



Martha Nussbaum:
Feeling, Fragility,
Flourishing

11. Fear







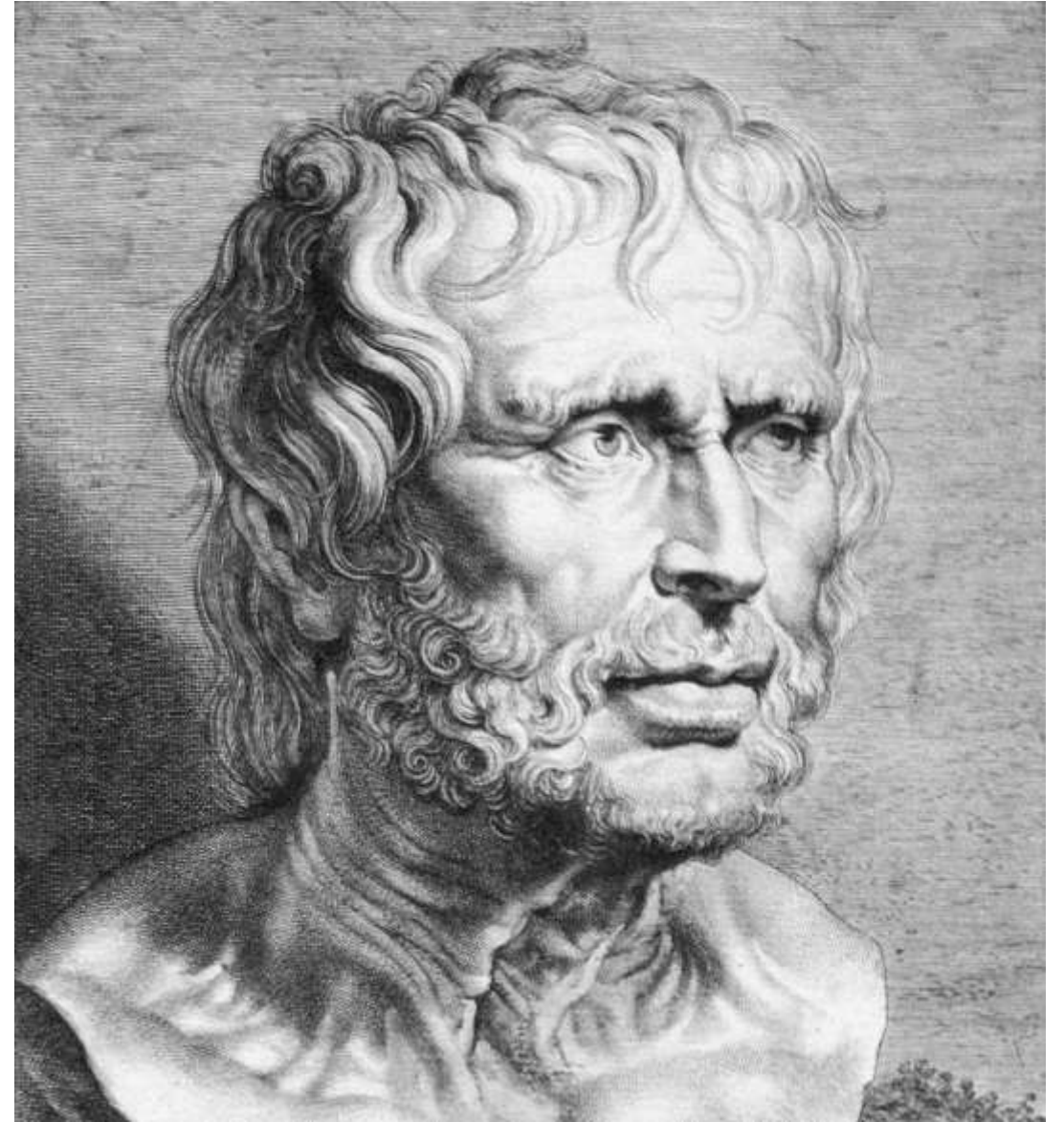
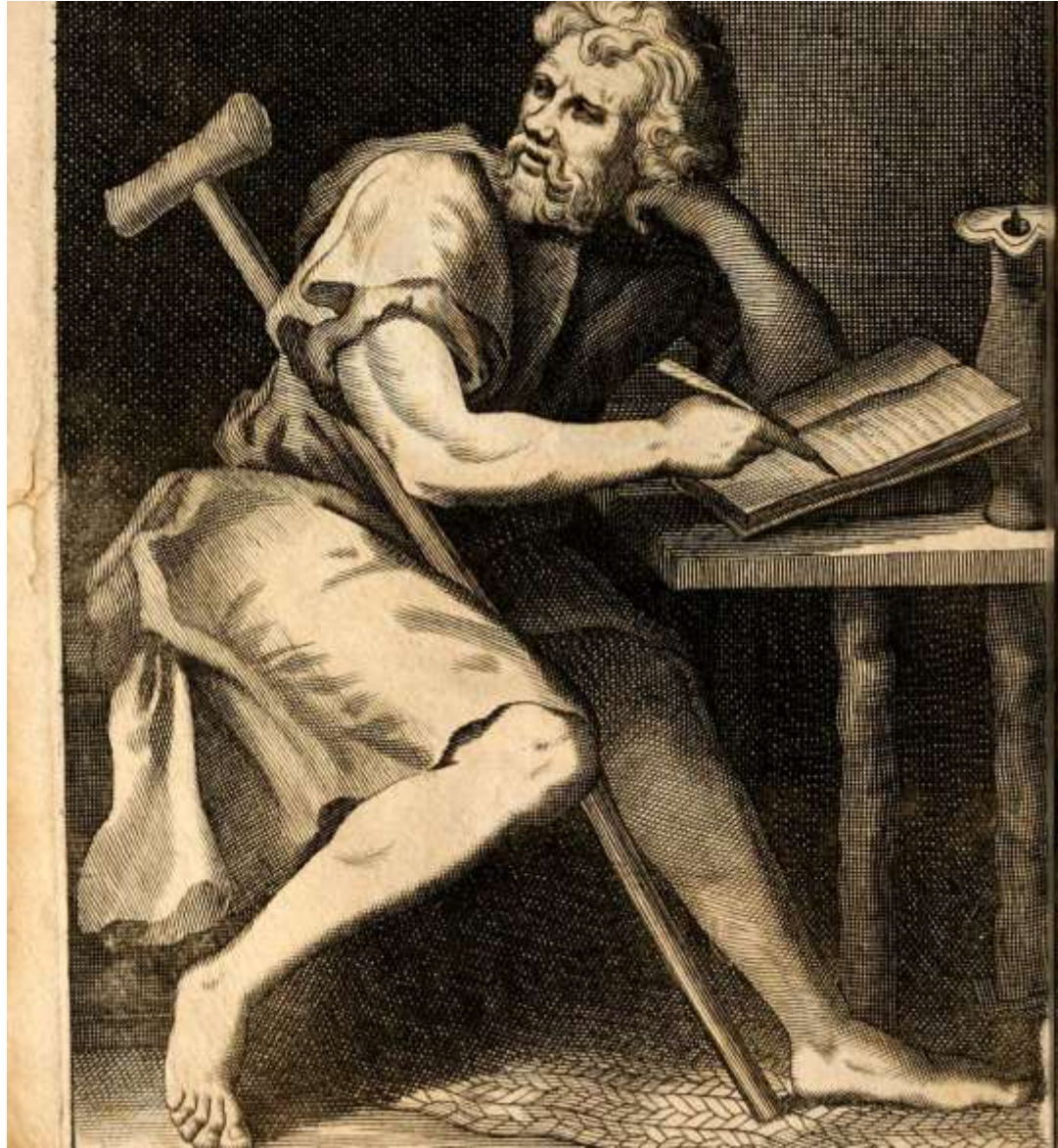




‘Philosophy’s main task is to respond to the soul’s cry; to make sense of and thereby free ourselves from the hold of our griefs and fears.’

– Epictetus

‘The man who has anticipated the coming of troubles takes away their power when they arrive.’ – Seneca



‘Whenever I see a person suffering from nervousness, I think, well, what can he expect? If he had not set his sights on things outside man’s control, his nervousness would end at once.’ – Epictetus

‘Everyone faces up more bravely to a thing for which he has long prepared himself ...

Those who are unprepared, on the other hand, are panic-stricken by the most insignificant happenings. We must see to it that nothing takes us by surprise.

And since it is invariably unfamiliarity that makes a thing more formidable than it really is, this habit of continual reflection will ensure that no form of adversity finds you a complete beginner.’ – Seneca

Spinoza

Hope or fear is...

an 'inconstant joy [or sadness],
arising from the image of a thing
future or past, of whose outcome
we are in doubt'

'there is no hope without fear, and
no fear without hope'

- *Ethics*







L: Jacopo Bassano, "St Roch among the Plague Victims and the Madonna in Glory" 1575;
 R: Josse Lieferinxe, "Saint Sebastian Interceding for the Plague Stricken" 1497-99

Ob sie sich selbs oder ander leut in
ander gestalt mögen ver-
wandlen. Cap. iiii.



Sigmund. Die vierdt frag ist gewesen/ Ob solich
böß leut sich selbd oder ander leut mügē verwand-
lē. Vlricus. Durchleuchtiger herre/wz beduncet
din gnad. Sigmund. Das sie es nie können. Vlricus.

“So many kinds of magic and demonic apparitions are gaining the upper hand in our time that nearly every city, market and village in Germany ... is filled with ... servants of the devil, who destroy the fruits of the fields ... with unusual thunder, lightening, showers, hail, storm winds, frost, flooding, mice, worms and other things ... using all their power, not just against the fruit of the fields and livestock, but yes, not even sparing kinsfolk and close blood-relatives, who ... suffer painful illnesses ending in death, and they direct all their industry in order that all kinds of ... death arise among the people”.

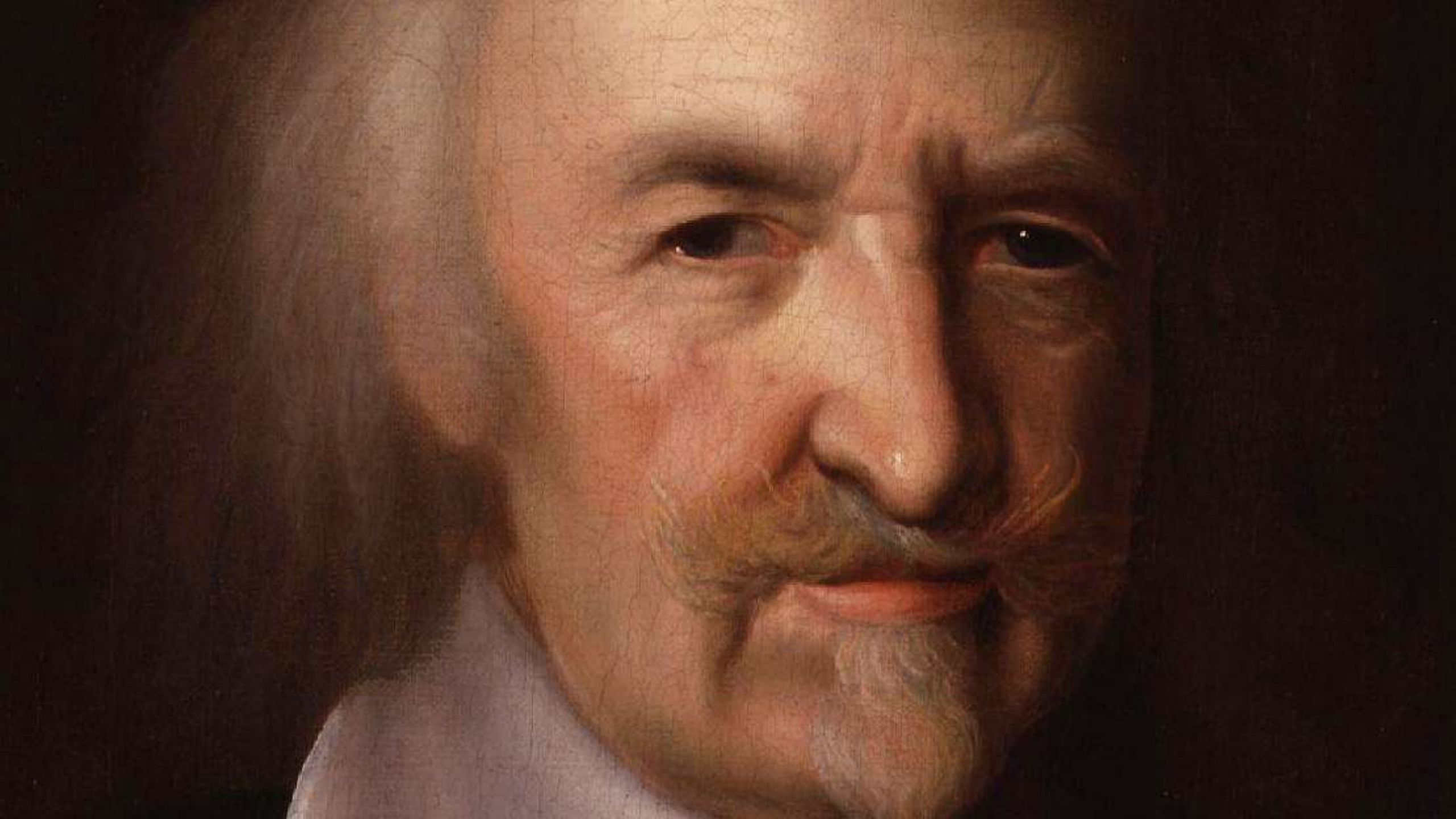
Anonymous German pamphlet, 1590



Albrecht Durer, "The Martyrdom of the Ten Thousand" 1508



Nicolò Nelli, "Turkish Pride", 1572



Hobbes on fear

- Fear is the most basic human feeling in 'the state of nature'
- Life outside society would be 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short',
- ... a 'war of all against all', where 'general diffidence' and 'mutual fear' prevails.
- Society arises from this fear of death and need for protection
- Fear, a passion, contained by a government based on reason



Non est potestas Super Terram quæ Comparetur ei Iob. 41. 24.



The
MONARCHY
of
FEAR

A PHILOSOPHER
LOOKS AT OUR
POLITICAL CRISIS







Fear in Modern America

‘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’. (1)

‘Fear always simmers beneath the surface of moral concern, and it threatens to destabilize democracy, since democracy requires all of us to limit our narcissism and embrace reciprocity.

Right now, fear is running rampant in our nation

... Our narrative of fear tells us that some very bad things can easily happen. Citizens may become indifferent to truth and prefer the comfort of an insulating peer group who repeat one another’s falsehoods.

They may become afraid of speaking out, preferring the comfort of a leader who gives them a womblike feeling of safety. And they may become aggressive against others, blaming them for the pain of fear.’
(61-62)



‘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’. (8)



The infant's fear

- Chapter 2: the horror story that is the unremarkable life of a baby...
- *What kinds of fears are present here?*
- *What kind of traces do such fears leave behind?*
- 'We do not survive it without being formed, and deformed, by it. Fear, genetically first among the emotions, persists beneath all' (20)
- 'Thus, from their weakness, which is in the first place the source of the feeling of their dependence, is subsequently born the idea of empire and domination'. (Rousseau)

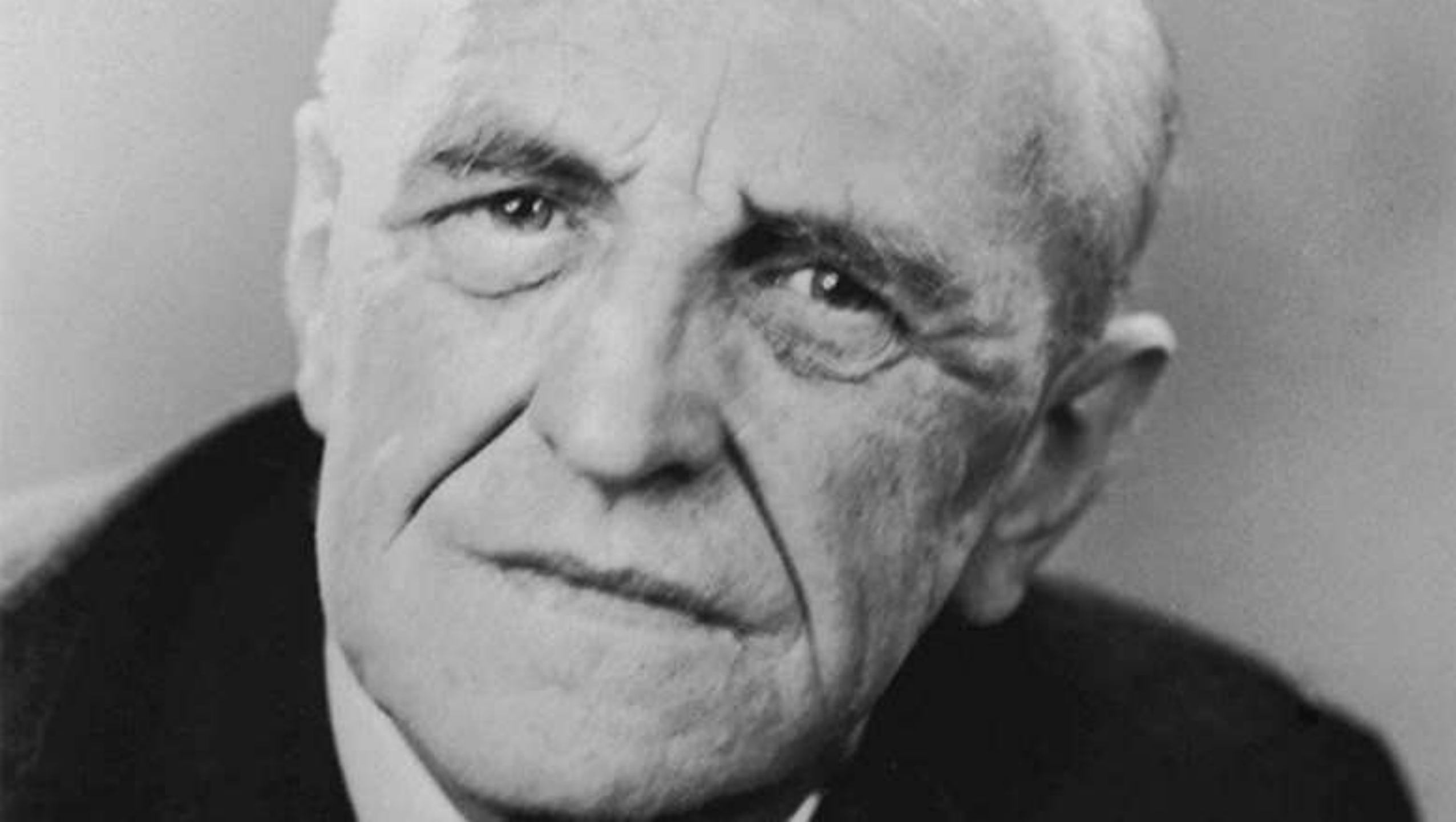


From fear to narcissism

- Fear is both primitive and asocial. Unlike compassion, it doesn't need others. It just draws on itself

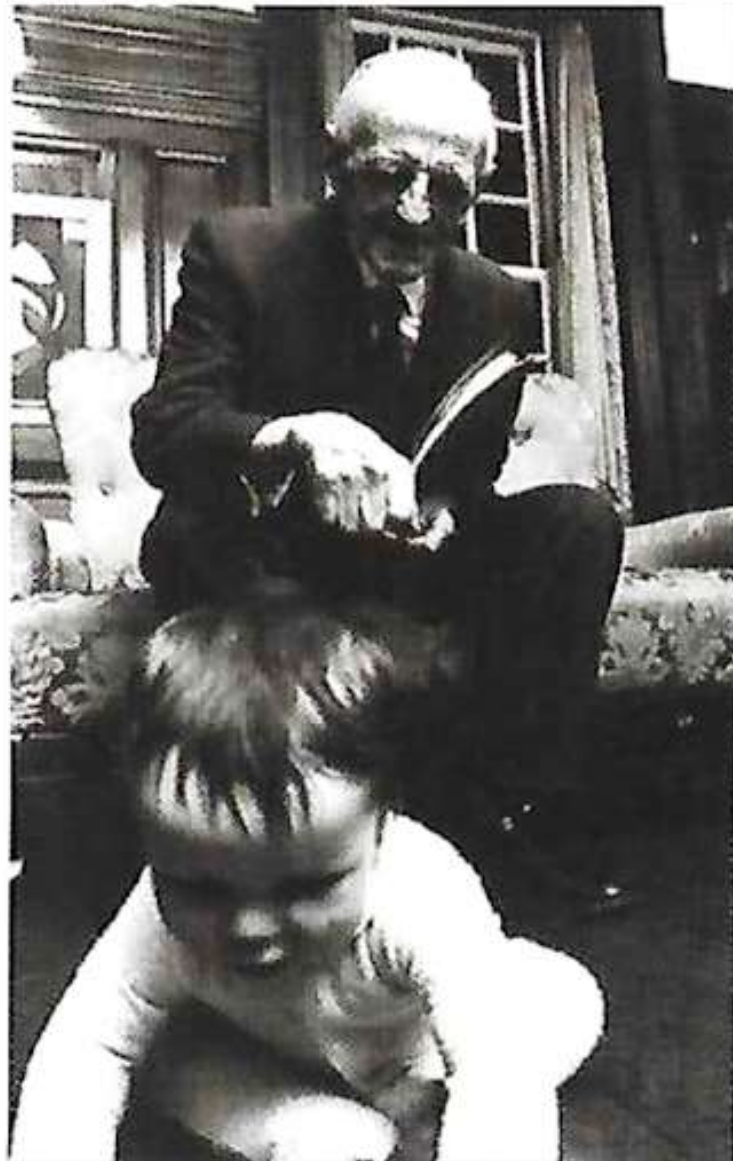
‘But you don't need society to have fear; you need only yourself and a threatening world. Fear, indeed, is intensely narcissistic. It drives out all thoughts of others, even if those thoughts have taken root in some form. An infant's fear is entirely focused on its own body. Even when, later on, we become capable of concern for others, fear often drives that concern away, returning us to infantile solipsism’. (29)

- Soldiers in battle, or people facing an uncertain diagnosis – each reports an increased or magnified concern with the self.
- Or Marcel in Proust, whose lack ‘of full control makes him crazy with fear and jealousy’



The facilitating environment

- From narcissism and monarchy to democratic reciprocity
- Good will, gratitude, 'moral adulthood' and citizenship
- Donald Winnicott, paediatrician and psychoanalyst
- Children use 'transitional objects' (34) like blankets and certain toys to comfort themselves when parents were absent.
- It gives a foundation to what he called 'mature interdependence'.
- Eventually the child learns how to play on their own. Their mother is no longer merely an extension of their needs.



The facilitating environment /2

- ‘out of dismay at its own aggression, the child gradually develops a “capacity for concern”: the parent must not be destroyed, and I must become the sort of person that does not destroy.
- ... Morality operates in tandem with love, since it is love that leads the child to feel the badness of its own aggression’.
- It is through playing with toys and other children that a richer imaginative inner world develops, where this becomes possible
- ‘We are poor indeed if we are only sane’ (Winnicott)



The rhetoric of fear

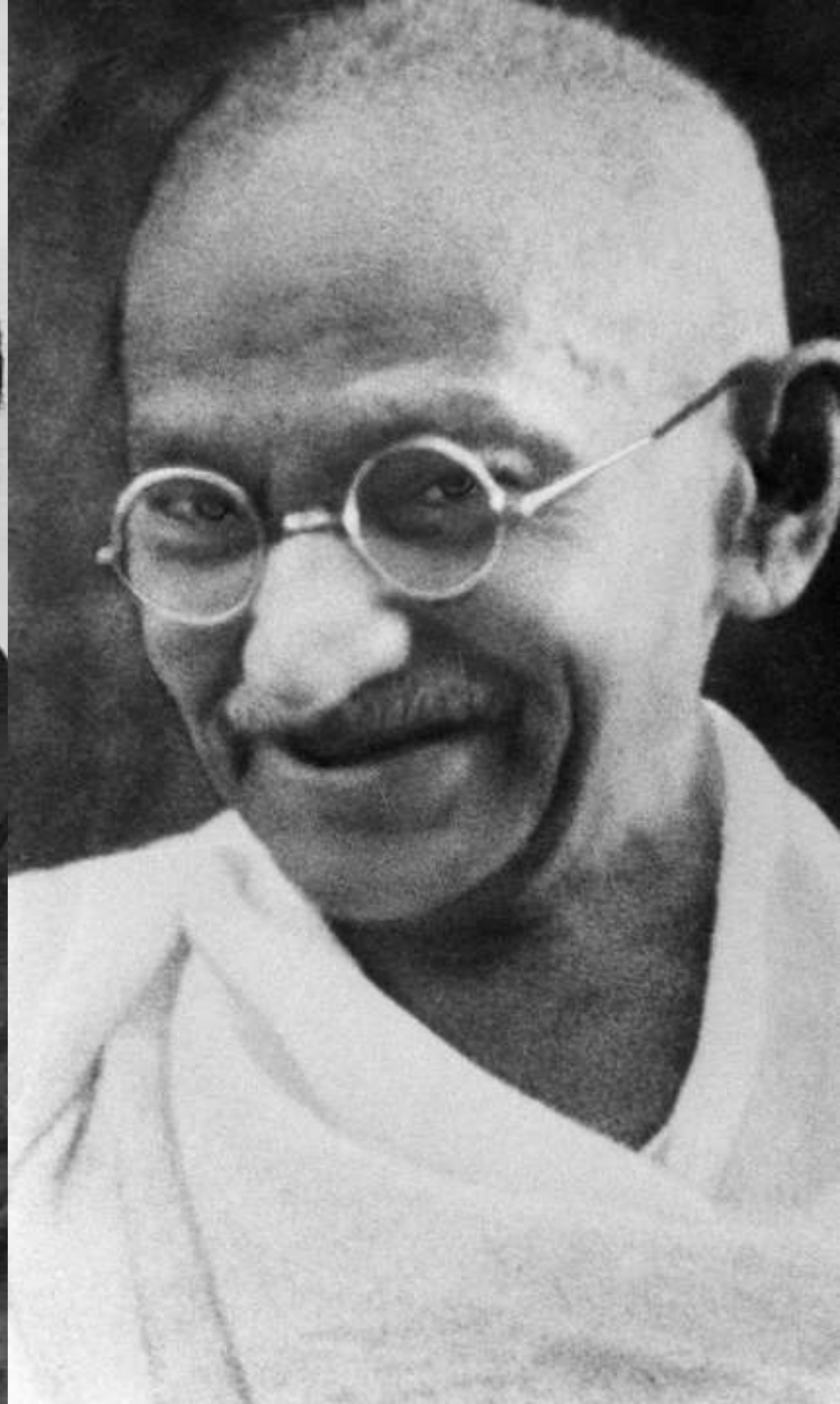
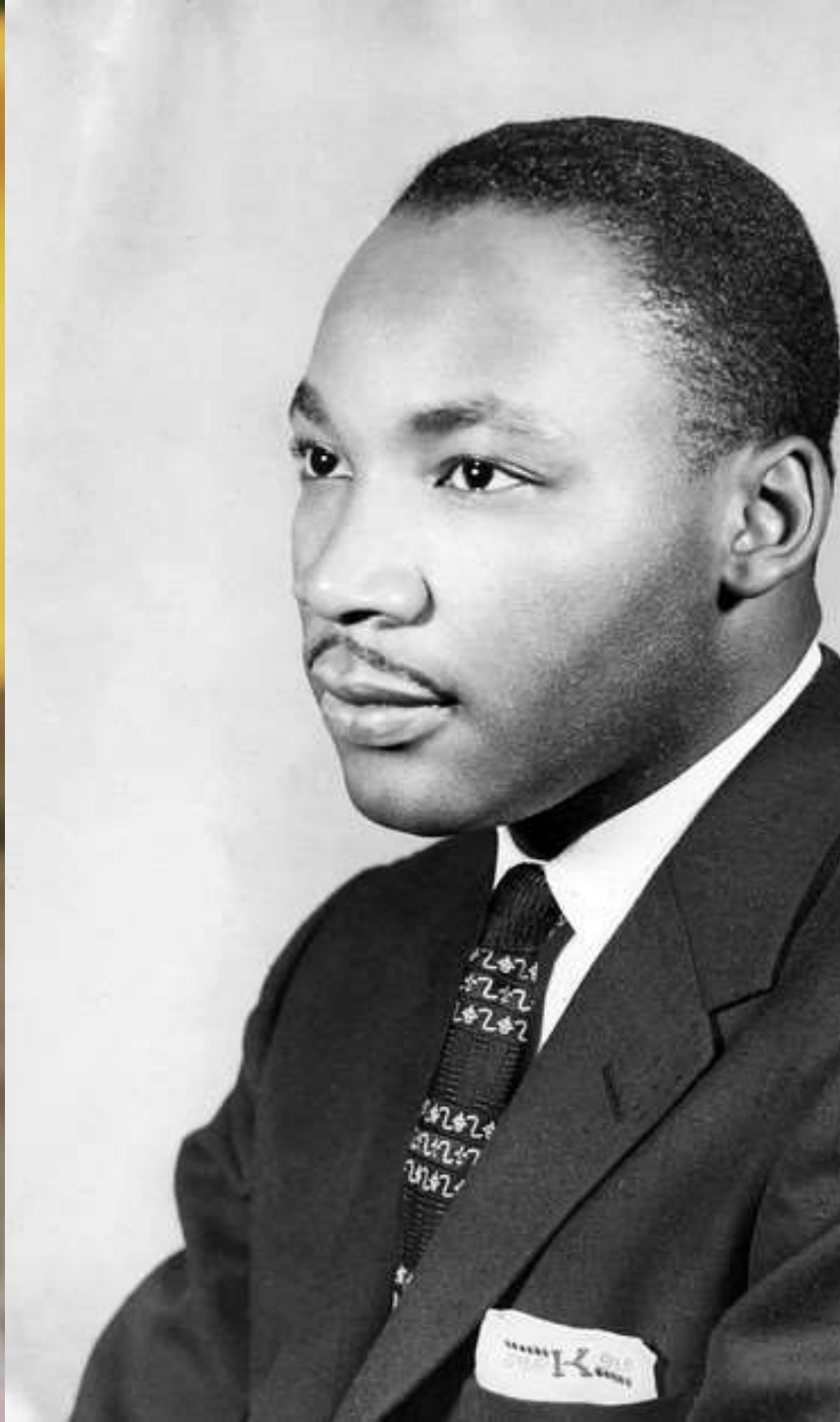
Aristotle – whipped up **if**:

- ‘(a) they portray the impending event as highly significant for survival or well-being, if (b) they make people think it is close at hand, and if, further (c) they make people feel that things are out of control—they can’t ward off the bad thing easily on their own’. The speaker must also be considered trustworthy’ (45).
- Demagogy and populism: the rebellion of Mytilene
- Cognitive biases: availability heuristic and cascades



The rhetoric of fear

- ‘Correct facts, informed public debate, and, most important, a spirit of dissent and independence on the part of citizens’.
- Fear and peer pressure: Asch experiments (or Stanford Prison ones...)
- Trump on Islamophobia
- ‘The achievement of the child who learns to “play alone in the presence of its mother” must be paralleled by that of the adult who learns to argue alone in the presence of powerful forces of conformity.
- ... Democracy needs to cultivate that willingness to take risks for the truth and for good ideals.’ (50)



The case for practical hope

- ‘Hope involves a vision of the good world that might ensue, and, often at least, actions related to getting there’
- Unlike idle hope, practical hope energises a commitment to action

Reasons for hope:

- it keeps love and trust alive, and love is valuable
- via Kant, hope enables us to overlook the world's evils and remain committed to treating others as ends, not means. (208)
- Kant: ‘This hope for better times to come, without which an earnest desire to do something useful for the common good would never have inspired the human heart, has always influenced the activities of right-thinking people’



FT Yuval Noah Harari: the world af X

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Coronavirus: free to read

Yuval Noah Harari: the world after coronavirus | Free to read

This storm will pass. But the choices we make now could change our lives for years to come

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Humankind is now facing a global crisis. Perhaps the biggest crisis of our generation. The decisions people and governments take in the next few weeks will probably shape the world for years to come. They will shape not just our healthcare systems but also our economy, politics and culture. We must act quickly and decisively. We should also take into account the long-term



Lasting questions

- In what ways does Nussbaum argue that fear is fundamental to the human condition?
- How satisfied are you by the reasons she gives for overcoming it?
- What other responses are available to us in a time of uncertainty and fear?

Next and final week... *Cosmopolitanism*

- Our course ends with Nussbaum's most recent book, of late last year
- *The Cosmopolitan Tradition: A Noble but Flawed Ideal*
- I will upload a recommended chapter onto Moodle by Monday evening
- We'll use this return to the Stoics to evaluate and reflect on some of the broader themes of Nussbaum's work: liberal universalism, the emotions, the capabilities approach, fragility, and her status as a public philosopher (and its positive/negative effects on her work)
- We will discuss this live, if you are free, on Monday at 1pm – link will be emailed. Or take part in the Forum
- Questions and thoughts to Dan.Taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk