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THE
MONARCHY
OF

A PHILOSOPHER LOOKS AT OUR POLITICAL CRISIS

MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM

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Preface

Election night 2016 was bright daylight for me—in Kyoto, where I had just arrived for an award ceremony, after a joyful sendoff from my colleagues at home. I was feeling pretty anxious about the bitterly divided electorate, and yet reasonably confident that appeals to fear and anger would be repudiated—although there would be a lot of difficult work ahead to bring Americans together. My Japanese hosts came in and out of my hotel room, explaining the schedule of the various ceremonial events. In the background of these conversations, but in the foreground of my mind, the election news kept coming in, producing, first, increasing alarm and then, finally, both grief and a deeper fear, for the country and its people and institutions. I was aware that my fear was not balanced or fair-minded, so I was part of the problem that I worried about.

I was in Kyoto to accept an award established by a Japanese scientist, businessman, and philanthropist—also a Zen Buddhist priest—who wanted to recognize "those who have contributed significantly to the scientific, cultural, and spiritual betterment of mankind." While I loved the fact that Dr. Kazuo Inamori

recognized philosophy as one of the disciplines capable of making a major contribution, I felt the award as more a challenge than an accolade, and was already wondering how, at this fraught moment in US history, I might actually live up to my laurels!

By the time the election result was clear, I had to go out to have my first official meeting with the other two laureates (both scientists) at the offices of the Inamori Foundation, so I dressed up in a cheerful suit, fixed my hair, and tried to express happiness and gratitude. The first official dinner was a chore. Social conversation with strangers, filtered through an interpreter, offered no distracting charms. I wanted to hug my friends, but they were far away. Email is great, but not like a hug for comfort and consolation.

That night the combination of political anxiety and jet lag made sleep somewhat intermittent, so I began thinking—deciding, around midnight, that my previous work on emotions hadn't gone deep enough. As I examined my own fear, it gradually dawned on me that fear was the issue, a nebulous and multiform fear suffusing US society. I got some ideas, tentative but promising, about how fear is connected to, and renders toxic, other problematic emotions such as anger, disgust, and envy. I rarely work in the middle of the night. I sleep soundly, and my best ideas usually come to me gradually, sitting at my computer. But jet lag and a national crisis have a way of changing habit, and in this case, I had a joyful sense of discovery. I felt that some insight might possibly be the fruit of this upheaval—and who knows?—it might be insight that would give others some good ideas, too, if I could do the work well. I went back to sleep with a calming sense of hope.

The following day—after a cleansing morning workout—I plunged into formal ceremony. I donned my evening dress and smiled as best I could for the official portrait photo. The on-stage ceremony was aesthetically beautiful and hence distracting, and listening to the biographies of my fellow laureates and their short speeches about their work was genuinely fascinating, since they were in fields (self-driving cars and basic cancer research) about which I know little, and I was filled with admiration for their achievements. Giving my own short speech, I was able to express some of the things I really care about and to thank people who had helped me throughout my career. At least as important, I could also express love of my family and close friends. (All this had to be written in advance for the sake of the translator, so no *ad hoc* modification was possible, but being able to express love was still extremely consoling.)

Kyoto prize banquets end punctually and extremely early, so by 8:30 I was back in my room, and I sat down at my desk and wrote. By that time the ideas I had had during the night had taken form, and as I wrote, they became more and more developed and more and more convincing (at least to me!). By the end of two evenings of work, I had a long blog piece that a journalist friend of mine in Australia posted, and that blog piece simultaneously took a different shape as a book proposal.

But who am I, you might ask, and how did I come to take such a keen interest in the emotions of political unity and division? I am, of course, an academic, living a highly privileged life in the midst of wonderful colleagues and students, and with all the support I could wish for my work. Even at this time of grave threat for the humanities and the arts, my own university still

strongly supports the humanities. As a philosopher without a law degree, I have the great delight of serving partly in a law school, where I can learn every day about the political and legal issues of this nation, meanwhile offering courses about justice and political ideas. So, it's a fine vantage point, but it might seem too detached to participate in the anxieties of most Americans.

I was a privileged child, too, but in a far more complicated way. My family, living on Philadelphia's elite Main Line, was upper middle-class and fairly affluent. I had love, excellent nutrition and health care, a first-rate education at an excellent private school for women, which in those days supplied incentives to excellence, free of gendered peer pressure, that a public-school education would have offered to girls only more unevenly. (My mother used to tell me, "Don't talk so much, or the boys won't like you," apt advice for the times, but I didn't have to worry about following it at school!) I've always loved reading, writing, and constructing arguments. Furthermore, my father loved my aspirations and supported them. A working-class man from Macon, Georgia, he had worked his way up to a partnership in a leading Philadelphia law firm by dint of ability and hard work, and he thought and said that this American Dream was available to all. That credo planted seeds of doubt. He repeatedly said that African Americans failed to succeed in America because they just didn't work hard enough; and yet, observing his own visceral racism, as he made household help use a separate bathroom, and even threatened to disinherit me if I appeared in public in a large group (a theater troupe) one member of which was African American, I saw that his credo did not make sense of the situation of African

Americans, held down and insulted by stigma and Jim Crow separation. And my father's disgust with minorities extended to many who plainly had (despite social obstacles) achieved success through hard work: to middle-class African Americans and middle-class Jews in particular.

He understood that women could excel. He delighted in my success, and encouraged independence and even defiance. And yet I observed an issue there, too: for he married a woman who was working as an interior designer, and it was immediately understood that she would stop working, something that left my mother unhappy and lonely for much of her life. His attitudes were so mixed. When I was sixteen, he offered me the choice between a debutante party and a homestay abroad on the Experiment in International Living, and was thoroughly pleased that I chose the latter—but he would never have married a woman who didn't choose the former. He did think that wearing daring fashionable clothes was (for both women and men) thoroughly compatible with intellectual aspiration and success, and the fun we had on shopping expeditions was doubled by the subversive plan that I would show up at his lecture on "Powers of Appointment" at the Practising Law Institute wearing a bright pink mini-suit. And yet, where did he really think all of this was heading? To what sort of family life, in particular? He encouraged me to date exactly those upwardly mobile preppy men who—like him—would never have wanted a working wife.

Meanwhile, that trip abroad fed further my skepticism about my father's credo. I was sent to live with a family of factory workers in Swansea, South Wales, and I understood how poverty, bad nutrition, bad sanitation (no indoor plumbing),

and bad health conditions (coal mining in particular, which had ruined the health of quite a few family members) robbed people not only of flourishing lives but also of desire and effort. My teenage pals in that family did not want to go to school or to excel by hard work. Like the working-class British families relentlessly studied in Michael Apted's "7 Up" and its sequels, they envisaged for themselves no rosier future than the lives of their parents, and their greatest pleasure was to go drinking and to visit the legal gambling casinos nearby. I remember lying in bed reading an elite British novel—in that house with an outhouse in the garden—and thinking about why Eirwen Jones, my own age, hadn't the slightest interest in reading and writing, or even in learning Welsh. The obstacles imposed by poverty often lie deep in the human spirit, and many deprived people can't follow my father's path. (By his own account, he was well nourished, given a lot of love, inspiration, and good health care, and somehow got a first-rate education. He didn't notice how being white gave him huge advantages. Born in 1901, he also lived in a world of greater upward mobility than is now the case, even for poor white people.) So, I saw myself in a new perspective, as not just a very smart kid but as the product of social forces that are unequally distributed. It wasn't surprising that much later I deepened this understanding through work in an international development institute and by a deep partnership with development groups working for women's education and legal rights in India.

Like most of the people I knew in Bryn Mawr, I was at that time a Republican, and I admired the libertarian ideas of Barry Goldwater. I still believe Goldwater was an honorable man and

totally committed to the eradication of racial segregation—he had in fact boldly integrated his family business. I think he really believed that people should choose to be just and should respect and help one another, only without government coercion. But when I began working for his campaign while still in high school, I discovered that most of my fellow Goldwaterites were not high-minded but deeply racist, supporting libertarianism as a screen for segregationist views. The ugliness of white supremacist politics repelled me, convincing me that Goldwater was naïve and that only the force of law would finally break the grip of Jim Crow. I also understood by then (after that homestay in Swansea) that real equality requires equal access to nutrition and health care. I began to embrace the political ideals of the New Deal, while my father protested to my school that my history teachers had "brainwashed" me—not the only time he underestimated the independence he had proudly nourished.

I've mentioned the theater, and early in my life the arts, especially theater and music, became my window onto a more inclusive world. First of all, it was a world that encouraged the expression of powerful emotions, unlike the WASP culture of Bryn Mawr. All my teachers encouraged my mind, but the drama teacher encouraged my whole personality. I decided that I wanted to be a professional actress. I did summer stock for two seasons, left Wellesley College after three semesters to take a professional job in a repertory company, and pursued acting at what is now the Tisch School of the Arts at NYU (New York University)—until I understood that I was not a very good actress, that the life was too unstable, and that my

real passion was thinking and writing about the plays. But I still act and sing as an amateur (I'm better, having had real-life experience), and it brings me joy. I also urge my colleagues to act (in plays connected to our law-literature conferences). I've found that sharing emotions with one's colleagues humanizes the law school and enriches intellectual friendship.

It was in the theater that I first encountered people who were openly gay. Indeed, I had a big crush on one such actor at the age of seventeen, and observed his life with the keen sympathy of disappointed infatuation, seeing how he had a life partner who visited him and with whom he had exchanged high school rings, but that they were openly together only in the world of the theater, not in the larger society. This seemed to me utterly absurd and irrational. He was certainly much nicer than most of the boys I knew, more understanding and respectful. I guess by that time I understood the ugly self-interest behind racism and sexism, but discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, previously hidden from me as were the phenomena, was another appalling American vice I then added to my list.

After deciding not to become a professional actress, I returned to the academic side of NYU, where I thrived. And soon after that I met my future husband, got engaged, and converted to Judaism. I was and am attracted to the primacy of social justice in Judaism. And I have always loved the Jewish culture I joined, finding it more emotionally expressive and more openly argumentative than WASP culture. As one of my Jewish colleagues (highly successful) said of his own history in "white-shoe" law firms, WASP lawyers would never criticize you, just fire you suddenly after five years, whereas Jewish

lawyers would yell and jump up and down, but in the end, treat you pretty fairly. Though no longer married, I've kept my Jewish name and my Jewish religion, and am more involved in the life of my congregation than I was back then. (With the middle initial *C*, I honor my birth name, Craven.) So that meant that I joined one of the groups my father despised, and he did not come to my wedding, although my mother helped organize it. (By that time my parents were divorced.)

I've had a charmed life in some respects, then, but early on I gradually learned to see it as privileged and to ponder the exclusions of others. One form of discrimination I did not avoid was discrimination against women, which played a major role in my early career (though I had a lot of encouragement, too), and which probably explained my not getting tenure at Harvard—although in a narrow decision, and with two departments split, any number of things could be brought forward to explain the result. And, like most working women of my generation, I've experienced the problems of reconstructing family life around expectations that were new and not yet fully explored. Even when both parties have the best intentions, male expectations of an earlier era are hard to live down in the heart, particularly when there are children. And sometimes two people who love one another just cannot manage to live together. But I certainly don't regret plunging in. My daughter, now a lawyer working for the rights of wild animals at Friends of Animals in Denver, is among the great joys of my life. (Her lovely and supportive husband, who was imprisoned in East Germany for three years, at the age of eighteen, for putting up one political poster criticizing Communism, has

shown me the perspective of an immigrant, one who loves the United States, with its freedoms and its tradition of welcome and inclusion.)

Academics can be too detached from human realities to do good work about the texture of human life. That's a risk inherent in academic freedom and tenure, wonderful institutions that did not protect philosophers of most earlier eras. My own commitments and efforts have always led me to want to restore to philosophy the wide set of concerns that it had in the days of the Greeks and Romans: concerns with the emotions and the struggle for flourishing lives in troubled times; with love and friendship; with the human life span (including aging, so well studied by Cicero); with the hope for a just world. I've had a lot of partners in this search for a human philosophy (and several superb mentors, including Stanley Cavell, Hilary Putnam, and Bernard Williams). But I'm hoping that my own history, both in its unearned privileges and in its awareness of inequalities, has helped my search as well.

Maybe if I had been able to hug my friends, that night in November 2016, I would not have embarked on this book project, or not right then. But once I started down this path, my friends have been crucial sources of support, understanding, skeptical challenges, and useful further suggestions. Deference is poison to intellectual work, and I am so lucky that my colleagues and friends are far from deferential. But there is one above others whose skeptical challenges, provocative insights, cynical scoffing at all emotions, and unwavering support and friendship make me enjoy my life and work more and (I hope) do the work better. So I dedicate this book to Saul Levmore.

THE MONARCHY *OF* FEAR

1

INTRODUCTION

ere's a lot of fear around in the US today, and this fear s often mingled with anger, blame, and envy. Fear all oo often blocks rational deliberation, poisons hope, and impedes constructive cooperation for a better future.

What is today's fear about? Many Americans feel themselves powerless, out of control of their own lives. They fear for their own future and that of their loved ones. They fear that the American Dream—that hope that your children will flourish and do even better than you have done—has died, and everything has slipped away from them. These feelings have their basis in real problems: among others, income stagnation in the lower middle class, alarming declines in the health and longevity of members of this group, especially men, and the escalating costs of higher education at the very time that

a college degree is increasingly required for employment. But real problems are difficult to solve, and their solution takes long, hard study and cooperative work toward an uncertain future. It can consequently seem all too attractive to convert that sense of panic and impotence into blame and the "othering" of outsider groups such as immigrants, racial minorities, and women. "They" have taken our jobs. Or: wealthy elites have stolen our country.

The problems that globalization and automation create for working-class Americans are real, deep, and seemingly intractable. Rather than face those difficulties and uncertainties, people who sense their living standard declining can instead grasp after villains, and a fantasy takes shape: if "we" can somehow keep "them" out (build a wall) or keep them in "their place" (in subservient positions), "we" can regain our pride and, for men, their masculinity. Fear leads, then, to aggressive "othering" strategies rather than to useful analysis.

At the same time, fear also runs rampant among people on the "left," who seek greater social and economic equality and the vigorous protection of hard-won rights for women and minorities. Many people who were dismayed by the election are reacting as if the end of the world is at hand. A majority of my students, many acquaintances, many colleagues, feel and say, often with anguish, that our democracy is on the verge of collapse, that the new administration is unprecedented in its willingness to cater to racism, misogyny, and homophobia. They fear, especially, for the possible collapse of democratic freedoms—of speech, travel, association, press. My younger students, especially, think that the America they know and

love is about to disappear. Rather than analyze matters soberly and listen to the other side, trying to sort things through, they often demonize an entire half of the American electorate, portraying them as monsters, enemies of everything good. As in the book of Revelation, these are the last days, when a righteous remnant must contend against Satanic forces.

We all need, first, to take a deep breath and recall our history. When I was a little girl, African Americans were being lynched in the South. Communists were losing their jobs. Women were just barely beginning to enter prestigious universities and the work force, and sexual harassment was a ubiquitous offense that had no laws to deter it. Jews could not win partnerships in major law firms. Gays and lesbians, criminals under law, were almost always in the closet. People with disabilities had no rights to public space and public education. Transgender was a category that had, as yet, no name. America was far from beautiful.

These facts tell us two things my students need to know. First, the America for which they are nostalgic never existed, not fully; it was a work in progress, a set of dynamic aspirations put in motion by tough work, cooperation, hope, and solidarity over a long period of time. A just and inclusive America never was and is not yet a fully achieved reality. Second, this present moment may look like backsliding from our march toward human equality, but it is not the apocalypse, and it is actually a time when hope and work can accomplish a great deal of good. On both left and right, panic doesn't just exaggerate our dangers, it also makes our moment much more dangerous than it would otherwise be, more likely to lead to genuine disasters.

It's like a bad marriage, in which fear, suspicion, and blame displace careful thought about what the real problems are and how to resolve them. Instead, those emotions, taking over, become their own problem and prevent constructive work, hope, listening, and cooperation.

When people are afraid of one another and of an unknown future, fear easily gives rise to scapegoating, to fantasies of payback, and to poisonous envy of the fortunate (whether those victorious in the election or those dominant socially and economically). We all remember FDR's statement that "we have nothing to fear but fear itself." We recently heard departing President Obama say, "Democracy can buckle when we give in to fear." Roosevelt was wrong if we take his words literally: although we had reason to fear fear, we certainly had many other things to fear in his time, such as Nazism, hunger, and social conflict. Fear of those evils was rational, and to that extent we should not fear our fear, though we should always examine it. But Obama's more precise and modest statement is surely right: giving way to fear, which means drifting with its currents, refusing skeptical examination, is surely dangerous. We need to think hard about fear and where fear is leading us. After taking a deep breath we all need to understand ourselves as well as we can, using that moment of detachment to figure out where fear and related emotions come from and where they are leading us.

But you might not be convinced, so far, that fear is really a deep problem for democratic self-government. Let me, then,

imagine a little dialogue between me and a defender of fear, whom I'll call DF.

DF: But surely, we don't want to extinguish fear. Without fear we'd all be dead. Fear is useful, propelling us into life-saving action.

MN: Of course, you are right there. But fear has a strong tendency to get ahead of us, propelling us into selfish, heedless, and antisocial actions. I'll try to show you that this tendency comes from the evolutionary history and psychological structure of that emotion. More than other emotions, fear needs careful scrutiny and containment if it is not to turn poisonous.

DF: I'll need to be convinced. But I also want to know right now why you say that fear is particularly dangerous to democratic self-government. Surely democracies are often well advised to consult fear in thinking of how to structure laws and institutions. Isn't our defense establishment a sensible response to the legitimate fear of foreign domination? And what about our Constitution? Weren't the Framers guided by fear when they wrote the Bill of Rights? After all, they wrote down all the things that the British had violated or taken from them: their fear that similar things would happen in the new nation gave good, not bad, guidance to democracy.

MN: It would be stupid to deny that fear often gives good guidance. Fear, after all, is part of our evolutionary equipment for survival. But your examples involve fear filtered by

careful and extended public deliberation. You've omitted hasty and ill-justified military campaigns. You've omitted cases where rights were unequally bestowed, or privileges hastily curtailed, as a result of popular fear. We have a habit of scapegoating unpopular people in times of national stress, and abridging their rights in ways that later seem completely misguided. Eugene Debs was thrown in jail for peaceful speeches opposing US involvement in World War I. Loyal and peaceful Japanese Americans were interned in camps. These are cases where fear not only did not lead in the direction of constitutional rights, but actually abridged rights that were established, and the same climate of fear prevented even our courts from seeing this at the time. Fear has a way of running ahead of careful thought. It's that stampede to hasty action, prompted by insecurity, that I view with great skepticism. Fear of that sort undermines fraternity, poisons cooperation, and makes us do things we're deeply ashamed of later.

DF: Once again, I await your arguments! You've persuaded me that there's a problem, but I don't yet see how large it is, or what its solution might be. But here's another thing you must try to clarify for me. You use the title "the monarchy of fear." And you keep saying that fear poses a special problem for democratic self-government. What I don't get is the particular connection you seem to be tracing between fear and a threat to *democracy*. To the extent that fear is a problem in society, doesn't it threaten all forms of government equally?

MN: Actually, no. In an absolute monarchy, the monarch, of course, can't be excessively fearful, although he or she had better not be excessively rash either. But monarchs feed on fear from below. Fear of the monarch's punishment ensures compliance. And fear of outside threats ensures voluntary servitude: fearful people want protection and care. They turn to a strong absolute ruler in search of care. In a democracy, by contrast, we must look one another in the eye as equals, and this means that a horizontal trust must connect citizens. Trust is not just reliance. Slaves can rely on a master's brutal behavior, but of course they do not trust the master. Trust means being willing to be exposed, to allow your own future to lie in the hands of your fellow citizens. Absolute monarchs don't need or want trust.

Think about a marriage. In an old-style marriage, in which the male head of household was like a monarch, there was no need for trust. Spouse and children just had to obey. But the marriages to which people typically aspire these days are more balanced, requiring genuine vulnerability, reciprocity, and trust on both sides. And trust is undermined by fear. To the extent that I see you as a threat to my life and my goals, I will protect myself against you, and I will be inclined to strategize, even dissemble, rather than trusting.

So too in politics. That refusal of trust is happening all over the country now. My students don't trust anyone who voted for Trump, and they view such people as like a hostile force, "deplorables" at best, fascists at worst. Many Trump supporters return the compliment, seeing

students and universities as subversive enemies of "real people."

And here's another side to the connection. When people feel fearful and powerless, they grasp after control. They can't stand to wait to see how things play out, they need to make other people do what they want them to do. So, when they are not seeking a benign monarch to protect them, they are all too likely to behave monarchically themselves. Later I'll trace this tendency to the way that babies try to make slaves of their caregivers: realizing their own powerlessness, what can they do but scream? In this way too, fear erodes the sort of equal give and take, the reciprocity, that is needed if democracies are to survive. And it leads to retributive anger, which divides when what is most needed is a constructive and cooperative approach to an uncertain future.

DF: You mentioned anger. This makes me ask another question: why this emphasis on fear? Aren't there many emotions that threaten democracy? What about anger, in fact? Shouldn't we worry about that emotion even more than about fear, given its aggressive tendencies? Isn't it a sense of being treated unfairly that makes many Americans strike out at others? People also often think of envy as a major threat to democracy, fomenting class conflict. Finally, there's been a lot written about the role of disgust in racism and other forms of stigma and discrimination.

MN: You are entirely right there, and the chapters of this book will indeed address these different emotions and their interconnections. But having worked for many years on

each emotion more or less in isolation from others, I've come to realize that my previous strategy obscured some very important causal relations among the emotions. In particular I've come to realize, and I'll try to convince you, that fear is primary, both genetically and causally, and that it is because of infection by fear that the three other emotions you named turn toxic and threaten democracy. Yes, sure, people strike back out of a sense of unfairness. But what is that exactly? Where does it come from? Why do people feel this way, and under what conditions does blame become politically toxic? These are the sorts of questions that we need to ask about each emotion, and I believe that they all lead back to fear and life-insecurity.

DF: But why all this fuss about emotions? Surely the big problems in American society are structural, and we need structural solutions, which can be implemented through law whether people feel good about them or not. We don't have to wait for people to become better, or more self-aware, in order to fix the things that need fixing, and focusing on emotions can even distract us from the structural work that needs to be done.

MN: I totally agree that structures and laws are crucial. I have views about those issues, which will emerge. But laws can't be enacted, or sustained, without the hearts and minds of people. In a monarchy, that is not the case, and all the monarch needs is enough fear to produce obedience. In a democracy we need much more: love of the good, hope for the future, a determination to combat the

corrosive forces of hatred, disgust, and rage—all fed, I claim, by fear.

DF is not satisfied, and should not be, since only assertions have been offered so far, not argument or analysis. Still, DF should by now have a general sense of where my argument is heading. The problems of our time—economic, social, security-related—are complicated, resisting easy solutions. We hardly know where work is going or what it is likely to look like over the next few decades. The rising costs of health care also pose incredibly difficult challenges for any party or leader. Higher education, increasingly crucial for stable employment, is getting more and more out of reach for many of our citizens. The confusing politics of the Middle East and the Far East need to be understood by all Americans but resist easy analysis. Thinking is hard, fear and blame are easy.

DF might, though, have a more fundamental question: Why should we turn to a philosopher at all, at this time of crisis? What is philosophy all about, and how can it help us?

Philosophy means many things in many different historical traditions, but for me philosophy is not about authoritative pronouncements. It is not about one person claiming to be deeper than others or making allegedly wise assertions. It 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.

Socrates questioned lots of people in the Athenian democracy. He found that all had the capacity for understanding and self-understanding. (Plato dramatizes this by showing Socrates questioning an illiterate and oppressed slave boy, and, suitably prompted, the boy comes up with a sophisticated geometrical proof.) Philosophical questioning assumes that basic capacity, but it also shows that most of us neglect its cultivation: people (including, as Socrates found, military leaders, cultural authorities, and politicians) don't really sort out what they think, and they rush to action on the basis of half-baked, frequently inconsistent, ideas. In that way, philosophy invites dialogue and respects the listener. Unlike the overconfident citizens that Socrates questioned (Euthyphro, Critias, Meletus), the philosophical speaker is humble and exposed: his or her position is transparent and thus vulnerable to criticism. (His or her, since Socrates said he'd like to question women, if only in the afterlife, and Plato actually taught women in his school!)

Socrates was right to say that his method was closely linked to the goals of democratic self-government, in which each person's thought matters, and to insist that it made a very valuable contribution to life in a democracy, improving the quality of public deliberation. He said he was like a gadfly on the back of the democracy, which he compared to a "noble but sluggish horse": the sting of philosophical questioning was supposed to wake democracy up so that it could conduct its business better.

This is not a book of public policy, or of economic analysis, crucial though both of these disciplines are to solving our

problems. It is more general, and more introspective. It aims at a better understanding of some of the forces that move us, and to that extent it offers general directions for action. But understanding is its primary goal. Understanding is always practical, since without it action is bound to be unfocused and ad hoc.

Philosophers talk about many topics that have relevance to democracy. My own work, like a lot of philosophical work in the past few decades, has discussed political institutions and laws, making general arguments about what justice is and what basic rights or entitlements all citizens have. I'll allude to some of those ideas about human empowerment and "human capabilities" in my chapters on preventing envy and constructing hope, suggesting that they may give us help as we move forward, but this won't be the primary focus of this book.

The other half of my career has focused on the nature of the emotions and their role in our search for the good life. Following a long tradition stretching (in Western philosophy) from Plato on through modern thinkers such as Adam Smith and John Rawls, I have argued (drawing on psychology and psychoanalytic thought as well as philosophy) that emotions have an important role to play in a decent political society. 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 social norms. That is good news, since it means that we have considerable room to shape the emotions of our own political culture. It is also bad news—for the lazy and uninquisitive: it means that we need to inquire into the nature of fear, hatred, anger, disgust, hope, and

love, thinking about how we might shape them so that they will support good democratic aspirations, rather than blocking or eroding them. We can't avoid accountability by saying of our own hatred or excessive fear, "Sorry, that's just how people are." No, there is nothing inevitable or "natural" about racial hatred, fear of immigrants, a passion to subordinate women, or disgust at the bodies of people with disabilities. We did this, all of us, and we can, and must undo it.

In short, we need to know ourselves and take responsibility for ourselves. It is incumbent on a decent society to give attention to how, for example, group hatred can be minimized by social efforts and institutional design. Even such a straightforward policy choice as the choice to mainstream children with disabilities in "normal" classrooms has evident consequences for patterns of fear and aggression. We need to study the issue—in this case and in many others—and then, on the basis of what we understand, to choose policies that produce hope, love, and cooperation, avoiding those that feed hatred and disgust. Sometimes we can only produce better behavior, while hatred continues to simmer beneath the surface. Sometimes, however, we can actually alter how people see one another and feel about one another—as mainstreaming kids with disabilities surely does. (It helps to start young.)

Philosophy doesn't all by itself dictate very many concrete policy choices, because these must be contextual, the fruit of a partnership between philosophy, history, political science, economics, law, and sociology. But it gives us a sense of who we are, what problems lie in our path, and where we should be heading. And as I said, its methods, involving equal

participation, respect, and reciprocity, also model some important aspects of where we should be going. It is a part of the study of our political moment, not the whole, but it can help us all to lead the "examined life."

Philosophy, as I've said, is a gentle discipline. It approaches people with respect for their full humanity, and is in that sense a form of love. It may frequently state unequivocally, "This is wrong. This is not the way to live." But it does so without banishing people from the room, condemning wrong beliefs and bad actions, but treating people, always, with attention and respect. I believe that it is not too bold to link the philosophical approach to America's problems with the methodology of nonviolent political change, as exemplified in the life and work of Martin Luther King Jr. Some approaches to political change are violent, angry, and contemptuous of the opponent. King (who will be an important figure in this book) insisted on an attitude to others that he called Love, even when what he was doing was to make an extremely vigorous protest against unjust conditions. Still, he said, we must approach opponents not with anger but with love. He always immediately stressed that it was not romantic love, and it did not even require us to like the people. The Love he demanded was a combination of respect for humanity with good will and hope: we treat people as people who will listen and think, and who ultimately may join with us in building something beautiful. Philosophy, as I shall practice it here, shares that project and that hope.

My argument begins, not surprisingly, with fear, showing how it is both chronologically and causally primary, getting its

teeth into us very early and then coloring the rest of our lives to a greater or lesser degree. This analysis already shows some strategies for containing fear and rendering it less poisonous, although it also concludes that we can't get rid of its dangers entirely.

I then consider three emotions that operate to some extent independently of fear in our private and public lives, but that become especially toxic when infused by fear: anger, disgust, and envy. I first analyze each of them and then show their bad effects in democratic political life.

I then devote a separate chapter to negative political emotions directed at women, which have been extremely prominent in our recent political discourse. I analyze the relationship between sexism (which I define as a set of views asserting that women are inferior to men) and misogyny (which I define as an enforcement strategy, a type of virulent hatred and hatred-behavior aimed at keeping women "in their place"). I argue that misogyny, which usually rests on sexist convictions but need not, is typically a toxic brew of punitive anger, bodily disgust (not incompatible with sexual desire), and envy at women's increasing competitive success.

Finally, I turn—or return, since each chapter has included constructive suggestions for containing or overcoming the damaging aspects of each emotion—to hope, love, and work. I am guardedly optimistic about our future, and a philosophical analysis of hope suggests strategies for nourishing hope, faith, and love of humanity, just when it seems especially difficult to believe that these good emotions might possibly guide us.

Throughout, although I do use some recent political

examples to underscore my points, my aim is to invite reflection, introspection, and critical argument. To that end, I more often use historical examples—especially from ancient Greece and Rome, where I have a long background of scholarship. As I've found in teaching, we often think better, and relate to one another better, when we take a step back from the daily, where our immediate fears and wishes are likely to be at stake.

2

FEAR. EARLY AND POWERFUL

u are lying on your back in the dark. Wet. Cold. [unger and thirst throb and throb. They are you, and ɔu are nothing but pain. You try to scream, and you somehow make a sound come out—but nothing happens. You try, or start to try, to move, to go somewhere, anywhere, out of this agony. But your limbs won't move. You can't make them do anything but wave uselessly in the air. You see, you hear, you feel. But you can't move or act. You are completely, simply, helpless.

This is the stuff of nightmare. Most of us have nightmares of helplessness, in which we try to run away from some terrible danger, but our legs won't move, or we try to scream but no sound comes out, or nobody hears it. In those nightmares we feel a terrible fear of the bad people or monsters who are

pursuing us, but an even greater fear, and maybe also hatred, of our own powerlessness.

But this horror story is also the unremarkable daily life of every human baby. Calves, colts, baby elephants, puppies, giraffes, dolphins—all other animals learn to move very quickly, more or less right after birth. If they can't stand upright, nurse, and, very soon, walk or swim alongside the mother, using their own bodies to get the food that they need, they are severely defective, and they will almost certainly die. Helplessness means the end. Human beings alone are helpless for a very long time, and human beings alone survive that helpless condition. As the first-century BCE Roman poet Lucretius, one of my favorite guiding spirits in thinking about emotions, puts it, the baby

> like a sailor cast forth from the fierce waves, lies naked on the ground, unable to speak, in need of every sort of help to stay alive, when first nature casts it forth with birth contractions from its mother's womb into the shores of light. And it fills the whole place with mournful weeping, as is fitting for one to whom such trouble remains in life.(5.222–7)[1]

[1]Titus Lucretius Carus lived from around 99 to 55 BCE, thus during the beginning of the long decline of the Roman Republic into tyranny. A disciple of the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341–270 BCE), he created a six-book epic poem in dactylic hexameters to disseminate Epicurus's teachings about fear, aggression, and the structure of the universe. Since he had access to more of Epicurus's writing than we do, it is difficult to say how much he innovated, but certainly all of the brilliant poetic imagery and at least some of the philosophy (especially portions reconciling Epicureanism with Roman values) is his own. There are many good translations. In this book I make my own, rather flat-footed and literal, but my favorite to

Other animals, he drily remarks, have no need of rattles or baby talk; they don't need different clothing for different seasons. They don't need to arm themselves, they don't need high city walls. After all, the earth and nature herself provide everything that any other animal needs.

We come into a world that we are not ready to cope with. (And in a crucial sense we never really are.) Terribly soft and vulnerable, we lie there helpless, waiting for others to provide what we need—food, comfort, and reassurance. After the soothing undulations of life in the womb, its automatic nourishment and unproblematic excretion, there is suddenly a violent separateness, the slap of the cold air, and a painful solitary powerlessness. The discrepancy between the very slow physical development of the human infant and its rapid cognitive development is in many respects a nightmare story.[2] You see what you need, but you can't move to get it. You feel pain, but you cannot remove it. Later nightmares no doubt recall this early torment. Neurological research on fear concludes that the scars of early fright stimuli endure, resisting change.[3]

And you really are aware of what is happening to you.[4] By

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capture the spirit of the poetry is that of Rolfe Humphries (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

[2]A brilliant re-creation, based in detail on what we now know from research, is psychologist Daniel Stern's *Diary of a Baby* (New York: Basic Books, 1990); a more prosaic version is in his *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (New York: Basic Books, 1985).

[3]See discussion of LeDoux below.

[4]My views therefore reject Freud's simple hedonism, which does not attribute to infants much in the way of awareness of objects; here, as in other work, I follow the "object-relations" school of thinkers such as W. R. D.


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So instead of a trembling, we may have a feeling of a "large mountain sitting on our chest." Or we have frenetic avoidance behavior, restless activity that seems aimed at nothing but self-distraction. Think of air travel. Some people have a conscious fear of flying. Many more of us, however, push that fear to the back of our minds but still feel an inner weight or tension, and a more than usual need to distract ourselves with email, or food, or aimless conversation. We may be simply more irritable than usual, or less able to concentrate.

Finally, scientists tend, these days, to agree with Aristotle, who was a great biologist and who theorized a lot about the emotions of animals: all animals, not just humans, feel fear of something bad out there that seems likely to harm them.[10] It's generally believed that fear evolved because of its role in keeping animals alive. But if we are to talk about the way fear feels to a rat, what should we say it feels like? We can be sure that animals have rich subjective experience, but it would be very rash to pretend to know what they feel.

Fear does involve feelings, then, but it's hard to define fear in terms of any particular type of feeling. We are on safer ground when we stick to the sort of awareness of objects as good or bad that seems an unavoidably central part of fear, and necessary to explain animal behavior. So, let's by all means say that the subjective side of fear is important, and let's call poets and novelists to our aid in describing its many types and instances. But let's focus, for now, on the awareness of objects that holds all the cases together.

[10]Aristotle, *Historia Animalium*, many references throughout.


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