

Review of: Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Monarchy of Fear. A Philosopher looks at our Political Crisis*

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Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Monarchy of Fear. A Philosopher looks at our political crisis*, Oxford (Oxford University Press) 2018, xviii u. 251 S., ISBN: 978-0-19-883021-4.

The author Martha C. Nussbaum, the Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago, started her latest book on emotions following the elections of 2016, when she “was feeling pretty anxious about the bitterly divided electorate” (ix). Deeply worried about how “to bring Americans together” (ix), she decided to deepen her research on emotions and how they influence and guide the ethical behavior of societies building on previous work on political ethics and emotions such as “Upheavals of Thought” (2001) and “Political Emotions” (2015). There she indicates the huge influences of emotions on behavior obligating governments to encourage one emotion while preventing others in order to guarantee an inclusive and tolerant society. In “The Monarchy of Fear” she focuses on fear, since this emotion is “the issue, a nebulous and multiform fear suffusing US society” (x), from which other emotions like anger, disgust, and envy arise. Therefore her book examines these four emotions and concludes with the alternative draft of hope, faith, and love. Constantly linking together modern and ancient examples, Nussbaum gives a definition of the emotion and points out its general ethical implications as well as its current occurrences in the US.

In the “Introduction” (1–16) Nussbaum summarizes the intent of the book to show how the primary emotion of fear triggers anger, disgust, and envy. If not scrutinized carefully, such emotions often lead to excluding behavior, rendering the emotion of fear “toxic” (9) for every democratic society. Philosophy, in contrast, helps to lead an “examined life” (10), encouraging dialogue and listening respect, enhancing an ethically reasonable management of emotions.

In chapter 2 on “Fear, early and powerful” (17–62) Nussbaum describes the very first fear in life: an infant’s primal feeling of powerlessness and dependence on others. This fear is an “asocial” emotion (28) as infants just perceive their

environment as a means to provide what they need. She therefore compares fear to the predominant emotion of a monarch, who only cares for himself. Even fear for others is an egoistic emotion as one fears to lose something that has become a part of oneself. Nussbaum summarizes that fear “threatens to destabilize democracy, since democracy requires all of us to limit our narcissism and embrace reciprocity” (61f.).

In chapter 3 on “Anger, child of fear” (63–95) Nussbaum points out how fear often leads to anger. Infants already have a “crude idea” of retribution (71). The primal fear of losing the parents results in anger against everyone that seems to take them away. Nussbaum discusses the three aspects of anger, of which the first one, “Transition-Anger”, is “personally and socially valuable when our beliefs are correct” (74): it points out something that needs to be changed. The second and third one, however, vengeance and “down-ranking” in status are leading to excluding behavior. Handling anger “requires self-examination, personal risk, searching critical arguments, and uncertain initiatives to make common cause with opponents – in spirit of hope and what we could call rational faith” (94).

Chapter 4 on “Fear-driven disgust” (97–134) explores said emotion as the origin of so called hate crimes. Disgust results from fear, without necessarily requiring unethical behavior. Primary disgust, as Nussbaum points out, follows the thought of contamination, which roots in the fear of death and decay. Unfortunately it entails no constructive solution but flight. “Because primary disgust does not sufficiently distance us from what we dread, fear engineers projective disgust as a further protective mechanism, threatening equality and mutual respect” (116). This projective disgust identifies a distinct group as “disgusting” in order to cover own weaknesses or to retain the own high status. Such disgust-reactions happened throughout history and even in our “post-racial era” are not overcome, but become “implicit bias” (121). In order not to avoid problems at hand and instead of focusing on others to blame, Nussbaum advocates constructive work

against disgust like a tolerant upbringing in family and school as well as a positive image of otherness in films and on TV.

Chapter 5 on “Envy’s empire” (135–164) discusses envy as a “destructive hostility” (140). The origins lie in the envy between siblings, resulting from the fear not to be seen. Politically envy is a highly problematic emotion as it leads to destructive actions and ends in a vicious circle. Nussbaum therefore encourages personal, social, and institutional alternatives that show generosity, creativity, and love.

Chapter 6 “A toxic brew” (165–196) Nussbaum dedicates to the hostility against women. She presents three reasons, once again, all derived from fear: fear-blame that arises because women are becoming more and more autonomous; fear-disgust, resulting from the biological otherness of women; and fear-envy, following the overall success of women. Once again Nussbaum argues that “misogyny is comforting for a moment but achieves nothing”; instead she pleads for “strategies that move us beyond what we might call the Fear Family, and into cooperative work for a more promising future with one another” (196).

In her last chapter about “Hope, love, vision” (197–245) Nussbaum portrays her solution to excluding and dividing emotions. She depicts hope as the opposite of fear and faith and love as its “relatives” (213). As those emotions “require[s] action, commitment” (201) they can be practiced by the arts, employing a Socratic spirit of listening and respect, religions, protest movements, and theories of justice. But Nussbaum also obligates the government to support them institutionally through national as well as communal institu-

tions. Referring to the German *Zivildienst* Nussbaum closes with the suggestion “that a mandatory program of youth national civil service” would encourage these emotions and thus promise a hopeful future for US society (242).

Added are Acknowledgments (247–249) and a short biography of the author (251). Everyone familiar with Nussbaum’s work will recognize a lot of her previous books in her latest one. And for everyone slightly informed about the psychology of emotions the solution of the book will not come as a surprise. But it is the insightful and highly reflected analysis of current, past, and even ancient politics that illustrates Nussbaum’s arguments in a convincing way, bringing all her fields of study together. By numerous analogies between Greek and Roman literature and contemporary politics she increases the value of her philosophical thoughts by illustrating the ethical importance of emotions throughout the history of mankind. Acknowledging emotions as universal phenomena yet still being strongly influenced and constructed by society, she shows a way out of an ‘emotional crisis’, that sees them as unchangeable or ethically irrelevant. However, the question remains, why Nussbaum hasn’t included compassion in her contrasting vision of love and hope as compassion and empathy are the pillars, on which her vision of an including and democratic society rests upon as she pointed out in her book “The new religious intolerance” (2012). Nevertheless, with “The Monarchy of Fear” she wrote a book for everyone, which not only gives valuable advice for managing emotions but also raises the awareness of the general sociological and ethical importance of emotions.