convince others that there is cause for fear). Moreover, fear and fear-related emotions and affects, such as anxiety, worry, and panic, are almost invariably included in scholarly discussions of “climate emotions,” a term sometimes used to denote a broad category of “affective phenomena which are significantly related to the climate

crisis” (Pihkala, 2022, p. 1).¹ Fear also has a rich history, stretching back to Aristotle, as an object of normative appraisal and philosophical and political analysis. Returning to that history, and particularly Aristotle’s moral psychology of fear in the *Rhetoric*, *Politics*, and *Nicomachean Ethics*, is helpful for clarifying the content of strong normative claims about fear.

Jonas’s so-called “heuristics of fear” is a natural choice for at least two reasons. First, strong normative claims about fear figure prominently in *The Imperative of Responsibility*, which achieved the relatively rare confluence of rigorous philosophical argumentation and popular uptake. Although Jonas is not a well-known figure in Anglophone philosophical scholarship, his environmental philosophy was notably influential on the German Green Party (Die Grünen), as well as both public and intellectual debates over environmental policy and political responsibility in the 1980s and ‘90s.² That German newspapers frequently reported on his public appearances speaks to the uptake that Jonas’s thinking received in this pivotal period in the German environmental movement (Schütze, 1995, p. 42). A second reason to engage with Jonas is that his claims are bold, going so far as the provocative assertion that citizens of the Anthropocene have a “duty to seek [the first word of fear] out by an effort of reason and imagination” (Jonas, 1985, p. 27). The radicality of Jonas’s argument brings the distinctive, second-order form of his normative claims about fear into relief. Though I will eventually raise several objections to Jonas’s argument as stated, his writing serves as an illustrative example of blunt normativity concerning emotion.

The structure of the article is as follows. In Section 2, I review several familiar registers of normativity through which to interpret the claim that one “ought” to undergo fear, and I suggest that at least one of Jonas’s claims—namely, that we have a duty to “intentionally induc[e]” fear—is atypical and requires further explication (p. 27). Next, in Section 3, I situate this unusual claim about fear in the context of Jonas’s overarching project in *The Imperative of Responsibility*. In Section 4, I interpret Jonas’s position by way of Aristotle’s moral psychology. Aristotle’s comments in the *Rhetoric*, and especially his treatment of *phantasia* (imagination) and *phobos* (fear), are particularly helpful for motivating Jonas’s insistence that citizens “ought” to undergo a “spiritual sort of fear” for the well-being of future generations (p. 28). Reading Jonas through Aristotle provides a way to interpret his strong normative claims about fear as demands to purposefully and imaginatively inflame and embrace specific *pathē* so as to reframe one’s moral and political judgment.

In Section 5, I recast Jonas’s claims in terms of collective (as opposed to individual) emotions. I argue that blunt normative assertions about fear can prompt others to imaginatively reassess and revise their own emotions (or lack thereof) by applying pressure on them to bring their affective sensibilities into alignment with the collective political emotions of a community, movement, or social group. This means that blunt normative claims about fear may have a role to play in “affectively integrat[ing] individuals’ affective concerns into a broader network of the political community’s concerns, and thus . . . (re-)align[ing] individuals around a shared emotional perspective” (Szanto & Slaby, 2020, p. 487). Finally, in Section 6, I pose a series

¹For example, in Panu Pihkala’s recent literature review of key scholarly treatments of climate emotions, fear is featured as a relevant emotion in twelve out of fourteen “peer-reviewed studies and published survey reports which discuss at least five different climate emotions with at least some empirical support” (Pihkala, 2022, p. 5).

²*The Imperative of Responsibility* “had a significant impact on the Green movement in Germany” (Vogel, 1996, p. 3), and references to it “found their way into countless speeches and addresses given at forums as diverse as ecological groups in remote villages to the Bundestag, the federal parliament in Bonn” (Schütze, 1995, p. 40). See also Troster (2008, p. 374n6). To my knowledge, there is no English-language scholarship detailing the precise ways in which Jonas’s ideas were taken up by the Greens. In Jonas’s *Memoirs*, he recalls: “It was politicians like Helmut Schmidt and Hans-Dietrich Genscher who soon made their views [about *The Imperative of Responsibility*] known in public. . . . I found out that in Bundestag debates my name was being invoked by members of all parties, and that the Christian Democrats and Social Democrats were determined not to let each other lay exclusive claim to Hans Jonas” (Jonas, 2008, p. 212). See also Hermand (1991, pp. 156–157).

of objections against Jonas's first-order project, and I suggest clarifications and caveats that would be helpful for further refining his strong normative claims.

2 | NORMATIVITIES OF EMOTION

To begin, it is worth sketching again some of the different kinds of considerations that bear upon normative claims about the emotions. I have indicated three provisional categories above: (1) considerations of fittingness, (2) considerations of expedience, and (3) considerations of virtue. These distinctions do not correspond to competing theories of emotion (i.e., cognitive theories, feeling theories, perceptual theories, appraisal theories), but instead to distinct registers of normativity to which one might appeal while working within a given theory of emotion. This is far from an exhaustive taxonomy, and (1), (2), and (3) each contain a diversity of subcategories not described here.³ Still, these categories convey something of the wide range of considerations that can underlie assertions about whether one “ought” or “ought not” to feel fear:

1. “Fear would/would not be fitting given its object.” Insofar as one accepts the view that emotions are, consist of, or are intimately connected to evaluation and appraisal, emotions can be judged fitting or unfitting by comparing their (implicit) evaluations with the properties of evaluative objects.⁴ As D'Arms and Jacobson put it, this is to raise the question of “whether [a] feeling gets it right,” as distinct from that of “whether some emotion is the right way to feel” (D'Arms & Jacobson, 2000, p. 66). It is in this sense that one might speak of “unfitting pride,” “fitting anger,” and “misplaced envy.” The claim that one ought or ought not to feel fear can be understood as an assertion that fear does or does not match its evaluative object, perhaps in a manner akin to how beliefs can be judged correct or incorrect by reference to the facts of the matter.⁵ The match between fear and its object may also concern how much fear one should feel, and not only whether one should or should not feel fear at all.
2. “Fear is an expedient/inexpedient response in this circumstance.” Insofar as one accepts the view that emotions motivate behavior and have distinct action tendencies, they can be judged in terms of their expedience in relation to valued ends.⁶ Even fitting emotions can be practically inexpedient, such that one might be advised not to “give in to” anger or indignation at an interviewer's rude comment during a job interview. To say that one ought or ought not to feel fear can be understood as a claim about whether experiencing and/or expressing fear (to a certain degree or with a certain intensity) would carry one closer to one's practical goals, or indeed the goals implicit in the emotion itself (e.g., a scuba diver's panic may motivate her to extricate herself from the situation, but panic is counterproductive to getting safely to the surface).
3. “Fear is indicative of virtue/vice.” Emotions are widely considered to be products and expressions of one's habits, dispositions, priorities, and values. From a certain perspective, it may not only be (un)fitting or (im)prudent to feel an emotion, but also revealing of one's

³For example, fittingness might pertain to the profile of an evaluative object or the profile of the facts of the matter, so to speak. One can cede to a fearful child that fear is a fitting response to monsters, while also maintaining that fear is unfitting given the absence of monsters in the room.

⁴Again, this premise is intended to be uncontroversial across competing theories of emotions. As Benedetta Romano puts it, “whatever they are, and however they work, emotions have some evaluative content” (Romano, 2018, pp. 592–593).

⁵For a thorough disambiguation of fittingness from appropriateness with regard to emotion, see D'Arms and Jacobson (2000). For a recent interpretation of fittingness in normative rather than representational terms, see Naar (2021).

⁶This premise is intended to be neutral on the matter of whether emotions are motivational mechanisms in and of themselves, or if they interrupt and redirect attention and behavior in a way that is relevant for motivation.

moral character. Elation at others' misfortune or resentment of others' successes might be said by some to indicate an improper ethical formation. To say that one ought or ought not to feel fear can mean that in certain circumstances fear is symptomatic of a virtuous or vicious character that one ought to cultivate or eschew.

That each of these normative registers can be expressed in formulations of “ought” or “should” sometimes brings about ambiguity and crosstalk. “The trouble,” D’Arms and Jacobson write, “is that there are various kinds of justification or endorsement which can be made of an episode of emotion” (p. 65). It is not always obvious which sense of normativity is relevant for adjudicating assertions that one “ought” or “ought not” to feel an emotion. Consider, for example, the following passage from *The Imperative of Responsibility*:

The imagined fate of future men, let alone that of the planet, which affects neither me nor anyone else still connected with me by the bonds of love or just of coexistence, does not of itself have this influence upon our feeling. And yet it “ought” to have it—that is, *we* should allow it this influence by purposefully making room for it in our disposition. . . . Such an attitude must be cultivated; we must educate our soul to a willingness to *let* itself be affected by the mere thought of possible fortunes and calamities of future generations. . . . Therefore, bringing ourselves to this emotional readiness, developing an attitude open to the stirrings of fear in the face of merely conjectural and distant forecasts concerning man's destiny—a new kind of *education sentimentale*—is the second, preliminary duty of the ethic we are seeking. . . . Informed by this thinking, we are obliged to lay ourselves open to the appropriate fear.

(Jonas, 1985, p. 28)

Here, there are multiple kinds of “ought” working alongside one another. (This is not, in itself, so unusual; e.g., unfitting anger can be correlated with inexpedient consequences.) There are ample textual grounds to attribute to Jonas the views that: (1) fear is a fitting response to the “slow incremental” apocalypse of the Anthropocene (p. 202); (2) fear is “appropriate” for the purposes of becoming effective political actors (p. 28); and (3) we ought to “mak[e] room for” or “cultivate” a moral “disposition” or “attitude” that is responsive to fear in order to live well (p. 28). Still, without knowing the specific register of normativity underpinning Jonas's claim that “we are obliged to lay ourselves open to the appropriate fear,” weighing its convincings is a murky process (p. 28).

A related problem is the matter of reconciling different registers of normativity when they rub against one another, as in cases of fitting, but inexpedient emotions. For example, anger is often subjected to what Amia Srinivasan calls “counterproductivity critique[s]” (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 125). Srinivasan offers the example of William F. Buckley Jr.'s critique of James Baldwin: “I agree with you that we have a dastardly situation, but I'm asking you not to make politics as the crow flies” (p. 124). Counterproductivity critiques like Buckley's cede the fittingness of an emotion, assert the inexpediency of (expressing) that emotion, and—crucially—maintain that expediency should win the day. Accordingly, one can challenge counterproductivity critiques in at least three ways: (a) by rejecting the claim of inexpediency itself⁷; (b) by introducing a rival object of expediency and arguing for its priority⁸; or (c) by denying

⁷Srinivasan, for example, cites Audre Lorde's, Marilyn Frye's, and Uma Narayan's reminders “that the counterproductivity critique often turns on suspect empirical assumptions” (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 126).

⁸Lisa Tessman uses the term “burdened virtues” to describe traits that are both politically effective and also “burdens to their bearer because they are disconnected from her/his own flourishing,” which is to say that they are individually inexpedient, but politically or collectively expedient (Tessman, 2005, p. 114).

that considerations of expediency win out over considerations of fittingness, or at least that the burden falls on the counterproductivity critic to justify prioritizing expediency.⁹ When these different rubrics yield conflicting demands, assessing the normativity of emotion involves weighing the priority of those rubrics against one another.

Assessing Jonas's claims about fear in *The Imperative of Responsibility* will involve navigating both challenges: first, identifying the normative register of his claims, and second, weighing those claims against conflicting normative rubrics. I will primarily devote myself to the former, though I will return to the latter in Section 6 when I raise several objections to Jonas. When Jonas asserts that “it becomes our duty to seek it [a heuristic of fear] out by an effort of reason and imagination, so that it can instill in us the fear whose guidance we need,” it is not immediately obvious whether this is a claim about the fittingness, expedience, or virtuousness of fear, or something else entirely (Jonas, 1985, p. 27). To make a start on these problems, the next section will reconstruct some of the argumentative context of Jonas's claims about fear.

3 | JONAS'S “HEURISTIC OF FEAR”

The Imperative of Responsibility argues that the exponential growth of human power has rendered key premises of classical ethics obsolete. Neither Aristotle nor Kant, Jonas asserts, could have predicted that we would one day have the power to destroy all human life on Earth. Nor were they faced with the material conditions of the twentieth century, and especially the harsh lesson that cumulative evil can be disproportionate to the individual vices and wrongdoings that precipitate it. Perhaps in times past we could get by with ethical principles that apply to a relatively short-term context: “The short arm of human power did not call for a long arm of predictive knowledge” (p. 6). In our own time, however, “all this has decisively changed. Modern technology has introduced actions of such novel scale, objects, and consequences that the framework of former ethics can no longer contain them” (p. 6). Twentieth-century technological and economic developments have rendered spatially and temporally “local” considerations insufficient for grounding informed ethical and political judgments. Accordingly, Jonas attempts to lay the groundwork for a new ethics of “long-range responsibility, coextensive with the range of [twentieth-century human] power” (pp. 21–22).

It is beyond the scope of this article to fully reconstruct Jonas's wide-ranging discussion of the “obligations upon the now [that] issue from that future”¹⁰ (p. 17), and his justification for a precautionary approach by which one would “act so that the effects of [one's] action are compatible with the permanence of genuine human life” (p. 11).¹¹ I will restrict myself to a recurring theme of *The Imperative of Responsibility*, which is the challenge of confronting entrenched habits of disregard for the far-future ramifications of our ways of life. For Jonas, we not only need to take future persons into account, but also undergo an affective transformation by which the sensitivity of our moral emotions is proportioned to the scope of our power. Put

⁹In an inversion of counterproductivity critiques, Srinivasan “grant[s] the counterproductivity critic's empirical supposition that anger generally makes things worse,” but argues that they “fac[e] the burden of explaining why, in [substantive normative] conflicts, reasons of prudence trump reasons of aptness” (Srinivasan, 2018, p. 127).

¹⁰This is Saskia Brown's amended translation of Jonas in Hartog (2015, pp. 197, 244n14). In the 1985 English edition, “goal” appears instead of “future” (Jonas, 1985, p. 17). The German reads: “Das Handeln geschieht um einer Zukunft willen, die weder Täter noch Opfer noch Mitlebende genießen werden; die *Verpflichtung ans Jetzt geht von dort aus*” (Jonas, 1984, p. 45; emphasis added). See also Bertrand Guillaume's paraphrase: “a new, asymmetrical responsibility that is based on the future and confronts us with the ‘potential’ effects of present actions” [“une responsabilité nouvelle et asymétrique qui procède de l'avenir et nous confronte aux effets «en puissance» de l'agir contemporain”] (Guillaume, 2012, pp. 505–506). (Translation is my own.)

¹¹For more on Jonas's formulation of this approach, see Guillaume (2019).

another way, Jonas undergirds his future-oriented ethics with a theory of political psychology.

According to Jonas ethics has two faces. On the one side, there is what he calls the "objective" question of "the rational ground of obligation" and the "validating principle behind the claim to a binding 'ought'"; and on the other side there is the "subjective" or "psychological" question of how it is that the "ought" motivates the will, or how an agent "let[s] it determine [her] course of action" (p. 85). Both faces are "mutually complementary" and "integral to ethics itself," since "without our being, at least by disposition, responsive to the call of duty in terms of feelings, the most cogent demonstration of its right . . . would be powerless to make it a motivating force" (p. 85). Affective receptivity mediates between the moral law and the will; or, as he puts it, "the gap between abstract validation and concrete motivation must be bridged by the arc of sentiment" (p. 86). On this picture, the perceived force of an "ought" hinges upon the successful activation of moral feelings, such that moral action requires *feeling* the weight of ethical claims that we can otherwise only abstractly and syllogistically approximate.¹² Jonas emphasizes that such feelings typically arise, not in moments of Kantian reverence (*Achtung*) for moral law, but in concrete encounters with objects and persons.

But this presents a problem: though we need to take responsibility for far-reaching human actions, our moral feelings (which, for Jonas, are a key piece in motivating ethical action) are not sensitive to speculative, future persons with whom we do not share Earth: "Regarding those consequences that are imminent enough still to hit ourselves, fear can do the job. . . . But this means fails us toward the more distant prospects, which here matter the most" (p. 23). On this point, Jonas finds some support from contemporary moral psychology. Linda Zagzebski, for example, describes the "thinning of moral judgment," which occurs when we abstract from "direct" judgments in situations in which "the objects to which the concepts apply are not here and now," as in the case of judging that something is pitiable without actually feeling pity (Zagzebski, 2003, p. 119). Ceding the importance of "engag[ing] in moral discourse about situations that are not here and now," Zagzebski argues that thinner moral judgments give rise to fainter motivating feelings: "We gain something, but we lose something" (pp. 120–121). Connecting Zagzebski's work to recent empirical psychological research, Sabine Roeser concurs: "Concerning [imagined cases], we will generally be less moved and motivated than concerning a case in which we directly experience something in front of our eyes" (Roeser, 2012, p. 1038).

Alongside the objective question of our duties to temporally distant persons, then, we must confront the subjective question of how to become affectively receptive to those duties. Jonas calls this process of rehabilitation "an *education sentimentale*" (1985, p. 28).¹³ More specifically, we ought to habituate ourselves toward fearing "imagined and distant evil" just as if it were "a present danger which threatens myself or those near to me" (p. 28). This fear, like the conjectures that illicit it, "must be procured with an assist from ourselves" (p. 28).

Why does Jonas choose fear as the emotion best suited to serve as the "arc of sentiment" and the cornerstone of his theory of political responsibility (p. 86)? One answer lies in the notable epistemic and conative effects of fear. "The perception of the *malum*," Jonas writes, "is

¹²As Jonas puts it in a 1985 lecture in Bonn, "Duty needs to be perceived in order to be followed" (Jonas, 1996, p. 100).

¹³To anticipate Section 4, this is already an implicitly Aristotelian position. As Alisdair MacIntyre argues, for Aristotle, "virtues are dispositions not only to act in particular ways, but also to feel in particular ways. To act virtuously is not, as Kant was later to think, to act against inclination; it is to act from inclination formed by the cultivation of the virtues. Moral education is an 'education sentimentale'" (MacIntyre, 2011, p. 175).

infinitely easier to us than the perception of the *bonum*; it is more direct, more compelling, less given to differences of opinion or taste, and, most of all, obtruding itself without our looking for it” (p. 27). Here, Jonas's claim once again prefigures recent psychological research indicating that negatively valenced emotions “are better at actually getting us out of our proverbial chairs to do something about a problem” (Morris et al., 2018, p. 22).¹⁴ Fear draws our attention viscerally to the evaluative object that occasions it and lends urgency to ensuing deliberation. Jonas's proposal, in Richard Wolin's words, is that “only a vivid delineation of worst case scenarios will shake men and women from their endemic moral complacency” (Wolin, 2008, p. 12). Evoking a parent's fear for their child's safety, Jonas adopts the Hobbesian view that pleasurable objects (and, contra Ernst Bloch, utopian projections) make a less immediate claim upon the will than objects of fear. This is not to say that we should only listen to our fears, but rather that the will is especially attuned to it:

What is most feared is not necessarily what most deserves to be feared, and still less so is its opposite the thing most deserving our desire. . . . [T]he heuristics of fear is surely not the last word in the search for goodness, [but] it is at least an extremely useful first word and should be used to the full of its helpfulness. . . .
(Jonas, 1985, p. 27)

It is worth pausing on Jonas's phrase, the “heuristics of fear.” In one sense, a heuristic is a shortcut for decision-making that sacrifices accuracy for speed. A heuristic of fear, then, would allow us to make provisional use of “the revulsion of feeling which acts ahead of knowledge” in situations in which decisions need to be made as quickly as possible (p. 27).¹⁵ But Jonas no doubt has another meaning in mind that is more closely connected with the etymological ancestor of “heuristic,” *heuriskein*, which refers to the act of discovery. It is in this sense that the Greeks often traced specific arts and techniques back to their *prôtos heuretês*, or “first discoverer,” as in the attribution of the art of rhetoric to Hermes or Homer (Pernot, 2005, pp. 10–12). A heuristic of fear, in at least one reading of the genitive, is a discovery by way of fear, or a kind of revelatory affect. As Ballet and Bazin put it, for Jonas “the value of something only becomes apparent when we risk losing it” (Ballet & Bazin, 2017, p. 188). When Jonas claims that “moral philosophy must consult our fears prior to our wishes to learn what we really cherish,” he appears to emphasize this disclosive power of fear over and above its viscerality or speed (Jonas, 1985, p. 27).

These threads—a diagnosis of modernity, a theory of moral motivation, a notion of fear as a “heuristic”—come together into a jarring claim: “it becomes our duty” to seek fear out “by an effort of reason and imagination” (p. 27). Controversially (especially in 1979), Jonas insists that it is not the looming Cold War specter of atomic destruction that poses the greatest threat to future generations, but instead “the nature of the unintended dynamics of technical civilization as such, inherent in its structure, whereto it drifts willy-nilly and with exponential acceleration: the apocalypse of the ‘too much,’ with exhaustion, pollution, desolation of the planet” (p. 202). The use of atomic weapons, he reasons, is not logical necessity, while economic and biological catastrophes of resource scarcity due to the prevailing Baconian paradigm of power over nature is. Averting this “slow incremental” apocalypse demands “a revocation of the whole life-style, even of the very principle of the advanced industrial societies,” and “thus will be much more difficult than the prevention of nuclear destruction” (p. 202).

¹⁴Morris et al. (2018) cite Peters and Slovic (2000).

¹⁵As Michael S. Brady puts it, “emotions can have value in so far as they facilitate a ‘fast and frugal’ detection of important objects and events. . . . [W]e can, in addition, make the stronger claim that we would be worse off, from the standpoint of noticing things that we ought to notice, in the absence of emotion” (Brady, 2013, p. 13).

Most of us in our day-to-day lives do *not* fear the slow-moving apocalypse. One can reach for any number of explanations for this dearth; for example, alienation, structural obfuscation, a tradition of ethical nearsightedness, emotional exhaustion, self-interest, affected ignorance, and more. Whatever the cause, it emerges that in the face of the greatest possible threat to the future of humanity, the "first word" of fear does not arise on its own (p. 27). Jonas finds this unacceptable: the "accusation that future generations are our victims makes the distancing of our feelings, which something remote otherwise permits, morally impossible for us" (1996, p. 109). This is why it is incumbent on us to summon "the creatively imagined *malum*" that is "intentionally induced" in the place of the more proximate, contemporary *malum* (1985, p. 27). In doing so, Jonas believes that we can grant far-future generations a kind of nearness and contemporaneity in the imagination, and that the precarity of their existence and conditions of life will elicit the moral feelings needed to bind our will to our responsibilities.

Recall the problem of adjudicating ambiguous normative claims about emotion raised in Section 2. Now that we have placed several of Jonas's commitments alongside one another, we can better disambiguate his distinct assertions about fear. Fear is *fitting* with a view toward its evaluative object (environmental degradation that imperils the quality of life of future generations); "we are right to feel . . . fear because what we see ahead is something terrible" (1996, p. 108). Fear is also more *expedient* than the hollow allure of utopian hope and "should be used to the full of its helpfulness" to engender focused, decisive action (1985, p. 27). Finally, as part of our *moral education* we ought to "purposely mak[e] room for fear in our disposition" through the "sensitizing of our feeling to this kind of stimulus" (p. 28), replacing the "selfish distancing of our feelings" with an "unselfish fear" (1996, p. 109).

We still, however, do not have a clear way to interpret Jonas's unorthodox assertion that we ought to seek fear out through "the anticipatory conjuring up" of an "intentionally induced" imaginative object (p. 27). As Lars Svendsen notes, Jonas "presents this fear as a moral imperative" (Svendsen, 2008, p. 66), as is evident in the title that Jonas gives to the section in which the concept of a heuristic of fear is introduced: "The 'Second Duty': Summoning Up a Feeling Appropriate to What Has Been Visualized" (Jonas, 1985, p. 28). But what does it mean to say that someone ought to "summon up" the experience of fear (p. 27)? Surely, one might say, Jonas is rhetorically driving home the need to inculcate a *predisposition* to experience fear; or, if he really does mean that one "ought" to self-induce fear, then he has overstepped "ought implies can." With this concern in mind, in the next section I reapproach Jonas's blunt normativity by way of Aristotle's moral psychology.

4 | ARISTOTLE ON EMOTION, IMAGINATION, AND JUDGMENT

Though Jonas is more often cast as an inheritor of the political pessimism of both Plato and Thomas Hobbes (Wolin, 2008, p. 12), the choice of Aristotle as a lens through which to interpret his writing is hardly unprecedented.¹⁶ Jonas openly draws from Aristotle's *De Anima* in his philosophy of nature (Ballet & Bazin, 2017, p. 190), and scholars have noted clear indications of Jonas's "Aristotelian pedigree" in his discussions of theoretical reason (Dinneen, 2014, p. 16) and the "co-constitution between being and purpose" (Chernilo, 2017, p. 116n4).

Such comparisons were also made in his own time. In 1979, the year that *Das Prinzip Verantwortung* was published in German, Hans-Georg Gadamer wrote to Jonas: "Dear Herr Jonas, I am writing to identify myself as a grateful reader of your book. . . . Your work has

¹⁶Surprisingly, few scholars have explored parallels between Jonas's heuristics of fear and Judith Shklar's landmark 1989 paper, "The Liberalism of Fear," despite the obvious resonances and personal acquaintanceship between the two thinkers.

made it clear to me that these days Aristotle has been becoming increasingly important for us” (Jonas, 2008, p. 204). Jonas later confessed that this praise puzzled him: “Although Aristotle didn’t play much of a role in my thinking . . . there was little I could do to keep myself from being classified as a neo-Aristotelian. I wouldn’t have classified myself in that way, but it’s hard to defend yourself against other’s views. At any rate, I wasn’t in bad company” (p. 204). This bemused response is puzzling given the fact that the concluding lines of *The Imperative of Responsibility* allude directly to *Nicomachean Ethics*.¹⁷ Moreover, as I will argue in this section, there is a notable compatibility between Aristotle’s and Jonas’s respective moral psychologies, such that reinterpreting Jonas’s blunt normativity through Aristotle’s account of *phobos* helps to render it more plausible.

Aristotle offers his most substantive treatment of the emotions (*pathē*) in the *Rhetoric*, in which at least two distinct lines of inquiry are discernible. Book I reconstructs how *pathē* are commonly said to precipitate wrongdoing in the context of juridical speech and includes a lengthy discussion of passionate desire (*epithumia*) that hews closely to a Platonic account; and Book II takes up the question of how an orator can elicit an audience’s emotions in order to sway their judgment—“for things do not appear the same to those who love and those who hate, nor to those who are angry and those who are mild-mannered”—and thus opens larger questions about how emotions modulate judgment (*Rh* II.1, 1377b30).¹⁸

It is primarily in this latter context that Aristotle steps beyond his teacher’s apparent view that emotions are mixtures of pleasure and pain by adding two additional features to their definition: first, that emotions are generally “those things due to which people, by undergoing a change, differ in their judgment” (II.1, 1378a20); and second, that (at least the majority of) emotions consist of or are elicited by *phantasia*, the faculty of imagination. For Aristotle, *phantasia* is “a sort of weak perception” (I.11, 1370a27); or, as he puts it in *De Anima*, “a movement that comes about a result of the activity of perception. And since sight is perception to the highest degree, imagination [*phantasia*] derives its name from light [*phaos*], because without light it is impossible to see” (*DA* III.3, 429a1–8). Unlike perception [*aisthēsis*], however, *phantasia* can activate in the absence of objects of sensation,¹⁹ and is at least sometimes “up to us [to have], whenever we wish” in the sense that “it is possible to produce something before our eyes” (III.3, 427b16–18).

The role of *phantasia* is especially notable in Aristotle’s treatment of fear [*phobos*], to which he devotes an entire section of Book II. There, Aristotle defines fear as “a sort of pain or disturbance coming from the appearance [*phantasias*] of a future destructive or painful evil” (*Rh* II.5, 1382a21).²⁰ More specifically, fear is an anticipatory emotion that involves “a certain expectation [*prosdokias*] of undergoing some destructive suffering” (II.5, 1382b29). Compare this with the following *endoxon* from *Nicomachean Ethics*: “People also define fear as the anticipation of a bad thing” (*NE* III.6, 1115a10). While both texts affirm that expectation is integral to fear, the *Rhetoric* clarifies that *prosdokias* is a form of imaginative perception: “Some sort of

¹⁷“In thus paying tribute to the present state of things, our one-sidedness follows the ancient ethical council of Aristotle that, in the pursuit of virtue as the “mean” between two extremes of excess and deficiency, one should fight that fault more which one is more prone to and therefore more likely to commit, and rather lean over in the opposite direction, toward the side less favored by inclination or circumstances” (Jonas, 1985, p. 204).

¹⁸Many commentators emphasize that Aristotle’s comments in the *Rhetoric* do not offer a systematic psychological theory, and in many passages he appears to merely rehearse *endoxa* without criticism. However, as Nussbaum points out, “the material on emotion is not similarly circumscribed. For Aristotle’s project in these chapters is to enable the aspiring orator to produce these emotions in an audience (*empoiein*). For this to succeed, he needs to know what fear and anger really are, not just what people think they are” (Nussbaum, 1996, p. 305). See Cooper (1996) for additional discussion of the framing of the *Rhetoric*.

¹⁹As Avshalom M. Schwartz describes this advantage, “while the senses are always of the present and immediate, *phantasia* can represent remote and absent objects” (Schwartz, 2024, p. 863).

²⁰Aristotle almost exclusively discusses fear concerning one’s own safety, comfort, and well-being, but this does not preclude applying his account to fear for others. See also his discussion of pity [*eleos*], which he connects to fear (*Rh* II.8). Jonas, too, is interested in the relationship between fear and pity, and at one point he describes the fear he has in mind as a form of “anticipatory ‘pity’ for later generations damned in advance” (Jonas, 1996, p. 109).

imagination of what he remembers or expects always follows along with the perception in the person expecting or remembering” (Rh I.11, 1370a27–35). What is perceived in a state of fear is the terrible *phantasmatos*, or object of the imagination, toward which the fearful person is anticipatorily oriented with what Nussbaum calls “rich intentional awareness” (Nussbaum, 1996, p. 308).

Like Jonas, Aristotle highlights the way in which fearful expectation confers contemporaneity and proximity to its object. The experience of fear transforms our perception such that the *phantasmatos* intrudes, as if nearer in space and time than it would otherwise seem: it “appear[s] not far off, but close at hand, and so about to happen. For people do not fear what is very far off” (Rh II.5, 1382a22–25). Aristotle’s point is not only that we tend to fear what is proximate (which, for Aristotle, explains why we do not tend to fear far-off, temporally distant, or unlikely events). It is, more radically, that fear *shifts our perception* in such a way that its evaluative object appears near and urgent. This takes us beyond an account of fear as an evaluative response of pain to dreadful perception, and toward one in which fear also acts as a modulating force over perception, interpretation, and judgment.

Because fear makes faraway possibilities felt in the present, it also has notable conative effects—namely, Aristotle claims that “fear makes people inclined to deliberate” (II.5, 1383a6).²¹ Of course, emotional pressure to quickly form judgments and act does not always yield good results. Aristotle openly acknowledges that heightened emotions sometimes lead to misperceptions and misguided actions, likening the excessively spirited to “swift servants who run off before they hear what is said in its entirety and then err in carrying out the command,” and “dogs [who] bark if there is merely a knock at the door, before examining whether it is a friend” (NE VII.6, 1149a26–30). In moments of intense emotion, we sometimes “hear reason in some way, but [also] mishear it” (VII.6, 1149a26); or, as Leighton parses it, the servant “hears the object *per se*, the sound, but through his or her emotion he or she is expecting something, and does not hear (does not put together) the object *per accidens*, the order issued” (Leighton, 1996, p. 215). An overactive imagination can result in poor perception, deliberation, and action.

Elsewhere, however, Aristotle maintains that emotions can have felicitous effects on perception and practical deliberation. The virtuous orator evokes the emotions and corresponding imaginative objects that prime her audience to form right judgments, just as the sophistical orator manipulates the audience’s emotions for private ends. As Rorty emphasizes, *phantasiai* can “guide [one’s] desires to appropriate movement” and “indicate properties that objects really have” (Rorty, 1996, p. 19). Indeed, a key premise of *Nicomachean Ethics* is that emotional perception is not inherently distortive, since cultivating a disposition toward certain emotions is a necessary step for forming proper ethical judgments. Striker makes this point convincingly: “Since emotion will have an influence on how we see and judge people and their actions, the right kind of emotional disposition may be what enables us to see things in the right moral perspective” (Striker, 1996, p. 298).

More to the point, Aristotle openly endorses the idea that we can and should habituate ourselves toward or away from fear, depending on the situation. This is made explicit in his discussion of the vicious recklessness of the person “who generally fears nothing” (NE II.2, 1104a21). In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle further suggests that excessive fearlessness is typically found in those who “are, or seem to themselves to be, in the midst of great prosperity; that is why they are wantonly aggressive, contemptuous, and rash (and what makes them such is wealth, strength, many friends, and [great] capacity)” (Rh II.5, 1383a1–2). Fear, for such persons, would “help to constitute the refined ‘perception’ which is the best sort of human judgment” (Nussbaum, 2001, p. 390).

²¹For contemporary empirical support of this ancient claim, see Meijnders et al.’s claim that “fear appeals may stimulate people to think and to be critical decision makers” (Meijnders et al., 2001, p. 965). See also Jonathan Haidt’s rebuttal that much moral reasoning “is generally a post hoc construction intended to justify automatic moral intuitions” (Haidt, 2001, p. 823).

There are even circumstances in which Aristotle recommends exerting pressure on others to undergo episodes of fear. The possibility for fear to improve perception and judgment helps explain the recommendation in the *Politics* to lawgivers that they should situationally instill fear in the citizenry: “Those who are concerned about their constitution should excite [*paraskévazein*, procure, contrive] fears and make faraway dangers seem close at hand, so that the citizens will defend the constitution and, like sentries on night duty, never relax their guard” (P V.8, 1308a25–30).²² In Aristotle's treatment, Michael Pfau writes, “the fear appeal is not just an irrational tactic of manipulation, but one method by which bodies of citizens may be made aware of the tasks which they must face if they and their political partnership are to survive the buffeting of *fortuna*” (Pfau, 2007, p. 223). The wise politician will know when “it is better that [her listeners] should feel afraid,” and how to make others “feel as if they were to suffer” in order to promote necessary vigilance and caution (Rh II.5, 1383a8–9).

To synthesize these varied treatments of fear, we can say that Aristotle understands fear as a form of anticipatory, imaginative perception that alters perception and judgment, promotes deliberation, and plays important roles in both ethical and civic spheres. With this account in hand, we can now return to Jonas's claim that citizens ought to imaginatively excite fear through “an effort of reason and imagination” (Jonas, 1985, p. 27). A radical demand emerges: we not only ought to perceive and judge with the right evaluative objects in view, but to the extent that we are able we ought to self-induce an affective, imaginative shift of perception that recasts speculative *phantasmata* of environmental degradation as nearer and more urgent. Jonas's position is radical because, unlike Aristotle, he takes citizens (and not only lawgivers) to have an agentic role in amplifying the imaginative pressure of faraway dangers. What we “ought” to undergo, on this reading, is an affective, anticipatory exercise of imagination that is at least partially self-induced.

Is this a coherent demand? It is natural to object that one's imagination and emotions are not within one's control in the way that most voluntary actions are, and Aristotle even admits as much regarding *phantasia*.²³ In Dorothea Frede's words, “Since there is no control, no special faculty in the soul, that ‘keeps them in order,’ *phantasiai* can become mere appearances that drift in and out of our consciousness, reappear in dreams, or delude us in a state of fever” (Frede, 1995, pp. 285–286).

The controversy of Jonas's demand, however, is partially assuaged by Aristotle's own suggestion that *phantasia*, though not perfectly under our control, is “up to us” in a way that differentiates it from perception and supposition both (DA III.3, 427b16). Even without clearly demarcating the boundaries of our control over *phantasia* (and, by extension, anticipatory fear), it is enough for Jonas to affirm that we possess at least some capacity to move ourselves toward episodes and comportments of fear thanks to what Rorty calls “the latitude of *phantasia*” (Rorty, 1996, p. 32n42). This is hardly an outlandish premise, and I think that denying it would be difficult. One can invite and amplify fear by, for example, directing one's imagination toward painful outcomes, posing pessimistic “what if” questions, or allowing oneself to fixate upon disturbing possibilities, just as one might avoid fear by refusing to entertain certain images or imagined situations, or by turning one's attention toward the present instead of the future. Even when such movements of the imagination do not fully achieve the felt

²²On first glance, this passage appears to advance a blunt normative claim that citizens should *self-induce* fear in a way that would neatly prefigure Jonas's claims. But the exhortation to “excite fears” and “make faraway dangers seem close at hand” is directed toward “those who are concerned about their constitution”—that is, lawgivers, as opposed to citizens. This is clear in Daniel Kapust's reading: “Lawgivers and legislators, according to Aristotle, ‘should promote fears [*phobous*]... and make the faraway near’ to encourage citizen loyalty and service” (Kapust, 2008, p. 359). I am grateful to Kerry Balden for discussion of this passage.

²³Frede notes several apparent inconsistencies in Aristotle's comments on our control over *phantasia*: “At first *phantasia* is said to be ‘up to us,’ since we can imagine what we please. . . . Soon afterwards it is clear that not all *phantasiai* are up to us (dreams clearly are not) and that *phantasiai* can also be true or false, otherwise they would not mislead us” (Frede, 1995, p. 281).

experience of fear, they can approximate or stand in for it. For instance, one's memories of a driving incident in which a collision was only barely avoided, and the imagined, terrible results that would have ensued had it gone differently, provide imaginative-affective touchstones for engendering vigilance and caution behind the wheel. Approaching the same intersection, one might purposefully hold those images in the forefront of one's imagination, “tapping into” fear much in the way that an athlete might tap into emotions of excitement, pride, or anger through imaginative self-inducement.

What I am suggesting is to take Jonas's demand—that we “should allow [fear] this influence by purposefully making room for it”—to concern a cognitive exercise of imagination that invites and amplifies fear for far-future generations (1985, p. 28). It is true that the experience of fear is varied in its phenomenology and defeasible by factors beyond one's control, much like Tessman's description of anger as “hard to call up” and “challenging to maintain” (Tessman, 2005, p. 116). But if I am right that the content of Jonas's blunt normative claim concerns how we redirect our imagination, then his argument survives the fact that “instances of specific emotions do not have the same internal state [and] are not experienced in an identical way” across circumstances and individuals (Sokolon, 2006, p. 16). The upshot is that, against the backdrop of an Aristotelian view that emotions are products of the complicated interplay of choices, habituation, perception, and predispositions, Jonas's demand to fear can be proportioned to those imaginative practices of summoning up fear that lie within our control.

Fear is, in this reading, the name that Jonas gives to an anticipatory, imaginative stance, or what Bertrand Guillaume calls an “emotional vision [vision émotionnelle]” (2012, p. 506), by which future persons obtrude into one's moral horizon, which is ideologically constricted in our time. In an age in which we would otherwise lack the phantasmic presence of future persons who are implicated in our choices and lifestyles, to fear for others' predicaments is to correct our ethical shortsightedness by imagining them to be moral objects. Tellingly, Jonas's diagnosis of modernity closely resembles Aristotle's description of the excessively reckless man who is, or “seem[s] to [himself] to be, in the midst of great prosperity,” and whose wealth, strength, friends, and power make him less fearful and cautious than he ought to be (Rh II.5, 1383a1). For Jonas and Aristotle both, correcting vicious fearlessness requires seeking out the affective conditions for altering one's perception of persons and circumstances. By demanding that citizens of the Anthropocene seek out fear, Jonas advocates for an affective counterideology through which future persons make an appearance as moral objects. Summoning this “educated . . . cultivated” (Dinneen, 2014, p. 10) fear with respect to the predicament of future generations would engender caution over the downstream ramifications of “technical civilization as such,” to which “every one of us contributes by mere membership in modern society” (Jonas, 1985, p. 202). In Theresa Morris's summary, “the realization of the extent of our power and its potential for destruction arouses fear, and it is fear that makes us hesitate and reevaluate our course of action” (Morris, 2013, p. 137). Jonas challenges us, then, to heed Aristotle's advice and, acting as lawgivers to ourselves, excite *our own* fears to “make faraway dangers seem close at hand” (P V.8, 1308a28).

5 | COLLECTIVE EMOTION, AND FURTHER CONCERNS ABOUT A HEURISTICS OF FEAR

So far, I have implicitly treated fear as a personal emotion. There are, however, some indications that Jonas has a form of collective emotion in mind, such as in his characterization of the emotion in question as “horror at what the future holds [that] cries out to us: ‘That must not be! *We* must not permit that! *We* must not bring that about!’” (Jonas, 1996, p. 109;

emphasis added).²⁴ This suggests that Jonasian fear may fall under the category of “political emotions,” which, in their most robust form, are collective emotions based on “a *shared and jointly felt evaluation* of the target in light of the community's concerns” (Szanto & Slaby, 2020, p. 485).²⁵ Demanding that others “ought” to imaginatively self-induce fear is one way for members of a social group to pressure others to align their affective sensibilities with those of the collective:

Collective affective intentionality puts certain normative pressures on individuals' emotional regulation and expression, and indeed on the very way they (ought to) feel. These norms are particularly powerful in political contexts. . . . Habitualized emotion norms guide and police appropriateness of emotions with regard to the display, suppression, or duration, of the emotion. . . . In more positive terms, such norms affectively integrate individuals' affective concerns into the broader network of the political community's concerns, and thus they (re-)align individuals around a shared emotional perspective.

(Szanto & Slaby, 2020, pp. 486–487)

Specifying that Jonas's strong normative claim concerns a collective, political emotion allows us to interpret it as a call for solidarity with a political community that has cultivated an “emotional culture” around fear for future generations (Barsade & Knight, 2015, p. 26).²⁶

To say that another “ought” to feel the fear that “we” feel can be to demand that she interrogate her emotions (or lack thereof) as if by a kind of internal audit, and bring them into alignment with our movement. Additionally, consider Brady's assertion that emotions “can promote our understanding of the evaluative world, by motivating us to search for reasons that have bearing on the accuracy of our emotional responses and upon the adequacy of our underlying concerns” (Brady, 2013, p. 158). My suggestion is that much the same holds for *others'* expressed emotions and normative demands concerning emotions. In this sense, strong normative claims about political emotions provide *prima facie* reasons for one to reconsider one's emotional outlook on matters of shared concern. When a friend feels very differently from the way I do and exhorts me to feel differently (“We are angry about our workplace conditions, and you ought to be too”), I have at least one reason to examine the fittingness, expediency, and/or virtuousness of my emotions (“Perhaps I should feel angry!”). Demands to share in fear, pride, shame, hope, or panic, like emotional episodes themselves, can challenge us to reflect upon, articulate, and revise our emotional intuitions, foci, and rationale.

²⁴Jonas repeatedly uses the first-person, plural: “And yet [fear] ‘ought’ to have [this influence upon our feeling]—that is, we should allow it this influence by purposefully making room for it in our disposition” (1985, p. 28). This is also consistent with how his claim is taken up by commentators. For example, Guillaume summarizes Jonas's position to be: “That which *we* cannot know, *we* must imagine and fear” [“Ce que nous ne pouvons connaître, *nous* devons l'imaginer et le craindre”] (Guillaume, 2012, p. 506; emphasis added). (Translation is my own.)

²⁵There is substantial disagreement over what a “political emotion” is and why. In Barbara Koziak's usage, the term refers broadly to “those emotions enacted through such typically political institutions as citizenship and the federal legislature,” and also includes “‘private’ and ‘personal’ emotions [that] may themselves be political in the sense that they carry repercussions for people's lives in terms of freedom, opportunity, equality, and participation in public institutions” (Koziak, 2000, p. 29). By contrast, Szanto and Slaby distinguish between “*weakly shared* political emotions,” “*group-based* political emotions,” and “robust, public, and properly speaking *collective* political emotions,” and contrast all three of these with the “*politically focused emotions*” of an individual “who doesn't have any solidar[ity] with similarly affected [persons]” (Szanto & Slaby, 2020, pp. 484–485). See also Protevi (2014), who holds that collective political emotions are political in virtue of their target, not their focus.

²⁶Barsade and Knight define emotional or affective culture as those “behavioral norms, artifacts, and underlying values and assumptions reflecting the actual expression or suppression of the discrete emotions comprising the culture and the degree of perceived appropriateness of these emotions, transmitted through feeling and normative mechanisms within a group” (Barsade & Knight, 2015, p. 24).

I have defended the coherence of Jonas's strong normative claim about fear by specifying that it concerns acts of the imagination. I have also suggested that strong normative demands about emotions can prompt others to bring their emotional sensibilities into alignment with the affective norms of an in-group. However, it remains to acknowledge that several problems emerge when we, to borrow Wolin's words, “try to translate [Jonas's] standpoint into a viable political program” (Wolin, 2008, p. 13). Here are four objections to Jonas's heuristic of fear, each of which goes largely unanswered by Jonas to the detriment of his argument. (Note that these objections land on Jonas's first-order project and do not target the coherence of the second-order form of his strong normative claim.)

First, does Jonas overestimate the indispensability of the emotions for moral action? Is it true that “the arc of sentiment . . . alone can sway the will,” and that we need to be fearful in order to admit future persons into our moral calculus (Jonas, 1996, p. 86)? Even if we accept that, as Romano puts it, “there is a qualitative difference between the evaluative knowledge achieved with the contribution of emotions, and the one achieved without such a contribution,” surely there are routes other than fear for achieving a moral outlook in which future generations appear as reason-giving (Romano, 2018, p. 606). Zagebski, for example, argues that “one can understand [the concepts of duty, right, and should] perfectly well without ever being in an emotional state when using them,” and doubts “that they are initially acquired through the experience of emotion” (Zagebski, 2003, p. 122). Even if, as I have suggested above, by “fear,” Jonas has an affective, anticipatory, imaginative exercise in mind, one might reasonably worry that he undervalues our capacity to respond to reasoned argument unemotionally. In reply, Jonas might fall back on the severity of our ideological predicament and the need for a potent affect capable of punching through habituated apathy. “Intellectual deduction,” he writes, “must be coupled with vividness of imagination in order for what we know about the future to win power over our present behavior” (Jonas, 1996, p. 104). Perhaps only an affective transformative experience can break us out of our solipsism. But this begins to sound like an empirical, psychological claim from the armchair. Though Jonas is certainly not alone in insisting that affective episodes provide opportunities for revising one's political responsibilities upward—an analogous claim is advanced by, for example, Hannah Arendt in her essay “Organized Guilt and Universal Responsibility”—his position as stated leaves little room for unemotional practical deliberation.²⁷

Second, who should fear, and how much? Should, for example, children fear the slow-moving apocalypse? If so, at what age, to what extent? Jonas does not caveat his blunt normativity and so appears to demand imaginative exercises of fear from even the least powerful and emotionally developed. What is needed is to clarify whether we all “ought” to feel the same fear, or whether fear for future generations is distributed and triaged according to, for example, considerations of power, oppression, agential contribution to climate degradation, and emotional bandwidth. Matters only become more difficult for Jonas when we include considerations of neurodiversity, since it is not clear from Jonas's stated argument how blunt normative demands about fear could avoid falling unfairly on persons for whom practices of joint attention and emotional connectedness are unintuitive or inordinately burdensome.

Third, what are the dangers of a heuristic of fear? Alongside its notable motivational effects, fear has other faces, including what Franklin Roosevelt famously characterized as that “nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.”²⁸ As Roeser puts it, “fear can be motivating, by, for example, enticing us to avoid the

²⁷“Those who today are ready to follow this road [and take political responsibility for all of humanity] . . . in fear and trembling, have . . . finally realized of what man is capable—and this is indeed the precondition of any modern political thinking” (Arendt, 1994, p. 132). See Ferguson (2022) for an interpretation of Arendt's claim as concerning the political affect of wonder.

²⁸From Roosevelt's 1933 inaugural address, as cited in De Castella, McGarty, and Musgrove (2009, p. 19).

fearful object, but it can also be paralyzing” (Roeser, 2012, p. 1038). Does Jonas sufficiently factor in the possibility for fear to give way to despair, fatigue, resentment, sectarianism, stubborn denial, and conspiracy-minded dismissals of anthropocentric climate change?²⁹ A similar objection can be raised against the epistemic reliability of the evaluative knowledge achieved through emotional episodes.³⁰ Demanding that others self-induce fear is reckless if it ignores these less desirable and widely acknowledged action tendencies and epistemic risks.

Jonas might respond that fear is “not the last word in the search for goodness,” and that once the requisite epistemic and conative effects of fear occur, we can move on from the experience itself (Jonas, 1985, p. 27). This would mean that fear serves as a transitional emotion that, as Nussbaum puts it, “puts itself out of business” through a “healthy segue into forward-looking thoughts” (Nussbaum, 2015, pp. 51–52). Indeed, Jonas takes pains to emphasize the provisional character of his heuristics of fear, which only “tell[s] us what is *possibly* at stake and what we must beware of” (Jonas, 1985, p. x). But this does not fully address the objection, since Jonas provides little in the way of guidance for metabolizing fear productively instead of problematically.³¹ Granting that, in Morris’s words, “negative emotions such as guilt or fear can serve as a guide for future action if they are coupled with a thoughtful examination of the conditions of our actions,” one might reasonably suspect that this is only one of many outcomes of fear, and a relatively optimistic one at that (Morris, 2013, p. 137).

Finally, when considering how a heuristics of fear would be realized in institutions and political movements, several scholars have voiced concerns that Jonas “flirts with the model of educational dictatorship” and that his “proposals for political reform are worrisome insofar as they toy with authoritarian solutions” (Wolin, 2008, p. 13), and even that his writing “may be used to justify anti-democratic authoritarianism” and “technocratic abuses” (Mitcham, 2008, p. 507). Jonas was certainly aware of these criticisms, and they did little to soften his position. In his *Memoirs*, he openly doubles down on what he sees as the necessity for antidemocratic solutions:

Of course I've stepped on some toes, because I've stated unambiguously that certain limitations on freedom are going to be essential if we're to survive. . . . But if you assert openly that democracy and individualism aren't the most suitable forms of government and life for facing the challenges of the future, you lay yourself open to suspicion in the West of supporting either fascist/dictatorial or authoritarian/hierarchical positions—something of which no less a thinker than Karl Popper has publicly accused me.

(Jonas, 2008, p. 213)

This response, which confirms Jonas’s view that “it is permissible, for the sake of physical survival, to accept if need be a temporary absence of freedom in the external affairs of humanity” (Jonas, 1996, p. 112), hardly deflects Wolin’s charge that Jonas is committed to the view that “the mass of citizens cannot be trusted to will the ‘good’” (Wolin, 2008, p. 13). If Jonas’s heuristic of fear dovetails with antidemocratic action and is more compatible with “a well-intentioned, well-informed tyranny possessed of the right insights” than with “the capitalist-liberal-democratic complex” (1985, p. 147), then surely the burden is upon him to provide “compelling empirical evidence of impending bio-evolutionary catastrophe before

²⁹Moreover, as Pfau points out, the political rhetorician must overcome the problem that “since fear is a kind of pain rather than pleasure, audiences will likely possess at least some inclination to avoid or resist these appeals” (Pfau, 2007, p. 222).

³⁰For a possible rebuttal to this line of concern, see Romano (2018, pp. 293–295).

³¹In her discussion of transitional anger, Nussbaum poses just this question (“How might someone become less prone to the errors of anger, and more likely to make the Transition?”), and turns to Aristotle for resources for answering it (Nussbaum, 2015, 54).

contemplating such emergency measures as a last resort" (Wolin, 2008, p. 14).³² The previous objection also holds here: just as fear can be destructive for an individual, regimes and atmospheres of fear pose weighty political risks.

It is not my task here to defend Jonas against these objections. I have raised them because they give a sense, even beyond Jonas's project, for some of the clarifications that may be helpful for developing more nuanced formulations of blunt normative claims about fear, and perhaps other political emotions. Again, one can maintain the coherence of strong normativity regarding the emotions (*qua* normative register) without granting the convincingness or correctness of a given strong normative demand. The aim of this article has been to motivate the distinctive register of "ought" that Jonas deploys, over and above the first-order particulars of his heuristics of fear.

6 | CONCLUSION

As a case study for exploring the content and coherence of strong normative claims about emotion in political contexts, this article has identified a strong normative claim about fear in Jonas's *Imperative of Responsibility*, reconstructed the argumentative context for that claim, and proposed Aristotle's moral psychology as a lens through which to motivate and recharacterize it. Aristotle provides a framework and set of premises by which one can defend Jonas's strong normative demand against the charge that it is overburdening. I have also raised four objections to Jonas's first-order argument that would need to be answered in further developments of a heuristics of fear. Though my focus has been on fear (and especially, following Jonas, fear related to environmental degradation and the plight of future generations), the interpretation offered above opens the way for reassessing strong normative claims about pride, shame, anger, patriotism, and guilt as demands to undergo affect-laden, imaginative reflection about one's emotional outlook on valued ends and joint projects. Thoroughly developing and adjudicating strong normative claims about a wider range of emotions will require context-specific analyses, and will no doubt be aided by recourse to the methods and insights of the social sciences and communication studies.³³

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³²For a defense of Jonas, see Dinneen (2014), who contextualizes Jonas's controversial references to benign tyranny within his broader philosophical biology and ethics, and reads Jonas to "envision an extreme situation in order to try to persuade the present generation to take measures to ensure that tyranny does not become the most practical regime" (Dinneen, 2014, p. 17).

³³On the topic of fear see, for example, De Castella et al. (2009); Pfau (2007).

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