



Political Philosophy

Week 12.
Martha Nussbaum
Course round-up



Introducing Martha Nussbaum (1947 –)

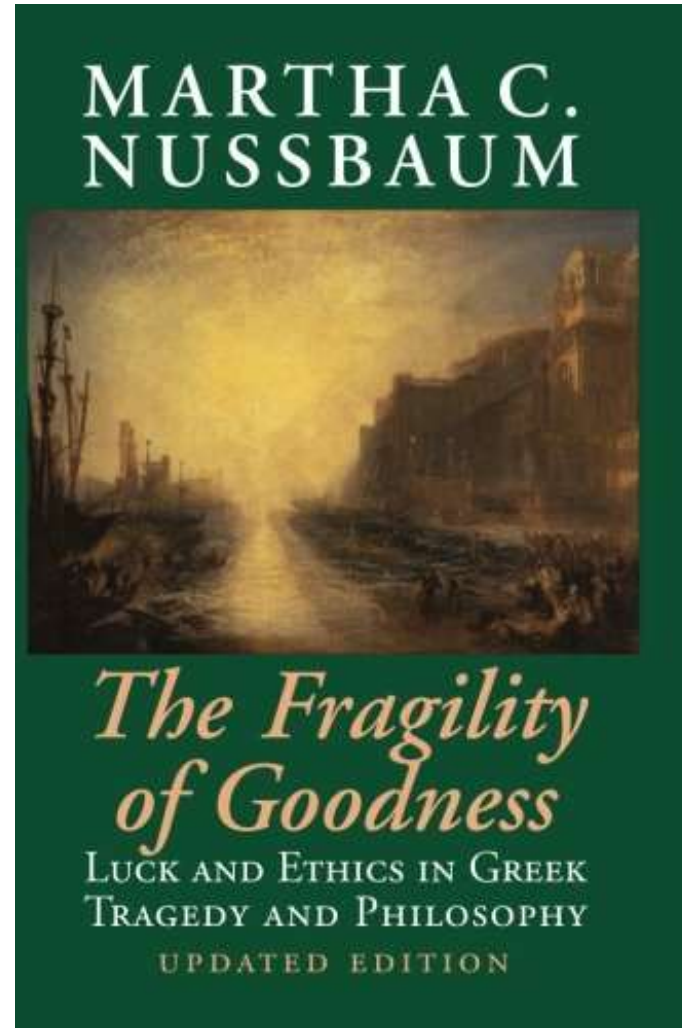
- Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago
- Upper class, New York background: 'East Coast WASP elite ... very sterile, very preoccupied with money and status'
- Trained in acting, then in philosophy and classics. Encounters sexism at Harvard and is denied tenure...
- Converts to Judaism, becomes very prolific from the 1990s
- Interests: justice, the emotions, feminism, ancient Greek thought, human development approach, global justice, the humanities, animal rights, sexism, ageing, patriotism ...
- Winner of Kyoto and Berggruen Prizes and many honorary degrees



Nussbaum: some key works

- *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*
- *Cultivating Humanity: A Classic Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*
- *Sex and Social Justice*
- *Hiding From Humanity: Disgust, Shame and the Law*
- *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*
- *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*
- *The Monarchy of Fear*

Authored around 26 books and 509+ papers

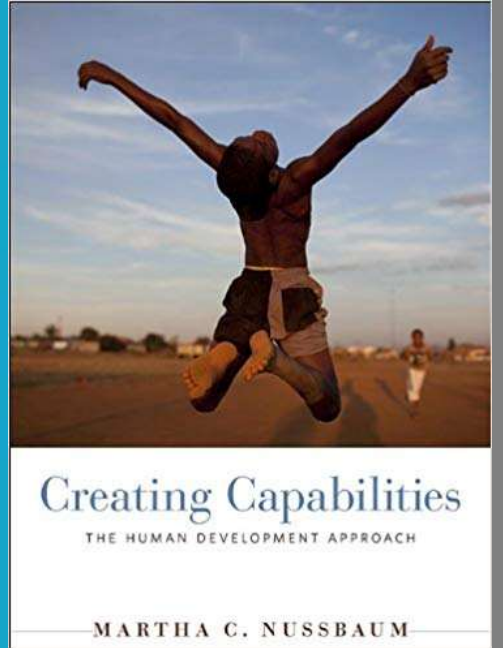
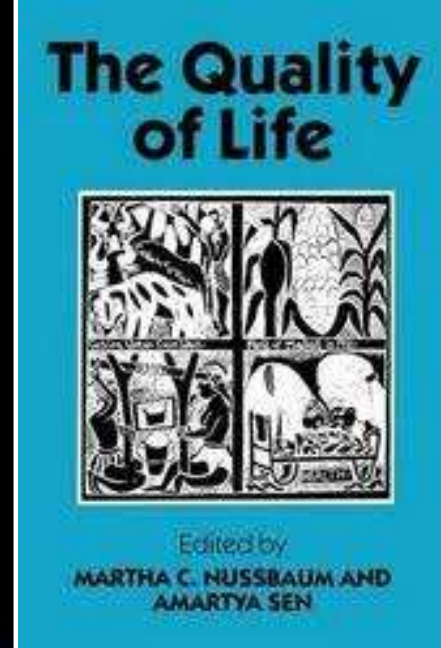


‘To be a good human being is to have a kind of openness to the world, an ability to trust uncertain things beyond your own control, that can lead you to be shattered in very extreme circumstances for which you were not to blame. That says something very important about the condition of the ethical life: that it is based on a trust in the uncertain and on a willingness to be exposed’

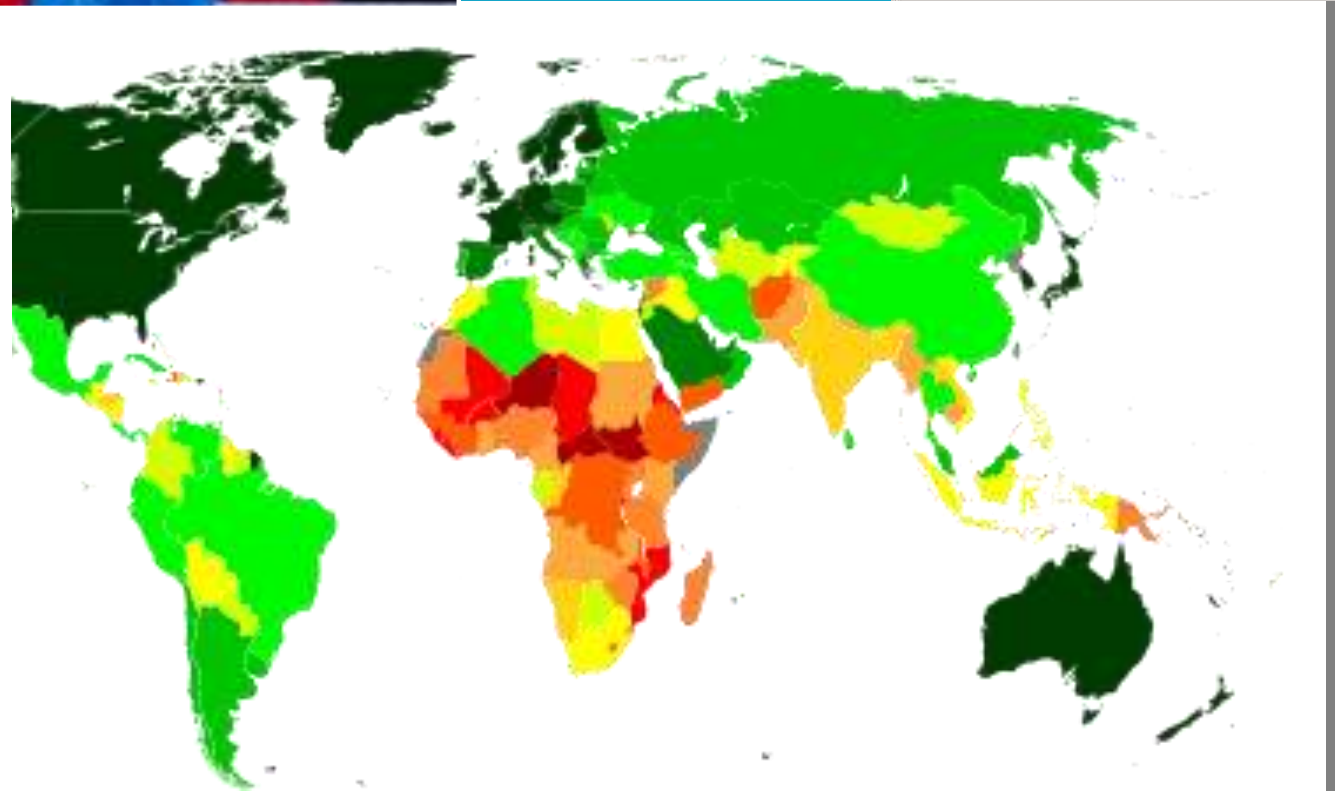
– Nussbaum, interview with Bill Moyers

‘It is possible to view another human being as a slimy slug or a piece of revolting trash only if one has never made a serious good-faith attempt to see the world through that person’s eyes or to experience that person’s feelings. Disgust imputes to the other a subhuman nature. How, by contrast, do we ever become able to see one another as human? Only through the exercise of imagination.’

- Nussbaum *From Disgust to Humanity*



'Development can be seen as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy ... Focusing particularly on people's capability to choose the lives they have reason to value' - Amartya Sen



The Capabilities Approach

1. **Being able to** live to the end of a human life of normal length.
2. ... have good health, adequate nutrition, adequate shelter, opportunities for sexual satisfaction and choice in reproduction, and mobility.
3. ... avoid unnecessary and non-beneficial pain and to have pleasurable experiences.
4. ... use the senses, imagine, think, and reason; and to have the educational opportunities necessary to realize these capacities.
5. ... have attachments to things and persons outside ourselves.
6. ... form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's own life.
7. ... live for and to others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings.
8. ... live with concern for and in relation to animals and the world of nature.
9. ... laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.
10. ... live one's own life and no one else's; enjoying freedom of association and freedom from unwarranted search and seizure.

Themes in Nussbaum

- 'My claim is that a life that lacks any one of these capabilities, no matter what else it has, will fall short of being a good human life'
- Central role of the emotions in ethical and political life
- Arguments for humanism, cosmopolitanism and ethical universalism
- Challenging social injustices, from sex and sexuality to global inequalities
- Broadly liberal but independent and sceptical : 'I don't like anything that sets itself up as an in-group or an elite, whether it is the Bloomsbury group or Derrida'







The
MONARCHY
of
FEAR

A PHILOSOPHER
LOOKS AT OUR
POLITICAL CRISIS



The Monarchy of Fear (2018)

- Written in response to Trump's election, and fears among her students that 'the America they know and love is about to disappear' under the weight of 'monsters' and 'enemies of everything good'
- In a period of panic, she reminds readers that things have come on: 'may look like backsliding from our march toward human equality ... it is not the apocalypse', certainly compared to the 1950s
- Yet fear has led to Trump, a fear which can make us self-absorbed, distrustful of others, antidemocratic, and narcissistic...
- Drawing on Martin Luther King, Gandhi, Mandela and ancient Greek thought, she argues that it's 'actually a time when hope and work can accomplish a great deal of good'



Over to you

In groups, discuss one of the following:

1. Why is hope so important for progressive politics?
2. What do you think of Nussbaum's practices of hope? (E.g. National service)...

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

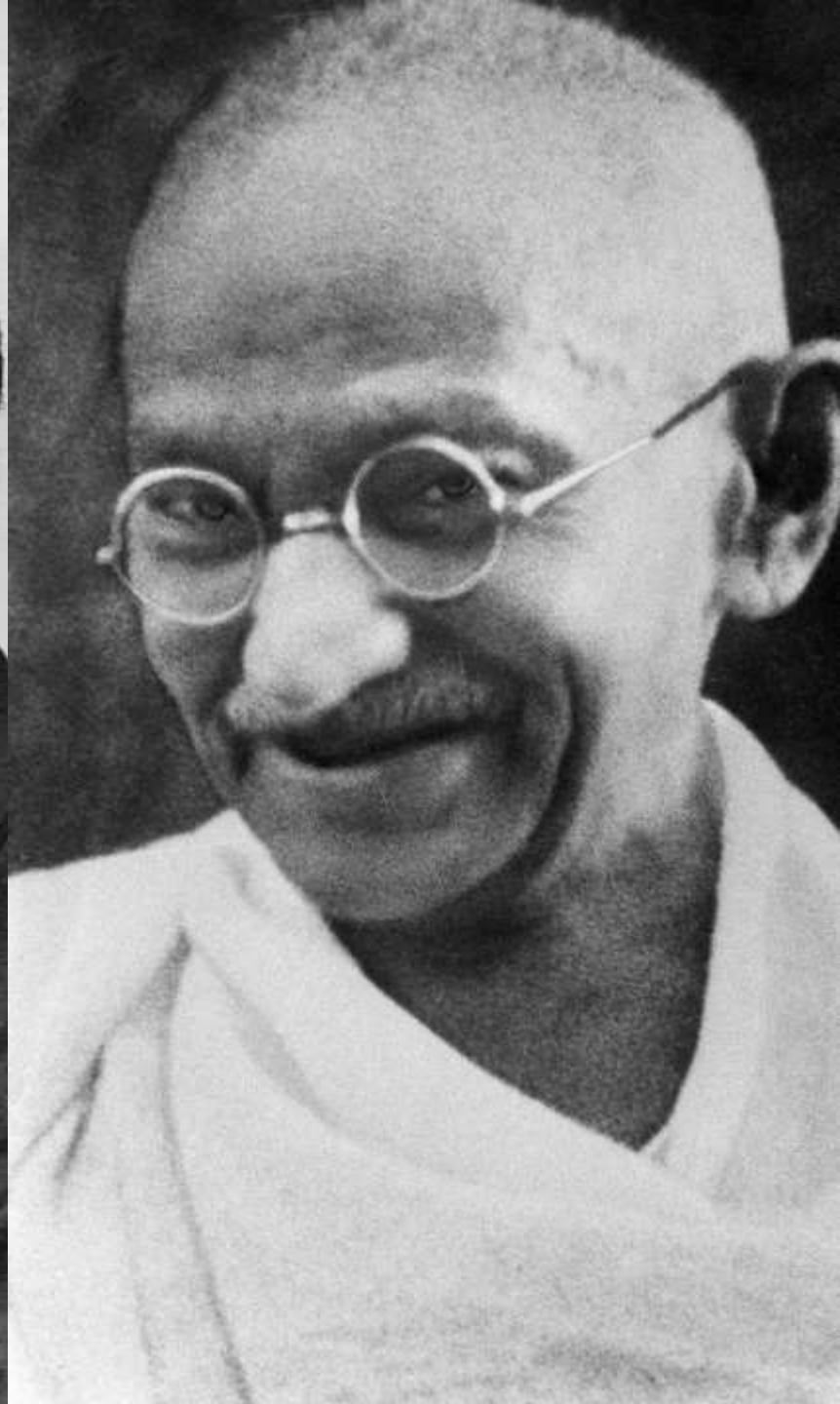
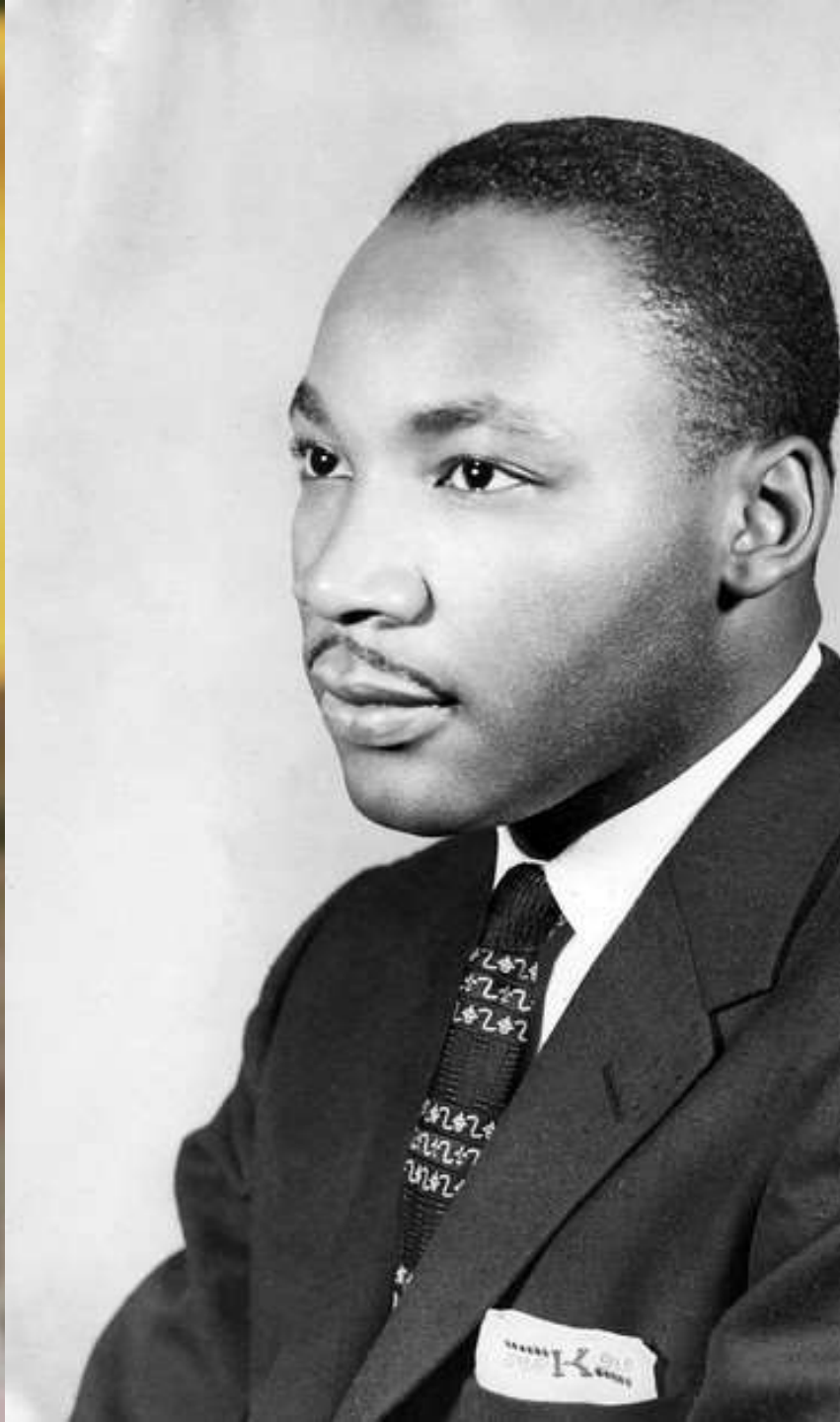
Reasons for hope:

- 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'

The case for practical hope II

‘the person who refuses to hope for the future is likely to be a controlling sort of person ...: nothing is good unless it dovetails with my wishes ... No hope here, because I don't have the entirety of what I want, and I don't want to depend on other unreliable people, or on chance. The spirit of hope, then, is obscurely linked to a spirit of respect for the independence of others, to a renunciation of monarchical ambition, a kind of relaxation and expansion of the heart.’ (211-212)

‘So, King had to go against one strand in the Christian tradition, urging his followers to have this-worldly faith that what they were doing, protesting and marching, could actually bear fruit, and preferably in their lifetimes. Otherwise, hard work and risk-taking action seem not worth it. So too with us today. If we think that democratic politics has gone down the drain and that our efforts are a waste of time, we won't embrace hope.’ (213-4)



Six practices of hope

- poetry, music and the arts
- critical thinking
- religious groups
- solidarity groups
- theories of justice
- national civic service

‘Our fellow citizens are not stupid or base to embrace religion. We must wish, and this seems as likely as anything good is likely, that each person who embraces religion will find there the ingredients of a hope that is inclusive and loving, rather than divisive and retributive. Philosophy by itself shows how we can respect our enemies; it does not show us how to love them. For that we need the arts, and many of us need religion.’ (233)



National Service?

'there is a large problem in American life that these "solutions" do not address. We live apart from one another.

... A second huge problem is that Americans lack a sense of the common good. They all too often think in narcissistic terms, what's good for me and for my family.

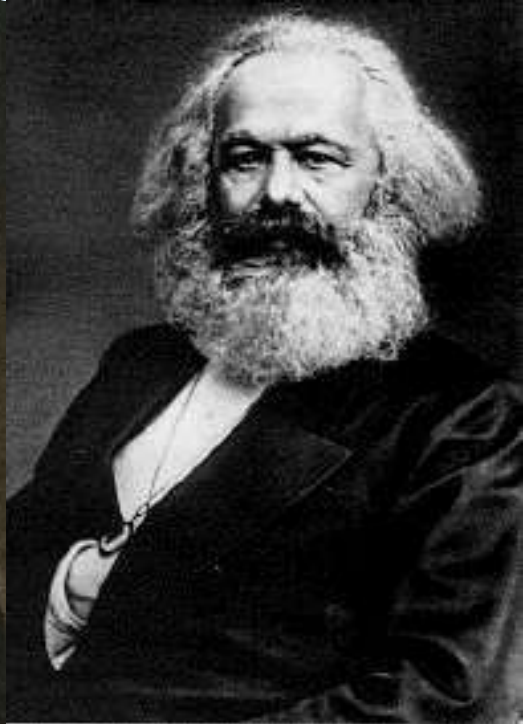
... The two problems are connected: because people don't meet one another across major divisions, they have a hard time thinking outside their economic or racial group towards a sense of common purpose.'

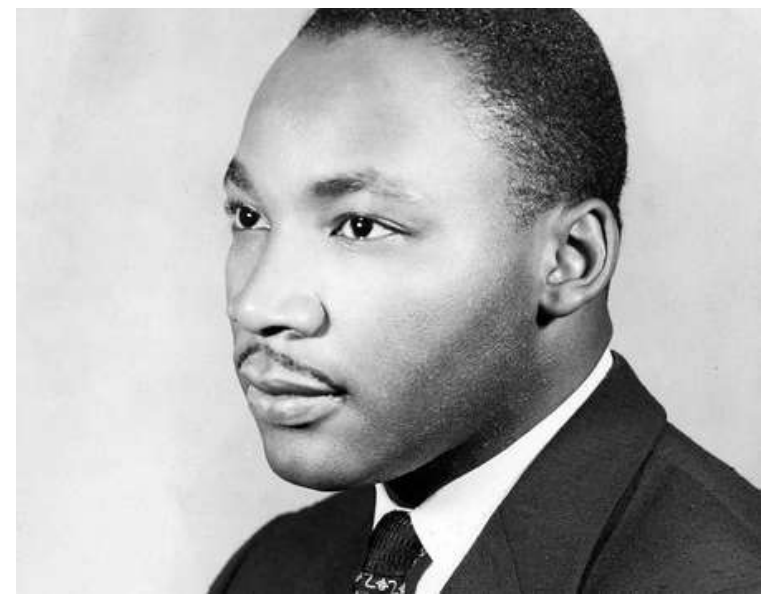
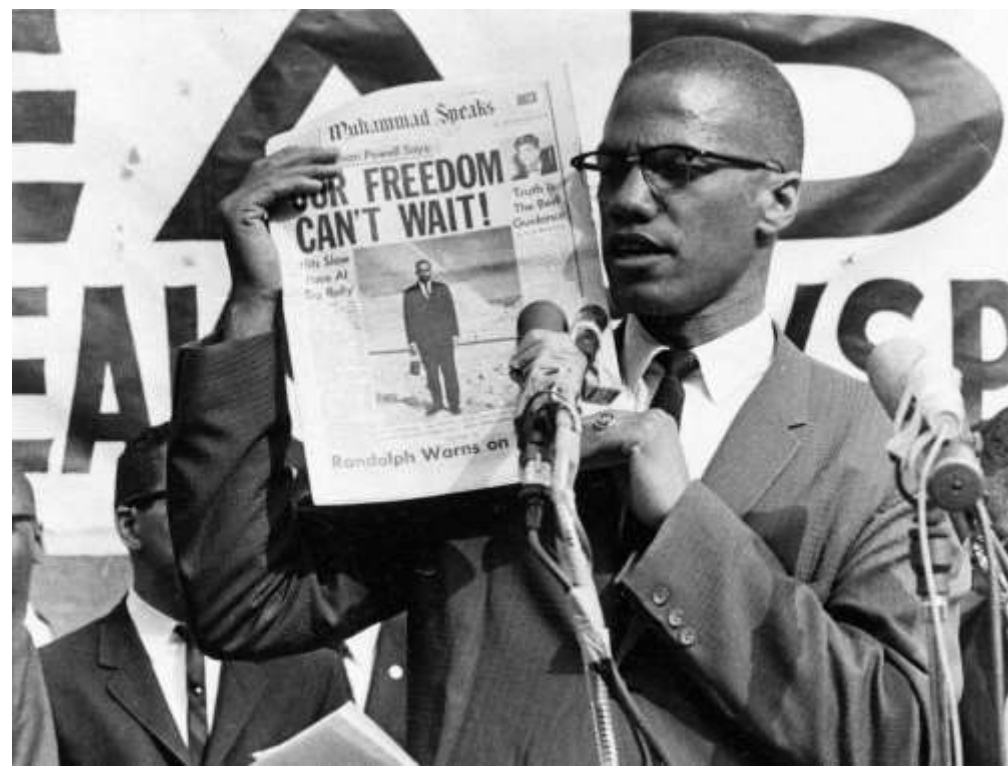
= Three years civil service, involving elder care, child care, infrastructure work, but always in different regions. Project could be led by an entrepreneur under the idea that 'we owe our country some of our work and our time' (242)



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Rounding it up

- Which political philosopher has stood out most to you on our course?
- Which ideas or writings have jolted your thinking?
- Were there any thinkers who seem especially relevant to our times?

I'll need to collect your course feedback forms too

*"Niemand hat
das Recht
zu gehorchen"*



Hannah Arendt
14. Oktober 1906 - 4. Dezember 1975

‘The expression “political philosophy”, which I avoid, is extremely burdened by tradition. When I talk about these things, academically or nonacademically, I always mention that there is a vital tension between philosophy and politics. That is, between man as a thinking being and man as an acting being...

... the philosopher can be objective with regard to nature, and when he says what he thinks about it he speaks in the name of all mankind. But he cannot be objective or neutral with regard to politics.’

- Arendt, interview with Gunter Gaus

That's it – thank you!

- I hope you've enjoyed our journey through Political Philosophy – I have
- If you'd like to dig deeper, then Jonathan Wolff's books are recommended, otherwise get in touch with me by email and I can recommend other things: dan.taylor@marywardcentre.ac.uk
- In September I'll be teaching 'Philosophy in the Anthropocene'; then, in January, 'Martha Nussbaum: Freedom, Flourishing, Fragility' – both tbc, but expected to take place around 2pm-4pm
- Wishing you well!