



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
5 MARCH, 2021, 15:15 (UTC +1) / 9:15 A.M. (EST)**

**Contacts: Ole Sandmo
(+47) 98 00 18 78
ole.sandmo@holbergprisen.no**

The Holberg Prize Names Public Philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum as 2021 Laureate

(BERGEN, Norway) – Today, [the Holberg Prize](#)—one of the largest international prizes awarded annually to an outstanding researcher in the humanities, social sciences, law or theology—named American philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum as its 2021 Laureate.

Nussbaum is the current Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago. She will receive the award of NOK 6,000,000 (approx. EUR 585,000 / USD 705,000) during a 9 June ceremony at the University of Bergen, Norway, provided travel restrictions allow for it.

Nussbaum is one of the most well-known and productive philosophers writing today, and her academic career spans more than four and a half decades. Her research interests include ancient Greek and Roman philosophy, political philosophy, philosophy of literature, feminism, and ethics, as well as animal rights. Nussbaum has also given significant scholarly contributions to fields such as legal studies, economics, education, and the measurement of quality of life independently of culture.

In addition to her many scholarly achievements, Nussbaum is a prolific public intellectual. She is known for carrying her stupendous intellectual energy and productivity to address issues of major academic concern, as well as issues that have concrete economic, political, and legal impact. Hence, she has been highly influential in the areas of development, justice and human rights. Nussbaum's impact is demonstrated by the multitude of awards bestowed upon her, and more than 60 honorary degrees.

Describing the key purpose of her work, Nussbaum says: "I write on a number of distinct topics, but they are unified by a single overarching theme: reflection about human vulnerability, its beauty and its costs." "On the one hand, I have spent many years producing philosophical accounts of emotions, which are our inner road map of our significant vulnerable attachments, and how they are faring in a world of uncontrolled events," the Laureate explains. "On the other hand, in developing the Capabilities Approach, I have asked this question: "What forms of vulnerability and impeded activity are incompatible with political justice?"

"A just society will protect its citizens from hunger, lack of medical care, sexual assault, and a variety of other obstacles to a flourishing life, while protecting significant freedoms of choice. Recently I have been extending the approach to the lives of non-human animals and the impediments to their flourishing, many created by humans," Nussbaum says.

To date, Nussbaum has written 26 books, with one shortly forthcoming and three in progress. In addition, she has published about 500 articles and edited 26 books. Her books have been translated into two dozen languages.

Nussbaum's earliest work concentrated on matters of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy. Her first book, a 1978 edition and commentary on Aristotle's *De Motu Animalium*, established her as a leading contemporary interpreter of Aristotle, a position she has never relinquished.

In her work on philosophy and literature, Nussbaum investigates how literature and art develop self-understanding and empathic attitudes towards others, evident in her breakthrough book *The Fragility of Goodness* (1986), as well as in *Love's Knowledge* (1990) and *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (1996). In *Cultivating Humanity* (1997) and *Not for Profit* (2010) she develops her ideas about how literature contributes to the quality of democracy by stimulating critical thinking about values and decisions.

As a political philosopher Nussbaum focuses particularly on human dignity as a core dimension of social justice. In *Sex and Social Justice* (1998) and *Women and Human Development* (2000), this is related to the

position of women globally and thus to their predicaments in a number of different political and cultural contexts. In the latter, she develops her *Capabilities Approach*, which is further explored in *Frontiers of Justice* (2006) and in *Creating Capabilities* (2011). In her forthcoming book *Citadels of Pride: Sexual Abuse, Accountability, and Reconciliation* (2021), Nussbaum explores sexual violence and analyzes how pride perpetuates systemic sexual abuse, narcissism, and toxic masculinity.

In her *Capabilities Approach*, Nussbaum conceptualizes human well-being in a way that is now widely used in the measurement of poverty, development, and social exclusion and inequality. By aiming to provide a humanist alternative to traditional welfare economics, this approach signifies one of the ways in which Nussbaum has made important contributions to the humanities more broadly in confronting modern political problems and questions of well-being.

For a large part of her career, Nussbaum has been working on emotions in human life. She presents her own theory of emotions in *Upheavals of Thought* (2001) and develops it further in *From Disgust to Humanity* (2010), *Political Emotions* (2013), and *Anger and Forgiveness* (2016). *Upheavals of Thought* also deals with the role of music. In *Hiding from Humanity* (2004), Nussbaum explores to what extent shame and disgust should be included as legitimate bases for legal judgments, while *In the Monarchy of Fear* (2018), she turns her attention to the political crisis that polarized the U.S. after the 2016 presidential election.

“While Nussbaum’s eminence in her fields of academic endeavor is unquestionable,” says Holberg Committee Chair Graeme Turner, “what is particularly admirable is her dedication to the task of putting her knowledge to work, towards making a real and lasting difference to people across the world.”

Nussbaum completed her PhD from Harvard University in 1975, where she became the first woman to hold the Junior Fellowship, and where she taught until 1983. She has also taught at Princeton University (1975), Wellesley College (1983 – 1984), École normale supérieure de jeunes filles (1984), Brown University (1984 – 1989), Oxford University (1986 – 1987), and the University of Chicago (1992, 1995 – present), where she is presently a member of the Law School and the Philosophy Department.

Nussbaum’s numerous awards include the Berggruen Prize in Philosophy and Culture (2018), the Kyoto Prize in Arts and Philosophy (2016). She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, a Fellow of the British Academy and an Academician of the Academy of Finland, to name only a few.

About the Holberg Prize

Established by the Norwegian Parliament in 2003, the Holberg Prize is one of the largest annual international research prizes awarded to scholars who have made outstanding contributions to research in the humanities, social science, law or theology. The Prize is funded by the Norwegian Government through a direct allocation from the Ministry of Education and Research to the University of Bergen. Previous Laureates include Julia Kristeva, Jürgen Habermas, Manuel Castells, Onora O’Neill, Cass Sunstein, Paul Gilroy and Griselda Pollock. To learn more about the Holberg Prize and the call for nominations, visit: holbergprisen.no/en.

Visit our [press pages](#) for photos, biography, Committee citation, expert contact information, and more.