"Another problem with people who fail to examine themselves is that they often prove all too easily influenced. When a talented demagogue addressed the Athenians with moving rhetoric but bad arguments, they were all too ready to be swayed, without ever examining the argument."
Martha C. Nussbaum, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities (2010)*

The Acceptance of True Humanity

Imagine you're standing in front of a mirror. It isn't hard to spot your own imperfections, a pimple here or there, an asymmetric structure somewhere along the planes of your face. Since we see our own imperfections every single day, we must have come to terms with them, mustn't we? That isn't often the case: in our western world we *don't* come to terms with our imperfections. And that make us incredibly vulnerable and easily attacked. What do *you* feel when someone tells you "you have a pimple on your nose?" We immediately see it as an attack, while it just may have been an observation. All too often in our world we seem to want to blend these imperfections away with things like Photoshop and makeup. I think this is because we can't criticize ourselves in a well-adjusted manner and we cannot come to terms with our own critiques of ourselves. This paper is a critical analysis of our Western society and its lack of emotion and self-criticism: a plea for the acceptation of emotions in politics and examining yourself.

Strengthening ourselves

I think examining yourself is important, like Nussbaum implies. Nussbaum states that people who don't examine themselves are easily influenced, and I agree with that. She gives an example of the Athenians, but I can give you an example which people may relate to a little better.

I used to be an insecure teenager. As soon as someone said something to me, I was either too scared to go in against them or I was too unsure of myself to even *think* about anything to retaliate. Often, I also thought the things people said to me were true, and the thought that they might have been wrong had never even crossed my mind. The lack of examining myself, looking at myself and seeing exactly what I was and not what others made me to be, that's what made me insecure and naïve. And since we seem to have many insecure and naïve teenagers (and grown-ups) these days, we need to change something about our attitude towards self-criticism.

Look at our society and how it handles kids these days. You already get a certificate for participating, it doesn't matter if you win or lose, as long as you do something that is remotely close to active. But I like to think that the feeling of *not just getting a certificate* for participating wakes up certain feelings that can lead to a critical examination of yourself. Although I would not recommend the feeling of losing to anyone, I do think it can help you get more information on yourself. This all too protective attitude, this harbouring of the feelings of people you care about is not working. It's making them too closed off from not only others, but also themselves. If you've been taught your entire life that you're amazing, that you're great and that you don't have any weaknesses (or have been told to ignore those weaknesses), you're never going to look at yourself and think *I've got some weaknesses*. But others are going to look at you and see that you are naïve, or easily offended, or insecure.

But what if? What if we can look at ourselves, see our weaknesses and our strengths, and learn to

live with them? I like to think of myself as a self-criticising (it's a talent of mine, really), confident person. But I wasn't always like I am now. I was once that insecure girl who ran away from her weaknesses. Now I'm running against them, and it's made me a bigger person. We as a Western society need to understand that weaknesses don't necessarily make you weak or less of a good person.

I truly like to think that examining yourself critically is so, so important. I think people who look at themselves and know who they are and what qualities and weaknesses they have, I think it separates them from the people who don't. You only know yourself when you don't only know your strengths, but also your weaknesses. Stopping your fantasies of being the best person who ever lived, examining yourself and evaluating the results, leads to something so important and in my opinion even a necessity of human existence: personal development.

The only knowledge you need?
Examining yourself makes you understand not only yourself more, but also the people and the world around you. If you look at yourself critically, you come to know a lot more about yourself. Not looking at yourself critically is denying your imperfections, denying your humanity. We are full of little mistakes and small errors, but we don't need to walk away from that. If we know what they are, we've already learned so much from ourselves, maybe a lot more than we truly understand. What in the world could come more in handy than just knowing things about *you*? If there is any information you need in your life, it is about yourself. Critically looking at yourself is only going to stimulate your self-knowledge, and it's only going to give you advantages. You're going to get insights on who you are as a person, as a human being, and as stated, is going to develop you into a better (in)formed human being.

We don't need to blend imperfections away, like we can with Photoshop and makeup: blending them away isn't going to work in the long term. Humans aren't perfect. We need to come to terms with that and move on.

Vulnerability
People nowadays can be quickly offended. We often feel attacked by small, simple word that were not really meant to be offensive, just critical. People nowadays are afraid of criticism, because we can't come to terms with them. This is because we deny our own imperfections, more often than not. Because the world around is asking of us to be perfect, and there are not many (none) of us who can reach that goal. We don't want to see that we're impatient or jealous or haughty, we just want to hear the good things. And this makes us very vulnerable to criticism: it breaks up your entire self-confidence.

However, people who criticize themselves and look at themselves with an honest view, people who are critical in making decisions are often more prone to comments from others. People who are critical and think about their decisions have good arguments as to why they made certain choices. It makes your choices reasonable, as opposed to someone who is easily attacked and doesn't want to hear any arguments against them. Not looking at your choices and being critical about them makes you very easily offended when it comes to people criticizing you. While we could just learn from people's critiques, can't we?

Too confrontational?

When we look at the numbers of mental health issues in the Western world there are no reasons to celebrate. Some may say that encouraging self-examination may make this number get even higher. Sometimes, after all, things can get a little confrontational when we look at ourselves without any fear for the truth. We may, after all, find things of ourselves that we cannot come to terms with. And especially with the Western society, where the pressure on students to succeed and to be good-looking and to be social and to get good grades and to work hard and to also be a nice person is a little over the top. The pressure is high, and the number of suicides is staggering. One might imply that actively encouraging people to look at themselves and be even more critical than some already are about themselves is only going to make that number higher.

Although I think this is a valid argument, I think people may not truly understand what I mean with critically self-examining. I don't, in any way mean to look at yourself and see all your bad qualities and then to feel bad about it. I mean to find out a bad quality, a weakness, and know how to counteract it, or how to deal with it. I, for example, am a very impatient person. If I have to wait more than three minutes in a bus station, I will have somewhat of a problem. But, because *I know* I'm impatient, I can work on being less impatient all the time. I can do little games in my head to pass the time. I don't have to act on my impatience if I'm aware of it.

Thinking that you have a certain quality and pretending that's the only way you can act, like if I could only be impatient all the time, is almost denying the autonomy of people's choices. Having a certain quality does not necessarily mean that that is the only way you can ever act. I think there is a difference between the choices you make, for example me waiting patiently in line, no irritation on my face, for ten minutes is different from my circumstances, meaning me wanting to be impatient in that same line. I think this divide is nicely made by political philosopher John Rawls, who came with the term of *choice-circumstance-divide*. He states that you're only responsible for the choices you make, and not your circumstances. He supports this by the argument of natural lottery; we've never actively chosen our IQ, our ethnicity, our place of birth, certain qualities that we have, or the way we were raised. And since most of the qualities and weaknesses we have come from either our genetics and on the other hand our social surroundings, we cannot really be held responsible for them, in my interpretation of Rawls's idea.

Right now I'm implying a certain oppression of your weaknesses, it seems. I could understand that someone might say that if we examine ourselves, don't like where it's going and make choices that have nothing to do with my weaknesses or strengths, that then we're back at the start. But truly, we're not. The whole goal of critically examining yourself, in my opinion, is self-development. Taking your weaknesses, pulling them together and knowing how to act better, that's what the development here is. We don't need to deny our weaknesses, no one human is perfect. But we can change our actions in a certain way that makes us more of a tolerant person.

Taking examining yourself critically too harsh on yourself is a danger, yes, but it's also a danger which can be prevented, if only we act according to a certain moral, which brings me to my next argument.

Aristotle's virtues

In the previous paragraph, I've discussed taking self-criticism too far and seeing only bad things about yourself, which can lead to a certain disliking of oneself. This would contribute towards the rise of mental health issues and suicides. But this would be taking it too far, it would be taking an

extreme. This is where Aristotle's views on virtues come in handy.

A virtue is the midway between two extremes. It is patience between impatience and living like the clock doesn't exist. A virtue is something that should be morally applauded, something that everyone (or in Aristotle's case: men) should pursue. Since Nussbaum is heavily influenced by the views of Aristotle, why not take the midway of being ignorant to your qualities and weaknesses and hating yourself? Why don't we take the tolerant middle between those extremes? Why don't we take the way of self-criticism and taking changing ourselves for the better? Because if we do that and try to live with it, who knows how developed we come out of it?

No naivety

Nussbaum has stated that people who don't examine themselves are often easily influenced. People who examine themselves, people who are critical will not be as naïve as people who do not examine themselves. I think not examining yourself also leads to not examining things that other people say, and that's how naivety comes into the picture. On the other hand, if we're being critical creatures, we often don't take on everything that's been handed to us on a silver platter. If the Athenians had been examining themselves, they would have not fallen for the well-spoken behaviour of the demagogue, they would have paused, thought to themselves critically, and they would have come to the conclusion that the demagogue gave bad arguments.

Examining yourself almost automatically leads to being more critical, and that in its turn leads to being less naïve. We start thinking for ourselves again, and not by the terms of the people around us. We don't need to be persuaded by others, we need to think as individuals. We need to use our brains for what they were made for: thinking by ourselves. And who knows what can come out of that?

Macho-philosophy

Not only does examining yourself lead towards self-development and more personal knowledge, I think it also opens up more of our emotions. If we've come to terms with who we are, we are often more in touch with our emotions. If we're freed from the pretentions of being the best or needing to be the best, we often see the other side of the spectrum. Because someone who criticizes themselves who is completely isolated from their emotions, will implicitly come to terms with the fact that they need to stop isolating their emotions.

There is this enormous problem in Western Society where emotions seem to be something much like a taboo. In one of her works (I believe it was *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs Humanities*), Nussbaum explains why we need emotions in our political system. She states that we need to stop pretending not feeling emotions, that we need to come to terms with them. An emotion, according to her, is often a good judgement. We need to get rid of, according to her the *macho-philosophy*.

But, emotions can often be clouded, can they not? Sometimes, our judgements are heavily influenced by our emotions and this takes us to making decisions we may not have made if our mind was clear of emotions. It's like we stopped being rational. Emotions make us look at the world with maybe a little bit too much through our own glasses, while maybe to solve certain problems in the world like poverty and climate change, we need to look through the glasses of not only ourselves and our own emotions, but also that of others. Maybe not using emotions and staying as objective as possible is what we need to resolve our problems?

Although I can find myself somewhat in these arguments, I do not think they are inherently true. Yes, sometimes it can be great to look at certain matters with an objective view, and sometimes we do need that. But look how far we have gotten with being mainly objective in politics. There is a huge problem of distribution around the world, the divide between rich and poor has never been bigger, climate change is going to be a really big issue and we've become so busy liking things on Facebook that we don't really care for resolving issues anymore. And I think when we get rid of the taboo of emotions, get rid of always wanting to look at each matter objectively in politics, that maybe we'll get a lot further than where we are now? We often seem to forget that we humans need emotions, and that it's natural to have them. Why not use those highly developed emotions, which among other things sets apart from animals, to our advantage? I think our society would benefit so much from not only accepting we're not perfect, like I've stated at the beginning of this paper, but also accepting our emotions and looking at them as a judgement instead of an intuitive flaw in the   human system. It would bring humanity back to caring for more people than just themselves and their surroundings, these emotions would make us sensitive to others hurting again. And in this world full of despair and pain, this may be our answer to solving these questions of unfairness.

Besides, looking at matters objectively is nearly impossible for a human being. We're not looking through clear glasses, we're always looking through pink or purple or green glasses, influenced by our frame of reference. So the argument that politics should be something objective, something without any emotion and just based on facts alone would be impossible. Having said that, facts alone do not respect the agony and the pain that comes to look with victims of the world crisis. Yes, we need to look through more than just our own glasses, but by just keeping politics by facts is not considering the problems we have in the world as the true problems they are. By just keeping the facts, we are not acknowledging the emotions behind those facts.

Capabilities

I don't want to pretend to be awfully familiar with Nussbaum's work, but I do know some of her main views. One is a very interesting one, which relates nicely to my previous paragraphs about emotions. Nussbaum has been busy with the question of poverty, and for that she has created this term: capabilities. A capability is something that a human can be, if they get the chance. Nussbaum's definition of poverty therefore is when certain capabilities cannot be guaranteed in a state. There is a list of capabilities, and if those are not assured, a country counts as poor. If I remember correctly, there were capabilities like being able to raise your children, to be able to love who you want, to be able to use your talents, things like that. As a citizen, you don't actually *have* to act on the capabilities: they're a choice. But they're a choice you should be able to make.

Like I said, I'm not extremely familiar with Nussbaum's work, but since she is a huge advocate for emotions in politics, I would like to present *being emotional* as a capability. I mean being emotional in every sense of the word. Being able to use emotion in politics and being taken seriously (which is sometimes still not the case in Western countries where emotions are very much a taboo), as a man being able to cry without being seen as weak. We need to make it our personal mission to ensure this capability, in Nussbaum's terms.

Right now, we often seem like robots, working and working and ignoring impulses from our emotions. But we can change ourselves to be a little more human again. To understand perfection is not within reach, to understand that we have our strengths and weaknesses.

Conclusion

In conclusion, examining yourself leads to having more knowledge about the world, being able to develop yourself more as a person, to knowing more about yourself and being able to strengthen yourself by knowing what your weaknesses are. It leads to coming to terms with your own humanity, to understanding that one cannot be perfect. It makes an opening for emotions, makes us able to go from our robotic tendencies towards human tendencies again. People who don't criticize themselves are often more vulnerable. Yes, Nussbaum is right, people who don't examine themselves are often easily influenced, but when they do, they are often more critical and don't believe everything that's said again. So why not tell everyone to show their weaknesses and their qualities and their emotions? Why not learn from those insights? Why not use emotions in politics to resolve hard matters like poverty?

Why not be human again?