

THE ART OF DEMOCRACY

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Review. *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, by Martha Nussbaum, Princeton University Press (2010)

MARTHA Nussbaum's *Not for Profit* is a concise yet provocative work which has, at its core, a plea for the importance of liberal arts education. She expresses the indispensability of undertaking core humanities, such as literature, in education, and warns that failure to acknowledge this is at the peril of the good society's very fabric. The arts are said to nourish our souls with the human emotions necessary for a true understanding of some of the greatest global concerns. Nussbaum eloquently communicates the necessity of human sentiment which allows us to properly understand concepts such as liberty, equality, and democracy. Frequently, the sciences are perceived to be superior to the arts when delving into the aforementioned concepts. However, this is quite a flawed assumption, because it is thought that our imagination becomes

stigmatised under the concentration of a bout of scientific and economic enquiry, which lacks creative thought. The plague expressed by Nussbaum is expressive of various conflicting schools of thought in philosophy. For example, the logic of utilitarianism, which has potential to be impersonal in policy and lapse on the issue of human dignity, is often favoured in the eye of the economist.

In light of this, Nussbaum deploys arguments from Rabindranath Tagore and re-sculpts Jean-Jacque Rousseau's footprints to use as foundations for her argument for the necessity of the humanities to democracy. One must have the capacity to sympathise, empathise, and be moved, she argues, in order to grasp the urgent need for some kind of human equality.

Nevertheless one might be sceptical about whether policy-makers truly do view the humanities as "useless frills." Whilst the listed examples are legitimate and highly valid - quite rightly presenting dangerous opponents to an enriching education system - they do also provide a biased account of what all authorities have to say about the curriculum in schools and universities.

It may, in fact, be the case, that executive branches deem the humanities to be less valuable than the actual schools themselves. The government puts pressure on education institutions to cut down on academic subjects that are too focused on the abstract. If this is the case, the executive branches require a reformation of their tastes, rather than the education institutions themselves. Even through the lack of financial aid available for potential postgraduate students in the United Kingdom, and the dramatic rise in university fees that will take place as of 2012, it is implied that there should be less time spent in classrooms or other intellectual pursuits, and more time spent in work, tax-paying, and, therefore, aiding the development of the nation's economy.

In essence, the Socratic ideal of deliberation is under a strain "in a world bent on maximising economic growth" (p. 48). The generic system that we are being moulded into is a result of standardised tests in schooling. Nussbaum jumps into the political debate; through the eyes of Socrates and Plato, we are taken to the

heart of Ancient Greece when she analyses the decision-making process in, for example, Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*, critiquing their form of reasoning. The author structures her book by contextualising historical narratives in relation to policy issues at stake in our present age. More specifically, Nussbaum eloquently philosophizes the dichotomy between education for profit-making and education for a more exclusive type of citizenship.

She criticises the United States for generally deploying the wrong kind of education system which optimises economic growth rather than learning outcomes, and she does not rule out non-Western countries either, such as India, for also having lost the educational authenticity that was advocated by Tagore.

Nussbaum does not, on any level, discredit scientific and technical education. Rather, she expresses a concern that other important human capabilities will be lost in a 'competitive flurry.' The abilities associated with the arts are characterised as follows: "the ability to think critically, the ability to transcend local loyalties and to approach world problems as a 'citizen of the world' and, finally, the ability to image sympathetically the predicament of another person" (p.7).

In questioning what it is about the world that makes it so difficult for democracies to be sustained, Nussbaum makes a highly relevant point in directing focus towards the importance of education. The primary levels of one's socialisation often have an serious impact on the way one relates to society and citizenships. She points towards the aggression built up towards foreign cultures as a result of the common misguided impression that "our own society is pure within" which generates "blindness" (p. 29). The build up of such warped concepts are inherently detrimental to global unity.

In presenting her argument, Nussbaum refers to various key inspirational figures; Mahatma Gandhi is referred to as the figure of redemption in such civilization clashes, and high profile political theorists such as Rousseau, John Dewey, Friedrich Froebel, come into play with fitting roles in the discussion. The book is elegant and accessible, as well as politically and socially relevant. Moreover, it

possesses a twofold nature of being both factual and also aesthetically fulfilling.

Conclusively, Nussbaum presents something that is reminiscent of Aristotle's notion of catharsis, when he is in disagreement with Plato. Albeit, Nussbaum's is a necessary, contemporary version of such a debate, which is truly relevant to today's democracies. It strives to reconcile issues in democratic decision-making through not only deliberation, but also an artistic movement. She refers to us as 'citizens of the world,' celebrating human diversity, not suppressing it - looking towards a democratic ideal driven by moral realisations, not economic profit.