



The Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis

Martha C. Nussbaum

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From one of the world's most celebrated moral philosophers comes a thorough examination of the current political crisis and recommendations for how to mend our divided country.

For decades Martha C. Nussbaum has been an acclaimed scholar and humanist, earning dozens of honors for her books and essays. In *The Monarchy of Fear* she turns her attention to the current political crisis that has polarized American since the 2016 election.

Although today's atmosphere is marked by partisanship, divisive rhetoric, and the inability of two halves of the country to communicate with one another, Nussbaum focuses on what so many pollsters and pundits have overlooked. She sees a simple truth at the heart of the problem: the political is always emotional. Globalization has produced feelings of powerlessness in millions of people in the West. That sense of powerlessness bubbles into resentment and blame. Blame of immigrants. Blame of Muslims. Blame of other races. Blame of cultural elites. While this politics of blame is exemplified by the election of Donald Trump and the vote for Brexit, Nussbaum argues it can be found on all sides of the political spectrum, left or right.

Drawing on a mix of historical and contemporary examples, from classical Athens to the musical *Hamilton*, *The Monarchy of Fear* untangles this web of feelings and provides a roadmap of where to go next.

The Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis Details

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From Reader Review The Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis for online ebook

Radiantflux says

82nd book for 2018.

Full of seemingly superficial platitudes that fails, despite it's title, to engage in the current political crisis.

2-stars.

Rachel says

I always welcomed the opportunity to introduce my students to great ideas and great thinkers. The works of Martha Nussbaum have always been sterling examples of both. I was anticipating (as a child anticipates Christmas) her latest work since learning of the working title, *Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis*, a few months ago. I believed it would both salve and inspire. Unfortunately, it does neither. It would be simply a disappointment if that is all it fails to do, but she does something in this text and in her promoting of the book (I have watched her discussing the book on PBS Newhour and on BookTV) that she has never done before—she attacks her students who fervently oppose T***p and his agenda with the same vigor that she addresses T***p advocates.

Nussbaum claims both sides are motivated by unwarranted and irrational fears. Not so. The current political crisis is not the result of the entire country panicking. One side, not both sides, is subject to: “Amorphous fear generated in a climate of ignorance and fed by imprecise and alarmist rhetoric, [which] is the enemy of any sane dialogue about our future” (59). She writes about fear: “The horrible darkness of early fear is always beneath the surface, easily awakened into nightmare by any destabilizing new development” (35). It is clear what the “destabilizing new development” is—T***p. He and his enablers are playing to the most atavistic and foul fears of his constituency: race, religion, sexual and gender anxiety, status, and terror of the future.

Nussbaum fails to make the connection to one side of the political divide while observing that: “Our culture of fleeting celebrity and social media narcissism contributes to an envy culture. We need, instead, a culture of virtue and a conception of citizenship focused on virtue in the Hamilton sense: a high-minded yet realistic search for political solutions that unite” (161). My only explanation for Nussbaum not making the obvious connection is that she does not want to offend the side that this observation most readily describes. Just think of the past two administrations: Objectively, which one would you describe as being engaged in a “high-minded yet realistic search for political solutions that unite” and which one embraces a cult of celebrity, narcissism, and envy? Honestly, which one?

If the answer is not clear enough consider this: “I call it the internal Furies that inhabit us all and that are not securely linked to real justice. The infants’ idea looks like a version of *lex talionis*: an eye for an eye, pain for pain. It is likely that this crude idea of proportional payback has an evolutionary origin. It is a leap to call this an idea of justice, and I think we should not make this leap” (71). I think we have all become too familiar with this infantile code of justice coming from our president and his enablers.

Keeping in mind that most T***p supporters are affluent and secure, consider the following excerpt: “Lucretius was probably right to think that the fear of death ‘suffuses’ our lives with ‘the blackness of death,’ even if there is plenty of light and happiness around” (44).

Of course, Trumpism did not happen overnight. Let’s remember that evangelicals supported him overwhelmingly (+80%). Which makes the following assertion pertinent to our political crisis: “Emotions can destabilize a community and fragment it, or they can produce better cooperation and more energetic striving toward justice. Emotions are not hardwired from birth, but are shaped in countless ways by social contexts and norms” (12).

Nussbaum claims that: “Hope is the opposite of fear” (211). But is it? Actually (here I will use one of Nussbaum’s own citations): The Greeks and Romans said that hope was the “flip side of fear”. Both involve evaluating an outcome as very important, both involve great uncertainty about the outcome, and both involve a good measure of passivity or lack of control. They therefore did not like hope, pleasant though they granted it was: hope betrays a mind too dependent on fortune. ‘You will cease to fear, if you cease to hope,’ writes Seneca. ‘Both belong to a soul that is hanging in suspense, to a soul that is made anxious by concern with the future’” (Moral Epistles, 5.7-80) (204).

I found Nussbaum’s assertion that “hope is the opposite of fear” peculiar in light of Seneca’s elucidation of the concept. When I think of the concept of “flip side” I think of two sides of the same coin—not opposites. And, it seems Seneca is of the same opinion. Interestingly, I recently read John Fea’s *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Trump* (review coming soon) and he has an entire section asserting the same concept—that hope is the opposite of fear. Neither author mentioned the other in their texts. Hope is a fine thing as long as it doesn’t inhibit action.

Nussbaum concludes with some words of wisdom and caution from Cicero. Cicero “records in his letters his profound upset and grief about what he sees happening to the Roman Republic. The life of detachment is ‘easier and safer.’ All the same, Cicero says, such people are guilty of what might be called ‘passive injustice’: the injustice that consists in not energetically enough pursuing justice, even when that is very difficult. They also lack in generosity and greatness of spirit” (244).

The problem is Nussbaum is calling on the victims of the political crisis to refrain from vigorously opposing policies and actions that have already taken health care away from over a million people, denied citizens their civil rights, traumatized children, exacerbated racial prejudice and religious animosities, undermined our democratic institutions and values, increased wealth and income inequality, promoted unequal educational opportunities, abrogated indigenous people’s right to their land, opened public lands to exploitation, undermined US relations with our historic allies, abetted foreign interference in our democracy, . . . etc. Again, the problem is not that those who are desperately trying to save lives, end suffering and humiliation, and preserve our democracy are not civil enough—the problem is that too many are, as Cicero writes of his fellow citizens, guilty of passive injustice. Nussbaum’s book simply fails to inspire action or comfort those discomforted by the current political crisis.

For inspiration and direction please review Nussbaum’s *Capabilities Approach to justice* on pages 236-9 (or Google it!).

Sharad Pandian says

Let me just say at the start that if you're someone who hasn't read any Martha Nussbaum before, and are looking for some philosophical self-help material in what seems like a dark time, this is probably a pretty good book for you.

Unfortunately I don't quite fit that demographic, and despite loving Nussbaum (or rather, because) this book was a total disappoint for two reasons. The first is that there is no new content at all here, everything is just a copy-paste job of various books she's written before. The second is that this work is supposed to be a political analysis of sorts, except its naivete and simpleness makes it pretty worthless in this regard because of its total insensitivity to power. I'm just going to expand of these two point below.

Criticism #1: Unoriginality

Admittedly the author is open about how she's bringing in ideas from her earlier work, but apart from one of two new examples, every approach, stance, argument, and example has just been lifted.

She starts off with a psychoanalytic approach of infantile fear, which was cool when she first introduced it in *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. She then applies this analysis to fear, to try to indicate how it propels people to irrationally fear certain people and practices, by comparing the burka with more accepted costumes like ski masks, as she did in *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age*. She then talks about anger, using a fascinating reading of Aeschylus' *Eumenides* with which she starts off *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice*, and then again presents her close reading of Martin Luther King's iconic "I have a dream" speech to argue for the importance of not giving into hatred, and instead channeling the constructive "transitional anger". Then she quickly summarizes her work on disgust from *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, where she points out how bodies are always a problem from us, and how we project disgust onto different groups through imagining or focusing on bodily secretions. She then uses Kate Manne's framework (slightly tweaked and with credit) from *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* for understanding misogyny as opposition women face when they move away from male care to independence. She lists the 10 capabilities on her list of minimum human capabilities that people should be entitled to, as in *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. She ends with the argument from *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, according to which hope is important, and you should hold onto critical love, come what may.

I mention this in detail, because I think if you're going to phone it in and simply rehash your old ideas, you should state that on the cover of your book, instead of tricking (even if unintentionally) long-time readers into spending time and money working through material they've already seen.

Criticism #2: Bad political analysis

But let's for a moment ignore the repetition by accepting the not-terrible excuse that it might still be valuable for a prolific writer like Martha Nussbaum to write a book which summarizes and connects the different work she's produced.

The presence of a lot of disparate ideas does make you think about connections, except this isn't always a good thing here. Although a lot of ideas get thrown at you, in a lot of places it's entirely unclear why. For example, the psychoanalytic bits really are fascinating, but I really don't see what they add to an analysis of political fear that won't be captured by simply stating that "everyone feels fear, and this is deep and ineradicable". And some of the connections seems tenuous at best - for example, even if we were to accept

the account of infantile fears, why think this somehow shapes all our adult psyches? There are some suggestive anecdotes and metaphors, but that's it.

But above all, the problem is that as a book that's supposed to show how "A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis", it provides incredibly little insight into anything political. All of her tools certainly make sense in their own domains, but they're not particularly useful for any kind of serious political analysis. I suspect that if anyone was asked about what exactly they learned after they reading this book, they would come up empty. This is because what Nussbaum is desperately defending is a stance or method of freely and respectfully exchanging ideas, without letting the more primitive and overbearing parts of us taking over. What she wants to defend then is Socratic philosophy:

[Philosophy] is about leading the "examined life," with humility about how little we really understand, with a commitment to arguments that are rigorous, reciprocal, and sincere, and with a willingness to listen to others as equal participants and to respond to what they offer. Philosophy in this Socratic conception does not compel, or threaten, or mock. It doesn't make bare assertions, but, instead, sets up a structure of thought in which a conclusion follows from premises the listener is free to dispute.

Very nice and poetic, but this seems like a great example of the kind of philosophy that Raymond Geuss denounces in *Philosophy and Real Politics*, which is the kind of philosophy that tries to focus on some autonomous domain of ethics antecedent to, or at least independent from, political thought. The problem with this approach is that it becomes woefully blind to power and cares only about how people speak to and about each other.

For example, she rightly criticizes Donald Trump for this rhetoric about immigrants, Muslims, and non-white people. But then she turns around and praises George Bush for always being careful about pointing out that it wasn't all Muslims or Islam itself that America was warring with, saying "for me, this is how a responsible leader reacts in the face of widespread popular fear". Which is nice, except for the slightly inconvenient fact that hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and Afgans died in wars that the responsible leader started. Of course, she isn't praising this aspect, but it is still jarring because it reveals a myopia to power and its effects in the real world.

It's also simply unclear why we should think that the norm of disinterested Socratic debate is that approach best suited to achieve political goals. While she obviously wants to both have deliberation and justice, it isn't Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech I kept hearing while reading her, but rather the "Letter From a Birmingham Jail" on the white moderate:

Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait."

She might object to this, because she continuously insists on how injustices like racism are deeply wicked, but insisting on certain norms of action and exchange which limit what you can do and feel, might plausibly slow down change. Simply mentioning the handful of successful non-violent leaders like Mandela and Gandhi isn't enough to make the case she needs.

This is particularly seen when she argues that both sides, the left and right, need to stop feeling angry if it's a kind of anger that's vindictive. Ok, this might not be terrible advise, but trying to parse the anger of the

deeply disenfranchised and telling them they need to feel "transitional anger", which doesn't want payback but only constructive solutions, comes off like weirdly policing the oppressed since she doesn't offer any criticism of the deeply exploitative classes which everywhere wield material and political power. Plus, she also seems insufficiently tuned into the complexities of the reactions of oppressed people. She appears to take as axiomatic that well-being cannot consist in social put-downs of others, but it seems to me that when a racist is called out and punished, it might legitimately be helpful to the community's sense of justice. She might still insist that these actions, even if right, should be cleansed of certain vindictive intentions, but at that point she just seems to not have anything actually relevant to offer.

(I'll admit, the tools she uses here actually were successful in her analysis of the Indian religious-Right in *The Clash Within: Democracy, Religious Violence, and India's Future*, but that was because in that case she actually did analyze the practices, beliefs, and the complex sociocultural and historical contexts in which it gained power. Without that kind of specific context here, her analysis just comes off as wispy liberal moralizing.)

She obviously has good intentions here too, but since it's not even clear if her purified anger would be more politically efficacious, this all just looks like a privileged white woman randomly defending bankers against overly-vicious leftist attacks (she even offers a bizarre reading of the musical *Hamilton*, which she ends by saying "It's a jolt, but a salutary one, to see young people cheering for the banker, and we should applaud Miranda for, among other things, undercutting the politics of envy by his surprising choice of a hero" since Alexander Hamilton was involved in setting up the central banks) Maybe she's just trying to be even-handed by criticizing the left and the right, but this urging for norms of civility needs to be argued for contextually and with an eye for actual consequences, not just assumed as axiomatic. Do bankers, with their hoarded wealth and power, really need another defender? And even if it isn't *really* about bankers but the health of the body politic, by lecturing about norms while ignoring all entrenched power, her "analysis" seems at best inappropriate, and at worst deeply pernicious. If all you have to offer is 272 pages of "don't treat the rich man badly, also racism is bad", maybe you shouldn't write that book.

In the end, stripped of any analysis of power, all she really offers people in this moment is a kind of "emotional sustenance" that is meant to keep them from despair and keep them hopeful about the possibility of change they can bring about. Which is something, but not much.

If this review seems rather negative, it's because I don't think I want to praise points which aren't new, and since this is a pretty useless book for actual political analysis, it's safe to say that you should read it only if its brand of navel-gazing obsession with your own emotions is what you want. Otherwise go read some other actually serious book, even one of Nussbaum's earlier books like the excellent *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, where she stays in her lane and doesn't claim to offer political analysis when she clearly isn't providing any.

Paul Womack says

A fine view on the resistance necessary to push back at fear's aim to dominate and control and manipulate the self as an engaged public citizen. She relates fear to disgust, envy, and anger, and offers a balanced view of hope as that emotion which, if practiced, can free the heart and mind to persevere in the pursuit of the just and the good.

Brendan says

Nussbaum is one of the relatively few bona fide philosophers (i.e., not popularizers of philosophy, but people who actually make contributions to the field) I feel safe recommending to non-experts. A few thoughts:

1. While the book was, by Nussbaum's own account, inspired by the election of Trump (and it includes a number of Trumpian examples), it's not really *about* Trump. Instead, it's an analysis of the emotion of fear, and the negative effects that this emotion can have in democratic societies. Nussbaum clearly believes that fear plays a role in right-wing populism (and in particular in the way it reacts to immigrants, women, etc.), but she doesn't think its negative effects are limited to conservatives (and the book begins with the idea that liberals' fearful response to Trump voters may be part of the problem).
 2. With some notable exceptions, Nussbaum's examples are generally *not* drawn from contemporary politics, but instead from a variety of areas in which she has particular expertise: classical Greece/Rome, the history of psychoanalysis, the early American Republic (especially as depicted in *Hamilton*, the musical), and even her own life. The book is well-written, but the examples are unapologetically those of an elite academic trained in the liberal arts. I found this to be a refreshing change from the narrow focus of many "political" books, though I also suspect this might turn off some readers. (And I think the reaction of these readers is part of the problem that Nussbaum is concerned about.)
 3. I generally agree with Nussbaum's analysis here (though I'm probably just as prone to political fear as anyone else), and I actually think she provides a pretty convincing argument for her view. That being said, there are plenty of things in here which don't fit well with the way many/most politically engaged people on the left (and the right) want to approach political conflict (and, in fact, on Nussbaum's analysis, indulging the sort of fear/rage that makes up a lot of contemporary political discourse is morally questionable). While reading this book, I often had the thought "Wow, there are some people who are really going to hate this analysis (and who frankly are going to dismiss it out of hand since it doesn't use their preferred language/conceptual framework)."
 4. Nussbaum's positive proposals near the end--required service for young people, a refocusing of life-long education on liberal arts, an expanded role for poetry in our personal lives--seem promising (if politically untenable, at least right now).
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Mehrsa says

I can't decide if Nussbaum is too naively optimistic or if she's right. I might go with the former in this book. I loved her book *Anger and Resentment*. This one seemed more like a pep talk peppered with some ancient Greek history. Don't let anger and jealousy ruin the political discourse. Fine. But, she at times equates anger at the 1% with anger at immigrants. To me, those seem like different drives altogether. One rooted in disgust (which she covers at length in this book) and the other motivated by well, something else, which she doesn't fully explore here.

Zack says

Martha C. Nussbaum is one of the great contemporary philosophers and this book an interesting application of her thoughts around emotion in relation to the recent political environment in the United States. Nussbaum analyses how a few primal emotions are having dramatic impact on the way society is developing and how this is influencing the way people vote. As you can probably tell from the title one of these emotions is fear;

but Nussbaum also includes anger, envy, and hope. Each chapter starts off defining and contextualizing the emotion (or social construct) and then provides an analysis of how this is being demonstrated in society, what the impacts may be, and also some recommendations on how to address the challenges or harness the benefits of the emotion. If you've never read anything by Nussbaum before, or if you're interested in political/social philosophy, this is a fantastic book.

Fraser Kinnear says

I got ~2/3 through this and gave up. I'm not sure what idea to draw here, aside from a reminder that much of our political motivations come from a position of fear and insecurity, and that overcoming these feelings through compassion could result in more political compromise.

The "Monarchy" idea is due to fear being a very selfish emotion.

There is some cool detail on Aeschylus's Eumenides, and an explanation for how the furies changed role at the conclusion of the play are an apt metaphor for how society harnesses our emotions to drive legislation. The other examples (MLK, etc) were less interesting.

Tuppermalone says

See NY Times review

Nick Klagge says

I always like reading Martha Nussbaum, but I wasn't very satisfied with the message of this book. The idea of the book is fairly clear: take Nussbaum's analytical framework for thinking about the emotions, which she developed in "Upheavals of Thought" and subsequent books, and apply it to our current political situation. She tries to walk a fine line in the book, making clear how the ideas are relevant to, for example, Donald Trump's misogynist statements, without making it a "Trump book" or seeming "too political." Perhaps it's my own political leanings coming through, but I felt Nussbaum went too far in trying to appear "evenhanded." She takes pains to talk about shortcomings on both the right and the left, talking for example about demonization of immigrants and demonization of bankers. I just think this is a false equivalence. There's a clear moral distinction, in my mind, between "punching down" and "punching up."

I also was disappointed that Nussbaum didn't talk much about fear, anger, envy, and disgust in the context of organizations trying to influence elections via Facebook and other social media. These are basically a laboratory for weaponizing predictable human emotional responses, and would seem like a very relevant subject for philosophical analysis.

Most of the content was fairly familiar to me from "Anger and Forgiveness," but there was one analytical perspective in particular that seemed new and that I appreciated. In biology there is a dictum that says "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny;" that is, the development of an embryonic creature resembles the evolution of its species. Nussbaum makes a similar connection between the emotional development of individual humans and the political development of societies. Her title draws a connection between the

tyrannical infant and authoritarian societies. Both, she says, are driven to be domineering by a combination of fear of deprivation and a lack of understanding others as autonomously valuable individuals. The development of a mature adult, who understands the need to balance her desires with those of others around her, resembles the development of a democratic government, which recognizes that all people have autonomous dignity and should have a say in the circumstances of their own lives. I really like this analogy and have thought about it a lot since finishing the book.

Donna Hines says

Globalization leads to powerlessness among the masses.
The current state is paranoia among the fear mongers.
Fear is often rooted amid anger.
Powerlessness leads to hopelessness and more blame and shame.
The fear that is evident is being shown on both sides of the political aisles.
So what now?
How do we heal as a nation?
How can we correct the wrongs and make them right?
This book was very basic and bland for my tastes but perhaps you'll enjoy it.

Franz says

Nussbaum explores the different kinds of fears generated by Donald Trump and others of his ilk. Drawing on her extensive knowledge of philosophy and literature, especially of the ancient Greeks and Romans, she analyzes how leaders with authoritarian tendencies exploit fears surrounding misogyny, blame, and disgust to create tribal agreements that demonize differences of gender, sexual orientation, race, and religion. She also references recent research in the psychological literature to help explain how these biased fears arise and then exploited by manipulative and unprincipled leaders. Hers is not a shallow exploration of emotions; she delves deeply into the emotion of fear and how it kills hope. That one way to counter the terrible and harmful influence of fear is to replace it with hope and respect for others. Only in this way can we rescue our democracy. Here she insists on Kant's imperative that each person should be should be treated with respect, that their dignity and inherent value is prior to any instrumental function that they might serve. Her examples of hope and respect, indeed love, for others are Martin Luther King, Jr., Ghandi, and Nelson Mandela. They always spoke the language of hope and love, never the language of fear, anger, or revenge.

Because it wasn't part of her subject matter, the issues surrounding our present moment does not just concern the damaging emotion of fear. Also relevant is how power should be shared and distributed. For Trump and his followers, it isn't enough to campaign to win elections. The election system must be manipulated so that their opponents have little or no chance of winning elections. While fear helps to produce the circumstances that allows for gerrymandering and suppression of voters' rights, the increase of hope, which may be necessary, certainly won't be sufficient to bring about a fairer electoral system. Similarly, the efforts of Vladimir Putin and the Russians to disrupt, delegitimize, and sow distrust with American democracy also requires more than hope to stop the undermining of elections. There also has to be efforts to subvert those efforts. But this is not the book Nussbaum intended to write. Instead she offers a blueprint for how to escape the negative feedback loop in which many of us are trapped.

Ailith Twinning says

What to say - that when your denunciation of hate and fear accommodates the likes of Goldwater and Bush, you clearly have some work left to do? That individualistic ethics as political stances are inherently daft as they ignore the core reality of politics as an interpersonal sphere with impersonal actors? That supporting 'disadvantaged groups' rhetorically, and overtly refusing to address the actual systems of oppression is hypocritical bullshit? That "the politics of envy" is a lazy misdirection from the actual moral concern "Can the existence of a billionaire be both justified and good?" That this is a hell of a lot of privileged, elite and elitist bullshit that almost makes we want to pull out the word bourgeois? That this is just self-indulgent masturbation? That the words you're looking for in your own context, Nussbaum, are horror and dread?

Frankly, what I really want to say here are all non-verbal expressions - drag my hand down my face, sigh, look up, roll my eyes, and throw the book in the bin.

You construct your castles in the air about the inherent fear that sticks with people from being a helpless, tyrannical, infant. The rest of us have work to do.

Marks54 says

When I heard that Martha Nussbaum had published a new book on "our political crisis" - politics around and after Trump's election - I had to read it, even though I suspected that there would be few pat answers or clear solutions to the issues that she raised. Nussbaum is a wide-ranging philosopher at the University of Chicago. She is know for a huge body of work among which are wonderful studies of classical political theory, virtue, human development, and the role of emotions in politics. It is impossible to neatly summarize all that she has done. It is, however, unfailingly thoughtful, readable, and insightful.

One of the more vexing aspects of the 2016 election is that while it cries out for careful and critical thinking, the American political scene on display in the election does not seem to be amenable to the careful thinking one has come to expect from someone like Professor Nussbaum. Phrases involving "rationality" or "reason" have not been critical parts of the explanations put on the market since the election. It often seemed more like the occasion for an anthropological expedition.

This is whether Professor Nussbaum enters. The book is a follow-up to her recent 2016 book on anger and forgiveness. Like the earlier book, this is an effort to subject the political emotions running rampant to some careful scrutiny - not to nullify the role of emotions but to clarify what they are and where they have come from. In any attempt to change policies or behaviors, careful understanding will still be needed, even in the midst of political emotions driving voters.

Without giving away much - the book is worth reading - the story line starts with fear, and a discussion of all the different reasons for fear in 2016. She makes some good comparisons to FDRs invocation of "the only thing we have to fear is fear, itself" at the start of his presidency. Then she discusses a series of related emotions - anger, disgust, envy, and related issues like sexism, misogyny, and antisemitism. The key to her

argument is that it is the interaction of political fear with these other emotions that created such intensely negative dynamics and consequences in the context of the 2016 election.

In determining what to do, Nussbaum brings in hope and love and tries to offer some constructive suggestions for moving forward. There are no simple solutions. Simplifying emotions and hatred will prevail until people interact with those with whom they disagree and find out that they are human too and worthy of concern and respect. This is not a matter of arguing (or yelling) one's way out of political disagreements but instead treating people with whom there are disagreements as worthy of the respect that one expects as a matter of course. The problems spurring troubling political emotions are real and persistent. Politics will not get better until enough people become convinced that better political life is worth the time and effort needed for improvements to happen.

Nussbaum brings in history in her account to show how despite current conflicts, there have been difficult political environments in the US before and that things may not be as bad as social media suggest. The world may not be on the brink of destruction. Perhaps things might improve with a little bit more constructive effort.

Nussbaum's books are always thoughtful and this one is no exception. It is a quick read and well worth the effort.

Alexander says

Wonderful read-Prof. Nussbaum has crafted a fantastic book that explores our current political crisis in the lenses of hope for the future. As usually her writing is clear, her reasoning is sound, and her arguments are persuasive.
