The recent upsurge in interest in the role of emotions in politics is not a coincidence, but linked to our current political situation: We have extreme nationalism in India, authoritarians like Erdoğan and Orbán, as well popular far right political parties like the French National Front in Europe, and right-wing populists[1] like Trump and Bolsonaro in power in the US and Brazil. According to the sociologist Cas Mudde in his book *The Far Right Today* there is something new in this situation compared to a few decades ago: During most of the postwar era, the far right was seen as a "normal pathology" of western democracy, that is, as essentially a pre-modern fringe phenomenon, ideologically unconnected to modern democracy, and supported by just a small minority of the population (Mudde, 2019, 106-107).

The current emotional climate and the populist far right

Today's situation is different according to Mudde; the far right is no longer a "normal pathology" but a "pathological normalcy", in that the far right's talking points about immigrants and minorities to a large degree have been mainstreamed, and mainstream values – support for the nation-state and law-and-order policies– have become radicalized. Drawing on international surveys, Mudde claims that that large part of the population hold a combination of authoritarian, nativist, and populist attitudes, combined with anti-establishment sentiments. Hence, the populist far right differs from the mainstream in *degree* rather than kind; "the populist radical right does not stand for a fundamentally different world than the political mainstream; rather it takes mainstream ideas and values to an illiberal extreme." (Mudde, 2019,170-171).

Angry White Men?

One emotion that has been at the forefront of the public debate about the current shift in politics is *anger*. During the presidential race, Trump told CNN: "I'm angry, and a lot of other people are angry, too, at how incompetently our country is being run." and continued: "As far as I am concerned, anger is okay. Anger and energy is what this country needs."

While most thought that Trump would soon be out of the race, a psychology professor at the University of Massachusetts who had studied anger as a social phenomenon is reported to have commented the following: “He understands anger,” “and it’s going to make voters feel *wonderful*.” [2]

The American sociologist Michael Kimmel also links the rise of the populist far right to the anger of a specific demographic, which he explores in *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era*. Based on interviews with members of the American far and extreme right, Kimmel suggests that ”Populism is not a theory, an ideology; it’s an emotion. And the emotion is righteous indignation that the government is screwing ’us.’”[3] (Kimmel 2017, xi.). A rather obvious response is to link this anger to the huge increase in economic inequality in the last decades – both in the west and globally – and as a reaction to an out-of-touch political establishment. This is the view of for example Thomas Piketty who in in *The Guardian* explained Trumps victory as “primarily due to the explosion in economic and geographic inequality in the United States over several decades and the inability of successive governments to deal with this”.[4] According to Kimmel, however, it is not the poorest, but white men from the *downwardly mobile* middle and lower middle class who form the backbone of the far right, and this also holds for the extreme right (i.e. neo-Nazis and white supremacists).[5] Kimmel found that the anger of his informants was driven by a sense of having been duped, that a “tacit contract” had been broken: the understanding that the government was ”for the people” and that if they worked hard they could support their families and retain their self-respect.[6]

Kimmel stresses that while *economic* inequality has risen dramatically in the US (”We are more unequal economically than at any time since the Gilded Age”) at the same time as society has become more equal when it comes to race and gender, and these two different processes have somehow fused in the minds of these white men who feel anything even remotely approaching equality as a catastrophic loss. (Kimmel 2017, xi, 281). In Kimmel’s view, it is thus precisely the very *belief* in the meritocracy of ”The American Dream”, and a deep and abiding faith in America, its institutions and its ideals that is the ”tragic flaw” of the angry white men: A rhetoric of masculinity combined with racism, nativism, anti-Semitism and antifeminism serve to resolve the tensions in their worldview and enable them to fix blame for their suffering. They are firm believers in capitalism, the free market and free enterprise but hate corporations, patriots who love America but hate its government. In

short, the story Kimmel gives us in *Angry White Men* is about the *misdirected* anger of a declassed group: ”America’s angry white men are right to be angry, but they are delivering their mail to the wrong address. That mail is now a letter bomb, and it will take a nation to defuse it.” (Kimmel, 2017, xiv). According to Kimmel, the anger of lower middle-class white men has a specific character; it is a fusion of two sentiments – entitlement and a sense of victimization, what he terms “aggrieved entitlement”. They believe that they are entitled to benefits and a status that have been taken away from them, and it is this sense of entitlement (i.e. their whiteness and maleness) which leads them to identify – socially and politically – with those above, even when they have economically joined the ranks of those who have historically been below them.[7] This aggrieved entitlement gives rise to a sense of *lost masculinity:*

As they saw it, they’d lost some words that had real meaning to them: honor, integrity, dignity. They’d lost their autonomy, their sense of themselves as “somebody.” And, as I heard them say it, they’d lost their sense of themselves as men. Real men. Men who built this country and who, in their eyes, are this country. (Kimmel 2017, x)

Kimmel does not only stress economic motives for the anger of a downward moving middle class, but explicitly links “aggrieved entitlement” to a traditional notion of masculinity which equals manhood with power and domination. These men feel powerless *but still entitled*; they have a strong sense that they *ought not* feel this way, and that fuels anger. As he phrases it: ”they are humiliated—and that humiliation is the source of their rage” (Kimmel 2017, xi). The anger that stems from ”aggrieved entitlement” can mobilize politically – but only in a nostalgic fashion, as attempts to restore that which one feels has been lost. (Kimmel 2017, 24). *Angry White Men* ends on a note of cautious optimism; the angry white men are a rearguard in a lost fight, since the clock cannot be turned back neither on women’s liberation nor racial equality. As Kimmel sees it, the anger’s *address* is women and racial minorities, but the ”engine” of the rage is the growing chasm between rich and poor, and the sinking middle class. Kimmel’s ”remedies” are therefore classical social democratic politics of solidarity with one’s economic class, unions, social safety nets, and New Deal.

Age of anger?

A more global – as well as more pessimistic – perspective is offered by Pankaj Mishra in *Age of Anger: A History of the Present*. Mishra describes his project as an exploration of a ”particular climate of ideas, a structure of feeling, and cognitive disposition from the age of Rousseau to our own age of anger.” (Mishra 2017, 28-29). His starting point is the paradox that while we in today’s global market are more literate, interconnected, healthy and prosperous than any other time in history, we still find ourselves in what he call ”an age of anger”, with authoritarian leaders manipulating the discontent of furious majorities: ”The world at large –from the United States to India – manifests a fierce politics of identity built on historical injuries and fear of internal and external enemies.” (Mishra 2017, 170). Mishra’s intuition (which he, as we shall see, shares with Martha Nussbaum) is that liberal political theory has gravely underestimated the importance of emotions in politics and that the traditional liberal model of the rational citizen – which focused on material progress alone – is fundamentally *wrong*; we are in fact less motivated by a rational pursuit of our own interests than by the *fear* of loosing honor, dignity and status, the *distrust* of change and the appeal of stability and familiarity, as well as negative emotions such as envy and ressentment: ”Those who perceive themselves as left behind by or humiliated by a selfish conspiratorial minority can be susceptible to political seducers from any point on the ideological spectrum, for they are not driven by material inequality alone.” (Mishra, 2017, 114).

Mishra attempts to cast light on a wide range of phenomena from identitarian movements to ISIS and Hindu nationalism by comparing them to nationalism, proto-fascism and nihilism in 19th century Europe through a reading of early modern critics of the Enlightenment, especially Rousseau. In Rousseau (”history’s greatest militant lowbrow”) he sees one of the first to criticize the belief that the interplay of individual interests could produce harmony and civilization; on the contrary, due to our ”amour propre” – a kind of mimetic self-love that always compares oneself to others and seek status and recognition from them – a commercial society will end in envy and hatred (both of ourselves and others). A society based on competition, emulation and the power of money, might promise progress, but is psychologically debilitating for its citizens. (Mishra 2017,113). His main point is that the violent reaction to modernism by those left behind, those who do not feel that they benefit from the promise of progress, prosperity, stability and individual freedom, are *not* some atavistic remnants of the pre-modern, but rather intimately linked to effects of the modernization-process itself.

The global situation today is thus read as a repetition of the European backlash to the modernization process in the nineteenth and early twentieth-century. This reaction is furthermore not a case of simple opposition between modern and traditional but rather what he with a psychoanalytical twist calls ”mimetic desire”; those gripped by resentment will mimic the very groups they claim to oppose: ”The key to mimic man’s behavior lies not in any clash of opposed civilizations, but, on the contrary, in irresistible mimetic desire: the logic of fascination, emulation and righteous self-assertion that binds the rivals inseparably. It lies in resentment, the tormented mirror games in which the West as well as its ostensible enemies and indeed all inhabitants of the modern world are trapped.” (Mishra 2017, 161). On the one hand, this story is that of “latecomers” to the globalized modernity, but on the other, it is about inherent contradictions in the modern project itself: Modernization dismantles premodern social structures, beliefs and communities, and urbanization uproots masses of people. While many traditional structures was intensely unequal and deeply unfair, modern society *promises equality* while its economic system generates inequality:

The ideals of modern democracy – the equality of social conditions and individual empowerment – have never been more popular. But they have become more and more difficult, if not impossible, to actually realize in the grotesquely unequal societies created by our brand of globalized capitalism. (Mishra 2017, 28-29).

In short: The rise of inequality *in a world that believes in equality* breeds *resentment*: ”… an intense mix of envy and sense of humiliation and powerlessness, resentment, as it lingers and deepens, poisons civil society and undermines political liberty, and is presently making for a global turn to authoritarianism and toxic forms of chauvinism.” (Mishra 2017,14). Unlike righteous anger, resentment is an inhibited and impotent emotion which lacks proper expression, a kind of constant simmering that eventually might build up to an explosion. Ressentiment is thus according to Mishra a distinctly modern phenomenon ”inherent in the structure of societies where formal equality between individuals coexists with massive differences in power, education, status and property ownership.” (Mishra 2017, 336). What held liberal societies together, Mishra claims was the promise of future progress and equality, which they have failed to deliver. When it comes to what to do in our age of anger, Mishra does not give us any answers, but warns us that the neglect of emotions in politics is dangerous, because if we do not acknowledge our need for belonging and identity, this will

only be offered by the extreme right in the form of exclusion and persecution of ”the Others”. Not just inequality, but also a lack of ”spiritual substance” in society is part of the problem, and at the end of his book Mishra refers to Pope Francis and his call for compassion with the poor as an important and hopeful political figure, while in other settings he has argued that socialism must be revived as an ethical project.[8]

Marta Nussbaum on fostering a political culture of compassion

Martha Nussbaum attempts to rectify this lack of focus on the emotions in liberal political theory that Mishra criticizes in *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice*. We do not only need principles, she claims, we should also think of strategies to actively employ certain kinds of emotions in order to create a more just, redistributive and inclusive society. It is both mistaken and dangerous to suppose that only fascist or aggressive societies are intensely emotional and that only such societies need to focus on the cultivation of emotions: “All political principles, the good as well as the bad, need emotional support to ensure their stability over time, and all decent societies need to guard against division and hierarchy by cultivating appropriate sentiments of sympathy and love” (Nussbaum 2013, 2–3).

Nussbaum’s vision is a liberal society, that is, one in which there is an overlapping consensus about fundamental principles and constitutional ideals without a common comprehensive view of ”the good life”. So the challenge is how to foster political emotions through leadership, education, government policy and culture without impinging on liberal principles such as pluralism and personal autonomy. Rather than following the idea of civic religion from Rousseau and Comte, she follows a thread through Mozart (sic!) Mill and Tagore with emphasis on aesthetic education: public artworks, monuments, parks, festivals and celebrations, humor and comedy, songs, symbols, official films and photographs, but also the rhetoric of politicians, public education, and even the public role of sports. Liberal democracies *should* cultivate certain emotions, Nussbaum claims, including love of country in the form of patriotism, although not in a form that romanticizes one’s own country, but loves it – warts and all. She argues that patriotism helps people ”think larger thoughts and recommit themselves to a larger common good” (Nussbaum 2013, 3).

Worthy projects require effort and sacrifice, and among such worthy causes Nussbaum

mentions national defense, economic redistribution, inclusion of previously excluded or marginalized groups and protection of the environment. I am not going to discuss patriotism and its problems here, but only mention that while a form of patriotism might function "progressively" in the US (She refers here to Luther King's speeches and Roosevelt's New Deal) playing up patriotism would probably only exacerbate xenophobia in European nation states. Nussbaum defends patriotism for liberal societies generally, however, not merely as a tool for a specific society. However, as her own example of Finland shows, while a country with a strong sense of interconnection between citizens and wide support for social security, can also be very reluctant to take in refugees, and the normalization of far right nativism that Mudde talks about has also happened in countries with more social cohesion and far better social security than the US.

According to Nussbaum, the most promising, "positive and helpful" emotion for establishing "decent" societies and political systems is *compassion***,** and she envisions the good society as one where we cultivate a "public culture of compassion" (Nussbaum 2013,157). An interesting point to notice here is that while compassion also was the prime virtue for Rousseau, his "Spartan" vision of the good society was extremely "masculine", and its emotions (shame, honor etc.) as Nussbaum points out, resembled those of the ancién regime. Nussbaum's "love and compassion" offers an alternative, more "feminine" register of positive political emotions as well as discouraging emotions such as fear, envy, shame, and disgust that can erode support for what she deems good political causes.

Nussbaum defines compassion as "a painful emotion directed at the serious suffering of another creature" and distinguishes it from empathy – the ability to imagine the situation of the other, taking the other's perspective (Nussbaum 2013,142). For Nussbaum, compassion is not only a private emotion but also a collective one, and she claims that although our compassion is often partial and narrow, we are able to widen our circle of concern up to the national level – and beyond – through education (ibid). Hence, compassion should be practiced in schools and other institutions with the help of literature and role-play (Nussbaum 2013, 276–279). As sympathetic as I find Nussbaum's vision of a compassionate society (and it is certainly hard to dislike) I would like to problematize this idea of a political culture of compassion and ask if there are some points in Arendt's rather infamous criticism of compassion and pity in *On Revolution* that may cause us to approach this strategy of making society better by fostering "a culture of compassion" with some restraint. [9]

Arendt: Compassion as a-political

Arendt's view of compassion as a visceral basic emotion is comparable to Nussbaum's, but unlike Nussbaum she does not think that compassion could ever be a *public* sentiment. Compassion is being "touched in the flesh" – it is a literal "passion", something we suffer – and hence a direct reaction to individual and concrete suffering that relates to persons in their singularity. (Arendt 2006 b, 80). In compassion, we suffer *with* another person as a response to the suffering one perceives in them, and as such, compassion is limited to a personal connection between individuals. Compassion is therefore essentially an *apolitical* emotion according to Arendt. Like love, it abolishes distance, "the worldly space between men were political matters, the whole realm of human affairs, are located" (Arendt, 2006 b, 76). Political interaction on the other hand, involves a certain distance according to Arendt, because it consists of speech "in which someone talks *to* somebody about something that is of interest to both because it *inter-ests*, it is between them.

This relation is reminiscent of what the Norwegian philosopher Skjervheim calls a "triangular relation" which characterizes a genuine intersubjective dialogue. In a triangular relation, I respond to an utterance by directing my attention to the same subject matter in such a way that we share a common object as participants (Skjervheim, 1996). The alternative relation is that of the spectator, to merely register the other's utterances, or infer his/her motives and thus make the other into my object. According to Arendt, this "triangular" relation is alien to compassion, which is directed only *at* the suffering person. In so far as compassion actually sets out to change the world, it tends to claim swift and even violent action, rather than persuasion, negotiation and compromise, which Arendt sees as the very substance of political life (Arendt 2006b, 77).

A further complication with evoking compassion as a political emotion is what Arendt refers to as "the darkness of the human heart" which she contrasts to the "light" of the public sphere. This notion of "the darkness of the human heart" points to the fact that we are never fully transparent to ourselves. The reason for her skepticism towards emotions in politics is not that the devalues them, but as Degerman points out, that we cannot truly know ourselves, nor fully trust ourselves either, since our emotional life is radically

subjective, ambivalent, conflictual and changeable. (Degerman 2019, 156). Arendt has a radically relational view of selfhood and reality, our very sense of ourselves as "someone" is dependent on our appearing to others through "words and deeds", and our capacity to make and keep promises, which likewise depends on others (Arendt, 1958, 237). Likewise, our sense of the reality and objectivity of the world is provided by the presence of others who see what we see and relate to the same objects. According to Arendt, what does not appear in a common world remains dream-like and without reality.

For us, appearance—something that is being seen and heard by others as well as by ourselves—constitutes reality. Compared with the reality which comes from being seen and heard, even the greatest forces of intimate life—the passions of the heart, the thoughts of the mind, the delights of the senses—lead an uncertain, shadowy kind of existence unless and until they are transformed, deprivatized and deindividualized, as it were, into a shape to fit them for public appearance. (Arendt 1958, 50)

The expression or representation of an emotion transforms something subjective and involuntary – the experienced emotion – into something communicable. What is intersubjectively "real" and objective is therefore not my emotion, but an appearance, it is my *representation* of the emotion that can be seen, heard and evaluated by others. And in the political sphere appearances are all there is (Arendt 1958,179-80, 193). Arendt's contention is that when compassion "goes public" as it where, it stops being an emotion and changes into something else – the *sentiment* of pity; being sorry without being "stricken in the flesh": "Pity, because it is not stricken in the flesh and keeps its sentimental distance, can succeed where compassion always will fail; it can reach out to the multitude and therefore, like solidarity, enter the market-place" (Arendt 2006b, 79).

A *sentiment* is a feeling evoked by and directed at an abstract depersonalized mage of "suffering masses" rather than immediately perceived particular persons (Arendt 2006b, 75, 80), and it is without limits –"boundless"– and leads to an insensitivity to reality, which in the case of the French revolutionaries turned into cruelty: "…it has been the boundlessness of their sentiments that made revolutionaries so curiously insensitive to reality in general and to the reality of persons in particular, whom they felt no compunctions in sacrificing to their 'principles'" (Arendt 2006b, p. 80).

Compassion and the specter of hypocrisy

According to Arendt, Robespierre and the revolutionaries –Inspired by Rousseau– saw compassion as a universal and natural basis for human relations and politics (Arendt 2006b, 71). Their conception of compassion's goodness stemmed from the idea that the subjective experience of compassion was – in itself – good. However since this emotion only exists within "the darkness of an individual's heart", we can never *know* for sure that a person actually harbors this emotion. Of course, there are actions associated with compassion, but it is also a subjective emotional experience that cannot appear to others directly as such. As Degerman points out, "The French revolutionaries developed a veritable repertoire of pity **–** conspicuous crying at public events, calculated simplicity of dress, etc. – to demonstrate their pity to others. They quickly realized, however, that a show of pity could simply mask the absence of feeling within". (Degerman 2019, 166).

Arendt's simple point here is that that words and deeds can never unambiguously *prove* the presence of authentic emotions in the political sphere. If compassion is seen as a political virtue, the impossibility of confirming the authenticity of another person's feelings (and our own for that matter) becomes an insoluble problem since every expression can be seen as potentially hypocritical: "…the search for motives, the demand that everybody display in public his innermost motivation, since it is actually impossible, transforms all actors into hypocrites; the moment the display of motives begins, hypocrisy begins to poison all human relations." (Arendt 2006 b, 88). According to Arendt, the obsession with unmasking appearances in a field where only appearances exist lead Robespierre and his followers to an endless hunt for hypocrites and traitors that transformed Robespierre's dictatorship into the Reign of Terror (Arendt 2006b, 89). While I certainly do not think that Nussbaum's "public culture of compassion" would lead anyone to the guillotine, I would argue that a public culture of compassion faces risks of its own.

The pitfalls of pity

Central for Nussbaum's vision is the idea of *human equality,* that all human beings are worthy of equal respect or regard, just in virtue of their humanity. If we are to believe

Pankaj Mishra however, it is precisely this same belief in equality that breeds resentment; the problem is not that we do not *value* equality sufficiently, but that our societies fail to deliver it. In her article ”The Pitfalls of ‘Love and Kindness’: On the Challenges to Compassion/Pity as a Political Emotion” Anne-Kathrin Weber points to another inherent tension in Nussbaum’s emphasis on compassion/pity and equality. Pity, she argues, involves a ”dual-level hierarchisation” between a) those who are miserable and those who ought to pity them, and b) between the virtuous (those who pity) and those who do not pity. Pity establishes a hierarchy between the subject and the object of pity; with the result that we feel an immediate urge to help others, to rescue them, as Weber puts it: “making politics for them**,** and not with them” (Weber 2018, 56). In other words, pity does not encourage the triangular relation (me-you-our common object) but tends to objectify the ones that are pitied.

Nussbaum suggests that by teaching citizens to love equality, freedom, liberal democratic institutions and other people, we could create a more just society; the hope is, in other words, that we can instill citizens with particular emotions in order to improve our societies. While I have no argument whatsoever with Nussbaum’s view that art and poetry can teach us valuable emotional lessons that might have political relevance, I think that to explicitly cultivate compassion as a political sentiment faces some challenges. One of the worries expressed by Weber is connected to the second hierarchy of pity, namely that an “emotion programme” such as Nussbaum’s “might potentially clash with the pluralistic and diverse (political) interests of each individual” and hence resemble an attempt to inflict a single political “popular will” in the shape of “rules of feeling” onto citizens (Weber 2018, 57). Or to put it a different way: If Müller is correct in diagnosing populism as a particular *moralistic imagination* of politics that sets an (imagined) morally pure and fully united people against corrupt and immoral elites (Müller 2006,19-20) and that populism’s threat to democracy consists in its suppression of pluralism, would not a political culture of compassion only risk to increase the tendency of moralizing political debates? How we frame a political conflict matters; to frame it is moral or cultural terms rather than in terms of economy or a conflict of interests strengthens populism according to Müller, and populists will attempt to moralize political conflicts as much as possible (Müller 2006, 42, 92).

A public culture where emotions such as love and compassion are considered essential

political virtues would certainly give political actors strong incentives to *appear* loving and compassionate notwithstanding how they actually feel. Moreover, such a public culture would also demand strong expressions of these emotions in order for the speaker to appear as *authentically* loving and compassionate. [10] We do not need any punishment for appearing "unloving"– sheer peer-pressure (which Nussbaum also is aware of as a problem) would suffice. A public culture of love and compassion risks being haunted by the old specter of hypocrisy, since, as Arendt reminds us: "…however heartfelt a motive might be, once it is brought out and exposed for public inspection it becomes an object of suspicion rather than insight." (Arendt 2006b, 86). If our emotions, rather than what we want to change or preserve in the world, take center place, *authenticity* of appearance becomes paramount with the result that being emotionally honest can easily trump (pun intended) being factually truthful. As Harry Frankfurt points out in his book *On Bullshit*, the bullshitter is – like the hypocrite – concerned with the impression he makes, but while the hypocrite misrepresents his feelings and character rather than facts, the bullshitter – who simply does not care about the facts– might very well provide a honest representations of himself (Frankfurt, 2005, 67).

As Arendt often reminds us, human affairs are fundamentally unpredictable; since political action always takes place within a 'web of relationships' among plural individuals. This web is itself active and reactive, and new players and new ways of playing the game enter the scene continuously, and what an action finally amounts to in the public sphere, is not under the agent's control (Arendt, 1958, 190). The outcome of an action might be completely different from what we counted on, and we never quite know what we are doing when we act "into the web of interrelationships and mutual dependencies that constitute the field of action" (Arendt 2005, 56). A fairly obvious problem in this context is that if a political culture of compassion is seen as compulsory and mandated "from above" it might just as well backfire and create more resentment towards the progressive social changes that Nussbaum supports. I think this is actually something we see pretty clearly today in American (and internet) debates in which alt-right memes such as "PC-culture", "snowflakery", "victim-culture", "virtue-signaling" and "oppression Olympics" have become common catchphrases. In short, I suspect that institutionalizing compassion only risks deepening resentment, rather than defusing the "letter bomb" described by Kimmel.

Solidarity vs. Pity – The role of principles

Fortunately, Arendt has an alternative to pity – namely the principle of solidarity. While the abstract sentiment of pity tends to lead us to see others as an abstract mass of sufferers, solidarity responds to suffering by deliberately establishing a community of interest with the oppressed and exploited (Arendt 2006b, 79). Solidarity may be aroused by suffering, but not guided by it, and might appear "colder" than love, because it is committed to ideas like the " 'the grandeur of man', or the honor of the human race', or the dignity of man" (ibid.). Solidarity is a *principle*, and thus not the same as an emotion, feeling or inner motivation, it is not located in the "darkness of the human heart" but appears and "shines" in public, that is, it is made manifest *in* the performance of the act itself and does not require people to infer the agent's motive or feelings (Arendt 2006, 88). Political principles vary with different polities and periods in history, and a part from Montesquieu's honor, virtue and fear she mentions freedom, justice, equality – and solidarity (Arendt 2005,195).

A principle is not "in" the subject but "inspire from without" as she comments in 'What is Freedom?' A principle is more general than particular goals, but the goals of an action might be judged in light of its principle. While political action is notoriously unpredictable, even a "failed" action that does not reach its goal can exhibit its principle and thus inspire further action, since the principle of an action can be manifested again and again. (Arendt 2006a, 151). The appeal of principles are also emotional, and Arendt is not as dismissive of emotions as she is often portrayed, and she is quite clear that absence of emotion does not promote rationality: "In order to respond reasonably one must first of all be 'moved', and the opposite of emotional is not 'rational,' whatever that may mean, but either the inability to be moved, usually a pathological phenomenon, or sentimentality which is a perversion of feeling" (Arendt 1972, 161).

Arendt actually shares Mishra and Nussbaum's criticism of the notion of "enlightened self-interest" as the basis for interest in the common good. A public good cannot be equaled with self-interest, however "enlightened" it might be, in that it has a different temporal character; a common good belongs to the *world,* which outlasts the lifespan of the individual (Arendt 1972, 78). The "public good" – the concerns we share as citizens– are and quite frequently antagonistic to whatever we may deem good to ourselves in our private existence.[11] What is central to Arendt is that the common good is a public "thing"– it is

something in-between us that unites and separates us at the same time. Institutions, material structures, artworks and infrastructure are things that make up an objective in-between, that can be seen and approached from different viewpoints. Principles share in this "objective" quality due to their visibility and repeatability, while our inner feelings or attitudes can never be public objects in a similar way.

Arendt's insistence on the separation of the moral and the political is tied to her view that politics is always about the world we share; moral considerations always turns towards the self and our conscience, while political considerations are directed towards the good of the world (Arendt, 2003, 153). Political evils demand political answers, and these must be found in the space in-between, and not within the moral life of the individual. From the perspective of the world, our inner motives (be it anger or compassion) are of little relevance, what matters is that a wrong has been done in the world (Arendt 1972, 62 and 2005, 106). The danger of making emotions explicitly political is that our focus becomes individualized – either by focusing on "our own hearts" or as various form of unmasking, diagnosing or pathologizing the other – rather than being about the world, a situation Arendt compares to the "weirdness" of a spiritual séance:

What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them. The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic séance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible. (Arendt 1958, 53)

Conclusion

When it comes to the question of how Kimmel's "letter bomb" can be defused, answers varies with how the problem is understood – whether it is framed in economic, political, psychological or cultural terms. Is it anger or resentment itself that is the problem, or is it, as Kimmel suggests rather that it has the wrong address? Kimmel, Piketty and Müller all

points to neoliberalism, downward social mobility and inequality as driving the populist right, while others – like Mudde and Norris– see the rise of authoritarian populism as first and foremost an expression of a social and cultural conflict.[12] Müller, who is wary of psychologizing the rise of populism in terms of ”fear”, “anger” and ”resentment” (which he sees as patronizing and condescending) in addition points to political – rather than economical– reasons for the upsurge of populism, namely the weakening of the party system. Populism is strong in places with weak party systems, and where populism claims to represent ”the people” as a whole, oppositional parties precisely represents ”parts” of the people, and hence have an antipopulist meaning (Müller, 2016, p. 79). Müller suggests that a technocratic view of politics has paved the way for populism – in fact, they mirror each other: In a technocratic politics there is only one correct policy, in populism there is only one authentic will of the people– in neither case is there a need for democratic debate.[13]

If the rule of experts has played a part in ushering in authoritarian populism, it is not likely that the threat to liberal democracy that it represents can be solved by experts – if we value our institutions we must engage in them as citizens. The resiliency of institutions, laws and political principles is not something that can be simply decided by politicians or professional policy makers or taught to school children (for example) but depend on citizens’ active engagement. There appears to be a curiously non-conflictual backdrop to the picture Nussbaum paints; I would suspect that organizing for political power (in the form of organized labor for example) would be rather more effective in pushing progressive politics than making the wealthy more compassionate?

Arendt muses in *The Promise of Politics* that the sociological and psychological gaze is profoundly unpolitical in fixing upon *man* rather than the *world*, since we cannot “change the world by changing the people in it” (Arendt 2005, 105-106). Mishra and Nussbaum are undoubtedly right, however, in claiming that the political is not just about rational interests but also always about emotions, and that the liberal tradition’s ”rational subject” is a simplified fiction is even supported by findings in neurology and cognitive science. However, I think there are reasons to be skeptical of singling out specific subjective emotions as *inherently* ”good” or ”bad” for politics independent of context. One would be hard pressed to find anything constructive in Mishras ”ressentment”, but I am not convinced that anger and fear are always ”bad” and compassion always an unadulterated good in political life.[14] ”Negative” emotions like fear and anger can prompt us to political action in order avoid

disasters and correct injustices – like taking to the streets in indignation and solidarity when the principle of justice is violated.[15]

Compassion – being touched by the suffering of others– is undoubtedly a *morally* good emotion, and perhaps even the most essential one –but as I have tried to argue here, if it is always a beneficial *political* sentiment is more dubious. One lesson we can take from Arendt is her insistence that political deliberation and action must be about the *world* and not about our ”hearts”. Referring to Rousseau, Arendt comments: ”while the plight of others aroused his heart, he became involved in his heart rather than in the sufferings of others (…)” (Arendt 2006, 78). Moral considerations tends to be directed towards ourselves, our conscience, emotions and what kind of person we want to be, but this involvement in ”the darkness of our own hearts” can also easily become a kind of entanglement, since we cannot truly know ourselves.

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Endnotes

[1] There has been a lot of discussion on how precisely to define the widely used label ”populism”. I will here use the term in accordance with Jan-Werner Müller who defines populism as containing several interrelated features, all of which must be present: Anti-pluralism, moralization of the political, anti-elitism and exclusion. While not being anything like a unified doctrine, populism has its own ”inner logic; it is always a form of identity politics (although the reverse does not hold) where the populist party, leader or movement identifies as the true representative of an –imagined, and ultimately purely symbolic– homogenous, unified people (in the singular) against a corrupt elite, and where opponens are seen as enemies of ”the people”. The core claim of populism is that ”only some of the people are really the people”. See Müller, *What is Populism?* (2016, p 19-20, 21, 29).

[2] The psychology professor in question was James Averill, and the anecdote is from Charles Duhigg: ”The Real Roots of American Rage–The untold story of how anger became the dominant emotion in our politics and personal lives — and what we can do about it” in *The Atlantic*, January/February 2019.

[3] Kimmel thus has a rather vaguer and much wider notion of populism than Müller, which allows him to classify Bernie Sanders as a left-wing populist, which Müller emphaticly does not.

[4] Thomas Piketty, ”We must rethink globalization, or Trumpism will prevail”, *The Guardian*, Nov, 16, 2016.

[5] The angry right is thus an intersection of race, class and gender; about 80 percent of all the jobs lost in the aftermath of the economic crisis in 2008 in the US were jobs held by men, (Kimmel 2017,15) and the lower middle class; independent farmers, small shopkeepers, craft and highly skilled workers, and small-scale entrepreneurs has been hit hardest by globalization. (ibid., 245).

[6] "They believed that there was a contract between themselves, and guys like them, and the government "of the people" that is supposed to represent us. They believed in the corporations that they worked for, confident in the knowledge that they could support a family, enjoy a secure retirement, and provide for their families. That contract was the stable foundation for several generations of America's working men—an implied but inviolable understanding between businesses and workers, between government and employers. They had kept the faith, fulfilled their part of the bargain. And somehow their share had been snatched away by faceless, feckless hands. They had played by all the rules, only to find the game was rigged from the start." (Kimmel 2017, 202).

[7] "It's not that their path upward is blocked; it's that the downward pressure from above is pushing them downward into the ranks of the marginalized. "They" might deserve to be down there, but "we" do not. Their revolt is, therefore, nostalgic, pessimistic, reactionary." (Kimmel 2017, xiii).

[8] See Mishra 2017, 327, 333 and *H-Diplo Roundtable Review* Volume XX, No. 44, 2 July 2019.

[9] My presentation here owes much to Dan Degerman (2019) **"**Within the heart's darkness: The role of emotions in Arendt's political thought" and Anne-Kathrin Weber (2018) "The Pitfalls of 'Love and Kindness': On the Challenges to Compassion/Pity as a Political Emotion".

[10] Weber uses Hillary Clintons campaign video titled: "Love and Kindness" as an example example of the hierarchization and the "magic feeling" involved in compassion, and I would add, the stress on emotion in the video combined with vagueness regarding concrete policies also makes it a prime target for a suspicion of hypocrisy.

[11] See Arendt 1977, ”Public Rights and Private interests” from: *Small comforts in hard times*, p.105. This text is also one of the few instances where Arendt appears to soften the political/social divide in that she explicitly states that equality demands getting people out of poverty: ”Before we ask the poor for idealim, we must first make them citizens: and ths involves so changing the circumstances of their private lives that they can become capable of enjoying ’the public’”. (ibid., 106- 107).

[12] See Mudde, p 101. Comparative political scientist Pippa Norris has also argued that income level is *not* a reliable predictor of support for authoritarian parties, which is better understood as a cultural backlash against social change. In her view, economic conditions and material insecurity are not the ”motor” but rather the accelerant of the ”authoritarian reflex”. See Pippa Norris, “It’s Not Just Trump,” *Washington Post*, March 11, 2016.

[13] Here he has more in common with conflictual political theorists such as Chantal Mouffe who claims that the convergence of political parties, as well as the compulsion to reach consensus has provoked antiliberal countermovements. See Müller 2016, 53 and 97.

[14] Nussbaum tends to focus on the counterprodutiveness of anger but as Srinivasan (2018) has argued, justified anger can be *apt* even though it is counterproductive, as a way of appreciating injustice, and that the situation of oppressed groups who must choose between getting aptly angry or acting prudentially suffers what she calls ”affective injustice”.

[15] As is happening now in the US while I am writing this (June 2020). When it comes to fear, Nussbaum sees it as a ”narrowing” and centrifugal emotion that it dissipates a people’s potentially united energy for a common project (Nussbaum 2013, 323) but the younger generation’s activism against global warming is driven by a very reasonable fear for the future; in the face of ecological disaster one cannot ”save oneself” alone. The relative swiftness of the concrete policies established in most European countries facing the Covid 19 pandemic, compared to the tardy response to climate change is telling. In the latter case we are obviously not *sufficiently* scared.