THE POLITICS OF COMPASSION

Edited by

Michael Ure and Mervyn Frost

ROUTLEDGE

THE POLITICS OF COMPASSION

This book provides a critical overview of the role of the emotions in politics. Compassion is a politically charged virtue, and yet we know surprisingly little about the uses (and abuses) of compassion in political environments.

Covering sociology, political theory and psychology, and with contributions from Martha Nussbaum and Andrew Linklater amongst others, the book gives a succinct overview of the main theories of political compassion and the emotions in politics. It covers key concepts such as humanitarianism, political emotion and agency in relation to compassion as a political virtue.

The Politics of Compassion is a fascinating resource for students and scholars of political theory, international relations, political sociology and psychology.

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INTRODUCTION

Michael Ure and Mervyn Frost

This book is about the politics of compassion. Its goal is critically to examine the current rehabilitation of compassion as a political virtue. The book's aim is twofold: to make a significant contribution to the nascent study of the politics of the emotions; and to do so by examining in depth one of the most politically charged emotions: compassion, and cognate terms such as pity, sympathy and clemency.

In the past decade we have witnessed an explosion of humanities and social science research on the emotions. As moving forces of political change and transformation, it is natural to expect that the emotions should also be an important topic of political research. Yet, as Susan James observes, a great deal of mainstream work continues to ignore or marginalise the emotions (James 2003: 221). Indeed until recently modern political and legal thought, especially liberal and liberal democratic theory, paid little attention to the role that the passions can and ought to play in the political arena (see Hall 2005; Nussbaum 2006; Kingston & Ferry 2009). By contrast, early modern thinkers like Hume, Smith and Rousseau made the human passions a central topic of political philosophy. They understood the investigation of how the emotions shape and are shaped by political agents, practices and institutions as one of its central concerns. They assumed that the passions bear directly on the art of politics. The passions, in their view, set the limits on political possibilities and transformations (James 2003: 224).

It is only in recent years that political scholars have once again begun to focus on the interdependence between the passions and politics. The politics of the emotions is now beginning to emerge as a new and important research agenda. Drawing inspiration from recent developments in evolutionary biology and ethology (De Waal 2009), social psychology (Goetz *et al.* 2010), social neuroscience (Decety 2009; Iacoboni 2009) and the cognitive account of the emotions (Nussbaum 2001), a new wave of political theorists has begun to revive the notion of politics as an

art of the emotions. Importantly, this emergent political paradigm rejects the hitherto common-sense view of emotions exclusively as political obstacles, distractions, seductions or hazards, and investigates their positive contribution to good politics. As Charles Taylor asserts, we can no longer 'factor emotions ... out of what makes for democratic politics, in which people can be brought together' (Taylor 2008: viii). This collection integrates and builds on this new turn in political thought.

The collection focuses specifically on compassion and its cognates because they are widely recognised as among the most controversial and politically significant emotions. Compassion has been hailed as both the key democratic virtue and condemned as politically toxic. Yet despite the controversy over the politics of compassion, we are still lacking a wide-ranging investigation of its significance for democratic politics, global civil society and cosmopolitanism and political reconciliation and repair. Indeed, we know surprisingly little about the political uses and abuses of compassion. The aim of this collection is to provide scholars in political theory, international relations, political sociology and social psychology with a first exposition and assessment of the politics of compassion.

Main themes and objectives

This book addresses one of the most significant and fiercely contested contemporary political issues: the rehabilitation of compassion as a political virtue. In the eighteenth century Adam Smith and Jean-Jacques Rousseau both made novel claims for the political and moral importance of sympathy or pity. Smith claimed that sympathy is the foundation of political harmony. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments,* Smith identified sympathy, properly cultivated, as the basis of co-operative communities. Sympathy, he suggested, enables citizens emotionally to attune themselves to one another so that they 'have such a correspondence ... as is sufficient for the harmony of society' (Smith 2002 [1790]: 27). Smith, as De Waal observes, saw sympathy as a second invisible hand that might combat the divisive, centrifugal effects of the invisible hand of the market (De Waal 2009: 222). Rousseau famously argued that pity should be the first and most important emotion cultivated in future citizens, on the grounds that only shared suffering creates bonds of affection and with them the sense of common humanity required to support the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity (Rousseau 1974 [1762]). Compassion, he claimed, was the democratic emotion *par excellence*. In the mid to late nineteenth century many European thinkers made the epoch's dominant positivistic outlook the foundation of a new 'religion of humanity'. These attempts to wed naturalism and morality formed an important strand of the nineteenth century: the invention of altruism (Dixon 2008). Auguste Comte captured this new ethical mood in his moral formula '*vivre pour autrui*'. Inspired by Adam Smith's theory of moral sentiments, Charles Darwin's evolutionary explanation of sympathy sparked a still-raging controversy within evolutionary biology about its moral and political significance (van der Weele 2011):

> In however complex a manner [sympathy or reciprocal altruism] may have originated, as it is one of high importance to all those animals which aid and defend one another, it will have been increased through natural selection; for those communities, which included the greatest number of the most sympathetic members, would flourish best and rear the greatest number of offspring. (Darwin 1981: 82)

For Darwin, the evolutionary success of political units turns on the selection of sympathetic and altruistic members and traits.

In the past decade, we have witnessed a renewed defence of the moral and political pertinence of compassion, sympathy and altruism for maintaining, consolidating and expanding democratic values and practices. With the recent rediscovery of the political importance of the passions, political theorists have revisited the idea that democratic institutions cannot remain stable unless citizens' emotional narratives support democratic norms and relationships (Nussbaum 2001, 2008; Mihai 2010).

According to its contemporary defenders, compassion is an essential democratic and cosmopolitan emotion. They believe that the security of democratic institutions and practices depends on compassion as a moral and motivational foundation. Martha Nussbaum, its most influential contemporary advocate, claims that compassion is *the* basic social emotion and that the task of generalising compassion is one of the greatest moral problems of our time (Nussbaum 1996, 2008). In her remarkable psychological studies of rescuers of Jews in Nazi Germany, Kristen Monroe suggests that political theory has failed to take into account the political and moral significance of altruism and compassion as precious sources of a fragile sense of common humanity (Monroe 1998, 2006). 'The hand of compassion', as one of these rescuers put it, '(is) faster than the calculus of reason' (Monroe 2006). Compassion, on this view, motivates citizens to respond to others' suffering more quickly and reliably than rational choice, even to the point of risking themselves for the sake of protecting others from harm and injustice. In his sociology of global morals, Andrew Linklater argues that compassion underpins democratic citizenship and the evolution of a just world community (Linklater 2007a, 2007b). Properly cultivated, its defenders claim, compassion can significantly contribute to addressing key problems of democratic order, global justice and political reconciliation. It is a political emotion that promises to help sustain stable democratic communities, expand the scope of moral and political responsibility and motivate reparations for the violence that haunts post-conflict and post-colonial societies. For this reason, its advocates warn, the failure to cultivate compassion will severely limit the capacity of states and citizens to address these fundamental contemporary political issues.

For the critics of compassion, however, this sentiment does not deliver on these political promises. Compassion, they observe, promises to enlarge the moral and political boundaries of communities, to motivate the politics of justice

and reparations and to engender and sustain equal respect across lines of time, place and nation. Yet in practice, they argue, compassion fails to deliver: it is far too partial, fickle and unreliable to rely on as a social motive (Crisp 2008); it motivates actions and policies that unwittingly entrench victimhood and resentment rather than create agency (Brown 1995; Torpey 2006); expresses itself as a shaming pity that diminishes its recipients and fails to redress the injustices it identifies (Nietzsche 1997 [1881]; Boyd 2004; Acorn 2005; Ure 2006); exhausts empathetic identification and generates indifference and fatigue (Boltanksi 1999; Moeller 1999; Tester 2001) and worse still, is profoundly connected to other morally questionable emotions like anger, revenge and cruelty (Hunt 2006). On this view, compassion belongs in the private sphere and has no place in the democratic public realm because it is a sentiment that compels its agents to use any power at their disposal to remedy suffering. If compassion 'sets out to change worldly conditions in order to ease human suffering', Arendt warns: ...

> ... it will shun the drawn-out wearisome processes of persuasion, negotiation and compromise, which are the processes of law and politics, and lend its voice to the suffering itself, which must claim for swift and direct action, that is, for action with the means of violence.
>
> (Arendt 1973: 86–7)

In light of the Reign of Terror, Arendt feels justified in warning that 'pity taken as the spring of virtue, has proved to possess a greater capacity for cruelty than cruelty itself' (Arendt 1973: 88). Politicised pity, she maintains, runs at cross-purposes to the liberal values of respect and tolerance and the democratic values of persuasion and debate.

Both defenders and critics agree that we are playing for very high political stakes in coming to terms with the politics of compassion. This collection attempts to illuminate, clarify and evaluate the competing positions in this debate.

The essays in Part 1 engage in the hotly contested debate in modern and contemporary political theory about whether compassion is a political virtue or vice. They examine whether it is an emotional disposition that democracies should foster in their citizens and embody in their institutions. Do its contemporary defenders answer the charge that compassion is too unreliable, partial, polarising or dangerous as a political motive? Can compassion avoid the danger of demeaning, insulting or harming its recipients? The essays in Part 2 address the sociology of compassion. They examine the social conditions that have made it possible for the motive of compassion to take root within states, the system of states and global civil society and that may enable it to become one of the motivational bases of a cosmopolitan ethos. The essays in the final part take a sceptical view of compassion and sympathy's political credentials, identifying how and why it goes politically awry, but also how we might develop a *critical* compassion that is not partial, demeaning or excessive in its demands. If compassion is to realise its

political potential as a sentiment that can inspire citizens to take responsibility to protect others from undeserved suffering and injustice, then we must identify ways and means of ensuring it does not confine itself to those nearest at the exclusion of the distant, or motivate paternalistic, intrusive political institutions that strip others of their dignity and agency.

Part I: Compassion as a political virtue

As we have seen, Arendt launched a scathing attack on the politicisation of pity as a motive that fundamentally undermines basic democratic principles and practices. If like the French Revolutionaries our political actions are motivated by the sufferings of the poor, she argues, we will necessarily cast aside or trample on democratic norms of tolerance and freedom. In *On Revolution* she argues the American Revolution succeeded in establishing a stable constitutional democracy because its founding fathers focused on building institutions designed to protect political or civic freedom rather than attempting to remedy the suffering of the poor and obscure. On the other hand, Arendt sees the French Revolution as a political disaster that necessarily led to the Reign of Terror precisely because the revolutionaries were motivated by pity for the masses. According to Arendt, if political agents make pity their motive, and overcoming suffering their goal, they will necessarily resort to untrammelled violence. She conceives the so-called 'pre-political' or biological needs that pity seeks to satisfy as blind and limitless. In taking these as their motive, therefore, political actors also acknowledge no political limits on their actions. '[G]oodness', she claims, '... shares with elemental evil the elementary violence inherent in all strength and is detrimental to all forms of political organization' (Arendt 1973: 87). Arendt maintains that the guillotine is the logical outcome of politicising pity. Notoriously, Arendt argued that for the sake of democracy we must not allow pity to corrupt the political sphere by making need and suffering matters of public concern. Democracies should address social needs as administrative issues rather than as matters of public concern and debate.

In various ways the essays in the opening part challenge Arendt's equation between pity and violence. Against Arendt, Maureen Whitebrook aims to elucidate compassion as a specifically *political* virtue. She argues that compassion becomes properly political when it identifies the systemic or institutional causes of collective suffering and addresses itself to remedying these causes rather than focusing on the intensity of feeling that it can generate in individual sufferers. While political compassion requires spectators to feel distress for and on behalf of suffering individuals, and hence retains a crucial element of compassion, it is not sufficient for this virtue: it also requires that they ascertain the objective or systemic sources of this suffering. Political compassion, in short, does not merely assuage suffering; it identifies and acts against the causes of suffering.

We can illustrate Whitebrook's notion of political compassion by contrasting it with the Good Samaritan model of compassion (Luke 10:25-38).[1] The limits of

the Good Samaritan ethic can serve to highlight this alternative concept of political compassion. In the parable, we might recall, a man – a Jew – travels from Jerusalem to Jericho, and on the way he is attacked, robbed, wounded and left half-dead on the roadside. By chance a certain priest comes down that way, and then a Levite. Both are fellow Jews with religious standing, and both pass by on the other side. Then comes the Samaritan who belongs to a nation hostile to Israel – as the verse tells us – and he takes care of the wounded man. Now, many commentators focus our attention on the central idea here that the concept of 'neighbour' is powerful enough to cross tribal, religious and ethnic boundaries; and that it is so when it is tied to compassion (Margalit 2002).

Yet, we should also observe that the Good Samaritan pays no heed to the legal, criminal or political context of the event. The Samaritan responds exclusively to the fact of the victim's suffering. The Samaritan's compassionate response begins with his dressing of the victim's wound and ends with his payment to a third party to nurse the man back to health. While the victim remains mute and passive in the parable, the one salient fact we do learn about him beyond his religious affiliation is that he has been the innocent victim of a violent crime. At no point, however, does the parable indicate that the Samaritan's compassion might entail that he address the victim's legal or political circumstances. The Samaritan remedies the immediate harm inflicted on the victim, but he shows no concern about the causes of his suffering or interest in remedying these causes. We might say that the Good Samaritan addresses the other person's individual suffering, but not the causes of his suffering. By contrast, political compassion, as Whitebrook defines it, requires not simply assuaging others' immediate suffering, but tracking and addressing systemic causes of suffering.

The Good Samaritan ethic depoliticises compassion insofar as it occludes the political dimensions of suffering that victims can express through resentment towards those responsible. Richard Sennett suggests one reason why Christianity truncates compassion in this manner. Christian *caritas*, he argues, is necessarily limited in its response to others because it conceives the act of giving or helping as an occasion for self-transformation. Christians transform their relationship to God through giving. As we have seen from the Good Samaritan parable, compassionate Christians do not necessarily seek to repair the victims' standing in relation to perpetrators or the broader community. Rather they seek to establish their own good standing with God by giving to those who suffer. *Caritas*, Sennett claims, 'means becoming a good person through making gifts; the act of giving combats one's own disposition to sinfulness. The value of the gift is irrelevant and even, in some versions, whether the gift does others good is irrelevant' (Sennett 2004: 134). Drawing on Arendt's analysis of St. Augustine, he argues that Christian compassion is intrinsically impersonal insofar as Christians conceive the neighbour simply as an occasion for the exercise of virtues that bring them closer to God's love. 'The Christian', as Arendt explains:

> ... can love all people because each one is only an occasion ... the enemy and even the sinner ... mere occasions for love. It is not really the neighbour who is loved in this love of neighbour – it is love itself.
>
> (Arendt 1996: 97)

On this view, Christian *caritas* entails a form of what we might call self-serving compassion: it aims at feeling good through giving, not doing good.

Whitebrook's notion of political compassion exposes the political limits of the Good Samaritan ethic: the Samaritan appears to experience no anger or indignation about the victims' underserved suffering. The Samaritan focuses on the others' suffering, not those responsible; and at stake in his response is his own standing before God, not the victims' legal or political standing. By looking beyond others' distress to its causes, political compassion establishes the conditions necessary for anger or indignation. Anger motivated by political compassion, Whitebrook maintains, has an important cognitive and political function: it alerts states and citizens to sources of harm and suffering that require political redress and focuses our compassion on its systemic causes. Against Arendt, she argues that there is no necessary or compelling reason to believe that such compassion-fuelled anger or indignation necessarily leads to violent excess, nor is the risk that it might sufficient to disbar it from politics any more than we think fear should be disbarred from politics because it might generate cowardice or impotence. The task at hand is not to dismiss compassionate anger, but to regulate and discipline it so that it can fulfil its important political function: identifying and protesting against systemic injustice.

In her chapter, Gudrun von Tevenar turns the tables on Arendt and demonstrates how political communities that fail to acknowledge compassion as a political virtue and guide to action necessarily perpetuate significant social injustice. Compassion, she argues, is a politically important cognitive and normative resource that enables us to identify hidden or unacknowledged forms of social and material suffering. Compassion addresses the problem of the political invisibility of the poor, marginalised and excluded: it makes us aware of this suffering and it compels us to remedy it. 'Only when seen with sympathetic eyes', as she explains, 'can social problems become visible and suitable for the political stage'. Since only compassion can make social suffering visible, and Arendt bans it from public life, her politics necessarily perpetuate political injustice. Tevenar acknowledges that pity and compassion can be fickle and partial. Yet, as she plausibly observes, this alone is not sufficient to rule it out of political life, any more than we consider banning other emotions because of their unreliability or riskiness. 'The positive aspect of opening our eyes and minds to the conditions and needs of others', she maintains, 'is far greater than, say, their possible lack of proportionality and measure'. Rather than following Arendt (and others) in rejecting compassion on these spurious grounds, Tevenar argues we need to redeem compassion's cognitive and normative potential by educating and disciplining it. Compassion, like any other emotion, poses risks when it becomes the basis of political judgement and action, but the issue is how to manage these risks so that we can yield the benefits of this emotional intelligence. Like Whitebrook,

she concludes that the important political task is not to banish compassion, but to educate and discipline it so that we realise its cognitive and normative potential to identify and address systemic social and political injustice.

One of the potential political benefits of compassion is that it can motivate citizens to care about and take responsibility for the underserved suffering of 'distant' others. Its political significance lies in extending the horizon of citizens' concerns beyond lines of time, place and nation. Yet compassion's elasticity also carries significant political risks. Lola Frost argues that politically and ethically the risk of compassion is well worth taking. She draws on idealist aesthetic categories to illuminate this risk. The experience of compassion, she suggests, can be analogous to the experience of the sublime: it can overwhelm rational, self-contained, self-interested agents, compelling them to experience their common vulnerability and their openness to others' suffering. In destroying the sharply demarcated boundaries of rational agents, compassion can motivate them to act on the basis of an ethics of generosity – the ethics of giving without thought of return – rather than an ethics of exchange and reciprocity. Sublime compassion explodes the moral and political limits of legal and market-based relations.

Frost argues that modern citizens and members of global civil society need ongoing recourse to aesthetic and political practices that engender such sublime experiences. They do so because through such experiences they can transcend the political, historical and cultural boundaries and distinctions – friend/enemy, insider/outsider, citizen/stranger – that divide them from one another and that prevent them from responding to one another first and foremost as mortal, needy suffering creatures rather than exclusively as agents whose relations are largely regulated by pre-existing legal, economic, cultural and historical dynamics. Frost uses South Africa's *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* as an example of a political practice that affords citizens the possibility of exercising compassion across deeply entrenched political divisions. In such cases citizens can exercise unconditional compassion: they bracket the question of whether those who receive their compassion warrant or deserve their assistance, and focus exclusively on assuaging others' suffering. As David Konstan reminds us in his chapter, the danger of such 'sublime' compassion is that it becomes unhinged from questions of desert. Based on such compassion citizens can, for example, forgive former enemies who bear legal and moral responsibilities for harmful actions. Frost suggests that we should maintain the possibility of such risky, unhinged compassion in liberal democracies and in global civil society because it can help citizens overcome entrenched political divisions and hostilities. Frost suggests that the ordinary liberal imaginary and legal measures are not always sufficient to overcome the traumas and divisions that flow from historic injustices or violent conflict. Unconditional compassion, she implies, can act as a catalyst to break the deadlock where normal legal and political remedies prove incapable of restoring or creating good human relations. Political communities and global civil society, she concludes, should risk political practices and institutions that use compassion to break the spell of the past and inspire in citizens an ethics of generosity. If, as Whitebrook and Tevenar show,

compassion has an important role to play in identifying and motivating responses to 'ordinary', yet often invisible injustices, Frost makes a plea for an excessive, unhinged sublime compassion as a response to the 'extraordinary' injustices that often defy conventional legal and political remedies.

Part II: Sociology of compassion

The chapters in Part 2 investigate the sociology and social psychology of compassion in domestic and global politics. As we have seen, in his broader research program Andrew Linklater maintains that the evolution of a cosmopolitan world community partly hinges on the cultivation and extension of compassion across the lines of place and nation (Linklater 2007a, 2007b). In this chapter he investigates the social conditions that facilitate or impede the extension of compassion within and between nation states. The fundamental issue Linklater confronts is that the scope of compassion is strongly tied to circuits of reciprocity and dependence. Compassion, it seems, requires forms of reciprocity that exist when people's lives are closely woven together in relations of mutual dependence. If compassion is tied to reciprocity, as he observes, it is likely to be absent where it is most needed: i.e. in cases of the poor, marginalised or excluded who cannot reciprocate. On the other hand, compassion has very little chance where states and citizens are locked in zero-sum competitions.

Linklater suggests, then, that for compassion to take root and become the basis of cosmopolitan concern we need to find ways to make our moral and cultural self-image as 'compassionate' relatively independent of our 'enlightened' self-interests so that we can help those who have nothing to give in return and conditions of rough equity so that we do not see the world strictly in terms of the insider/outsider, friend/enemy dualisms. Linklater notes that in the eighteenth century, theorists of moral sentiments were already investigating whether and how compassion might become a political virtue that citizens could exercise more evenly and universally, even towards those from whom they stood to gain nothing. Adam Smith, for example, developed and recommended neo-Stoic exercises or therapies that might serve to limit citizens' 'over-valuation' of their own immediate concerns, and novel exercises in sympathy aimed at enhancing their understanding and estimation of others' emotions and interests (Muller 1995; Forman-Barzilai 2011; Ure 2013). Smith, in other words, sought to elaborate a range of practices or exercises that might make compassion an emotional habitus that enables citizens to have regard for others' sufferings independently of their own pragmatic or strategic self-interest. Linklater's chapter leaves us with the challenge of investigating the social conditions and practices of the self that might make it possible to establish compassion as a motive that operates with some degree of independence from strategic, self-interested concerns so that it can extend to the distant, vulnerable and powerless.

Terry MacDonald's chapter reinforces Linklater's claim that moral motivations such as compassion are crucial to the evolution of cosmopolitan political institutions. She argues that harnessing support from *moral* motivations (not just coercion

or self-interest) is critical to the political prospects for cosmopolitan institutions. They are critical because unlike other types of motivation, moral motivations remain operative even with shifts of power and interest – i.e. with such motivations we can remain committed to cosmopolitan justice even when we are not subject to external coercion or driven by self-interest. Macdonald argues that compassion promises to be an especially effective moral motive because it is capable of supporting the development of new institutions that realise cosmopolitan ideals. If the institutional status quo does not effectively alleviate suffering then compassion motivates citizens to create and support new institutions that achieve this end. However, MacDonald also acknowledges that compassion is limited by its partiality. She argues that compassion's partiality is a contingent rather than necessary condition. Cosmopolitans, she argues, can address this partiality not only by working to expand their own and others' imaginative understanding of distant others, but also by working with and developing current social relations in which members of global civil society engage with one another co-operatively. In other words, MacDonald argues that the lack of cosmopolitan compassion is not a permanent human flaw, but a sociologically generated problem that is amenable to change via institutional design and advocacy.

Iain Wilkinson argues that we can deepen our understanding of the sociological conditions of compassion by examining the history of modern humanitarian social movements. He suggests that we can learn valuable lessons from these movements about how to educate our moral sentiments in pro-social directions and how to develop our visual 'literacy' so that it motivates cosmopolitan compassion. What we need to investigate is how in mobilising compassionate responses to the mass dissemination of images of suffering these movements developed a new cosmopolitan political agenda and also new methods of conducting social research. By examining the social and cultural history of modern humanitarianism, Wilkinson challenges the widespread and pessimistic view that our expanded field of vision must necessarily generate a sense of political powerlessness, moral indifference or sheer compassion fatigue (Boltanski 1999).

Nicholas Faulkner's chapter suggests that compassionate anger is one of the key mechanisms for counteracting political impotence or compassion fatigue in the face of the scale of human suffering. Drawing on social psychology findings, he suggests that anger is more effective than guilt in motivating individuals and groups to engage in compassionate action to help those suffering; and to confront or challenge those responsible for this suffering and/or the policies and practices that sustain it. Empirically confirming Whitebrook's supposition, he argues that anger about others' suffering effectively focuses our compassionate responses on the political sources of harm. Anger is politically galvanising. Faulkner also maintains that compassionate anger is politically valuable because it has a much wider compass than guilt: our anger can be triggered by injustices suffered by *any* individual or group, whereas our guilt is triggered only when we feel personally or collectively responsible for this injustice.

In his chapter Mervyn Frost acknowledges that compassion has indeed become one of the emotional registers in our two major political practices: the state system and global civil society. Frost is confident that the scope of our compassion is already global. The key issue for him is not how to educate members of these practices to expand the boundaries of their moral concern; for all intents and purposes, he claims, they are already cosmopolitans. Rather the key concern for these members is how they are to assess who most merits compassion. Granted that compassion for all underserved suffering is already a requirement for participants in these two global practices, they still need to determine how they ought to distribute their concern.

However, he suggests that even if we extend the scope of compassion as the sentimental basis of a cosmopolitan community, feeling compassion is not sufficient to answer the ethical or political questions about *how* to alleviate suffering. Compassion, he observes, may indeed require that agents do what is ethically appropriate to alleviate others' suffering, but it is not sufficient to indicate *what* ought to be done or by *whom* in order to realise this end. The mere having of compassion, as he explains, does supply the answer to these ethical or political questions. This is not to say that compassion cannot inform a theory of ethical value or the good. Nussbaum argues, for example, that compassion entails judgements of seriousness and desert. It contains a theory of what counts as integral to a good human life that determines what losses and misfortunes we believe are sufficiently serious to merit our concern. She argues that occasions for pity represented in Greek tragedy give us a defensible basis for developing a universal theory of value. Compassion also entails judgements of desert that shapes our sense of *who* merits our concern: we have compassion for those who we believe suffer undeservedly, but not for those who deserve their suffering. It is on this basis of the insights of compassion that she develops her capabilities approach to development, which identifies practical prescriptions about what states and global civil society ought to provide citizens so that they have all they require to achieve human flourishing. Frost's point is that even if compassion can inform a defensible theory of value, it alone cannot answer political questions about, for example, what institutional arrangements and policies best realise this goal or how to balance tensions between universalist accounts of capabilities and those accounts which stress cultural and religious diversity.

Part III: Critical compassion

The chapters in Part 3 focus more sharply on the political pitfalls and dangers of compassion. While these chapters do not reject the idea of compassion as a political virtue, they do warn that it can go dangerously awry in ways that jeopardise an impartial application of principles of justice. Calling upon citizens' compassion to bolster their motivational support for democratic principles of fairness and equity carries the serious risk of backfiring. If we are to justify politicising compassion then we need carefully to consider how to institutionalise and inculcate a critical form

of compassion: one that enables citizens to identify how and when their sentiments become misplaced or inappropriate. In essence, the chapters in this part demonstrate that the scope of compassion can easily become too broad or too narrow, with disastrous political consequences, and that even well-intentioned compassion can unwittingly motivate political actions that encroach on its recipients' autonomy or undermine their flourishing. Collectively these chapters suggest that the generation of critical compassion depends on its interactions with a range of other emotions, including shame, disgust, envy and honour (Nussbaum 2010).

In his chapter, the classicist David Konstan draws upon classical ideas that are broadly within the semantic neighbourhood of compassion to suggest some distinctions among a range of concepts that may be useful in evaluating the role of compassion in politics. Konstan shows that the classical notion of pity (*eleos*) carries an ethical judgement that arguably is absent from modern notions of sympathy. His primary aim is to suggest that in contemporary political contexts, we should think long and hard before abandoning the classical wisdom of making pity dependent upon an ethical judgement of desert. Following Aristotle, Konstan defines classical pity as a decidedly moral emotion that entails several judgements, including whether those who suffer misfortune deserve their fate or not. In cases where we have good reason for believing they deserve their misfortune we rightly feel no pity. By contrast, Konstan claims, the modern Enlightenment notion of sympathy entails an identification with another, and in doing so abandons the crucial moral element: the judgement of desert. Konstan sees this uncritical notion of sympathy at work in the current politicisation of forgiveness (Janover 2005; Ure 2007; Konstan 2010). In contemporary pleas to forgive political offenders, he maintains, we are asked to have compassion for them independently of the question of desert. Konstan worries that such sympathy is in danger of exonerating the wrongdoer and condoning the crime. It broadens the scope of sympathy to the point that it is fundamentally at odds with basic principles of justice. It was a worry such as this, he observes, that led ancient thinkers to insist that pity not be eviscerated of its ethical or judgemental content, and so be casually extended even to those who deserve their suffering.

Focusing on Sophocles' tragedy *Philoctetes*, Paul Muldoon also examines how compassion can distort our political judgement, but in the other direction: he suggests that it can narrow and concentrate our concern to the point that we fail to balance our compassion against the broader needs of our political community. Compassion, he suggests, carries the danger that those moved by this sentiment are liable to allow their concern for a particular suffering individual to trump broader political concerns and responsibilities. Compassion can distort our political judgement by compelling us to console damaged, suffering individuals and assuage their grief and resentment at *any* cost, including sacrificing the needs and interests of our political community. Rather than showing us the political value of compassion, Muldoon argues, *Philoctetes* highlights the tragic tension between the ethical demands of community and the ethical demands of humanity, between law and love.

However, Muldoon also shows when citizens exercise this kind of 'excessive' or 'unconditional' compassion it can pave the way for re-establishing the social trust of injured parties. He suggests that this may prove particularly valuable in post-conflict societies struggling to find ways to address the legacy of state-sanctioned violence and injustice: entrenched hatred and resentment. By fully and unreservedly acknowledging the legitimacy of the injured parties' resentment and offering to accede to their often 'excessive' demands, unconditional compassion can contribute to restoring the political trust and faith of those traumatised by past injustices. By restoring social trust, it prevents legitimate political resentment (Muldoon 2008) sliding into deeper, intractable forms of ontological *ressentiment* (Ure, forthcoming). Paradoxically then, Muldoon suggests that in some circumstances unconditional compassion can serve the political – it can reintegrate traumatised, aggrieved individuals – but only by putting it (the political) at risk.

However, we also need to investigate why compassion expands and contracts in such politically fraught ways. Joanne Faulkner's chapter casts a sceptical, critical eye on the grand claims about the political value of compassion first made by eighteenth-century moral sentiment theorists and now echoed by those we might call advocates of 'sentimental' democracy. In doing so she aims to reveal some of the dangers and pitfalls of uncritically relying on compassion to address or resolve significant political conflicts and divisions. Drawing on the example of the fraught political relations between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, she argues that spectators' sympathetic identification can lead them to misrecognise or obscure the conditions, motives, demands and goals of victims of political injustice. Through sympathetic identification, she claims, spectators can paper over the differences between themselves and the victims of injustice, especially where would-be sympathisers are beneficiaries of this injustice. She argues that sympathetic agents not only risk obscuring politically salient differences between themselves and recipients, they can also infantilise the latter and dismiss their claims to political agency and self-determination. Compassion, Faulkner shows, can all too easily lend itself to political paternalism. As many examples of paternalistic measures to repair past injustices show, it is a very short step from conceiving victims as needy and suffering to treating them as helpless children who require authoritarian governance and social discipline. Faulkner presses us to address the hard question of whether and how we can formulate and institutionalise a type of compassion that fully acknowledges, recognises and addresses the political agency of victims/sufferers. She shows how the formation of critical compassion is likely to prove most difficult where there are historical and political grounds for significant discord or disagreement between compassionate agents and those they attempt to assist. In post-colonial societies it has proven difficult, if not impossible, for compassionate citizens to acknowledge indigenous peoples' political agency and claims because these often cut against not just their material interests, but also their identity or pride. In other words, in these important political cases the formation of critical compassion relies on citizens overcoming shame about themselves or their collective past. Arguably, citizens

ashamed of their political community's past injustices will displace their shame onto those whose grievances trigger this painful feeling. The displacement of shame, as Nussbaum argues, can underpin paternalism and violence towards those onto whom we project our frailties and weaknesses (Nussbaum 2004, 2010). Shame is one of the key sentiments that regulate the expansion and contraction of political compassion.

Martha Nussbaum, one of the most influential proponents of a sentimental model of democracy, argues that compassion is the sentimental basis of democratic political community: without it we lack the motive to respect others, protect them from harm and respond to their undeserved sufferings. She argues that respect for others' rights or dignity is not sufficient to motivate the kind of care and responsibility integral to democracy. Yet she too recognises we need to *educate* compassion so that it can facilitate and support democratic political institutions, practices and norms. We need to educate compassion, she observes, because our compassion has a tendency to be narrow and polarising: I only care for my own and I care about them to the exclusion of others' interests or concerns. Nussbaum, however, believes we can develop a *critical compassion* that overcomes this emotion's 'degeneration' into partiality and partisanship. We can address these two problems, she suggests, by following the example of Athenian democracy and using tragic narratives to educate citizens to recognise their common human vulnerability; and by not overvaluing those external goods (money, honour, status and fame) that divide us from others or motivate us to treat them with contempt. Instead she argues that democracies should encourage citizens to pursue less problematic external goods (love of family, friends and work, perhaps even nation). According to Nussbaum, a culture that overvalues honour or esteem establishes the conditions necessary for toxic shame, and with it serious distortions of our capacity for political compassion.

In her chapter, Dorothy Noyes also examines the educative role of theatre and narrative. She conducts a novel exploration of a subcategory of compassion, that of clemency. She explores it through a fine-grained consideration of three pieces of theatre that present different ways in which an act of clemency can play out in a polity. What distinguishes clemency from the more general idea of compassion is that it is exercised by an actor who has power over another, but who, prompted by compassion, decides not to wield it. Where clemency is exercised by political authorities we find power-holders doing precisely the opposite of what those who adopt a standard reading of compassion recommend. On the common understanding, compassion belongs within the realm of intimate relationships – this is the realm within which emotions are properly at home, whereas compassion ought to be eschewed in larger collectives such as the state because it can undermine its foundations of law and justice. On this view, what are required in larger institutions are stable systems of rational rule, rather than bonds that rest on unstable emotions. What makes clemency so interesting is that when it is exercised we can see an intimate relationship unfolding between a sovereign and a subject within the context of the polity as a whole. In such acts, the personal and the political come together in a particularly intriguing way. In the three works explored in this chapter (Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito*, Schiller's *Don Carlos* and a play by Victor Hugo, *Hernani, ou l'Honneur castillan)*,

Dorothy Noyes explores how the drama involved in acts of clemency brings to light the insurmountable tensions between the compassion a ruler might feel for a subject and the requirement of distant authority required to rule a large collective of individuals. Her chapter ends with an intriguing insight, derived from a consideration of clemency, for the modern phenomenon of 'compassion fatigue'.

In his chapter, Michael Ure picks up the thread of Nussbaum's analysis of the attitudes and judgements that impede or skew compassion. He does so by investigating Adam Smith's account of the extra or non-moral motives that shape the scope and quality of our sympathy and compassion. On Smith's analysis, 'extra-moral' vanity constrains compassion. The chapter argues that Smith's attempt to address the problem of this partial, skewed sympathy reproduces the problem in a new guise. Smith identifies two versions of this partiality problem: our propensity to give our sympathy to those who exercise self-command and withhold it from those who do not; and our vain tendency to live vicariously through the sentiments of great or exalted individuals. He proposes that we resolve the first problem by exercising a neo-Stoic therapy which would aim to lower the pitch of our passions to make it easier to receive sympathy despite others' reluctance to go along with our passions. Ure argues that this neo-Stoic therapy actually reproduces the second version of the partiality problem: our partiality for sovereignty and contempt for vulnerability. The chapter then suggests that Smith proposes a more generalised Stoic attitude as a response to human vanity. Ure argues that Smith's Stoic solution to the problem of vanity does not prime us to act compassionately and take others' goals and feelings into account, but to treat our own and others' passions as matters of indifference. Stoicism does not enable us to counteract our partial sympathies, but to flee from our own and others' passions. Smith eventually acknowledges the moral limits of Stoicism, but he offers no alternative solution to the problem of partiality. Ure suggests that if our capacity for sympathy is to become a moral compass, it must be informed by a perspective that acknowledges rather than despises human vulnerability.

Overall then, the editors of this volume hope that it has demonstrated just how rich and subtle a discussion of compassion in the political context can be. Their ambition is that this analysis of compassion will lead to similar considerations of other emotions that are key to the political domain, both domestic and international. Such further work might focus on anger, fear, security and insecurity. Also important are emotions pertaining to forgiveness, generosity and fraternity.

Note

1 Witnessing another's suffering, the Samaritan 'had compassion on him [or he was moved to pity]'. It is worth noting that in the Greek version of the Bible, the parable uses the rare Greek term *splagchnizomai* (σπλαγχνίζομαι) in the middle voice modality: *episplagchnizomai*. This term and its usage indicate that the Samaritan shares the wounded man's suffering in a powerfully visceral way, which is obscured by the translation of *splagchnizomai* simply as pity or compassion. *Splagchnizomai* indicates a sensation in one's entrails; it literally means to be moved to one's bowels.

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PART I

COMPASSION AS A POLITICAL VIRTUE

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