Nussbaum about Sentience: A Philosophical Reflection During the Pandemic toward Indigenous Societal Aid as an Imaginative Act

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Using Martha Nussbaum's Upheavals of Thought, I argue that ethical and political systems are only good if they are alive in human ways. These systems have valuations and are cultivated in the ways of the people, surfacing out in times of crises. This demonstrates that emotion and imaginative abilities enhanced by the humanities and the arts play important roles in ethical decision-making and public undertakings.

The first section is intentionally written from a personal standpoint through a thought experiment to ground the reality that, indeed, ethical decisions can never be devoid of emotional considerations. It is supported by another experience situated in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. This follows Nussbaum's literary technique, showing that "emotions and reason are inextricably linked in an inescapable logic." Then, in the second section, the analysis is extended to the national crisis that was caused by the same pandemic. I discuss here the importance of imagination, which is usually stimulated in the humanities and the arts. Consequently, to acquire or to be deficient in imaginative abilities would determine the response of those on political platforms in times of dire need and desperate conditions of their people. I end briefly with a particular imaginative act, the establishment of community pantries, as an embodiment of Filipino sentience through the national concept of bayanihan. This serves as a challenge to imaginatively build on indigenous concepts as the Philippine society battles against every crisis.

Keywords: Emotion, ethical decision, imaginative ability, COVID-19 pandemic, *bayanihan*

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Introduction

In the *Upheavals of Thought*,[1] Martha Nussbaum propounds the argument that emotion plays a substantial role in ethics and moral judgments. Apparently, it is a voluminous account tacitly counterarguing against traditional ethical theories that see emotions affecting moral reasoning in negative ways. Although contingent on various factors, for Nussbaum, emotions are essential cognitive functions. Ethical reasoning is grounded in human sentience and, in this sense, philosophical abstractions are avoided in coming up with moral judgments. Grief and neediness are identified as salient points because they are emotions that necessitate interconnection and dependency on one other. To be imaginative in creating such states of affairs is one of the appropriate responses that would result in committing to such upheavals in Nussbaum's sense wherein there are varying heights and depths in terms of our socio-political conditions. This was further realized when we struggled against COVID-19 in various aspects.

In this article that was suspended until post-pandemic, I argue that ethical and political systems are good only if they are alive in human ways. I do this by first establishing the logic of emotion in the first section. Nevertheless, it is demonstrated not by providing a series of arguments just as in traditional philosophical discourses, but by narrating subjective experiences and specifying the rational undertakings and ethical decisions done by the subjects. These experiences are aided by the philosophical insights Nussbaum laid out in the *Upheavals*. The second section extends to having the perspective of a national sentiment. Sentiments are emotions. It is a feeling or opinion toward situations or events. So, I turn then to broaden my notion about emotion to involve national concerns in relation to the previous COVID-19 crisis. In this section, I posit Nussbaum's challenge that emphatic imagining is an ability that is necessary for political platforms wherein a political leader can understand the struggles of the people from a first-person perspective. This ability is further developed in the study of the humanities and the arts, and then fully executed in times of crises. In the concluding section after considering national concerns, I highlight the emergence of community pantries as a manifestation of an imaginative ability that fully demonstrated *bayanihan*, a Filipino indigenous concept, in the recent national crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Personal Take on the Logic of Emotion and Ethical Decisions

I would like to begin this section by setting it in an experiential context *E* of a particular subject *S*, just the same which grounded Nussbaum's thinking to be profoundly philosophical (i.e., the death of her mother). Although I can say that Nussbaum's experience is far too irredeemable than the experience of *S*, it can be said that the challenges could ground one's thinking to a more complex but intuitive standpoint type of living. By complex, I mean having the principles *S* learned in life that may be unrelated but are surely connected in a complicated way that makes it almost impossible to come up with a consistent perspective. It seems that as one follows Nussbaum's material, the oscillation from one philosophical system to another is evident. As she documents various research in anthropology, psychology, the arts, and even cognitive science, the complications further surface out as well. The insights she inter-disciplinarily gathered made the *Upheavals* perplexing, yes, but allowed

[1] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

one to look at life more holistically if dealt with painstakingly. This is in contrast to just providing a series of justifications and cognitive reasoning about life's phenomena as a typical philosophical approach.

This leads me to say that as humans go through circumstances beyond what we can control, with the varying heights and depths of life experiences, we may allow intuition driven by emotion and imagination to guide us so we can come up with an ethical system as human beings attached to our humanness. Although the aforementioned contention is not overtly stated by Nussbaum, she notes, "most of the time emotions link us to items that we regard as important for our wellbeing, but do not fully control. The emotion records that sense of vulnerability and imperfect control." She goes on to say that "we can observe that this means that the acceptance of such propositions says something about the person: that she allows herself and her good to depend upon things beyond her control, that she acknowledges a certain passivity before the world."[2] Indeed in the analogy of Marcel Proust's Baron de Charlus, Nussbaum takes off with her treatise from where she drew the material's title, i.e., *Upheavals of Thought*. She emphasizes that just like the world of Charlus in love, the "geography of the world" are movements that are out of control and varying heights and depths. His strong feelings may be compared to the world's shifting terrains of valleys and mountains. As if by "geological upheavals of thought" in contrast to the "uniform plain" of a life that is indifferent and unattached to human relations wherein "no idea stood out as urgent or salient, no evaluation jutted up above any other." Charlus' initial highly independent world is seen from "the point of view of a far-distant sun" that is "not yet humanized by the earthquakes of human love and limitation, which are at once comic and tragic."[3]

Let me now turn to the experiential context *E* I mentioned above that grounds this article's philosophical insights. This follows Nussbaum's demonstration of having emotional attachments in her logical decisions in the *Upheavals* concerning the death of her mother in April 1992.[4]

In 2018, *S*'s mother, at 61 years old, was diagnosed to have Alzheimer's disease. Although it seemed to just be an early manifestation at that time, *S* thought that the pain of seeing her cognitive functions deteriorate was probably more painful than the illness itself. Somebody experiencing a gradual cognitive decline, most likely, is not even conscious of the immensity of the illness. Of course, people with dementia feel pain, and it is surely more awful not being able to identify what's wrong. But it is also undeniable that the people around them experience mental and emotional distress – knowing for a fact that a loved one having this case can no longer be cured but the loved one's cognitive decline may only be suppressed. The death of Nussbaum's mother is irrevocable, but the case of *S*'s mother is incurable.

The condition of *S*'s mother is further aggravated due to the lockdowns mandated by the government in battling against the crises during the COVID-19 pandemic. Her condition turned severe, wherein she started to lose her speech, and rapid mental deterioration got underway. She also began to have violent aggressions throughout the day and extremely unpredictable mood swings. This article assumes this *E* at the time of its original writing.

[2] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 42.

[3] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 87.

[4] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 19.

So, in this first section, I do not intend to provide a critique of Nussbaum's account of the role of emotions in coming up with an ethical system to provide a counterpoint against emotions being merely impulses that may be separated from our cognitive functions. I just presuppose this role as I look at what emotions value in consideration of the backdrop *E* I laid out at the onset. I then hope that this initially establishes that indeed what's deeply embedded in philosophizing and ethical judgments are these emotions that precondition the imaginative disposition at the latter part of this article.

Value and Culture

It is first important to note that in valuation and cultivation, not one precedes the other. Values develop in the existence of cultures in a diverse particularity of contexts, and cultures are honed due to the value-systems that are greatly considered by peoples. Nussbaum does not also provide a genealogy to understand the evolution of these concepts. It is surely not her intention. But it seems that she just articulates her argument by assuming both value and culture.

The assumption of both value and culture is also evident, which leads Nussbaum to reject reductionistic accounts of emotions and that psychological approaches "have been handicapped" by psychological reductionism "that ignored, or even denied, the role of the creature's own interpretations of the world."[5] She asserts that human beings in having their emotions are "profoundly rational: for they are ways of taking in important news of the world."[6] She powerfully argues from the study of Richard Lazarus that:

> To desire something and to recognize what must be done to attain it, as well as to recognize when its attainment has succeeded or failed, is to be inevitably emotional. In this way, emotions and reason are inextricably linked in an inescapable logic.[7]

Emotions are attached to valuations. To desperately yearn for something or to be indifferent about anything is an expression that allows us to see the value of what is being desired. It can also be evaluated if one is doing well in the attainment of what is being valued. For example, in the context of the recent pandemic, *S* struggled to decide if *S* would visit her mother to spend time with her and take her to places or just focus on finishing one's academic tasks. Needless to say, *S* is pursuing a doctorate degree, has a full-time job, and is committed to other responsibilities as well with her young family. There are also times that there needs to be medical consultations because *S*'s mother has other serious health issues too. Apparently, her mother also has Leukemia. Having a loved one with severe illnesses indeed slows down one's life. Definitely, *E* is an emotional struggle and a rational undertaking also.

Evaluating how one is doing in the attainment of what is being valued, one is forced to think things through by weighing what really matters. It is the exact experience *S* has, hence a rational undertaking. If *S*'s work performance gets affected because of spending time with her mother, will *S* be in danger of losing one's job? Yes, definitely! If *S* loses her job, will *S* regret the monetary loss her young family would experience? Probably not much, because *S* may have experienced it before and income still became possible. (Of course, God is faithful to provide in the faith *S* profess – a metaphysical consideration that Nussbaum herself recognizes as a cultural factor in the third chapter.) Is completing *S*'s doctoral

[5] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 92.
[6] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 108.
[7] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 108.

degree really that important? Of course, because *S* committed to a lifetime of scholarship – a *vocation* that *S* greatly considers as opposed to just being employed as a teacher. Could it not be delayed? Yes, *S* could decide so. But considering that dementia is hereditary, it would be most prudent to take every opportunity to finish her degree as early as possible. But how about the time lost considering that the brain functions of *S*'s mother are relentlessly deteriorating and her brain functions can no longer be reverted, is the delay not justifiable at all? These and some other questions of critical importance get in the way and the problems cannot just be dealt with by logical rigor apart from emotional factors and considerations.

I say that emotions that are anchored to what we value provide substance to our logical decisions. In fact, the emotions that are anchored to what we value are always strongly attached to *human* reasoning as opposed to the valueless propositions of logical symbols and philosophical propositions. Nussbaum tells a story that could be related well in consideration of the thought experiment. She thought of canceling a lecture out of respect for her mother's death and to give way to her grief due to this. However, she was discouraged by friends who said that canceling an organized lecture would be a bad thing. In her own words so as not to distort her dilemma, she said,

> I felt guilty when I was grieving, because I wasn't working on the lecture; and I felt guilty when I was working on the lecture, because I wasn't grieving.
> But then,
>
> The night before the lecture my hosts wanted to take me to a festive dinner, but there I drew the line. Eating a big celebratory meal seemed to me disrespectful and terrible. Some of my hosts understood these feelings, but others thought me peculiar. I ate quietly in someone's home, insisting on baked chicken with no sauce.[8]

[8] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 140.

Nussbaum's experience, *S*'s situation, and other conditions demanding ethical considerations may only be prudently responded to by having valuations. Drawing the line seems to be a prudent decision, if not outrightly ethical. Giving way to Nussbaum's grief and respect for her mother's death is, in her conscience, the only right response. However, canceling the lecture is also not right because it would be a violation of other people's precious commitments to it. But to not honor a festive dinner may be considered of less value. In *S*'s case, *S* just cannot give up making her time available for the needs of her mother while *S* also cannot neglect her personal responsibilities. But in terms of losing income for some time, *S* could gladly forego it for the highly-valuable things.

Some may raise issues on this valuation of *S* just as some may have been very disappointed with Nussbaum's turning down the invitation. They might say to *S*: "How about your young family's sustenance?" Indeed, this is a very pragmatic and legitimate concern. But it is already stated that *S* has ethical valuations (and metaphysical assumptions). These make her value judgments and decisions concrete – allowing *S*'s struggle to demonstrate what Nussbaum mentioned above "emotions and reason are inextricably linked in an inescapable logic."

What adds up to this valuation is actually how culture forms one's judgments into certain patterns of behavior. Nussbaum also regards the cultivation of emotions in animals. She reports the account of George Pitcher wherein the dogs Lupa and Remus are seen to have emotions. These dogs rush to Pitcher to lick his eyes and cheeks when he weeps in watching a documentary of a boy dying due to a congenital heart ailment. Lupa, however, was a wild dog and it's possible that she may have experienced certain abuses. In one instance, she refused to

approach the food while men were in view when she was being fed as a puppy. Even though both dogs could empathize, this tells us that external factors indeed cultivate negative and positive emotions even in animals.[9]

This is also true in the different upbringing of children, particularly infants, in their cultures. In the third and fourth chapters, Nussbaum discusses this notion extensively. The extrapolations and the variations are interesting but too comprehensive to discuss. Let me just highlight the trait that is highly relevant to *S*'s emotions and reasoning posited above. *S* is a Filipino and family ties is firm in the culture, especially attachment to parents.[10] Of course, this trait has many disadvantages just as it might have several advantages. But this is beside the point and to have a critique on this Filipino trait is not this paper's intent. This surely requires another length and purpose.

The purpose of juxtaposing this cultural trait is simply to establish the fact that *S*'s relationship with her mother may be of the same worth as that of Nussbaum's. In fact, it turns out that most factors of *S*'s social variation (i.e. beliefs, behaviors, care, needs, etc.) as discussed by Nussbaum may have direct links to *S*'s mother. It is the kind of cultivation that a splice of *S*'s emotion goes through. Emotional it is. But it is also the most logical and ethical for *S* in this season of her life.

Trisha Greenhalgh also narrates a personal experience about the death of her mother due to COVID-19. She identifies a number of ethical theories including deontology (duty-bound ethics) and utilitarianism (minimizing pain and maximizing benefits) wherein she recognizes that these "moral theories lead to different conclusions about the best course of action in situations of moral uncertainty" but the outcomes prove to be *humanly* unsatisfying. She then notes how she was helped by the practical ethics of Nussbaum about the role of emotional human attachments rather than theoretical ones.[11]

Greenhalgh's mother was admitted to the hospital following a fall when COVID-19 was surging in Britain. After discharge, her mother had a fever and got readmitted because she got infected by the virus. Named as her next of kin, Greenhalgh received a call that her mother's condition worsened, and said to be closer to death. The dilemma was common – either to visit her mother or not because of the rising cases. On one hand, she desperately wanted to see her mother for the last time to "provide a measure of physical contact to ease her suffering" and hear her final words. But on the other hand, she is a cancer survivor and living with a few vulnerable relatives. She thought, "What if my well-intentioned visit led indirectly to the death of someone who would otherwise have remained well?"[12] So from the utilitarian perspective, she notes, "the action which most probably maximises expected rightness, given the uncertainties involved and the seriousness of certain outcomes, seems to favour not visiting."[13] Trained as a clinician, however, Greenhalgh was taught to reason deontologically, and visiting a dying parent is "*intrinsically* right." She also

[9] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 89, 118-120.

[10] Strong family ties as something typical to Filipinos and the closeness we have with our parents may provide a rudimentary ground for our decision-making. Nussbaum also emphasizes that "laws and institutions shape our sense of intimate attachments…" (Nussbaum 421). Actually, there is a Senate Bill by Senator Panfilo Lacson known as the Parents Welfare Act of 2019. It intends to legislate the responsibility of the not incapacitated children or grandchildren to take care of their parents. Of course, there will be points of contention here and clarification of terms, such as "incapacitated," "neglect," "responsibility," etc. But considering our culture, this bill is highly possible to be a law. One might ask if a bill is even necessary. Yet probably, it is now the kind of individualism creeping into Filipino contemporary society. But since there is a possibility of it being a law, it will then be another cultivating factor in the emotions – if not in the family members, in the society that might see if there's neglect.

[11] Greenhalgh, Trisha, "Moral Uncertainty: A Case Study of COVID-19," in *Patient Education and Counseling* (2021), 1-5.

[12] Trisha, "Moral Uncertainty," 2.

[13] Trisha, "Moral Uncertainty," 3.

thinks that restrictions to visit patients with COVID-19 are uncritically based on utilitarian values that sacrifice the patients' well-being. But the essence of Kant's categorical imperative also reminds her that she only ought to act and that she can also will that her maxim should become a universal law. "Whilst I personally am unlikely to spread the virus," she says, "others following the same course of action may not be willing or able to take the same precautions."[14] So she realizes that she also has a duty to set an example and stay away. But still, she decided to go because it was her mother and it was surely the right thing to do.

In this dilemma, Greenhalgh resorts to Nussbaum's *Upheavals*. She recalls how the book is prefaced with the same experience when Nussbaum received a call about her dying mother and gave an account of conflicting emotions and ethical decisions before and after her mother's death. Just as in this present article, Greenhalgh pays attention to Nussbaum's argument that "emotions do moral work and embody judgments about value." Surely, it is inevitable to be "emotional about something we care about" and emotions are indeed "evaluative in nature and should be engaged with." Hence, rather than suppressing our emotions, "we appraise the situation with and through our emotions."[15]

Greenhalgh's article is indeed a powerful example of the role of emotions in times of personal crisis and moral uncertainty. She finally decided to visit her dying mother. But as her husband drove her for that final visit, just as in Nussbaum's "earthquakes of human love," she felt a new wave of powerful emotions toward the man who journeyed with her for 34 years and committed to support whatever choice she made. So, when they arrived at the hospital, she could not bring herself to go in. Instead of holding her dying mother's hand, in sober silence, she grasped her husband's instead.

Greenhalgh concludes that the philosophy of Nussbaum allowed her to use the emotional response to her mother's predicament and informed her of what she should do morally. Although she initially concluded that visiting her mother was morally right, she was led to an entirely different act, not by "a dispassionate appraisal of empirical facts or formal value hierarchies" but by a further wave of emotion towards her husband.[16]

Ending this section, I would like to highlight Nussbaum's profound insight that preconditioned the argument of the *Upheavals*. Nussbaum posits that emotions cannot be easily sidelined in ethical judgments since they are "suffused with intelligence and discernment," and they contain in themselves "an awareness of value or importance." Hence, "we will have to consider emotions as part and parcel of the system of ethical reasoning" as we "grapple with the messy material of grief and love, anger and fear, and the role these tumultuous experiences play in thought about the good and the just."[17]

As one truly engages in philosophy, one deals with the problem of pain and suffering inevitably. Indeed, there are traditional ways to approach these problems philosophically with extreme logical rigor, sometimes even to the point of getting devoid of emotions and having merely cerebral responses. But this is not the approach of Nussbaum. In fact, she deliberately shows that the philosophical approach can be demonstrated the other way around. The more we deal with the problem of pain and suffering, the more our emotions prove to be in the substructure of the

[14] Trisha, "Moral Uncertainty," 3.
[15] Trisha, "Moral Uncertainty," 3.
[16] Trisha, "Moral Uncertainty," 4.
[17] Trisha, "Moral Uncertainty," 1.

discourse. As philosophers talk about the good and the just, they deal with evil and injustice at the same time. As they talk about pleasure they still deal with pain. But one needs not to be a philosopher (just as Greenhalgh is not) to grapple with these opposites. We naturally deal with tensions between true and false or between good and bad as sentient beings. As Nussbaum says, we deal "with the messy material of grief and love, anger and fear," etc. making our ethical judgments not pass through a "uniform plain" but "geological upheavals."

Imaginative Abilities Confronting a National Concern

Establishing logic grounded in human emotion seems to be a big leap to discuss socio-political issues. Nevertheless, Nussbaum contends that the concern we have inside our own families is "related to a broader concern for fellow citizens of our nation and the world." In the same way, "[p]ublic arrangements (or lack of them) for the care of children, the disabled, and the elderly, shape the type of compassion we will have for predicaments befalling people who give care, or who receive it."[18] Hence, there seems to be no gap between the inclination for compassion of an individual in the private sphere and his concern as a citizen in the public space because "compassion itself standardly includes the thought of common humanity."[19] Although still, Nussbaum admits early on that there cannot be "a full answer to our questions about emotion's role in a good human life, even in its public dimension."[20]

As private citizens with emotions and personal concerns, we engage the public space as common individuals who are all in need. In this engagement, regardless of our own individualities and private needs, "compassion should be given to the person who is unaware of the extent of her illness or deprivation because of mental impairment or the social deformation of preferences."[21] Interestingly, "mental impairment" and "social deformation of preferences" coincide here in Nussbaum's thought. Although I cannot avoid correlating the severe illness of *S*'s mother at this time of writing, I am aware that Nussbaum considers this impairment in a broad sense that extends to the socio-political that has nothing to do with the likes of *E*. What Nussbaum emphasizes is that even those who are deprived of basic entitlements are themselves oblivious to the extent of their deprivation and the abuse being done to them. Giving compassion to those in need may only be perfectly done if agents acquire the ability of emphatic imagining. It involves "a painful emotion directed at another person's misfortune or suffering."[22] I shall go back to this in the discussion of the importance of the humanities and the arts because these are the domains in education where emphatic imagining gets enhanced and developed. But let me first briefly discuss the notion of public life and political systems.

Nussbaum approaches the issue of compassion in public life in two levels: the level of individual psychology that entails emotion and imagination, and the level of institutional design in the public sphere. She emphasizes that the "relationship between compassion and social institutions is and should be a two-way street: compassionate individuals construct institutions that embody what they imagine; and institutions, in turn, influence the development of compassion in individuals."[23] The intertwining of these two

[18] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 422.
[19] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 370.
[20] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 299.
[21] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 371.
[22] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 306.
[23] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 403.

levels are very evident that it might not be possible to come up with a clearly identified division of this section. Nevertheless, for the sake of thought flow to highlight the envisioning of an imaginative public sphere, the succeeding discussion includes a brief description of what Nussbaum sees about the inescapability of the condition we are in due to a universal socio-political structure. Then it zooms into individuals who are potential agents in the public space by learning to be imaginative in setting the world right through compassion and emphatic imagining in the interplay of institutions and individuals.

"The insights of an appropriate compassion may be embodied in the structure of just institutions," thinking of Adam Smith's "judicious spectator" and John Rawls' "benevolence via the Original Position" Nussbaum asserts, "so that we will not need to rely on perfectly compassionate citizens."[24] However, the converse seems to be true in our human condition since we do not live under just institutions. In fact, we can say that we are highly unlikely to live under this just state. Even if excellent institutions could exist, she further comments, "they will need support from people in order to be stable." She strongly stresses:

> We must, therefore, rely on compassionate individuals to keep essential political insights alive and before our eyes. **Political systems are human, and they are only good if they are alive in a human way.** If we produced an excellent social welfare system and yet dead, obedient, authority-focused citizens, that would be a failure no matter how well the system worked.[25]

Amidst the political system, no matter how good it is, compassion allows us to see that there are misfortunes that happen to people "through no fault of their own," in Nussbaum's own words. "It imagines that a person possessed of basic human dignity has been injured by life on a grand scale."[26] Some Filipinos consider a nugget of wisdom such as: *Hindi kasalanan ang ipanganak kang mahirap. Pero ang mamatay kang mahirap, kasalanan mo na 'yun!* But this seems to demonstrate naivete and shortsightedness, if not a denial, of the kind of system all human beings are trapped within. This was expressed by an elite whose world is just the world of monetary success since birth that seems to be detached from common humanity.[27] But as we break free from the confinements of our own conceptions about the world, it can be said that it is easier to take such a principle than to live and be guided by it. Unfortunately, many people are trapped within the economic and political systems and the more they try to escape, the more they get submerged down deep into the mud, so to speak. Even if some are able to escape the confines of their misfortunes, the disparity still exists between them and those who have always been up above the social ladder. The truth is, I may be pointing this out from an abled, middle-class, third-person, perspective; but still not able to understand it as somebody who really experiences misfortunes, poverty, and deprivation from a helpless, low-income, first-person consciousness.

This is where Nussbaum's point about compassion and public life becomes very salient. "We will continue to need compassion as an appropriate response and as a motive to attend with concern to the needs of our fellows," she posits, "a motive that needs recognition in the design of the political conception and the education of citizens."[28]

[24] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 403.
[25] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 404 (emphasis mine).
[26] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 405.
[27] I searched for the source of this seemingly powerful Tagalog quote. I did not know that it was just a translation from a rich person's statement that I shall leave unnamed: "If you are born poor, then it is not your fault. But if you die poor, then it is your fault." Perhaps a better derivation from this would be: "*Hindi kasalanan ang ipanganak kang mahirap. Pero ang mamatay kang* ***ganun pa rin kahirap****, kasalanan mo na 'yun!*" I suppose this statement at least acknowledges Nussbaum's contention of "being injured by life on a grand scale."
[28] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 405.

The level of individual psychology that entails compassion and imagination enters the education of citizens. Nussbaum points out that "if compassion is there, even in a distorted form, we have an ethical core to work with, a promising imaginative basis for the extension or evening of concern."[29] Hence, there is a need to strongly inculcate compassion in the teaching of ethics. It is not clear though what Nussbaum means by compassion being in a distorted form. Perhaps for example, whenever we practice altruism, different motives are associated with the act that makes sifting the noble intentions from ill motives difficult – thereby, making this act impure and distorted. Of course, one should always act with noble intentions. However, it is still sometimes tainted with distortions as such. Be that as it may, an act of altruism allows an event by which the interdependency of humans is conceived, taught, and learned. "A culture that publicly supports care for extreme physical and/or mental dependency as a primary social good," Nussbaum says, "no longer pretends that its citizens are all independent rational adults… It acknowledges the neediness of every person, and the fact that all of us begin and many of us end our lives in a state of extreme dependency."[30] Filipinos strongly demonstrate this interdependency. However, being in the national crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic impeded what would have been a good demonstration of connections among people. In turn, what transpired is the aggravation of the dire needs and desperations of the people, isolations from one another, and the distortions of the interplay between the individuals and their institutions.

In that context of extreme dependency, Nussbaum then moved to suggest a seemingly trivial but strongly justifiable proposal. Her critique is that at all educational levels, the humanities and the arts are set aside and given less priority. However, she highlights that these domains in education "make a vital and irreplaceable contribution to citizenship. Without such contributions, there will just be "an obtuse and emotionally dead citizenry" blind about the picture of others in social reality.[31] She profoundly articulates that,

> it connects its reader to highly concrete circumstances other than her own, making her an inhabitant of both privileged and oppressed groups in these circumstances. In that way, it exercises the muscles of the imagination, making people capable of inhabiting, for a time, the world of a different person, and seeing the meaning of events in that world from the outsider's viewpoint.[32]

I find it really interesting that Nussbaum's eclectic thinking highlights the importance of the imagination even in the early exposure of children to a rhythmic song like *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*. "In learning such a song," she notes, "the child develops further her already present sense of wonder – a sense of mystery that mingles curiosity with awe" in singing "How I wonder what you are."[33] Nussbaum argues that a child who has been cultivated with wonder and imagination will be able to welcome other persons' misfortunes with sympathy, especially if that child is "psychologically able" to care outside one's self. She will be able to identify "with thoughts and feelings that are in some ways like her own, and some ways strange and mysterious." She will be greatly disturbed as she notices the "sight of blood, the deaths of animals, the distress of parents and friends" and the suffering of other living creatures. "[T]his empathy will be accompanied by good wishes toward the object," Nussbaum stresses, "if the child has received a basically loving upbringing."[34]

[29] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 414.
[30] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 425.
[31] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 431. See also Jose Dalisay, Jr., "Why Arts Should Matter" in TVUP *100 Master Voices*, 08 December 2016.
[32] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 431.
[33] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 426-427.
[34] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 427-428.

Nussbaum also emphasizes that "public education at every level should cultivate the ability to imagine the experiences of others and to participate in their sufferings." The compassionate imagination of individuals provides essential information to aid the sufferings of the people they imagine. Although of course, imagination cannot "displace the calculative and fact-gathering uses of intelligence." But this imagination supplements what is lacking in the calculation and the facts gathered to enable individuals "to see the human meaning of facts that might otherwise have seemed remote" and "to master more and more of the appropriate judgments and become able to extend their empathy to more people and types of people."[35]

It is very unfortunate that as a person grows older, that person loses such awe and wonder, and gets detached from being imaginative. That's why the teaching of the arts and the humanities should not be sidelined just as Nussbaum argued and it needs to be seriously considered. This enhances empathic imagination wherein students learn to value "the diversity of circumstances in which human beings struggle for flourishing."[36] The arts and the humanities are not intended to learn facts about classes, nationalities, historical phenomena, etc. But being drawn through imagination to the contexts where other people's lives struggle and eventually becoming participants with them. In the study of history, politics, etc., of course, being drawn to the struggles of the people is surely attained. But through stories, the humanities and the arts further enhance the imagination of how to go about the struggle.[37] As Nussbaum emphasizes, "empathetic imagining is an extremely valuable aid to the formation of appropriate judgments and responses."[38]

The humanities and the arts are not for erudition according to Nussbaum. In fact, if that would be the case, it may just bring about an entirely opposite response that may just lead to impractical discussions about artworks and other forms of literature. It would compromise the very spirit of the narrative conveyed by a particular art or literature that "exists because of love, humility, faith in humankind, hope, and critical thinking among women and men, in communion with each other with the goal of abolishing *dehumanizing* discourses."[39] Just as Nussbaum cautions, this erudition may encourage elitism that fails to be compassionate for the less-privileged and promotes smugness and prejudice to those in need. Rather than being engaged with the struggles of the people in whatever way possible, this leads to the neglect of what she considers as the "vital political function" that is to "cultivate imaginative abilities that are central to political life."[40]

Thus, the challenge of Nussbaum is to demand political leaders who are not just knowledgeable about historical facts and social phenomena. Rather, they must have the ability to take on the "imaginary curriculum." This is demonstrated by not just being informed about gathered data and necessary facts about the diverse ways of life with which they are likely to come in contact, "but entering into these lives with empathy and seeing the human meaning of the issues at stake in them."[41] They should demonstrate "a reasonable and appropriate compassion."[42] With this she commends Lincoln's compassion for the suffering of slaves, for whom his imagination led

[35] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 427.
[36] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 432.
[37] Toledo, John Leihmar C. "The Oblation on Our Minds: Teaching the Oblation in the Time of the Pandemic." *Philippine Humanities Review* vol. 22, no. 1 (2020): 3-4.
[38] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 432.
[39] Toledo, "Oblational on our Minds," 3 (emphasis mine).
[40] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 432-433.
[41] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 441-442.
[42] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 435.

him to invoke equal humanity to their oppressors; while at the same time conduces a merciful view to the offenders.[43] Nevertheless, leaders may still try to employ anger "that is targeted at injustices, not at people."[44] Although leaders ought to be merciful and compassionate to offenders in the state, injustice, of course, should not be taken lightly. It needs to be addressed legally and accordingly.

But then, it still seems that a compassionate leader may sometimes get it wrong due to the "distorted forms" that may insidiously creep into the political action. Still, as Nussbaum strongly stresses:

> Compassion is not "irrational" in the sense of "impulsive" or "lacking thought." Nor, in central cases, is it normatively irrational in the sense of being based on bad thought… The fallibility of compassion should not induce us to omit it entirely from legal deliberation, any more than the fallibility of belief should cause us to omit all beliefs.[45]

Besides, to omit compassion entirely pulls out the "ethical core" from which the imaginative basis for a political action could emerge.

Denouement: Imagining an Indigenous Concept amidst National Crises

Due to the lockdowns and other contingencies that were brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, our people were deprived of the very entitlement to earn a living. Many lost their jobs due to the economic decline and bankruptcy of employers. Health professionals and facilities were not even prepared for such a crisis. It also seems that the mental health of people (just like *S*'s mother) is not even on the radar of serious concern. And there are surely other desperate considerations that now and then would come up wherein the emotions are affected by Nussbaum's "geography of the world" with "uncontrolled movements" and enormous "variations of heights and depths."[46]

During the previous national pandemic, it could be asked how our government responded. Social anthropologist Melba Padilla Maggay pointed out in an institutional conversation that *bayanihan* – a Filipino core concept of having a spirit of communal unity to attain something – arises when an established leadership acts authoritatively but fails to address critical concerns thereby making the people get their acts together. The context of the discussion is on the emergence of community pantries wherein random people are encouraged to give goods according to their ability and take any available goods based on needs.[47]

Unfortunately, the term "*bayanihan*" had been hijacked by the corruption of our political system and the vested self-interests of our public officials. One aim of the recent Bayanihan Acts is to provide subsidies to assist families through the social amelioration program (SAP) as they go through atrocious contingencies brought about by the pandemic. Nevertheless, these Acts just accommodated distortions (probably not even "compassion in distorted forms") that oppressed the people in one way or another. Aside from the inefficient distribution of subsidies, we heard of people receiving less of what they were expecting as informed by the news and public announcements. One would wonder who should be questioned about the cutback and the taking

[43] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 437-438.
[44] Nussbaum, Martha C. "Toward a Globally Sensitive Patriotism." *Daedalus* vol. 137, no. 3 (2008): 84-85.
[45] Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 441.
[46] Greenhalgh dealt with the said clashing emotions at the time of her crisis: "Anger towards everyone who had ignored masking and social distancing guidance, resulting in the surge of cases from which my mother had become infected. Guilt that I had so rarely found time in my busy schedule to visit her before the pandemic cut us off. Compassion for the depth of her suffering. Fury at a nurse's decision that a doctor could not be disturbed at night even though she was crying out in pain. Anguish that I may not be able to see and touch her one last time."
[47] Melba Padilla Maggay, "Community Pantry: Kulturang Pinoy para sa Pinoy" 1:02:00-1:03:20.

of commissions. Helpless as they are, there can really be no way to make their complaints be heard outside their small communities.

The Bayanihan Acts woefully demonstrated a kind of "top-down" approach wherein the leaders of our country executed laws while standing aloof from the real plight of the people. This shows the lack of emphatic imagination that Nussbaum suggests. But it is good that through the imaginative project of Ana Patricia Non in initiating a community pantry that rippled nationally in just days of its initiation in April 2021, *bayanihan* as an indigenous concept of Filipino nationhood is redeemed by parrying traditional politics that just exploited the Bayanihan Acts. Consequently, it exemplified the "two-way street" relation between social institutions and compassionate individuals and a "bottom-up" approach wherein the people were rallied for a legitimate socio-political agenda.
Moreover, this *bayanihan* spirit is moved by emotion in being compassionate and by imagination in being subversive. Who would have thought that it was possible for a then 26-year-old woman to turn a street into a movement? Reflecting for more than a year, as she empathized with the helplessness of the people while the government seemed to be ineffective in dealing with the crisis, none may have exercised imaginative muscles long enough to initiate something that even our public officials nationwide failed to do or think about. Surely, *bayanihan* was foreign to her mind and no one can ever know if there are other motivations apart from compassion in this initiative.[48] It is just interesting that the national spirit of *bayanihan* that was awakened by imagination and driven by emotion overtook all these motivations.

Being drawn through imagination to the struggles of the people to be participants with them is what seemed to be lacking in our government's response. The arts and the humanities bolster "ownership of meaning" because these domains educate us to "not succumb to the illness of assumption or those conditioned by history, institutions or society."[49] To reiterate, "empathetic imagining is an extremely valuable aid to the formation of appropriate judgments and responses." No wonder it is highly necessary to stimulate emotion and cultivate the imaginative abilities that are central to political life as Nussbaum contends. The classic work of Maggay anticipates this notion, as she strongly points out that:

> The ability to calibrate expectations to discern what could be pushed to the limits of the possible and what is best left to a more opportune time and circumstance is a critical element … We need to be able to make strategic choices, advancing the possible good even as we seek the impossible best.[50]

[48] A personal interview was held with Ana Patricia Non last March 28, 2024. The transcript will appear elsewhere. Through this transcript, other motivations are evident.

[49] Toledo, "Oblation on our Minds," 8.

[50] Melba Padilla Maggay, *Transforming Society: Reflections on the Kingdom and Politics, 2nd ed.* Quezon City: Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture, [2004] 1994, 119.

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