



The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age

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What impulse prompted some newspapers to attribute the murder of 77 Norwegians to Islamic extremists, until it became evident that a right-wing Norwegian terrorist was the perpetrator? Why did Switzerland, a country of four minarets, vote to ban those structures? How did a proposed Muslim cultural center in lower Manhattan ignite a fevered political debate across the United States? In *The New Religious Intolerance*, Martha C. Nussbaum surveys such developments and identifies the fear behind these reactions. Drawing inspiration from philosophy, history, and literature, she suggests a route past this limiting response and toward a more equitable, imaginative, and free society.

Fear, Nussbaum writes, is “more narcissistic than other emotions.” Legitimate anxieties become distorted and displaced, driving laws and policies biased against those different from us. Overcoming intolerance requires consistent application of universal principles of respect for conscience. Just as important, it requires greater understanding. Nussbaum challenges us to embrace freedom of religious observance for all, extending to others what we demand for ourselves. She encourages us to expand our capacity for empathetic imagination by cultivating our curiosity, seeking friendship across religious lines, and establishing a consistent ethic of decency and civility. With this greater understanding and respect, Nussbaum argues, we can rise above the politics of fear and toward a more open and inclusive future.

The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age Details

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From Reader Review The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age for online ebook

Karen McNair says

The beginning is a bit dense, unless you love philosophy then knock yourself out. Her arguments are strong and compelling. It's a must given the current state of Xenophobia in this country. It will definitely help you think critically about current events. You should also keep in mind that this book came out in 2012, so it doesn't, at times, reflect our current state of affairs.

Ailith Twinning says

Second Read:

The author explicitly defines morality, culture, and legal ethos in a sigal term dedicated wholly to religion, and basically says that just is what religions is: Dignity.

This definition offends me. I'm not a member of any religion, and that definition of the source of all law continues to proscribe non-believers a different class of law, one in which their personal morality is irrelevant to their actions as lit by the laws and natural activities as they exist. WE should bend over backwards and hold religion as the first inalienable thing about humanity, the source of humanity -- and. . .that's nonsense. It's offensive and it's nonsense. Very, very few nods are made to the existence of atheists, and they are wholly dismissive. Conscientious objectors to war are allowed to exist, but literally nothing else is permissible. There are mentions that religion should not have preference over non-religion, but no American examples are provided, but rather examples of the opposite -- non religion should not trump religion, and those are French examples.

The book is about the US -- basically, and I will treat it is as such. It is irrelevant in its own terms. The First Ammendment protection of minority religion, even in the case of a Mosque on Ground Zero (as it was viewed, not as it really was) was not argued to be against the constitution. Religion is a positive right in the US, the law will go out of its way to not just respect, but actively support all religions.

Which discriminates against the non-religious. We have no equal protection.

Moreover -- all my comments from the first reading stand really. I think the author comes off as a genuinely nice 'feel-good' preacher trying to make the world a nicer place. And I also think she's ignorant, or willfully ignored the non-religious minority to make a point specifically about Islam. . .except the point is not actually well made. Almost everything in the book is preaching to the choir, and only the very very end of the book even mentions the importance of imagining others complexly, which is what the book should have been about in the first place -- but she uses burqas in France as a totem for bigotry and it just falls flat on its face.

First read:

One useful idea of the book "Maintain the first amendment and don't be ruled by unfounded fear" -- but as the author points out, this hardly needs stating in the US.

One incredibly bad idea of this book is that morals are entirely subjective, and wholly defined thru theistic relationships. That is the purpose of the God construct - -but it is not solely its dominion, nor is it even the best construct for that domain.

The author spends a weird amount of time on the burqah bans. They're nonsense, xenophobic, oppressive and downright silly.

The author is an apologist for profiling by Homeland Security and the TSA. . .even tho all scientific inquiries suggest that none of post 9/11 policies make any positive effect on preventing terrorism.

The author is a hypocrite.

Respect individuals and basic civil liberties. No problem. Demanding that I respect religious institutions on the ground that being religious inherently makes them more important than basic ethical issues? No. Fuck that. It's moronic.

I draw the line where she suggests that religious laws are as important as social ones. A priest is entitled to keep confessions -- and she does say this in context of a thief who returned an item and confessed. . . and in that case I would personally expect a judgment call to just not even ask the priest the question. . .but when you say a priest can't be subpoena'd in any circumstance you're saying that exactly what did happen (mass cover-ups of child rape) should be legal.

In the realm of civil liberties, no -- there should be no differentiation. . .but in criminal law there can be no provision for religion. If a religion cannot meet the base standards of morality, or even criminality, of a society -- then that religion must face the consequences of its own evil. (this position is not negated by the fact criminality is not generally a good predictor of morality, it's just a sign the laws as a whole need to change)

All that said -- Islamophobia playing such a big role in the last US election was. . .downright shameful. I really think the same author writing this next year would have been more interesting.

Pavel Linshits says

Even though it's very short for an academic-y text, it repeats itself at times, and I'm probably more aligned with the European model of religious toleration/integration than the one Nussbaum is repeatedly endorsing, particularly with regards to male circumcision, which she defends in a not particularly convincing way at all, but this is engagingly written, empathetic, and well argued. Looking forward to getting into her meatier work.

Johannes C says

I first encountered Nussbaum in Astra Taylor's documentary, "Examined Life", and also encountered her work a few times in some global development courses (e.g. stuff she collaborated on with Amartya Sen). This book was an interesting read, and what I enjoyed best about it was the wide assortment of books and

writers she recommends or makes interesting to her reader, ranging from the fashion historian Anne Hollander to a wide variety of children's books that explore religious acceptance (of Quakers, Jews, and Muslims for example, relevant to different periods in American history). This is particularly helpful because I've been trying to figure out a good source of children's books that I can buy for some of my cousins' children.

Anyways, I also find Nussbaum's prose to possess a refreshing clarity and I found her writing in this book a lot more accessible than almost any other philosopher I've read.

I was fairly shocked at how much Islamophobic legislation in Europe had already been passed back when Nussbaum was writing this book. I think this current uprising of nationalist populism, particularly the racist sort, would have been a lot less surprising if I had already known the situation in Europe as Nussbaum presents it here. I had never known the extent Islamophobia was legitimized by government power in some European countries. I'm in no way condoning any sort of violence, but whenever the media portrays any act of terrorism, it's hardly contextualized within the reality of discriminatory policy that affects religious minorities every single day of their lives. Embarrassingly Canada almost stooped to such a low near the end of the Harper government.

And of course, I shouldn't be surprised, yet it's still surprising for some reason: Robert Spencer's book "The Truth about Mohammed: Founder of the World's Most Intolerant Religion" was assigned and recommended in FBI training for new Bureau recruits, Spencer being the co-founder of "Stop the Islamicization of America," considered a "hate group" by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Nussbaum mentions a little bit in this book about growing up Southern Baptist, and becoming Jewish later on in life. I think she consequently has fairly interesting perspective regarding faith, particularly as a professor in philosophy and law. Being Jewish, and having parents that were far less than supportive of that decision in her life, she showed an acute sensitivity to the history of anti-Semitism, and the deep similarities it shares with contemporary Muslim discrimination.

My political views are probably a bit more radical than Nussbaum's for the most part. She seemed fairly more centrist on a number of points, particularly when she goes into her reflections on profiling in airport security screenings.

Overall an insightful book that offered me a look at a lot of new things I've never encountered before.

Steve says

Philosopher Martha Nussbaum makes a patient, nuanced examination of the legal and ethical questions concerning tolerance of the practices of religious and social minorities in the USA. This was written in 2012, before Trump and his Muslim ban. However, the Ground Zero mosque and burqa bans give her plenty of material. Xenophobia and fear are rooted in narcissism, she says, and empathy is too demanding for Americans.

Ivo Moyersoen says

Nussbaum hoeft geen introductie. Zij is top in de filosofie. Prof in Chicago en een groot publicist. Dit is boek is van 2012 maar meer dan actueel en bijzonder goed gedocumenteerd tot en met over de situatie in België o.a. In verband met het hoofddoekenverbod. Nusbaum is klaar en duidelijk. Na 9/11 is er een nieuwe religieuze intolerantie aan het groeien en niet het minst tegen de moslims maar niet exclusief. Zij neemt stelling op grond van een zeer grondige studie. Het eerste deel van het boek is gewoon meesterlijk. Zij weerlegt de domme praat die rond radicalisering en het aanpakken ervan wordt verteld door mensen die echt niet weten waarover zij het hebben, zoals sommige "deradicaliseringsexperten" in Vlaanderen. Zij wijst ook op de fouten die vooral in Europa worden gemaakt en die op zelf vrij korte termijn precies het omgekeerde veroorzaken dan bedoeld wordt Ter

Zij verzet zich terecht tegen waanzinnige beslissingen zoals het verbod op hoofddoeken en andere bijzonder kwetsende maatregelen die inderdaad een onmiddellijk radicaliseringseffect hebben. Haar situering van de Franse *laïcité* in dit kader is bijzonder interessant. Uiteraard is haar schrijven mede bepaald van uit een Amerikaanse beleving van de godsdienstvrijheid.

In een tweede deel analyseert zij het verloop van de acties en reacties op het voorstel van in New York op korte afstand van de gewezen twin towers een moskee gebedsruimte te openen. Zoals een gesprekspartner, thuis in dezelfde problematiek, hierover stelde zou het wel eens zijn dat de professor hierin een Erk van een of andere medewerker heeft opgenomen. Is leuk om lezen maar minder interessant dan het analytisch werk van Nussbaum in het eerste deel.

Een verplichte lectuur voor de Vermeerschen en andere betweters en wevers in dit land.

Stephan Zeijlemaker says

Nussbaum is a very subtle and thorough thinker and she's makes it very clear what freedom and equality are and how they are treated differently in the US and Europa. She adds the importance of knowledge and understanding. But. We are often not a very rational creature and the fear and anger in this world are very powerful and a lot less subtle. She's writes this book to counter the ugly effects of fear and anger but ratio is not an answer for most I fear.

Otto Lehto says

Martha Nussbaum is a genteel gentlewoman, a rational preacher of religious tolerance, a punctilious student of the passions (emotions), and obviously one of the most influential moral philosophers of our era. Her style, while never naive, has a saintly honesty about it.

This book exhibits all of her virtues, most notably her commitment to liberal toleration and (beyond that "coldly" rational virtue) to a passionate, poetic and experiential openness to the lives of others. An engagement with public discourse, this book exits the ivory tower and the Empress walks among the plebeians. With the help of Athenian philosophy and literary examples, she dissects recent public controversies around religion (especially Islam) in an admirably honest way. The book does not advance any great theory; but it puts a lot of great theory into practice.

She is palpably committed to exposing the all-too-human tendency, in our psychology, to generate suspicion, fear and conflict. Her solutions range from expanding our consciousness through the development of our moral conscience and the visionary capabilities of our empathetic "inner eye."

She explains the parallelisms between the religious intolerance of yesterday (e.g. anti-Semitism, anti-Quakerism and anti-Catholicism) and the religious intolerance of today (e.g. anti-Islamism). I especially loved her discussion about the differences in the European and American attitudes towards religious toleration, and the arguable superiority of the latter over the former in the constitutional protection that it grants minorities (especially minority religions). Of course, there is a downside to every tradition; but more on that later.

While competent, her insights rarely ascend above the interesting and mildly enlightening. The bourgeois caution of her liberalism mixes with an almost aristocratic disdain of the crude emotions of the masses. Her recommendations could be faulted as being occasionally paternalistic, or should I say "maternalistic": She thinks that problems could be solved with better education and moral growth, combined with a comfortable dose of anti-discriminatory and pro-minority legislation.

Perhaps I was also disappointed in the superficiality of her analysis of contemporary affairs. Her carefully worded observations on the moral virtues and follies of Newt Gingrich and Sarah Palin, or on the origin story of the Lower Manhattan "mosque" controversy, do not contain much insight that a good op-ed in the New York Times or the Guardian has not already expressed better.

Another big failure is her attempt to slide over the problems of religious belief. This problem is shared by all writers who emphasize peaceful coexistence, but it is made worse by her open allegiance to a tradition in American liberalism that places special regard to religious belief over secular beliefs, and even wishes to grant legal religious exemptions to members of minority groups. This road had lead to a lot of strange loopholes in the legal code (what Justice Scalia justifiably decried as legal "anarchy"). It also fundamentally strengthens the power of organized religions, and entrenches religions - as privileged loci of moral force - thus making it more difficult for secular voices of conscience to be heard in the legal system and in the realm of public policy.

She also fails to face up to the special problems caused by Islam compared to many other religions. She glosses over the fiercely patriarchal and intolerant attitudes of mainstream religions. She fails to properly inquire whether the toleration of intolerance will lead to more tolerance or intolerance.

Well-meaning but one-sided liberals like Nussbaum are often willing to excuse or tolerate abhorrent practices, all in the name of friendship, tolerance and multiculturalism. This has led to a lot of problems with poor immigrant assimilation and radicalization. Religions can be quite intolerant - be it Christianity or Islam - and if one really cares about tolerance, one should try to reform religions to be more modern and tolerant. While the answer cannot be anti-religious bigotry, or rampant Islamophobia, the solution still eludes us. It cannot be the case that the cultivation of the "inner eye" - with the practice of the public virtues of friendship, mutual toleration and openness to otherness - as suggested by Nussbaum, are the end of the story.

Liberal and courteous measures, which place religion above criticism, and which sanitize marginalized groups, while a tolerable start for peace and prosperity, are only the first step. The next stage of toleration requires the exposition of the intolerance of religions themselves.

Hadrian says

Analysis of contemporary Islamophobia through Aristotelean virtue ethics: focuses on the 'narcissism' of fear, the necessity of empathy, downplaying one's own bias, and understanding others. Though I have to say I

marvel at how remote these examples seem: were the Utøya attacks and the furor over the 'Ground Zero mosque' only five years ago? And as much as fear motivates certain aspects of Islamophobia, more of the contemporary electorate is about Rage.

Ben Adams says

A concise overview, both historical and contemporary, of the way that religious pluralism has developed, manifested and been challenged, in both Europe and the US.

Nabil says

As a child of an interfaith marriage in which my father is a Moroccan Muslim and my mother a French Roman Catholic, I have intimately experienced the divisiveness of religious intolerance. Growing up, my family dynamics were a microcosm of a diverse society with opposing opinions on how to establish a dominant identity. My grandfather asked my mother: “you’re marrying, a what!?” The furtive baptism attempts were disallowed, but of course I was allowed to have a lamb slaughtered at my circumcision to ensure my virility (TMI?). My family was fighting for control of how I would end up identifying, and it all seemed arbitrary and somewhat hateful. I was confused. My 5-year old self said it best: “mom, if you’re Catholic and dad’s Muslim, does that mean I’m Jewish?” Clearly, neither side was winning.

Thankfully my parents were kind enough to limit my exposure to the hardliners of my extended family and instilled a minimum of one hour per day of literary consumption (when I still needed the knowledge nudge). It didn’t matter what I read, even comic books counted sometimes. Through literature, what started as a binary war for my identity was transformed into something much more complex. There weren’t just two perspectives, but countless ones, all of which could have a part in making me, well, me. I started holding a very strong belief that I share with Descartes; that my individual perspective is only as complete as the amount of perspectives to which I have been exposed.

Unaware of it at the time, all of the reading was helping me cultivate what Nussbaum refers to in "The New Religious Intolerance" as the “mind’s eye”. One of her main ideas in the work is that in a world of increasing divisiveness fueled by religious (and many other types of) intolerance, there needs to be further development in human compassion. Nussbaum expands on this point by quoting George Washington, making a sharp distinction between a majority-controlled power structure merely tolerating and pitying differences, and a truly pluralistic society in which individuals have an inalienable right to “freedom of conscience.” Moving from the former to the latter, Nussbaum argues, requires the cultivating of a curiosity about others that is currently being stifled by hate-mongering and conservative demagoguery. These divisive forces encourage forming opinions about minority populations around the world from a single (and mostly uninformed) vantage point.

Nussbaum deconstructs contemporary global society’s tendency for monoline opinion forming about Islam through a brilliantly crafted genealogy of fear. Drawing from a diverse arsenal of academic tools, including her vast knowledge of political philosophy and Constitutional law, she continues that certain contemporary attitudes about minority groups are not only irresponsible, but against the foundations on which this country are based. Her language may be dense at times if you haven’t read much philosophy, but the narrative is well balanced with charming anecdotes about her personal experiences as a woman, a child of a racist father, a

converted Jewish wife, and a Chicago White Sox fan, showcasing some of the socially constructed aspects of her personality with which she has the freedom to proudly (or not so proudly) identify.

Given the identity crisis that the current presidential election cycle has made clear America is going through, I think "The New Religious Intolerance" is an especially relevant work. It reminds us that one can always create a logical (and even sometimes legal) framework for systemic religious intolerance, but it's an oversimplified model based on exploiting some of the physiological limitations of our brain behavior, and one in which a majority is claiming the right to define the identity of a minority. While I was reading this book, I couldn't help but think about what Nussbaum would make of the Make America Great Again campaign. I'd oversimplify it and say it's lazy and entitled. She'd probably be a little more specific, drawing heavily from some of the well-constructed arguments presented in this book. To make a comparison to a recent Oscar-nominated film and critically acclaimed book, if you keep a child in a Room his whole life, it's easy to superimpose a simple set of rules that define his reality. But the maintenance of the Room/child dynamic is based on a power dominance scheme that's at least unethical, but more likely morally reprehensible. Nussbaum's book urges me to say, let's free America's identity child and give the doctor from "Room" another chance to say, "It's a good thing you got him out while he was still plastic."

Ayman Fadel says

Full review available at: <http://muslimmediareview.blogspot.com...>

How can the industrialized, formally democratic societies of Europe and North America increase religious pluralism? European nations "have understood the root of nationhood to lie first and foremost in characteristics that are difficult if not impossible for new immigrants to share. Strongly influenced by romanticism, these nations have seen blood, soil, ethnolinguistic peoplehood, and religion as necessary or at least central elements of a national identity." (p. 13) Other nations, such as the United States and India, define "nationhood in terms of political ideals and struggles," thus somewhat opening the door. (p. 16)

While understanding nationhood as a political ideal facilitates religious pluralism, the chief determinant is a society's response to fear. Fear begins with a genuine problem. It "is easily displaced onto something that may have little to do with the underlying problem but that serves as a handy surrogate for it, often because the new target is already disliked." Fear is amplified by the enemy's disguise ("They pretend to be like us."), which can only be penetrated by the racist, xenophobic, patriot or religious bigot's superior insight. Humans share the emotion of fear with many other animals, and it is no doubt biologically necessary, especially in pre-agrarian societies. But "human beings [in industrialized societies] have to make decisions in a world for which evolution has given them only a very rudimentary preparation." (p. 29):

Fear is a "dimming preoccupation": an intense focus on the self that casts others into darkness. However valuable and indeed essential it is in a genuinely dangerous world, it is itself one of life's great dangers. (p. 58)

So how can human societies choose wisely despite genuine and misplaced fears?

I'll be arguing that to get a handle on our fears we need a combination of three things: sound principles involving respect for human equality; arguments that are not self-serving, targeting an alleged fault in the minority that is ubiquitous in the majority culture; and a curious and sympathetic imagination. But first we need to understand more about fear and how it works. (p. 21)

Chapter 3 discusses the first of the three legs of Professor Nussbaum's stool of religious pluralism, sound principles. If one accepts that all humans deserve dignity, regardless of their physical traits or social status or capacity for reasoning, and, if one rejects the extreme argument of the ancient Stoics that outward

circumstances can never injure a person's conscience (an expression of dignity), then "we get the principle that liberty should be both ample and equal." (p. 68)

The Anglo-American legal tradition is a result of the migration of Europe's religious dissenters, which, when combined with the religions of the Native Americans, created a religious pluralistic population. The Americans rejected "toleration" as a feature of hierarchy and adopted freedom of religion as an expression of inherent natural rights. The effort to define the proper standard for government to protecting liberty of conscience found expression in two strands of thought which have persisted in United States jurisprudence until today. The first is associated with John Locke, a seventeenth-century English philosopher. The government is forbidden from enacting laws which penalize religious belief and discriminate against practices, although they may incidentally impose burdens upon those practicing them. The second tradition, which Dr. Nussbaum supports, calls for accommodation of religious minorities practices, including atheists, since laws will typically reflect the majority's practices.

Chapter 4 exposes many instances of majoritarian suppression of minorities' doing things the majority does. She uses various European nations' restrictions of clothing associated with Muslim women to illustrate how this pattern of selfish thought threatens religious freedom.

Chapter 5, "Inner Eyes: Respect and the Sympathetic Imagination," is, in my opinion, the most important for readers of this blog. In political science terms, it's like the development of soft power for oppressed minorities:

From now on, then, I'll be focusing on works that help the imagination break out of its narcissistic moorings close to "home," by challenging it to inhabit the reality of a life that is in some respects distant or difficult. (p. 148)

The literary examples of such works include Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man*, Roger Williams's *A Key into the Language of America*, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* and Marguerite de Angeli's *Thee, Hannah!* and *Bright April*. She went into depth in discussing how the last four authors' opened the possibility of sympathetic consideration of the majority for Native Americans, Jews, Jews and African-Americans, respectively.

In effect, our authors have a triple task: first, to present true facts; then, simultaneously, to lure people's imaginations into that world and entice them to care about the people they find there; finally, to convince readers that the people there are not actually disgusting or evil but deserving of friendship and respect. (p. 187)

My only concern with this chapter is that, by using as examples authors who are members of the majority, Dr. Nussbaum leaves unanswered the question of a minority group's agency in this process. When a minority is most repressed, conversations about it occur without any of its members' participation. For example, a major milestone in perceptions of African-Americans was Alex Haley's *Roots* and the subsequent mini-series. Does Dr. Nussbaum believe that these self-expressions have limited effect unless a member of the majority precedes them?

Professor Mohammad Fadel, in June 2012, wrote a resource paper for journalists and public intellectuals to use when talking about Muslims. In it, he wrote:

In such an atmosphere [of the "war on terror"], American Muslims were subjected to a virtual inquisition, their words and actions placed under continual scrutiny, to determine whether they held any questionable beliefs. If so, they were subject to exclusion from public life. In the worst cases, sting operations were launched against individuals in the hope that they might be induced to commit a manufactured crime. A community faced with what amounts to a systematic inquisition of its beliefs, doctrines, and practices is obviously in no position to defend itself. ... As a result, American Muslims have been effectively silenced and excluded from public discussion of their own faith, not to mention important public issues regarding the

future of the “war on terror,” the country’s relationship with the Muslim world, and the future of peace in the Middle East. In such circumstances, the obligation to defend Muslims’ status as equal citizens in the American political community has necessarily fallen on the shoulders of non-Muslim individuals and civil society institutions.

I've tried as much as possible in this blog to highlight and support North American Muslims' own expressions. Maybe I've imbibed too much radical and black nationalist thinking, but I've become unconcerned about the level of non-Muslim support of Muslims.

Having said, that Dr. Nussbaum's book is quite supportive, and I appreciate it. And thinking more about it, I'm a member of the American Civil Liberties Union and Americans United for Separation of Church and State, both of which are liberal, not radical, organizations. (Gulp), I'm probably a liberal.

Chapter 6 is an examination of the Park 51/Cordoba Institute ("Ground Zero Mosque") controversy in the light of the three necessary characteristics to overcome some people's fear.

Chapter 7 is a conclusion reiterating the importance of the imagination in establishing pluralism.

When we read this book, in addition to seeking ways to improve their own situations as minorities in industrialized societies, we Muslims should also consider how to escape our own narcissism. The audio quality isn't great, but listen to this lecture by Junaid Jahangir entitled "The Cycle of Hate." He lists the human rights abuses Muslims perpetrate against minorities in Muslim-majority societies.

Finally, I hope the author changes the book cover, pictured above, in any future printings. I guess I'm just tired of Muslim women's clothing being such a focus of attention, from both Muslims and non-Muslims. It also reminded me of the regrettable promotional poster for Showtime's Homeland.

Kramer Thompson says

A fairly interesting look at religious intolerance (read: Islamophobia) in the modern world. While I agree with much of Nussbaum's general argument, I was not convinced by her handling of whether or not a burqa ban would be legitimate. She argues that on several factors, the burqa is really no worse than other things (scarves, or tight jeans, etc.). But I do not think she dedicated enough time to proving this point. Or at least, she didn't dedicate enough time for my liking.

Yair Leonardo Vera says

Realizar un análisis filosófico de la religión como factor aún decisivo en la política, la cultura y la economía es un tarea delicada y densa; escribirlo, un reto. Martha Nussbaum afronta este complejo ejercicio con una narrativa clara, escritura precisa y ejemplos tan claros como cotidianos, cuya lectura llevará al lector a un inevitable ejercicio autocrítico.

Al evaluar varios episodios que buscan restringir la avanzada del islam por Europa (debido al temor frente a los fenómenos migratorios y el aumento de la población proveniente de aquellas naciones), Nussbaum evidencia no sólo los rescoldos de nacionalismo que aún persisten en los imaginarios de los países europeos, también las contradicciones de un continente que promueve ser la cuna de la civilización occidental, pero donde todavía persisten comportamientos e ideales que contradicen una supuesta modernidad, evidente en

las restricciones a los minaretes en Suiza o los velos islámicos que visten las mujeres en Francia.

El miedo a lo distinto sólo desenmascara el narcisismo de quien se cree superior al otro, debido a la tradición cultural, lingüística o religiosa, baluartes intangibles que son amenazados por los preceptos del Corán y el hipotético establecimiento de la *Sharia* (la Ley Islámica). Ese miedo frecuentemente está justificado en que aquellos migrantes son sucios, huelen mal, tienen hábitos poco saludables (relacionados con su alimentación o su higiene personal) y su vestimenta representa un potencial peligro terrorista.

Frente a esta discriminación la supuesta imparcialidad abre el espacio a la injusticia, pues las leyes que tratan de limitar los derechos de un grupo de personas específico (sea por su raza o religión) no aplican para otros grupos, amparados en la libertad religiosa. Al evidenciar estas contradicciones, Nussbaum expone a través de la filosofía del Derecho que estas acciones afectan los principios fundamentales de respeto e igualdad que inspiraron a los fundadores de las trece colonias o George Washington.

El miedo es valioso para el discurso político que promueve la defensa de un enemigo interno, aquél que está afectando los valores tradicionales de nuestra sociedad, socavando nuestros empleos, traficando drogas y violando a las mujeres. Frente a esa amenaza silente, camuflada en nuestras ciudades, es necesario construir muros que detengan la migración de esos *bad hombres* (mas no aquellos extranjeros de dudosas fortunas, dispuestos a invertir petrodólares o lavar las ganancias de la ilegalidad en el mercado inmobiliario de Miami) y devolverle la grandeza a nuestra nación. Atacar aquellos que piensan, creen o se visten diferente parece ser el fundamento de un nacionalismo ignorante, dispuesto a elegir a cualquier líder que sepa agitar esos temores primitivos.

Vale la pena la lectura de este libro, no sólo por la importancia actual, sino por la solidez de los argumentos y la exposición de los motivos, para comprender la empatía como un principio de justicia y convivencia en una sociedad libre.

Noé Ajo caamaño says

Vivimos sumidos en la ignorancia más vergonzosa. La heurística del miedo y el prejuicio más burdo nacido de la desinformación y la mera imaginación reinan. En un mundo donde la cultura monolítica ya no es una opción pragmáticamente posible, una situación semejante es deplorable y peligrosa. Martha, con su mirada cultivada y bien sopesada nos muestra un modo virtuoso de pensar las libertades religiosas, bajo la premisa de que, sencillamente es necesario que las buenas personas aprendan, si no a quererse (utopía imposible) si al menos a tolerarse con buen criterio.
