NUSSBAUM, MARTHA C. (2010) *NOT FOR PROFIT: WHY DEMOCRACY NEEDS THE HUMANITIES*. PRINCETON: PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS, THE PUBLIC SQUARE BOOK SERIES. ISBN: 978-0-691-14064-3.

Shelley Cobb

Since Martha Nussbaum's *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* was published in 2010, there have been numerous high-profile education scandals and battles in both the US and the UK (the two countries in which I have both studied and taught in HE): the Atlanta test-cheating scandal in the US; the downgrading of GCSE results in England, and the plans for (and subsequent dropping of) a baccalaureate; massive cuts to state-funded higher education in California and other states after the financial crash (Proposition 30 reversed some of the cuts in California, but the fight over public funding rages on); and the three-fold rise in tuition fees in England, which prompted mass student protests and created the anomaly whereby students from the wider EU do not have to pay fees to attend Scottish universities but English students do. Of course, there are many more examples we could point to, and none of these is about a threat to the Humanities, in particular. And yet, threats to humanist principles of education lurk beneath them all, as a utilitarian and profit-oriented understanding of education continues to gain momentum in public discourse. The state-funding of higher education regularly evokes arguments such as that of the Governor of North Carolina: 'If you want to take gender studies, that's fine, go to a private school…But I don't want to subsidize that if that's not going to get someone a job' (quoted in Bruni, 2013). The coalition government of the UK has effectively ended public funding for the Arts and Humanities, while funding for the teaching of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects has been protected, the result being that Humanities departments are under more pressure to recruit and justify their contribution to their institutions. Both cheating scandals could be seen as signs of

the competition ethos and target-driven assessment in secondary education: in the US, teachers and principals altered incorrect answers on state-administered standardized tests under the pressure of district targets to fulfil the No Child Left Behind Act; in the UK, the GCSE grades for English exams were marked down by the government regulator because it suspected teachers of over-marking coursework in order to reach grade targets set by the government, and the education minister's plans for a baccalaureate were meant to marginalize supposed 'soft' subjects like the Arts. In addition to all this are the debates about MOOCS (massive open online courses) – whether they make higher education accessible to all or if they are the beginning of the end of face-to-face, student-led teaching that is central to the Humanities. All are examples of the desire to make success in education quantifiable, a demand that Humanities subjects particularly fail to fulfil. In light of this evidence (and much more not noted here) of a 'crisis in education', Nussbaum's 'manifesto' (121) for education that values, 'searching critical thought, daring imagination, empathetic understanding of human experiences…and understanding of the complexity of the world' is more than welcome (7).

Taken as a manifesto, Nussbaum's book makes a resolute and succinct intervention into debates about the role of a Humanist (or Liberal Arts) education for democratic nations within a contemporary globalized economy. Her main examples of the current state of the Humanities come from the US and India, where she has done global development work, and there are references to Europe throughout. Her polemic for a humanistic education draws on Western philosophies of education from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Maria Montessori, as well as from Rabindranath Tagore, the Indian poet and founder of the Visva-Bharati University.

Chapters One and Two articulate a common frustration for those of us who teach within the Arts and Humanities about a growing (although not novel) discourse that they are superfluous to education at all levels. This attitude sees only the basic skills of literacy and numeracy as well as STEM subjects as necessary for economic growth, and Nussbaum's critique of this view is strong. She makes it clear that education for profit needs workers who don't question systems of hierarchy: 'educators for economic growth will not want a study of history that focuses on injustices of class, caste, gender, and ethnoreligious membership, because this will prompt critical thinking about the present' (21). She continues even further saying that '[Proponents of education for profit] will fear them [the

Arts], for a cultivated and developed sympathy is a particularly dangerous enemy of obtuseness, and moral obtuseness is necessary to carry out programs of economic development that ignore inequality' (23). This is Nussbaum in her most critical mode, and her most political.

The middle chapters (Three to Six) set out her explanation of what a Humanist liberal arts education should be and the goals it should have. Chapter Three is taken up with her articulation of a 'psychology of human development' (30). Following Rousseau's ideas in *Emile*, she argues that infants' helplessness can be developed into either narcissism or sympathy. Her own view on the link between infant helplessness and shame is her explanatory paradigm for 'projective disgust' – the tendency in humans to reject or dominate those of minority identities and those who seem weak or are vulnerable. Her key solutions are to engender sympathy and an examined life through a liberal education that helps students to see from another's point of view, that teaches history so that it counters stereotypes and encourages critical thinking, and 'the skill and courage it requires to raise a dissenting voice' (46). The main tenets set out for achieving these goals are the employment of a Socratic teaching method in small classrooms, required study of Philosophy and access to arts education. The extended practical example here is Tagore's education philosophy for the school and university he founded, both of which are structured on the principles of equal education for women, learning to think for oneself rather than by rote, and the arts as central to empathy and challenging the status quo. Later, when she notes that Tagore's university needed money and went to the government for help, causing it to lose its independence and liberal arts structure, the reader shares her very real disappointment with this turn of events.

In her general outline of a liberal arts education, the study of Philosophy is, unsurprisingly for a Philosopher, where the Socratic method is taught and the discipline in which the opportunity to develop the 'examined life' is most available. Some recognition that other Humanities disciplines also employ Socratic methods could have strengthened her rallying call, but the study of History, Literature and Languages are never specifically mentioned as disciplines that foster critical thinking as a skill. The arts are central to the engendering and development of sympathy and cooperation, and important for a humanist education because 'Citizens cannot relate well to the complex world around them by factual knowledge and logic alone' (95). Many suggestions here are for the practice of

art – dance class, choirs, poetry-writing – and the examples, such as Morton Alternative (a high school for those expelled from mainstream education) and its incorporation of theatre and poetry-writing as part of its therapeutic environment, are inspiring. There is, though, little discussion of the academic study of literature, theatre or the musical or visual arts. And there is no reference to film, television and other media arts (which, though disappointing for this film and media scholar, are not unsurprising). Part of the reason for this absence is because her argument for art as central to education directly takes on the claims that they are too expensive and that they require extra 'equipment'. So, it's no surprise that her examples include choirs and student-written plays and poetry. No expensive musical instruments, scripts, or museum-visit fees are required for these arts, and more funding for these kinds of activities is not part of the conversation here. She is simply arguing for the inclusion of any art at all. The decimation of art instruction in schools has been going on for so long that it does feel like any call for their inclusion in public education borders on the radical.

Nussbaum's final chapter is the most specific about the state of the Humanities in contemporary schools and universities, and in it she makes some strong claims. Her claims here for what is and what is not working, however, are a little troubling. She argues that what is still working, more or less, is the United States' model of liberal arts and Humanities requirements in a four-year degree. The expansion of the study of minority identities and non-Western histories in the Humanities has created curricula 'fashioned with an eye to good citizenship' (123). Of course, there are threats as state schools look to 'downsize' Humanities department to 'core' disciplines. But the real trouble lies in Europe, which functions, for Nussbaum, as a sort of bad object representative of utilitarian higher education. She rightly points out that the specialized nature of university education in Europe means that Humanities disciplines can't make claims for their contribution to the wider university (whereas US universities require a minimum amount of Literature, History and Arts classes). Consequently, European/British Humanities disciplines constantly face the question of financial viability based on recruitment; the recent high-profile example of the closure of highly rated Philosophy department at Middlesex University is an example its peer departments wish to avoid. And yet, Nussbaum makes some sweeping generalizations about large lecture-only courses and the limits to research-leave, in which the US is presented, problematically, as the better example. In contrast to Nussbaum's claims, much teaching of the Humanities (at least in Britain) is a

combination of lectures and small-group seminars, not dissimilar from the US model. Large lecture-only classes may dominate STEM subjects, but, again, this is not dissimilar from the US. She also claims that research leave in Europe is dependent on government funding. In the UK (where I work) this may be true at some universities, but the situation is more complicated than Nussbaum makes out. Many Russell Group Universities (research-intensive institutions) offer research leave to their staff on a regular basis (often with fewer years in between than in the US), while other institutions may offer only teaching remission or not offer leave at all. The inequity is not a good thing, of course, but there is no mention of the different levels of employing fixed-term (or adjunct) staff. Although exact numbers are hard to verify, UK academia employs about 1/3 of its staff on fixed-term contracts. In comparison, the *New York Times* claimed that 75% of US academic staff are adjunct faculty. In both countries, these are academics without the many benefits of long-term contracts, including research sabbaticals. Nussbaum also claims that an event on gender and religion at her 'own university' would have more male attendees than one she attended in Germany because of Europe's lack of a liberal arts structure to its degrees and 'because the requirement to take a course on women's issues is often the only thing that destigmatizes the field for young men' (127). However, this is not a universal or even common requirement at universities in the US. Nussbaum's valorisation of the US higher education system with its Humanities requirements and regular sabbaticals is implicitly focused on the experiences of elite universities like her own institution – Yale University.

Using Yale as an example of all US universities is obviously problematic, and at times Nussbaum becomes practically myopic: 'we in the United States should pause at this point to be thankful for our traditions, which combine a liberal arts model with a strong cultivation of humanistic philanthropy and a basically private-endowment structure of funding' (132). There is no stated recognition of the wide variance of funding for universities in the US, and her insistence on the American model as a kind of beacon becomes awkward when she says that at her own university 'we do not have to go hat in hand to bureaucrats who lack all sympathy with what we do… we go to wealthy alums whose educational values pretty well match our owns' (132). This is an exceptionally privileged position to be in. Moreover, it is not, of course, an answer to the threats that she previously mentions. Setting aside the amount of money and time the university must put into cultivating those

wealthy alums rather than investing in teaching and resources, those endowments are dependent on investment returns for their ability to pay everything from salary to scholarships. Their size is subject to the ups and downs and bubbles of the financial system. And, unsurprisingly, they have taken hits in the recent financial crisis. The system may seem like a stroke of 'good luck' to Nussbaum, but that luck could turn bad at the whim of the stock market or of an individual. These endowments also widely vary throughout the US – between private universities, between private and state universities, and between state universities – with Harvard's endowment worth 90% of all endowments and many state universities suffering under those unsympathetic bureaucrats and politicians like the Governor of North Carolina with whom Yale is lucky not to have to deal.

Nussbaum's larger polemical point about the value of the Humanities is thus undermined by its own philosophical broad sweep. Making the general arguments about the threats to the Humanities and side-stepping the particularities of resources raises the question of who the audience is for this book. It's not those of us who work in the Humanities – we experience what she outlines daily, and though we may not agree fully with her articulation of a liberal arts education, we would be the choir to whom she's preaching (and most likely to notice her privileged position). It's not parents – many of those who would read this book will be those whose children will go to elite universities like Yale. It's not policy makers and politicians – they rarely respond well to manifestos, and her remarks that they lack all sympathy with what Humanities educators do, does not invite them into the discussion. Earlier I described the book as a 'rallying call'. I still think it is, but to whom and for what is, ultimately, unclear.

References

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