

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 arguments.

Martha C. Nussbaum

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Outline:

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- **Importance of critical thought in modern democracy**
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Argument N.1

- **The importance of examining arguments**

Argument N.2

- **Human nature and its tendency to jump to conclusions**
- **The individual as a product of society and thus not responsible for their inability of critical thought**

Conclusion

On the morality of post-factualism

A tall man stands upon the podium, upon the rally stage, upon the public forum. They are immersed in their political rhetoric, gesturing and speaking with immense eloquence. The crowd beneath eager to listen, and to agree, but not to stop and examine what arguments they are hearing. It is another day in a democracy. It might seem as if the campaigning politician is the subject of the scene, but he is not. It is the crowd, who holds the political power, it is them, whose collective rational or irrational thought will decide about the future of their society.

The very concept of a functional democracy inherently relies on the rationality of its electorate. If one examines the history of society though, there are many occasions where rhetorical eloquence trumped rationality. Examples of charismatic leader-figures using invalid argumentation which sways the masses are ever-present, from ancient Athens, to the United States 2016 election. The shared property of political demagogues is that they succeed by replacing arguments by emotional appeal, whether it is fear-mongering, envy or sorrow, every demagogue's success relied on evoking strong emotions. In this paper, I will firstly examine why a functioning society inherently requires critical thinking, ever more so in the modern era, and secondly, in disagreement with Martha C. Nussbaum, will argue the problem lies not with the individual person, but with the structure of the society and its institutions.

1.1 The importance of examining arguments in the modern world

“...with moving rhetoric, but bad arguments, they were all too ready to be swayed, without ever examining the argument.”

In agreement with Nussbaum, I will further elaborate on the immense importance of examining arguments in the modern world. To set the boundaries of these arguments, when the concepts of true and false are used, they do not refer to truth in the absolute sense of the word. True in this essay merely means supported by the synthesis of empirical and rationalistic ways of attaining knowledge, therefore truth refers to justified information.

People take decisions daily. The decisions themselves are based on the combination of all the knowledge the person possesses. In the modern society, their information about political and social issues will almost never come from their personal empirical experience, nor from their pure rationalistic deduction. It will, almost always, be information received from a medium with perceived informational authority, a website, a book and so on. If the medium contained information that was false and unsubstantiated, the person would take a decision not based on the factual reality. This is the case with all decisions, for which the information required is beyond daily causally observable events. The argument for a decision to purchase food such as: *“The action of going to the supermarket yields a very high probability of being able to satisfy hunger.”* is a one with easily observable information, thus not very concerned with argumentation. The more important decisions, however, require more nuanced information than mere daily experience. Because without the proper knowledge, arguments such as *“Vaccination is practically injecting poison and the state is not an entirely trustworthy entity, so I will not vaccinate my child.”* or *“The economy is in a bad state and there aren't any jobs. A foreign person coming means they will take yet another job, worsening “our” chances of employment even further.”* might seem feasible. The problem with these arguments is not that they would not follow logically, in fact, they seem to make perfect sense.

However, the arguments are obviously false, and it is the premises that are faulty, not the logical induction itself. The mechanism of these premises seems utterly simple. That is the

reason it feels intuitively true for a person with not much expertise in the field. It requires at least some elementary understanding of biology to be able to constructively argue about the effects of vaccination. The second argument also seems to make sense, at least until one understands the complicated workings of macroeconomics and the research on migration. This means that it is not only in constructing arguments that people have to think critically, even more importantly, it is important to critically assess knowledge in the process of receiving it, because that is practically the data set that will be used to take decisions.

The implications of invalid reasoning in digital and democratic societies are tremendous. It is precisely the two properties that amplify the repercussions of bad reasoning among the general population. Firstly, in a digital society in which we live, there is unlimited spread of information through modern technology, this means that falsehoods are easily spreadable to the masses. Improper information also has a tendency to be more desirable to consume, as false information can be made catchy and interesting without concern for accuracy. This means that false information that wasn't able to spread in the past, now became easily shareable, with the amplifying factor of being more outrageous. This effect is even further amplified by the unregulated nature of the internet. The second, even more important property, is democratic. Every single adult citizen possesses political power by holding a right to vote. The voting procedure is precisely one of the decisions that requires nuanced information, rather than common sense. The fact that the mere opinion of the public decides who will rule a country, creates immense incentive to influence public discourse. The modern demagoguery might not always happen in great squares with pompous speeches, it happens every day, when another webpage inciting hatred towards groups of people, or simply furthering unsubstantiated claims is read by the people. The modern day demagogue might not only be a charismatic leader, but also a product of various information streams and events, to which the reactions are inspired by emotions and common sense, rather than rational argumentation. Here I examined why "bad arguments", as said by Nussbaum, are bad. What this all means, is that finding the rational truth is not only worthwhile in the philosophical sense, but also utterly useful and effective, as it prevents the society from being swayed onto the wrong course.

1.2 Where does the problem lie?

"Another problem with people who fail to examine themselves is that they often prove all too easily influenced."

I see a problem with the claim that it is the problem with the individual persons themselves. Nussbaum seems to impose a moral liability on a citizen to behave rationally. However, in this part I will explain why people are inherently irrational and shaped by their environment, and then why the society is the only entity morally responsible for the rationality or irrationality of their conduct.

Firstly, I will analyse the rational capabilities of a single human being, as the “people”, whom Nussbaum refers to, are simply some indefinite number of independent individuals. People are not biologically made to be able to calculate rational outcomes. Instead, the default mode of a human decision-making process, is one based on instinct. This mechanism stems from earlier stages of the evolution of Homo Sapiens Sapiens, and guarantees the most elementary needs such as staying out of danger, eating, breathing and such, by inciting involuntary desires or fears. People have later evolved to have more complex and intelligent brains, they are still one organism in combination with the original primitive design, which merely responds to impulses, but now with brain parts that can solve complicated problems. This historical development means that people have achieved a relatively high intelligence level, however they still tend to take very irrational decisions, as manifested by excessive procrastination, irrational fears and so on. Moreover, rational argumentation is not in any way inherent in the biological or psychological predisposition of a human. It took humankind to develop rational argumentation thousands of years, even when collaborating with each other, so it cannot be expected to manifest itself in an individual independently.

Therefore, as the individual is brought to life, there is not essence in life that would lead them towards rational argumentation. What determines and shapes the individual however, is the society and environment they live in. It is the ways of education and parenting the individual receives that determine their future cognitive achievements. The phenomenon of society shaping an individual is present all around the world, and it is easily observable that babies with no inherent essence receive values and ways of thinking of the culture they are raised in, and their academic performance will statistically greatly differ merely based on the location of their birth.

Since people are mere short-lived severely cognitively limited, how can they be morally liable for their own rationality? If their rationality is determined by how well they were educated, and their education is determined by where they were born, how can it be immoral to be irrational? If we were to construct an ideal society from behind a veil of ignorance, as proposed by John Rawls, we would not choose to judge people as problematic and immoral merely by the how well “examine themselves” and whether they are “all too easily influenced”, as put by Martha C. Nussbaum.

If moral fault was to be distributed, I argue it would lie on the part of the society. The person, as we have examined, is a severely limited entity. The society on the other hand, is an entity with a much longer life span, with much more cognitive and processing ability, and with will and resources to govern the individual persons. A society almost always governs itself through a centralised government. The most important properties mentioned that the government possesses, while the individual doesn’t, are the will and resources. This means that if the society decides it needs to bring up rational people, they have the will to plan such education for the society’s future, and the resources to institutionalise such education through any manner of schooling. As such education needs to happen during early parts of the human life, the child will never be able to find will or reason to create a coherent

education for itself, nor will it ever be able to muster the resources to do so. The Kantian rule of moral obligation applies here. "Ought implies can", if one is obliged to do something, it must be the case that they are, in fact, able to do it. As I've analysed, this is not the case with individual people, since they're determined by the aspects of their societies. However, if we find irrationality wrong, then society is the entity liable for the moral blame, as it is the entity that is actually able to provide all people with education. Moreover, as proven in the first argument, it is always in the society's self-interest to have rational citizens.

Conclusion

This paper explained why critical thinking is essential in creating and sustaining functional and effective societies, and also explained how emotions can blur the way of rational argumentation. This scenario of emotions winning over rationality in a wider or lesser extent has led to many atrocities throughout recorded history. Also applicable to today's Europe, if the irrational fears swerving the public opinion pertained by some segments of society weren't so influential, the European society might have had the political will to save thousands of refugee lives. Moreover, refuting Nussbaum's quote, this paper explained why the moral blame stemming from the irrationality of the public opinion cannot be on the individuals holding these opinions, but on the society that has not educated the well enough. Not well enough to tolerate.