

Cultivating Constructive Civic Emotions: Why Compassion Matters in Human Survival During the Covid 19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Most people tend to be suspicious of the role of emotions in the management of change, given those historical precedents or experiences in political communities, such as in fascist states. In these historical and experiential contexts, emotions are seen as political vectors that encourage an unthinking and uncritical political community. Martha Nussbaum, dubbed as the philosopher of emotions or feelings, has suggested that good political principles or policies are also realizable, if intently worked out to persist and to remain stable or institutionalized, over time. For example, a policy such as the redistribution of wealth requires thinking on how a community could be driven to care for people to whom they were ordinarily indifferent, by a thoughtful and constructive analysis and subsequent re-programming of the inherent emotions which forge citizens together.

In this study, the focus is the imperative cultivation of positive emotions as a potential tool for human survival, as communities battle against the Covid-19 pandemic. It is posited that material conditions are waning, and humanity requires compassion; the poor needs help for their survival. Researches, however, have shown that extending alms is not easy. Not too different from other animals, human beings are narrow and shallow in their area of existential concern: caring for those nearer them, and largely indifferent to those farther away. This assumption considered, the policy challenge is to zero in on civic emotions that might cultivate the element of compassion and concern to a larger community radius. This paper also highlights preliminary proposals on how to overcome negative emotions, i.e. fear, disgust, and shame, which the study posits as hindrances antithetical to the formation of constructive civic emotions needed for human survival.

Key Words: Compassion, Civic Emotions, Pandemic, Disgust, Fear and Sham



Introduction

Martha Nussbaum in her book *Political Emotions and Why Love Matters for Justice* has done a remarkable job of tracing the social and political elements of a just and decent society. In this work, she has explored the role of emotions, which she deconstructed in terms of a binary or dual effort of overcoming the negative kinds through a proper cultivation of positive emotions imperative in the formation of good political goals that are stable and reliable over time. Nussbaum's dominant tone in some of her most important works suggests that humans all come into the world unfortunately as rather narrow and selfish creatures. Researches in psychology document that unlike other mammals; human beings are narrow in their scope of concern. In actual cases, people always end up loving the ones they are close to and become unmindful of the plight of the ones that are far away. This mirrors the problem that the entire world is facing right now, this pandemic is confrontational of the question: *how do we get people to care about the ones that they do not know, and to care in a way that requires sacrifice of their personal interests (i.e. financial and material)?*

Any ambitious project of redistribution of wealth in an attempt to extend benefit to a larger group involves thinking about how people will come to care about the ones that they do not know through a careful analysis of the types of *emotions that truly matter to them*, the kind of emotions that can bind citizens together. Nussbaum finds it necessary to cultivate public emotions of *extended sympathy* and *mutual love* if good political principles are to come into being and for these principles to remain stable or institutionalized. However, part of the challenge is the need to answer the question: *how can society--even if endowed with firm aspirations of universal or more inclusive compassion-- achieve stability, given the perpetual undermining posed by the structural, sociological, and psychological challenges posed by negative emotions motivated by greed, anxiety, and self-interest?*

What is suggested here is the imperative to maintain optimism, even after a grim acceptance of the reality of “greedy, anxious, and selfish” culture of societies and nations. The present paper, therefore, is an aspirational work on justice, grounded on the twin realizations that even with the fundamental imperfections of society, in which people are vulnerable to negative emotions, the room for improvements of the

human race is possible, starting with pragmatic acceptance and a will to address the imperfection.

For Nussbaum, “emotions shape the landscape of our mental and social lives, and like geological upheavals a traveler might discover in a landscape where recently only a flat plane could be seen, they mark lives as uneven, uncertain, and prone to reversal.”¹ Emotions, likewise, play an important role in shaping our political sphere. For instance, emotions influence or create impact on political thought. Realizing the importance of politics in human development, an understanding of the relationship between emotions and human “good will” will impact on the quality of political development of communities and relationships among constituencies. And “if we think of emotions as essential element of human intelligence, rather than as mere props for intelligence, then the promotion of emotional well-being in a political culture becomes even more imperative. This view entails that without emotional development, a part of our reasoning capacity as political creatures will be missing.”²

In general, this paper is a discussion on how the cultivation of positive emotions in a community could serve as an important conceptual foundation in the effort of overcoming the trauma of uncertainty in human survival during this pandemic.

The outline of this paper is as follows:

1. The first part presents an analysis of *eudaimonistic* judgment and its relevance in shaping the needed emotion for the promotion of compassion to a larger group of people;
2. The second part deals with the basic structures of compassion, the key ingredient in cultivating proper and imperative civic emotions;
3. The third part highlights negative emotions to prove that bad political decisions might arise from such emotions;
4. And lastly, this sub-section aspires to provide a factual analysis on the positive effects of emotions to the social and political settings, providing situational and actual examples.

1 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 12.

2 Ibid.

Eudaimonistic and Aesthetic Judgments on Emotion

One of the challenges in promoting an aspirational work on justice is finding the proper balance between cultivating the positive emotions on individuals, on one hand, and getting the right kind of institutional support for such effort, on the other. Both are needed in protecting vulnerabilities. Indeed, the formation of just societies requires serious contemplation on the stability of the political culture itself, i.e. of its ability to accept and address its vulnerabilities. Therefore, for Nussbaum, such can be accomplished by fortifying positive emotions of compassion, constructive anger, sympathy, and the other emotions that bind the citizens of a certain nation.³

Recent studies of sociological behavior shows or documents the fact that people find difficulties extending sympathy or concern for their fellow citizens beyond their immediate families or communities.⁴ A universally arguable assumption is that people love to protect their personal sphere of interests i.e. properties, wealth, and many other personal resources. Nussbaum sees this clearly, and she believed this is an obstacle to the political goal of institutionalizing community compassion. She zeroes in on the problem with the question: *how can we make people care for others?* And in an event when the individual thinks of her life as aimed for a *eudaimonistic end*⁵ (defined as a sense of human flourishing), this *end* is hardly conceptualized with the inclusion of others in one's sphere of interests.

Nussbaum saw the cultivation of positive emotions as tied to one's sense of *eudaimonistic* living. She said that of the Greek the central question being asked is; *how should a human being live?*⁶, an inchoate understanding of the Greek eudaimonistic theory. She said that the answer to this kind of question has been individualistic, e.g.

3 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2013), 3.

4 Ibid.

5 Eudaimonia is a Greek word commonly used by Aristotle in his works in Ethics, it deals with the thought that human life is intended to achieve happiness or human flourishing.

6 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 41.

dependent on how the person conceptualizes one's own sense of a eudaimonistic life or of human *flourishing* which at the same time defines a complete human life. However, despite our notion of individualistic human flourishing, Nussbaum believed that the Greek contemplation of eudaimonism is the conception that eudaimonism is inclusive. A deeper reading of this theory requires an understanding that "the actions, relations, and persons that are included in the conception are not all valued simply on account of some *instrumental* relation they bear to the agent's satisfaction."⁷ This is the mistake commonly committed by the Utilitarians. For Nussbaum, *eudaimonia* includes "*mutual relations of civic and or personal love and friendship, the object here is loved and benefited for his or her own sake for they are constituents of a life that is my life and not someone else's.*"⁸

So how do we educate one another as regards formulations of proper emotions conducive to the good of general welfare? The development of emotion can be seen as a crucial step so that *people will learn to see their fate in everyone else's* and to form emotions of sympathetic kind. For Nussbaum, this is where the role of human freedom and imagination becomes interestingly important. One of the most essential elements of her works on emotion is her conceptualization of the notion of '*similar possibilities*.'⁹ In this account, people all together imagine the possibility of their own bad fate, making them potential victims of a life that is not meant to be fair after all. An added critical consideration to this is a realization that '*vulnerability*' is a common plight of all human beings. This, in turn, also leads to the cultivation of positive emotions of compassion and sympathy since one's sufferings might be a similar possibility to another.

The discussion has a clear bearing on the suffering that people and nations confront in this pandemic, the threat of becoming potential victims., the fear that deadly virus poses a "*similar threat and possibility*" for everybody. This pandemic in effect promotes an unwitting inclusive culture, that the suffering of one is a possible suffering of another. We

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 42.

9 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 324

can imagine *tragedy as a common lot of all*, it is a similar possibility and it triggers the very formation of compassion to our fellow human being. In the long run, tragedy repudiates the negative emotion of ‘*blame*’ since no one deserves to suffer a bad end after all.

By imagining the sufferings of others, we likewise cultivate the formation of positive civic emotion. This sense of *wonder* and imagination on the tragic end of others will lead the individual to form compassionate emotion to the suffering group which Nussbaum has dubbed as ‘*eudaimonistic judgment*.’¹⁰ How does eudaimonistic judgment work? Nussbaum believed that such judgment would inspire thinking that the suffering person is important; in effect this ultimately means the inclusion of the larger group to one’s area of concern. Such can only happen if we truly include others (despite them being strangers to us) in our conception of *eudaimonia* or human flourishing. After all, “others” are human beings too deserving of proper human survival. This *eudaimonistic judgment* demands an imaginative “focus on the suffering person or people as among our significant goals and ends, as part of our circle of concern.”¹¹ An example could be a vivid story of a stranger’s predicament which may generate a concern for that person, leading to both compassionate emotion and the consequent behavior of helping. In the end, compassion becomes the key element in the process of cultivating positive civic emotions leading toward a just social and political sphere.

How Emotions Affect Political Judgment

Aristotle viewed emotions as central to the kinds of creatures human beings are, and crucial to this idea is the interaction of emotion and reason for it determines the formation of moral and political perceptions over time. What underlies this view is a belief that judging well would also mean having the right feelings for the right reasons.¹² The Aristotelian view that *arête* or excellence is important in performing

10 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2.

11 *Ibid.*, 58.

12 Susan Bickford, *Emotion Talk and Political Judgment* (*The Journal of Politics*, Volume 73, No. 4, 2011), 1027.

civic duties and involves the need to assess the proper emotions needed as a way of human reactions to different situations. In a sense, acting or thinking well is tantamount to feeling rightly especially applicable in our formulation of proper responses to our diverse experiences in life. This, in turn, requires appropriate cultivation of emotions, because for Aristotle, feeling rightly is not an automatic response but rather developed over time through habitual activity. And if the practice of judging and feeling rightly is done habitually, it eventually becomes an integral part of one's character. For example, the type of emotion that citizens feel towards the political field is oftentimes justified by their experiences of it; it consists of a reasonable perception of fair distribution of government aid, a deep appreciation of the justice system, and confidence or trust in particular political figures to mention a few. These perceptions or beliefs may have significant emotional components that instigate change in a time when further experiences will no longer sustain positive civic emotions to flourish. This change in political judgment can happen with respect to a particular experience of citizens that may end up in the formation of a radical view, for instance, citizens' anger is known to be a product of deep frustrations in the political state of affairs in relation to how authorities handle certain issues of immediate concern. Anger can be a constituent of a valid political discernment, say for instance, about a potential environmental harm caused by a proposed bill or any political culpability. Thus, the shaping of political strategies may be done in recognition with the type of emotions developed by citizens over time.

The traditional solution to civic issues is rooted in the emotion of civic love that may arise out of a special affection for one's polity. This kind of love constitutes a motive for civic action; it includes in its structure a common preference of including others in one's motive to develop the good of the polity.¹³ Civic love can influence people to form strong moral reasons to contribute to the development of democratic polities of which they are citizens. A citizen who develops a strong emotional bond with his or her polity has higher motivation to contribute to its development or progress. This bond will encourage one's sense of pride, and in return, the citizen will also feel a degree of responsibility and feels the need to act in virtue in order to avoid

13 Ian MacMullin, *Doing without Love: Civic Motivation, Affection, and Identification* (The Journal of Politics, Volume 76, No. 1, 2013), 75.

shame. How exactly this can be best achieved is a complex question, but our analysis sheds light on the types of civic education and political socialization that human beings need in order to nourish the kind of affection that they feel for their polity.¹⁴ As such, emotions play a crucial role to the nature of political judgments rendered by citizens to their *polis* or city-state.

Basic Structures of Compassion

Aristotle viewed compassion as a painful emotion directed at another person's misfortune or suffering. Nussbaum further suggested that it has three cognitive elements formulated as follows:

1. *The first cognitive requirement of compassion is a belief or appraisal that the suffering is serious rather than trivial;*
2. *The second cognitive requirement is the belief that the person does not deserve the suffering; and*
3. *Lastly, the belief that the possibilities in life of the person who experiences the emotion are similar to others.*¹⁵

The first requirement of compassion involves the recognition that the *situation is nontrivial*: the sufferings felt by a person or a group can be seen as detrimental to the formation of a flourishing life. Bringing the topic to the heart of our issue here, this pandemic is nontrivial, the sufferings experienced by people are detrimental to their idea of a flourishing life. All are potential victims of this deadly virus, infected or not. Human survival is threatened to the very core. The literal threat to life happens at the very moment one becomes infected by the virus, but this threat is no different from the ones who, on the other hand, are confronted with the very limits of their material and economic survival. Confronted by limited resources, people do not know where to get their next food, have no money in their pockets, and are facing a threat to their physical survival. Everyone, rich or poor, influential or not-- all face a very serious threat in the material, physical, mental and psychological states of their being.

14 Ibid., 83.

15 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 316.

The next question: do people deserve this kind of suffering? The fact is that no one is prepared with this pandemic. The second requirement of compassion is a serious *appraisal that no person deserves the suffering*, thus it is not helpful putting blame on other people for not being economically prepared, e.g. blaming the poor and the needy. Compassion in this second instance can only be formed with the absence of blaming and fault-finding- compassion then addresses itself to the “non-blameworthy increment.”¹⁶ This pandemic is no different from a natural occurrence of a storm or any calamity. It is noted that the term *depression*, in describing a calamity, is a linguistic masterstroke in diction, because the term connotes that the disaster is beyond control and people are thereby not to be blamed for it.

The third requirement of compassion is a *judgment of similar possibilities* stating that “compassion concerns those misfortunes” which the person himself might expect to suffer, either by himself or by one of his loved ones. Aristotle believed that compassion will be felt only by those with some experiences and understanding of suffering; and be wanting in compassion if untouched by suffering and has everything.¹⁷ This could explain why the privileged ones could be often lacking in sympathy. Unless these privileged people would be imaginative as to include the sufferings of others in their minds, compassion would unlikely flourish in privileged circles:

This third element speaks of a situation where a person who has compassion often does think that the suffering of another is similar to him or her and their possibilities in life may likewise be similar.¹⁸ For Nussbaum, this thought performs important work especially in removing barriers to compassion that have been created by artificial social divisions (as what Rousseau pointed out in *Emile*). Rousseau insists that in any setting, however promising, the *judgment of similar possibilities* has the advantage of *truth* in its side.¹⁹ It opens up a clearer

16 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 320.

17 *Ibid.*, 324.

18 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2013), 144.

19 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 350.

view on the misfortunes to which compassion commonly responds to i.e. deaths, wounds, losses of loved ones, losses of citizenship, hunger, poverty--- these are real and general because they really are the common lot of all human beings²⁰, these become common to all during this pandemic too. Even kings who deny that the lot of the peasant could only be theirs are deceiving themselves; it is clear that no human being is exempt from misfortunes.²¹ Applied in the instant reality, no one is exempted from this pandemic. So, for Rousseau, most humans have thought of *similar possibilities* as an important avenue to compassionate response, and have also so contemplated that people themselves might confront similar predicaments.²²

Negative Emotions as Impediments to the Formation of Compassion

In much of Nussbaum's philosophy, her main focus has been the cultivation of positive emotions in a just political sphere. She has enumerated the negative emotions that potentially hinder the formation of good civic emotion. This paper cites the most salient ones in her list, namely: *disgust, shame, and fear*. It has been pointed that human beings, like animals, tend to be narrow in their formation of sympathetic feelings or emotions; that people are inclined to prefer a narrower group to a broader one (we only care for the ones closer to us and we become unmindful of the ones that are remotely connected).²³ For instance, stigma and exclusion becomes central among the problems our societies must combat. Studies on human psychology show that human beings have deeper problems other than mere narrowness of sympathy, and in this case, Nussbaum has stood up to the serious task of discovering the origin of these deeper problems through her critical examination of the negative emotions of *disgust, shame, and fear*.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2013), 144.

23 Ibid.

A. Disgust

Nussbaum defined *disgust* as “a powerful emotion in the lives of most human beings, it shapes our intimacies and provides much of the structure of our daily routine.”²⁴ In many ways, *disgust* affects our social relations too and we extend multifarious effort to ward it off.²⁵ The author observed that “group hatred and loathing are a major part of what our nations (have) agreed to oppose. And even in Rawls well-ordered society, where such discrimination is absent, it cannot be guaranteed that it will not arise, given the reality of human psychology.”²⁶

Where did *disgust* come from and how did it affect the formation of compassion? Nussbaum realized, that from our early situation of *childhood narcissism* grows a tendency to think of other people as mere extension of the self, other people are seen as slaves (and not full people with needs and interest of their own).²⁷ It becomes evident that *narcissism* of this type creates major influence in the later development of human psychology. As not easily overcome in the childhood years, it goes on exercising a pernicious impact in human lives, as people turn a blind eye to their greedy nature and focus most of the time in in their own security and satisfaction.²⁸ Nussbaum had a clearer vision of where narcissism leads to, this infant helplessness produces an intense anxiety that is not mitigated by trust in the world or its people and the only solution is *perfection* which can only be achieved by making other people one’s slave and the key device of subordination is *disgust*.²⁹

It is not simply disgust that inspires this tendency of subordinating others, but it is specifically what Nussbaum called *projective disgust*, which grows out of the same anxieties that inspire infantile narcissism. *Projective disgust* as a negative emotion puts certain people in a vantage

24 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2004), 72.

25 Ibid.

26 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2013), 164.

27 Ibid., 172.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid., 182.

position and as they feel a sense of superiority, *they consider themselves strong and frown upon any encounter of inferiority or weakness*. People in power impute disgust in human characters that typically show inferiority of some kind making them capable of casting discrimination to the lower group i.e. poor people, women, gays, lesbians, and so on and they then use that alleged *disgustingness* as a reason to discriminate or frown upon them.³⁰ This clearly shows the divisive nature of *projective disgust*, it cuts the tendency to cultivate positive emotion and puts a boundary to the formation of extended compassion to other people. In our manner of facing this pandemic, very poor political strategies are being utilized by our local and national leaders. They cannot really overcome a sense of being political and discriminatory in their decision-making, they only extend concern to the ones close to their circle, and they similarly attend to the needs of the ones they can potentially use in their political agenda. For instance, in the present author's experience with this pandemic, as a resident of an apartment unit in Sta. Mesa, the author herself has experienced her own share of having been discriminated against in the access to basic services such as the minimum- securing a quarantine pass. Not being a registered voter in the jurisdictional barangay, the present author felt she was treated like a second class citizen by the officials, who, in imposing such policy, were unmindful of the fact that this pandemic calls for egalitarian justice, that everyone needed 'quarantine pass' to secure food and medicine for daily survival. Since all residents were experiencing a similar challenge, all have a right to survive as others, and therefore, this narrow and self-serving policy of the barangay was detrimental to some residents. Such propensity to position for superiority and to treat others as a subordinate extension of one's ego, as one's slave, is related to the problem focused on in the next analysis on the negative emotion of *shame* among the priority for a quarantine pass. People managing the affairs in the barangay level have rationalized the discrimination as a privilege with priority set for registered voters.

30 Ibid.

B. Shame

Like disgust, “*shame* is a ubiquitous emotion in social life.”³¹ Shame is already existent even prior to people’s awareness of what has been considered ‘normal’ in a particular social value-system. Shame is constantly reiterated and defined by Filipino sociologists as traditions and beliefs that beguile strength and superiority, undermining anything that manifests weakness and inferiority. Relatedly, Nussbaum sees “shame as cutting beneath any specific social orientation to norms, and serves as highly volatile way in which human beings negotiate some tensions inherent in their humanness, that is, their awareness of themselves as being both finite and marked by exorbitant demands and expectations.”³² In addition, another burden to the desire of formulating positive civic emotion is given by a certain realization that some people are more marked out for *shame* than others. Evidently, shame and disgust coexist as societies ubiquitously select certain groups and individuals for shaming, marking them as inferior and abnormal even to a point of demanding that they *blush* at what and who they are.

In the absence of a visible brand like in the case of *blushing*, Nussbaum argued that societies have been quick to inflict the element of shaming i.e. as in the case of ex-convicts, by tattooing: by branding individuals with certain names: or by other visible signs of social ostracism and disapproval.³³ The negative emotion of *shame* shares a similar tendency with *disgust* as it marks certain individuals inferior, different and not normal in a given social group. Kant contends that the invisible enemy inside is something peculiarly human: connected with one’s propensity for narrowness and self-love, an instinctive drive that makes one insensitive to others’ needs for sympathy and compassion.³⁴ And this condition manifests in one’s behavior of undermining the value of other people, the extreme part of which is the tendency to use *shaming* as a stigmatizing force in marking the face of another.

31 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2004), 173.

32 Ibid., 174.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

Almost always, individual members of stigmatized groups not only experience ordinary pain whenever shamed. In addition, they also suffer from the mockery, taunting, and assault on their human dignity.³⁵ Moreover, shaming would put certain people in a disadvantaged position in getting access to certain social services- they consequently also suffered from pervasive discrimination in housing, employment and other social functions too.³⁶ As Nussbaum analyzed, the element of *shame* focuses its target on the most vulnerable groups, the members of which are considered weak and not normal. It is also alarming that the society has no legal recourse to the sufferings of the stigmatized; and that this has been the situation of those considered minority. The stigmatized suffered tremendous damage from the stigmatizing behavior of others who held themselves as superior members of the population.

Looking at the context of this pandemic, who are the stigmatized? Are they not the most vulnerable too, i.e., health workers, poor people, other front liners and so on? It is indeed true that the stigmatized suffer damages and the government or even our society has no legal remedy for their miseries. In the Philippines, for instance, it appears that the sense of compassion is overcome by an urge to implement order from higher authorities with misplaced emphasis on the use of force. Since the response is so militarized,³⁷ it seems that even minor offenses ranging from not wearing face masks and other violations of quarantine rules are being responded to by men in camouflage in vehement ways. In the local news, it has been observed that the use of physical violence is always present in their manner of executing the state's mandate to ensure order in society. For instance, a fish vendor in Quezon City named Winston Ragos was shot and killed because he violated quarantine rules by not wearing face masks. This killing was in fact just one among the many instances of police injustices in their response to the health crisis. Needless to say, the pronouncement of the

35 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law* (United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 2004), 225.

36 Ibid.

37 Antonio Contreras, "Losing Reason, Compassion and Humanity. Accessed July 2, 2020, URL: <https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/05/02/opinion/columnists/topanalysis/losing-reason-compassion-and-humanity/721447/>

head of the state to “shoot them dead” (referring to violators), becomes a legitimate call for these supposed law enforcers to end up brain dead, irrational, and unsympathetic agents of the state. It becomes lethal too when this execution of power is driven by ignorance and wrong emphasis on the use of force. Seen from the perspective of human rights advocates, this pandemic started as a health crisis but ended up to be a human rights crisis.³⁸ An anti-poor sentiment is also growing more pronounced in social media, people are hastily outlining the faults as intrinsic to the lower class, i.e., the notion that the poor are lazy, irresponsible, dependent on government aids, and given to vices. This casts an opportunity of branding the poor as disgusting, and shaming them as burden to the government and a waste to taxpayers’ money.

C. Fear

Fear as one of negative emotions countering compassion, has some resemblance with Nussbaum’s characterization of disgust and shame. Our author also saw *fear* as a primitive narcissistic emotion: “(...which does not require very elaborate mental apparatus... (but only requires)... some rudimentary orientation toward survival and well-being of people, and an ability to become aroused by what could threaten them.”³⁹ Fear can be taken as a form of heightened awareness, though it has a very narrow frame since it initially focused on one’s own body, one’s life, and one’s survival.⁴⁰ It may include others in one’s circle of concern, but the inclusion of other people and things is still in connection to the self. Nussbaum further reiterated that *fear* is also triggered by mechanisms that are rooted in genuine evolutionary usefulness, but it is recalcitrant to learning and moral thinking.⁴¹

Fear rooted in biological origins is responsible for human tendencies to intensely self-focus. Fear often hijacks thoughts powerfully, making it difficult to think about anything else but the survival of the

38 Ibid.

39 Martha C. Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2012), 25.

40 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2013), 321.

41 Ibid.

self and one's immediate circle.⁴² Even John Stuart Mill shares the same sentiment, describing *fear* as just taking into context the self; it tends to make humans resent indiscriminately whatever anyone does that is disagreeable to one's self.⁴³ In consequence, Nussbaum realized that here lie many potential problems. For example, a public culture that wants to encourage extended compassion needs to think as well about limiting and properly directing fear, for once it gets going, the good of others is all too likely to fade into the background as well.⁴⁴ How this happens depends on how we perceive a certain situation as threatening or dangerous to our survival.

Evident here is the capacity of every society to launch rhetoric and politics working on ideas of what is dangerous, taking advantage of it to subjugate certain groups which may lead to marginalizing these groups as well. This process of extending and shaping fear is influenced by culture, politics and rhetoric. Nussbaum claimed that Aristotle makes his point explicit, that "people do not fear if they think that they control everything important and cannot be harmed."⁴⁵ This is the very situation that people face in society today; they are always being threatened by many natural forces and diseases, not to mention human hostility, war, poverty, and dangers more abstract like economic catastrophe, group discrimination, including lack of political and religious liberty, among such threats.⁴⁶ Nonetheless, how people counter fear remains self-centered, and only focused on avoiding the harm that these external forces may inflict. Fear further galvanizes narrowness in terms of weaving a circle of concern. It forms a heightened self-focused and solipsistic attentiveness. It reduces to vivid awareness of one's own survival, and perhaps at best, that of a narrow circle of people.⁴⁷ Fear is centrifugal; it dissipates a people's potentially united energy. Leaders

42 Ibid., 322.

43 Martha C. Nussbaum, *The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2012), 28.

44 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2013), 322.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid., 29.

47 Ibid.

need to rally people to face an aggressor with courage and fellowship because what they say can make a great deal of difference, bringing people together around a common project. If this sounds familiar, this is because political leaders are using fear mongering at present as a way to mitigate the threat of this pandemic. This researcher is reminded of Antonio Gramsci's words that we are not really addressing the real issue, because our response to the danger that this pandemic represents can be characterized as an *artificial response* to an artificial issue of being frightened of the unknown. The real unknown is not the virus per se, but people's survival in relation to their basic needs. The real unknown is people's capacity to survive, and how long their resources will last. This government is blinded by the negative use of fear, with the added disappointment solution of officials is the inflicting of fear on people instead of addressing the real issue of survival. And such survival needs compassion from leaders, for them to really see that what people need is not a military control but clearer political plans, a clearer direction of addressing their basic needs for food, medicines, and safety of their family in the material sense.

What is scarier than the threat of Covid 19 virus is the fear of non-survival. For instance, in the immediate aftermath of the lockdown here in the Philippines particularly in the National Capital Regions, poor Filipinos were distraught by the prospect of contending with hunger, with no available stable sources of income, many homeless slum dwellers bore the impact of the ECQ (extended community quarantine).⁴⁸ However, instead of comprehensive means to cast hope to helpless Filipinos, the element of fear was instigated by the national government as a manner of response to the pandemic. Social media sources and local news broadcast these poor strategies of fear-mongering and harassment cases mostly due to minor violations of the poor if not due to their attempts to look for avenues to survive. On April 1, in a city slum of Sitio San Roque in Quezon City, poor inhabitants gathered on a nearby highway to voice their discontent and demanded food and other aids. Because even prior to the pandemic they were already poverty stricken, their community found hard to deal with having no livelihood and other sources of potential income to survive.

48 Michael Beltran, "The Philippines' Pandemic Response: A Tragedy of Errors," *The Diplomat*. May 12, 2020. <https://thediplomat.com/2020/05/the-philippines-pandemic-response-a-tragedy-of-errors/>

Twenty one of these hungry protesters were beaten and arrested by the police.⁴⁹

This and other similar cases of arrests occurred just over a week President Rodrigo Duterte granted himself emergency powers to deal with the pandemic, and with newly acquired power he called for an even stricter implementation of the lockdown rules. Taking the president's cue, the police declared they will not hesitate to arrest low-level violators even without a warrant. Since then, there have been many reports and sightings of mishandlings on how the operation on law enforcement is done. Common to these would be stories about a mentally-ill Army veteran who was shot dead for being outside and others who are being arrested for not wearing a face mask. Arrests have also been extended to the ones critical and who are openly criticizing the government's perceived failures in the way it handled a health crisis in the case of Covid 19 pandemic. The biggest single haul of the crackdown came on Labor Day (May 1) where ninety-two (92) individuals across the cities were imprisoned while engaging in different activities i.e. feeding programs or online/actual protests.⁵⁰ This can also be seen as 'scare tactics or fear appeals', and according to some philosophical views, it might be argued that scare tactics are acceptable in times of crisis so long as they urge 'large population segments, who are at moderate risk, to adopt risk-reducing practices ... to influence those who are at high risk'.⁵¹ Under the ethical theory of utilitarianism, if fear tactics promote the *greatest benefit for the greatest number*, it is ethically acceptable as an approach. However, if *deontological ethics*⁵² will be used in our analysis in terms of its appropriateness, fear-tactics approach violates the universal fundamental rights of every human being especially in relation to one's security of life and liberty, and this makes fear-tactics questionable on the ground of its moral acceptability.

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 H.T Biana and J.J.B. Joaquin, "The Ethics of Scare: COVID-19 and the Philippines' Fear Appeals," World Health Organization Corona Virus Disease 2019 Internet. April 10, 2020. <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>.

52 The German Philosopher Immanuel Kant is the proponent of *deontological ethics*, the view of which is to be ethically responsible for the good of all or the universal aspect.

Conclusions

This paper highlights the important role of compassion as the main resource in overcoming the negative emotions present in the socio-political sphere. Other philosophers support this claim too, like for instance, J.S. Mill posited that our main resource in forming a decent society with an aspiration for justice is *compassion*. The only problem with our original conception of compassion is that- it is too narrow; we only care for the ones near and dear to us. Nussbaum thought there is truth to this, but she suggests going deeper into analyzing the roots of compassion. She said that we need to think not just about compassion but its roots in love.⁵³ The Indian philosopher Rabindranath Tagore is closer to this kind of project as he is likewise coming from the ‘thought that people are selfish, but they are also capable of feeling very deep sense of love. This love has its own roots in the family, in the child’s intense love for parents and the latter’s love as well to the child. It can eventually lead to a profound sense of gratitude that people learn to have for their parents for caring for them.’⁵⁴ This kind of love is one thing that we need to cultivate in order to form a nation. And at the same time, we hope that political institutions will cherish this ideal for it to perpetuate and promote our good ends. Having a just condition in the political sphere and with government or institutional principles giving due consideration to its people, this love will potentially grow outward as it encourages a sense of gratitude to the political order that sustain them.⁵⁵

On the other hand, a potential problem arises in a situation where there is neglect in the cultivation of public emotions that bind people together. At this juncture, we are reminded of Tagore’s notion of a ‘creative reach’ to the critical spirit of the citizens. This can be shown in the way political policies are made alongside with the advancement of other institutional reforms as well with the noble intent of benefitting the people. Nussbaum observed that the 19th century people were so optimistic about progress that they neglected the dark side of human psychology. As emphasized in the context of the book, if emotions of

53 Martha Nussbaum, “Political Emotions”,url:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87hwtoLfd6I&t=4290s>.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

positive kind i.e. sympathy, love, compassion, and respect are the needed ingredients in the formation of a just and decent society, the negative sorts of emotions representing the dark psychological side turn out to be the main problem serving as obstacles in the realization of good political goal. In this line, Nussbaum believed that ‘creating compassion requires us to understand what threatens it.’⁵⁶ Taking off from an unfortunate reality that people are narrow and greedy in their sympathies, the more it should be accepted that people are also reluctant to support projects aimed at a common good if these require sacrificing from their part.⁵⁷

So, how does one overcome the problem posited above, which is deeply rooted in the dark force of emotion? Nussbaum would then take an inspiring leap from the liberal ideas of the philosophies proposed by J.S. Mill, Tagore, Rawls, and Kant among others. For instance, Mill proposed the need for the government to reconsider its *redistributive responsibilities*.⁵⁸ J.S. Mill held both public and private alternatives should coexist and compete by public examinations.⁵⁹ Rawls sees society as a cooperative venture for mutual advantage, where individuals’ entitlements are determinable only within the cooperative scheme. In the final formulation of the difference principle, he mentioned that “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged.”⁶⁰ So, the basic structure of a just society is the *all-inclusive social system* that determines the background justice.⁶¹ What is challenging in this part, is for the government to learn how to strike the right balance of limiting the role played by negative emotions in the public sphere on the one hand, and promotion of state policies supportive of the best interests of people at large on the other. This is where many political systems failed, especially on the part of suppressing negative public emotions.

56 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, Chapter 10, Harvard University Press, 2013.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid., p.138

Taking this context in localized Philippine setting with the way our government weave its strategies of surviving the pandemic, the country is facing the same dilemma now, because there is a visible pattern that the use of the negative emotion of fear becomes part of the response. There is a tremendous neglect of fundamental issues even leading to an evident class struggle. For instance, the poor is viewed as a liability since their low capacity of survival would force the government to release budget in order to help them with their survival. And given that there is an available budget to help them, the problem does not stop there; it opens a potential venue for corruption. Evident here again is the narrow and shallow type of compassion. The middle class in our country does not receive the same type of attention or help from the government, limiting the class' capacity for survival in a sense. On the other hand, the upper class with their supposed capacity of helping is what the German philosopher Immanuel Kant wanted to manifest, though he dubbed it as an *imperfect duty* of being benevolent because 'helping others' is not compulsory, it is voluntarily done by the action-bearer. Many have responded to this so-called Kantian call, but the materially privileged type of people generally has formed a judgmental stare against the needy.

An added burden lies on how our government responded to public demands of securing people's safety and survival. First, there is too much *cultivation of negative public emotions of fear* alongside with the offered solution of militarization. In a way, military presence reminds people of the historical trauma during the martial law, which makes it an unlikely solution to a health crisis like this, when the needed solution is rather or preferably a clear formulation of strategies to help combat the pandemic with the proper help from people in the medical field. Other countries are quite successful in doing it, i.e. mass testing, deliberate distribution of food and medical supplies to all people without doing further categorization of social classes. Such very *inclusive* technique is arguably, promotional of the well-being of all. The second factor is seen by many as an *attempt to kill the spirit of democracy and dissent*. When people began questioning the validity and intent of political strategies, the government responded negatively by positing threat to the safety and well-being of the dissenters. In some cases, mass protesters were put behind bars, instead of being heard for their calls for justice. As we learn from the philosophy of Tagore, the government's way of handling the critical spirit of its own people can be categorized as truly

unbecoming. Tagore believed that, “man never fails to invoke in his mind a definitive image of his own ideal self, of his ideal environment, which it is his mission to reproduce externally.”⁶² A nation’s political culture must not stagnate itself in domestication and complacency, despite the threat of fear coming from the ones in power. It has to be in constant striving of recreating the spirit of democracy as further manifested in the public emotional support that must be extended to the critical spirit of dissent.

At the end, Martha Nussbaum has not failed to provide concrete and hopeful scenarios serving as a good proposal of cultivating public emotions. For her, any good intention of cultivating civic emotions will be adequate only if it is not experimental but highly contextual. In her observation, what moves people is a function of their nation’s history, its traditions, its current problems- *what moves people, is much more concrete*.⁶³ In an effort to generate political emotions beneficial for the public sphere, public officials must avoid regarding people with abstract sense of humanity. So, political leaders, in an attempt to generate emotional support for valuable projects, must engage with people as they are, with their particular needs. As what John Rawls emphasized, the ‘basic structure’ of a given society must be promotional of its people’s welfare. Despite some serious beneficial measures, there remain problems and disappointing decisions made by Philippine political leaders--- a failure that proves the difficulty of getting rid of what Kant called ‘*the radical evil*’ or people’s innate tendency to discriminate and exclude others in their circle of concern. As observed, the ones in power cannot avoid the tendency of manipulating public emotions through the cultivation of negative emotions of fear, disgust, shame, and blame. Instead of being genuine to their intent of promoting the general welfare, it cannot be emphasized that leaders have shown narrow and shallow concern, at times even selective in their implementation of laws, for example (benefitting the ones belonging to their circle, and excluding those considered hostile). There are elements of deception, neglect, blame, fear, and force in some of our country’s

62 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*, Chapter 5, Harvard University Press, 2013.

63 Martha Nussbaum, “Political Emotions”,url:<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87hwtoLfd6I&t=4290s>.

political endeavors. Nussbaum is correct after all, positive emotions of compassion as propelled by genuine love of humanity can move people to a good direction- this is the main resource. But the true enemy is the promotion of negative emotions in the public sphere alongside with an attempt to kill the democratic spirit of dissent and critique. Through it all, I then offer this view: that this is the true failure of the Philippines as a country, its political sphere has failed in extending respect to the potential compassionate dynamism of the Filipino people.

So, how do Filipinos go further? The nation cannot simply give up; they must carry these ideals as Tagore has urged people in his own country to do. Filipinos cannot simply give up in striving for a potential realization of the true essence of their humanity. There is hope after all, given that the Filipino people are imaginative and optimistic in spirit. Filipinos are patient and hopeful in their attempts to solidify cooperation and solidarity, and their national history shows that Filipinos knew very well how to fight and strive for justice. The heroic tradition has not been lost, as for instance there are clear attempts from both private groups and individuals to extend help to others in this pandemic. With the advancement of technology, social media can prove helpful in shaping civic emotions as well. In several occasions, there are genuine campaigns and fund raising activities supportive of the plight of the poor and the most vulnerable, the last includes front liners especially in the medical field and food services. These projects have yet to reach perfection in terms of cultivating a 'fellow feeling', but these are arguably positive starters in spirit and might even create rippling effects of goodness, eventually leading to a better state. Nussbaum's philosophy can serve as an inspiration, Filipinos must remain hopeful in their striving. They have to discover the Tagorean sense of creative reach and sympathy to their fellow, as they cultivate the emotion of civic love that inspires the poetic spirit of dissent and critical attitude. In shaping the country's democratic space, compassion demands the ultimate sensitivity to the needs of its people in order to find better means for survival.

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