

# Overcoming the Politics of Fear and the Role of Liberal Education in the Filipino Youth's Formation of Political Emotion

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## Abstract

Emotion is seen as an uncritical force that can bring detriment in shaping the political terrain of the land. Historically, emotions are seen as negative political vectors that promote uncritical and unthinking culture among the citizens of a given political community. The Philippines as a country has its dilemma when it comes to nurturing negative emotions of some kind; what is rampant in its political landscape is the negative emotions of fear, shame, and disgust.

The danger of sustaining negative emotions can be present in the political atmosphere of many societies around the world. Its detriment is extended to the formation of political emotion among the younger generations. This study intends to pay serious attention to the possibility of redirecting the political emotions of the youth into the formation of positive kinds through a careful analysis of the potential role of liberal education. Our current approaches to civic education do not yet account for the emotional basis of citizenship that will generate the formation of a positive political culture.

Eliminating negative emotions requires a sensible analysis of the factors that contribute to its polarized direction. We live in a time where the generation of politics of fear is rampant among civic leaders. Negative emotion in our political sphere needs to be addressed by cultivating a culture of emotion characterized by compassion and care. Thus, this study sees it imperative to inculcate positivity among the youths at present to better shape the future of our country's political culture.

**Keywords:** Civic emotions, Filipino youth, liberal education, political emotion, politics of fear

## INTRODUCTION

The role of the youth in nation-building is to take an active part in the development and progress of their country. This can be done in a variety of ways including volunteering, participating in community service projects, and advocating

for social and political change. The youth can also contribute to nation-building by staying informed about issues that affect their country, supporting organizations that are working towards positive change, and becoming involved in the political process by voting and running for office. In short, the role of the youth in nation-building is a necessary ingredient for the formation of a good political system of a given land because they are dubbed as future citizens of any given polity. It is in this light that they are expected to be proactive and engaged citizens who work hard to improve their communities and contribute to the overall well-being of their nation.

The Philippine political system is characterized by complexity due to partisanship and its conservative political culture. This, in turn, provides a limited space for the voices of the youth to be heard. This study is designed to discover the potential role of the youth in nation-building. This further discusses the type of political culture needed for them to be given a fair share in shaping the political terrain of the land. Analyzing Philippine politics also requires an understanding of its political history and culture. Evaluating closely, our country's contemporary politics is influenced by a political culture characterized by personalism and skepticism about the effectiveness of the government and many Filipinos have an ambivalent view about the nature of democracy that rules the land (Timberman, 2015). The level of political participation of the Filipino youth at present is an important ingredient if we are to change the direction of our political system, especially since young people hold the key to the type of political climate we will eventually create in the future.

The detrimental effect of the youth's passivity in political matters can be seen in the way they show little concern with political matters. It is important to note that our present political climate is dominated by a negative culture full of distrust and fear. A deliberate attempt to silence the critical spirit in the civic atmosphere is a pressing reality that needs to be addressed. Dissent and other forms of attempt to cast criticism in the political culture of the land at present are blocked by fear-mongering tactics, and this threat to one's safety may silence the dissenter. In a democratic society, recognizing people's active participation in political affairs is essential, included would be their capacity to voice out their concerns and form interests relevant to the foundation of a just society. Our reality in the Philippines has an opposite trajectory in matters of creating a healthy democratic space that allows people to actively engage in debates and voice out their dissent. This passivity in politics is alarming, and it has potentially planted a seed of hesitation among the youth's possibility to engage in active and critical civic engagement.

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Characterizing the Filipino youth at present, they can be seen as well-informed, their constant exposure to social media made them aware of the politicized nature of politics at the same time. As we expect them to be vigilant citizens of the land, there is also a need to provide a conducive public space for them to develop and maximize their political participation. There are promising ways to secure the type of political environment needed to help them realize their relevant role in shaping the future destiny of our political system. This can be done through the following means, first is providing them with the type of education that will expose them to a new level of awareness, second, this can be done through good exposure to liberal education, and third reevaluating the type of political emotion that is dominant in our political space, the goal is to promote positive civic emotion and to overcome the negative types detrimental to the realization of the Filipino youth's development of active political and civic engagement.

However, the Philippines has its internal problem in the educational system that is prevalent in the land, with the overcrowding of the public schools and universities, it also confronts limited public resources alongside the growing demand for free education. For instance, higher education in the country is always shaped by the social needs and personal aspirations of individuals to transform their quality of life (Alcala, 1999) About this experience, there has been a high level of personal investment in education in the Philippines since it is a common belief among our folks that one's ticket to solve an impoverished life is to finish a degree. Driven by the need to succumb to a market guided by meritocracy and credentialism, the Philippines has one of the highest percentages of students entering tertiary education in Southeast Asia, and this resulted in a scenario of diploma disease having the market's incapacity to provide good jobs because we live in a place with poor economic system (Horner, 2022). The classic idea of liberal education is rarely evident today, not to mention that it hides behind the shadow of neoliberalism and has found itself overpowered by efficiency and market orientation. In this case, we lost touch with the original intent of establishing humanistic liberal education. It even contributes to the formation of its opposite value giving birth to sporadic growth of injustice and many forms of social inequalities. As such, despite the benefits of neoliberalism as it contributes to our youths' readiness for globalization, it has negatively affected humanity, for the most part, perpetuating the creation of oppressive relations not only in the local arena but also on a global scale of things (Adarlo, 2016).

What remedy does the educational setting have to offer to move out from such a problematic state? One of the essential steps needed is for educators to provide favorable conditions for students to recognize how knowledge is related

to the power of one's social agency and self-realization. This idea requires a revolutionary perspective among educators for them to be able to inspire young minds to form a compassionate spirit that will promote social justice and interdependence. The way higher education institutions are being accredited at present runs contrary to the formation of a positive culture,

it pays little attention to the discussion and application of morality and ethics and how do persons make an impact into the community in term of peace and development initiatives, environmental advocacies and care and love of life in general. While very recently, the educational system of the country has undergone reform and overhaul, the focus of these educational reforms and directions are not on the most important aspect of education, which is moral and ethical education (Bayod, 2020).

Since the focus of academic training is to produce highly skilled workers or professionals who can survive the competition in the market, it overlooked the essence of forming compassionate young citizens in the long run.

Recently, there has been a promising step with the manner the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) emphasized the framing of citizenship education, leaning on the need to prepare the Filipino youth to live meaningfully in a complex and rapidly changing world while engaging in their community and nation's development issues and concerns (Adarlo, 2016). However, there is a need for educators and learners to critically recognize unjust structures in society, understand their causes, and be rational in their assessment of reality. This type of educational system must be characterized by a certain openness to a culture of questioning.

### **The Role of Liberal Education in Cultivating Political Participation**

Martha Nussbaum (2010) in her book, *Not for Profit: Why democracy needs the Humanities*, recognized this type of problem of a highly systematized academic atmosphere devoid of human emotion and insisted that among the social and economic commitments of our societies, education is key if we are to pursue the individual capacities of our citizens. Societies support this type of commitment to uplifting the dignity of its citizens through a careful assessment and formation of an educational system supportive of citizens' needs. Equally important is the goal of converting individuals into sympathetic citizens who truly care and value other people's dignity and sense of freedom.

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When society commits to education, it commits as well to its future stability, not just in economic matters, but also in pursuit of its political goals. Education will then be one of the main arenas in which the shaping of politically appropriate sympathy will take place, and in which inappropriate forms of hatred, disgust, and shame will be discouraged (Nussbaum, 2013).

It is in this line where Nussbaum believed that there is a need to get rid of the formation of negative emotions in the public sphere so that there is a good chance to develop citizens with a compassionate spirit. This goal, however, becomes possible only in a culture where education is given the right atmosphere of freedom.

Classroom settings need to provide democratic spaces for students to be truly sensitive and imaginative upon forming their judgments on many socio-political issues. There should be enough space for them to exercise questioning and be allowed to air out their dissent. The culture of dissent requires an absence of control; it is a deliberate cultivation of the ability to stand up to others with one's arguments. Democratization of dissent is made possible by our studies of liberal education, the study of our nation's history, comparative law and politics, of economics – all of which give direction and substance to a young citizen's arguments (Nussbaum, 2013). The educators of the youth have a great role to play, for instance, in a university, it is inappropriate in this case to teach in a manner that one is indoctrinating people with a single view on normative matters, but highly necessary for them to lay down facts and arguments that will inform the young minds on how to properly wage their judgments, especially on issues with ethical and political concerns. Societies around the world expect the youth to form active participation in politics since they are sources of fresh ideas, energy, and dynamism, and so this needs serious attention as to how the educational system trains them (Arguelles, 2020). John Stuart Mill supported this claim by saying that:

the object of a university is not to make skillful lawyers, or physicians, or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beings where education, by ceasing to be general, branches off into department adapted to the individual's destination in life performs its essential role – the cultivation of informed and responsible citizenship” (Nussbaum, 2013).

What defines political participation? In most literature at present, the broader context of defining the term will lead to include “those activities by private citizens that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of government personnel and/or the actions they take” (Weiss, 2020). The

suggested activities involved but were not limited to voting, campaign activity, and other political activities of the same nature. Alongside developments in political participation, there is also a parallel improvement in the manner the Filipino youth at present get high involvement in civic engagement. This will be analyzed across the lines of how education shapes the young individuals' conception of what responsible and humanistic citizenship truly means, and how education created a high impact in developing responsible civic emotions among the youth at present. It is not surprising that even education is not safe from political influences. We hear stories about how "the politicizing of arts and humanities in education in recent years has resulted in our losing sight of the traditional humanistic point of view toward learning" (Smith, 1993). It is here where young adults are constantly being reminded to be watchful of the insensibilities and machinations of social media and education. An educated voter is expected from the pool of young people, so, this study will take serious scrutiny on how their education training can lead to their detection of lies spreading across all types of media and information campaign strategies of the candidates.

Recently, existing works of literature on the voting pattern of the youth revealed a promising interrelationship between their confidence in voting and their capacity to spot fake news. In our recognition of the youth's political participation as vital in shaping Philippine democracy, any type of disillusionment can compromise their promising participation in any political activity (Deinla, 2022). Since our youth are active creators and receptors of media content, they also tend to devote the majority of their time to online encounters of all sorts. In a survey data made by Deinla (2022) and her co-researchers, out of 23, 996 respondents from college students across the country, they examined how social media, by deliberately facilitating fake news and incivility, affects the voting behavior of Filipino youth. This is remarkably promising as an initial step to inculcate critical literacy among the youth today in political involvement. The sad truth is that the majority of our youth live in poverty and their top priority is just to get through the day with their basic needs met (Adarlo, 2016). However, their constant exposure to social media poses a challenging task to form a critical attitude in processing information that they become exposed to. In effect, confidence in their ability to detect misinformation and fake news led to a higher percentage of political participation in terms of voting during the country's presidential elections. With the dark image of the Philippines in the global infodemic by Facebook executive Katie Harbath, it has been labeled as "patient zero" after the overwhelming wave of disinformation that is believed to have compromised electoral integrity in the country's 2016 elections; a problem of similar nature threatens democracies across the globe (Deinla, 2022).

## The Youth's Voting Behavior During the Pandemic

The pandemic served as a turning point for most of the young ones in terms of their active participation in the electoral process. Marielle Marcaida of the UP Diliman Political Science Department explained that young people's high involvement during the 2022 election can be accounted for the many losses they suffered, a lot of them lost opportunities for proper education, employment, and worst, the loss of their loved ones (Ranada, 2021). Looking at the numbers from the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) back in September, it showed that of the 63 million Filipinos who had registered to vote in next year's polls, more than half were aged 18 to 30. As of December 14, 2021, the total has shot up to 67.5 million but it is reasonable to assume that a big chunk of that consists of young people. When the election was over, it was found that 56% of the local voters were the youth, and from their sector alone, there were seven (7) million new voters (Lopez, 2022). Because of this, Commissioner George Garcia of the Commission on Elections (COMELEC) said that the new voters will become "game-changers".

In a very real way, 2022 becomes the year where young Filipinos made a huge and lasting impact on the country. The year 2022 is the year young Filipinos exerted great power in participating in political matters that are relevant to the type of leadership that the Philippines will experience in the next six years (Ramos, 2022). Philippine politics had been defined by many as dirty and frustrating, but the 2022 presidential election shaped a significant direction of youth participation, and this is partly due to the presence of candidates whose names ring a symbol of hope to some who are already weary of our toxic political culture. The outpour of support for certain candidates becomes a valid assessment of the Filipino youth's concern for the direction of their future, least, the fate of the entire nation. What is intriguing about this is the development of political emotion among the many that are truly fueled by the desire to create an impact on the potential outcome of the electoral process. In this part, understanding the gap motivated this study to examine the potential link between the nature of education that they are receiving from their respective academic institutions and the level of participation that is characterized by a seemingly genuine intent to elect leaders with legitimacy and moral ascendancy.

What is inspiring is the level of participation the youth extended in doing campaigns for their chosen candidates. They even went to rallies and exerted great efforts in drafting campaign paraphernalia just to show their support, denouncing the old view that the youth nowadays are political, let alone apathetic. The level of involvement of the Filipino youth who volunteered in an election monitoring exercise is a positive indication as well of the development of their

critical spirit in forming political or civic judgment. This only proves that giving them the freedom to be imaginative and creative will help them develop sound and mature political judgments. Thus, the democratization of dissent must be observed in the classroom setting at all costs, especially if we aspire for a nation with active participation from the young sector of our society.

The recent development in the political participation of the Filipino youth carries with it a positive display of civic emotion. Their high involvement in political affairs speaks of their concern for their future as young citizens of the land. This study will also uncover potential factors in the educational system that may influence the cultivation of their political engagement at present. In effect, there is a need to analyze further the connection between their involvement in politics and their fight for fairness and freedom, if it is indeed an indication of good learning, let alone the substantial lessons that they may encounter in studying liberal education.

### **Why Liberal Arts Matter?**

The classic scholar and philosophy professor Martha Nussbaum traced the origin of the contemporary notion of liberal arts, and she found it to relate to the Latin definition of a curriculum of course of study that is representational of human freedom (*liberalism*). This Latin conception was appropriated during the old days to those who were born rich, with the status of freedom as they were usually male members of prominent or landed aristocracy who were granted access to Socratic education that carefully received training in the rigorous method of inquiry and discourse intended to convert them into becoming good citizens of the land (Rice, 2006). Nussbaum reiterated that this idea of liberal arts was likewise interpreted by the Roman philosopher and statesman Seneca (4BCE-65CE) as a manner of liberating human intellect. According to Nussbaum (1997), an “education is truly “fitted for freedom” [liberalis] only if it is such as to produce free citizens, citizens who are free not because of their wealth or birth, but because they can still call their minds their own. Seneca supported this view by emphasizing that ‘liberal studies’ are worthy of free-born citizens, and they are called such because it is a study that teaches man wisdom and inspires the learners to seek and protect their freedom. Successful integration of liberal education has the potential to produce learners who have a higher value for life, love of country, and compassion for their fellow which fosters the spirit of democratic ideals (Claudio, 2015). Thus, liberal education is the study of lofty, brave, and great-souled, all other studies are puny and puerile (Rice, 2006).



However, liberal education in the Philippines may also encounter its pitfalls. We are not distinct from other neighboring Asian countries, we see education as a type of escape from poverty, and this tendency puts at stake the very essence of liberal education. Despite the assertion that intellectual inquiry needs to carry a tone of being 'disinterested' and avoid being motivated by the prospect of economic or material gain, the Filipino youth is likewise confronted by the limits of their reality that they must combat hard survival in living. Liberal education in its current form is facing the sad reality that it hides in the façade of neoliberal character. The impact of neoliberalism has influenced the governance of education with a high degree of bias towards establishing an accountability culture focused on efficiency, functionality, and meritocracy (Horner, 2022). This realization will lead us to see the problem here, that a hindrance to the formation of a genuine civic emotion propelled by the true essence of liberal education is this type of market-driven attitude for survival. If there is hope left that it is indeed liberal education that will serve as an antidote to the eroding political system, we will try to analyze that in the next section of this study. But there is a need to uncover first the limits of our aspirations by exposing the enemies of liberal education and exploring ways to overcome them.

At this point, it is evident that the most significant dimension of the liberal arts curriculum emerges. While professional programs offer a well-defined set of skills that enable graduates to practice their vocation, liberal arts focus on broader frameworks of knowledge and theory that give the students the ability to synthesize and acquire newly encountered knowledge essential to one's survival. There was more to being human than professional competence, and this is where even our manner of teaching philosophy is truly helpful. Going back to our original question: What should we be teaching? The debate over this question is necessarily ongoing in the academy, in the same sense that what we define as "true" should and will always be contested by evolving facts, "ways of knowing," and all manner of competing ideologies and belief systems. The good news is that the academy, when properly attuned and aware of its agency, is designed to precisely encounter those kinds of volatile challenges. Rooted in a liberalism that provides the foundation for a secular democratic intellectual tradition, the academy can rely on the rigor of its methods of inquiry and discourse and take on all issues, letting the chips fall where they may. So, the content or form of the core curriculum may not be the issue at hand but the standards the institution applies to itself. The challenge of examining the constituent elements of a liberal arts curriculum is more often one of coherence than content. How does it all fit together? And once this critical mass of knowledge is defined, what are the scholarly "rules of engagement" for those (students and faculty) who encounter

it? Whether or not all the actors involved are fully aware of it, today's academy remains committed to the Socratic idea that knowledge is best derived from structured discourse and inquiry and that means, for students, the need to meet certain standards of thinking, writing, and synthesis in their studies. The notion of "truth" is based not upon the absorption of a set of facts from a teacher, but rather as the result of a disciplined rational exercise of inquiry or a discourse.

### **Cultivating Civic Emotion as a Potential Antidote to Political Emotion of Fear**

One of the biggest obstacles in the youth's formation of a sympathetic civic emotion is the proliferating political culture of fear. This is evident in many political policies being implemented in our countries, its negative side effect is an obvious attempt to sow the seed of the culture of passivity. To overcome and go beyond this culture, there is a need for a careful analysis of the genesis of fear. Understanding its origin will help us design a good strategy as well to combat it. It is here where Nussbaum took scrutiny of the critical role of emotion in developing a well-inclusive civic sphere. In the old days, emotion as a concept was given too little importance in philosophy, it is often seen as a negative political force that inspires a non-thinking formation of civic emotion. For instance, the negative and uncontrollable passions of political leaders can lead a given political community into a state of discord and civil unrest. In many works of Nussbaum, she highlighted the cognitive component of emotion, and when taken seriously, the formation of a promising political state is not far from reality. Emotions shape ideas, and this could lead to the formation of political opinion – the structure of politics is a product of human emotion and reason (Kassab, 2016).

In Aristotle's *Politics*, he believed that emotions are a fundamental part of the intellectual process, and it is needed to form the right political decisions. The polis is a product of human reason, but it was born out of fear. The uncertainty of survival in an environment where everyone faces hostility and threats led to the necessity of the formation of a governing body that will secure human survival, thus the creation of the political system or the polis (Deslauriers, M. et.al., 2013). However, it is also the same negative emotion of fear that hinders humanity from experiencing a life full of flourishing and contentment. For Nussbaum (2011), "fear is a primitive emotion that does not require an elaborate mental apparatus. All it requires is some rudimentary orientation toward survival and well-being, and an ability to become aroused by what threatens them." Since it is focused on individual survival, this type of emotion can paralyze one's reason as it creates an intention to escape the threat in an instant. Nussbaum even categorized it as solipsistic and will not be of relevance to a bigger group of people, it could even

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be of detriment to a larger political scale. J.S. Mill, as cited by Nussbaum (2016) argues that fear can make people resent indiscriminately, making it an unreliable guide to decision-making especially in the socio-political setting where we need to consider the interests of all. Mill even suggested that “fear, in and of itself, resists a larger view of the good, thus that view needs to be supplied from outside, by a different set of emotions and thoughts.” It is in this context where this study finds it necessary to cultivate the external source of goodness, a civic emotion that is inclusive, and to borrow Antonio Gramsci's idea, it needs to be hegemonic (a representation of the collective aspect).

In many of her works, Nussbaum (2013) suggested that good political principles are realizable, provided, it is intently worked out to persist and remain stable over time. But a more realistic assessment of the way citizens participate in political affairs would give us an awareness that our common enemy is humanity's narrowness and self-centeredness. For instance, a government's mandate to redistribute wealth and demand higher taxes does not easily get support from people. In relation, human psychology dictates that kind of narrowness, we only care for the ones near and dear to us. Thus, if political leaders intend to drive civil society to care for people to whom they were ordinarily indifferent, it requires a careful assessment of the necessary emotions that forge citizens together.

In this study, the researcher would like to focus on the imperative cultivation of positive emotions as a potential avenue in forming a collective culture of compassion and solidarity among the Filipino youth. This assumption shows the need to hurdle our narrowness, the challenge is to recognize civic emotions that cultivate the element of compassion and concern to a bigger community network. This problem is also a hindrance that needs to be overcome if we are to make our goals realizable over time, especially if there is an attempt to form a political community characterized by inclusivity. The idea of inherent human equality originated from the Ancient Stoics, who emphasized that equality must transcend gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality (Nussbaum, 2012). This is widely shared in our society at present, people may be unequal in wealth, class, talent, strength, achievement, or moral character; but all are equal as bearers of an inalienable basic human dignity that cannot be lost or forfeited over time. However, this attempt to form universal or inclusive compassion needs to address the problem of overcoming the danger of negative emotions so evident in any political community motivated, for instance, by greed, anxiety, and fear.

One of the challenges that this study will confront in promoting aspirational work on politics is linked to finding the proper balance between cultivating political emotions on the individual level and at the same time getting the right kind of

institutional support; both are needed in protecting our vulnerabilities in many ways. This ardent need to promote the formation of just societies requires serious contemplation of the stability of political culture throughout time. For Nussbaum (2013), such can be accomplished by fortifying positive emotions of compassion, constructive anger, sympathy, and the like emotions that bind citizens of a certain nation. She further realized the problem deals with the question: how can we make people care for others? Here, the need to move from one's narrow sphere of protecting individual interests and thinking of the collective is a promising step to include others in our element of concern. Cultivation of emotion among the younger generation will be a challenging task, and education is key to its potential realization.

## **CONCLUSION**

Finding a solution to human narrowness is central to this study, the hard part, however, is concretizing the content of the said intent. In this regard, Nussbaum argued that there are many potential ways of realizing it, few in her list would be the role of education, the role of the arts, and other socio-political activities that make this attempt to find an inclusive and compassionate civil society realizable over time. For Nussbaum, literary works can be a good source of education of emotion, it is a good place to begin our analysis. It is because focusing on works that assist the imagination in moving out of its narcissistic leaning will challenge human emotion to embrace the reality of life, which is in some respects still distant or difficult to accommodate since it is not the suffering of self that is at issue but the sufferings of others. Imagination makes other people's pain real to us, and this is a common human failing to see the whole world from the point of view of including others in our sphere of concern. The study aims to produce an aspirational work on justice. Grounded on the realization that even with the fundamental imperfections of political communities, where people are prone to their vulnerabilities of embracing negative emotions, there remains room for improvement for the human race where the possible starting point is the acceptance of addressing our imperfections and working our way out of it, and a clear imagination of the sufferings of others because by doing so, we do not necessarily learn to agree with their goals, but we do see the reality of those goals for them, we learn that other worlds of thought and feeling exist.

Nussbaum also sees the importance of emotions and their essential role in shaping a given political field. Indeed, emotion is influential in forming a political thought and giving direction to it. In this regard, it is relevant to note that politics has a high impact on human development, and an understanding of

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the relationship between emotions and human's conception of 'good will' directly affects the quality of political development of communities and relationships among constituencies. Therefore, Nussbaum believed that there is a need to accept emotions as an essential element of human intelligence, rather than as mere props since from here, it can inspire the promotion of humanity's well-being in a political culture that one is part of.

The role of positive political emotion is detrimental to our realization of a society that is grounded in the idea of justice. Nussbaum realized too, that there are obstacles in achieving this goal: first on the list is the problem that we encounter in human psychology represented by the narrowness of one's element of concern. Cultivating positive emotions of compassion is key for Nussbaum, and it is in this respect that she finds the necessary role of imagination in its potential formation. How, then, is it possible to promote appropriate compassion in such a society, and what would a compassionate society look like? Given our acknowledgement that even appropriate compassion is unreliable and partial, we must approach the issue of compassion on two levels: first, is the level of individual psychology, and second is the level of institutional design. Thus, insights into appropriate compassion may be embodied in the structure of just institutions, so that we will not need to rely on perfectly compassionate citizens, and this is where academic institutions can contribute to the potential realization of this goal.

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