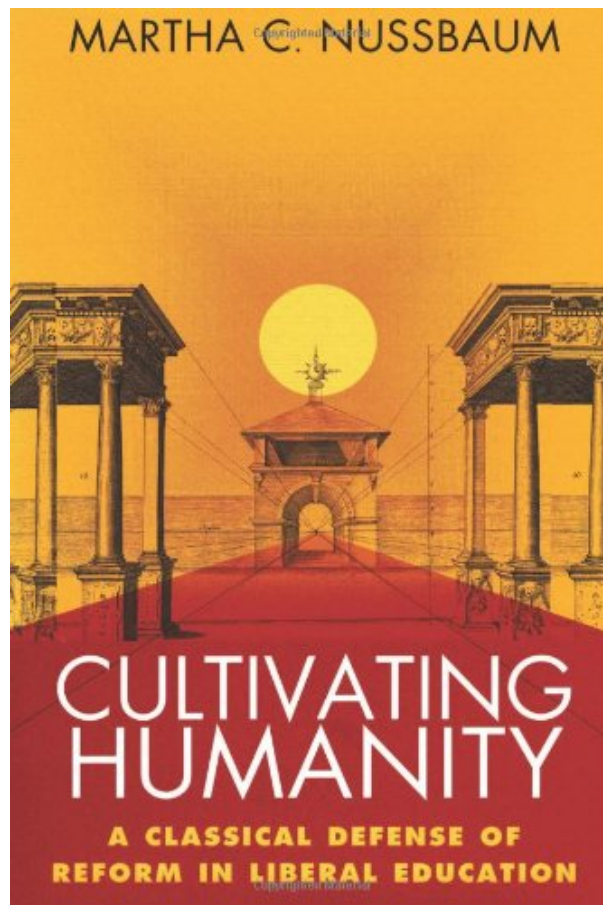


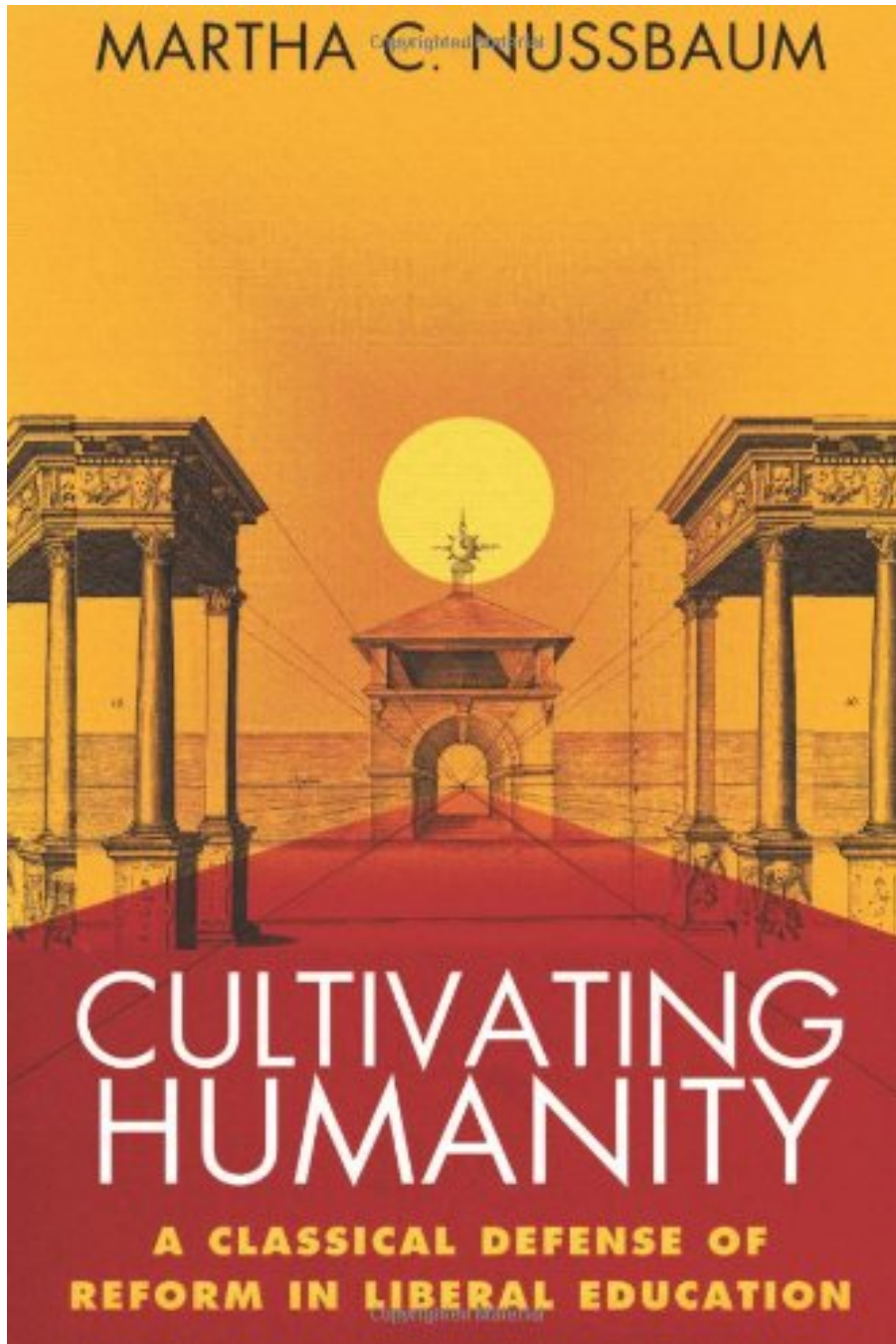
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How can higher education today create a community of critical thinkers and searchers for truth that transcends the boundaries of class, gender, and nation? Martha C. Nussbaum, philosopher and classicist, argues that contemporary curricular reform is already producing such "citizens of the world" in its advocacy of diverse forms of cross-cultural studies. Her vigorous defense of "the new education" is rooted in Seneca's ideal of the citizen who scrutinizes tradition critically and who respects the ability to reason wherever it is found--in rich or poor, native or foreigner, female or male.

Drawing on Socrates and the Stoics, Nussbaum establishes three core values of liberal education--critical self-examination, the ideal of the world citizen, and the development of the narrative imagination. Then, taking us into classrooms and campuses across the nation, including prominent research universities, small independent colleges, and religious institutions, she shows how these values are (and in some instances are not) being embodied in particular courses. She defends such burgeoning subject areas as gender, minority, and gay studies against charges of moral relativism and low standards, and underscores their dynamic and fundamental contribution to critical reasoning and world citizenship.

For Nussbaum, liberal education is alive and well on American campuses in the late twentieth century. It is not only viable, promising, and constructive, but it is essential to a democratic society. Taking up the challenge of conservative critics of academe, she argues persuasively that sustained reform in the aim and content of liberal education is the most vital and invigorating force in higher education today.

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- Great product!

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29 of 36 people found the following review helpful.

Cultivating Rationality

By Katherine Katsenis

This book, like all of Nussbaum's is intelligent, well written and worthy of your time. But it is not without flaws. *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education* argues in favor of the current trends in eliminating the traditional "western canon" as it has been understood. Critics have come at Nussbaum from nearly every conceivable front, claiming that she argues that education is ultimately political, that she provides ineffectual anecdotal evidence from America's top-tier and well-funded universities, that she aims to destroy the western perspective and finally, that she is idealistic and unpractical. Each of these points is well founded but lack viable impetus unless one other element of Nussbaum's argument is noticed. Namely, that Nussbaum's book is a book about critical thinking skills and how they are taught in our nation's universities. The peripheral issues of gender, class and ethnicity, (where most of Nussbaum's critics attack), must be seen under the overall issue of education's primary purpose, namely, to produce rational thinkers. Thus, her thesis is much more about cultivating rationality and less about carrying a torch against the Western Canon.

To explain how rationality is to be cultivated, Nussbaum devotes much of her efforts to getting clear on what it means to be a "world citizen". This discussion is thoughtful and informative, even if you ultimately disagree with her. Yet, embedded in this detailed examination are serious assumptions about morality, which many other critics have noticed as well. She breezes through claims about avoiding "retributive anger", being "empathetic" and being "non-violent"; which prima facie sound reasonable. However, it may make some nervous that she grounds her entire argument on a morality that is far from generally accepted among philosophers. Nussbaum is harkening back to her roots as an expert in ancient philosophy, and this Aristotelian bias must be remembered as one reads through her argument. If you are an Aristotelian, a Hippy, or if you accept the ideas of Natural Law, Nussbaum's argument will be more successful for you.

Finally, as Nussbaum sets out her definition of what a Liberal Education is, she ignores the certain impact that her argument, if correct, will have on college instruction and pedagogy. While it may be possible to accept her implicit moral claims for the sake of an enticing discussion, I, like many others, was disappointed that she failed to seriously acknowledge the practical implications her argument begets.

9 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Enlightened Common Sense

By AmericanDreamer

I did not read this book as amounting to a bashing of the Enlightenment canon at all. Rather, it struck me as an all-too-uncommon commonsensical, middle-ground position, well articulated, on controversy over multiculturalism. Reading some of these negative reviews leaves me scratching my head wondering whether these reviewers and I read the same book. I understood Nussbaum to be offering a "both/and" approach that would retain teaching of the "dead white men" Western canon but add to it the best of voices from other

traditions.

The practical difficulties of doing this seem obvious enough: what to leave out, then? Unless she is advocating more time spent in college curricula on humanities studies and/or more required courses than is the case in many colleges and universities for undergrads these days. I did not see arguments for either of those points of view so one question would be how to implement her suggestions even if one agrees with them? There is only so much time in a day and so much space in a curriculum. Passionate subject-matter advocates ultimately weaken their case when they don't say what should be taught less.

Still, Nussbaum is asking powerful questions and contributing what I see as all-too-infrequent well-stated middle-ground fodder to inform these discussions. So even if you find her case unpersuasive this book should help you clarify your own views on this subject.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

Philosophy for Everyone?

By MoseyOn

What should American students study in order to be prepared for informed citizenship? According to legal scholar and political philosopher Martha Nussbaum, they should study philosophy. She does not argue that they should major in philosophy, only that a sensible dose of philosophical study is the best curricular cure for an education that is overly narrow, that is not designed to prepare citizens to think carefully and critically about important issues, and, perhaps most importantly, that does not equip them to imagine the experiences of others, thus making it more difficult for them to develop the kind of sympathetic imagination that is necessary in the globalized world of the 21st century with its intensity of cross-cultural contact. Heavily influenced by classical Stoic philosophers as well as by Harvard economist and Nobel laureate Amartya Sen, Nussbaum argues that the objective of universities should be to produce "world citizens." By this she does not mean people who have put aside more local loyalties (including national loyalties) in favor of some cosmic connection, nor does she have a word to say about world government (which people often think of when they hear the term "world citizens"). What she refers to are people who have loyalties at a variety of levels, but who still understand that there are "common human abilities and problems" that connect them to people who are either very far away from them, or who are nearby but have very different backgrounds and beliefs from their own. If universities are to create world citizens, then students need to study philosophy for two reasons: it provides training in rational argumentation that allows one to base decisions on reason rather than emotion, and it enhances the likelihood that students will develop the "narrative imagination" (that is, the ability to put oneself in the shoes—and mind—of another) that is crucial for understanding of, and positive engagement with, the modern world.

Much of the book is a presentation of examples of how philosophy makes its way into the required curriculum at a number of American colleges and universities. This is accompanied by a general discussion of the various ways in which Nussbaum believes the study of philosophy is needed for all students. Some of it is along the lines of "the unexamined life is not worth living," while some of it is concerned with the way in which the study of philosophy and rational argumentation will not only help students understand the complex issues they will have to deal with as citizens, but will also help them make sound decisions regarding those issues.

The book is not perfect. Far from it. One of its major weaknesses is that Nussbaum often makes conclusions about programs or even entire universities based on a very small sample of opinions and exposures. Certainly she knows well the small number of elite institutions where she has been a faculty member, and there are other universities with which it appears she has had some in-depth engagement. But in other cases, she seems completely comfortable making judgments based on few, selective, and second-hand reports. That may be

unavoidable when you are trying to make broad statements about a huge educational landscape, but it should be done with much greater caution than Nussbaum displays.

Still, there is much to agree with in Nussbaum's defense of the value of studying non-vocational subjects that have as their primary purpose the engagement of students with broad questions whose exploration can lead to a more intelligent, engaged, humane citizenship and a greater understanding of the complexities of the world. And without question, when a curious student and a committed teacher engage in real, open-minded, sympathetic pursuit of knowledge and understanding, powerful insights can be gained by both. As Nussbaum writes, "no curricular formula will take the place of provocative and perceptive teaching that arouses the mind" (p. 41).

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[A] judicious and empirically grounded defence of recent curricular innovations...Martha Nussbaum's book moves beyond the wars over PC and the curriculum, transcending the terms in which they were fought...[H]er report should end the tired brandishing of caricatures that has marked the academic culture wars. (Dennis Wrong Times Literary Supplement)

Over the last decade or so, Nussbaum's work has gone off in a new...direction and one that once again draws on her remarkable feeling for the ancient world. She started reading the Stoics...Nussbaum discovered in Cicero, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius a much richer and more subtle moral and political theory than they are usually given credit for. More importantly, perhaps, they prompted her to start thinking about what the Stoics' ideals of global citizenship--their belief in the fundamental equality of all people--would look like in practice. The results can be seen in her insistence, in *Cultivating Humanity*, on the importance of a multi-cultural liberal education which opens its students to alternative values and traditions. (Ben Rogers Independent on Sunday)

Cultivating Humanity is the most potent salvo yet in the academic culture wars launched back in 1987 by Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*. Nussbaum reveals herself to be an expert practitioner of intellectual judo, taking the most powerful thrusts of the opposition and using them to stake out an eminently sensible defense of ongoing reform in higher education. (Scott Stossel Boston Phoenix)

Nussbaum has succeeded in saying something fresh, forceful, and interesting about curricular reform and the culture wars. *Cultivating Humanity* is persuasively argued, philosophically well-grounded, and firmly based on Nussbaum's own experiences as a visitor, lecturer, and teacher at a wide range of colleges and universities. She draws upon the best elements of current work in feminism and the study of race and ethnicity even as she calls attention to excesses and errors in new pedagogy and scholarship that need to be remedied...Throughout *Cultivating Humanity* (the title adapts a phrase from the Stoic philosopher Seneca), Nussbaum emphasizes reason, careful argument, logical analysis, self-questioning, the pursuit of truth and objectivity, and critical inquiry. (William E. Cain Boston Sunday Globe)

One of the strengths of *Cultivating Humanity* is that it explores the conflict between authority and reason explicitly--even if it doesn't entirely resolve it. Nussbaum's untrammelled confidence in both the universality of reason and the diversity of human life makes hers a challenging and novel book, one that strongly endorses multicultural study while distancing itself from nearly everything typically associated with it, including postmodernism, identity politics, and the critique of philosophical universalism...If her book is read as carefully and as sympathetically as it was written, it just might give humanism a good name in the academy again...For secular intellectuals who agree that the unexamined life is not worth living, it seems only human to hope that Nussbaum's vision of higher education will guide American universities in the twenty-first century. (Michael Bérubé *Lingua Franca*)

Nussbaum is a culture warrior who earned her stripes defending universities from charges of caving in to the demands of politically correct multiculturalists. In this vigorous response to critics, Nussbaum adopts an unusual approach in her defense of the college-level multicultural curriculum. Instead of casting multicultural instruction as a type of payback for the sins of Western racism and sexism, she artfully argues how the Western philosophical tradition itself leads directly to a multicultural agenda...Nussbaum's arguments are convincing. She is careful to avoid the pitfalls of cultural relativism, and there is no debating the cosmopolitan effects of the educational process she supports. Her work is a welcome addition to the ongoing debate about culture and curriculum. (Publishers Weekly)

Nussbaum's wide ranging discussion of liberal education and its evolution at the end of the century is both thoughtful and concrete. She supports the idea of liberal education, suggesting that it should be shaped by institutional realities at individual colleges and universities, and by broader intellectual trends in American and world society...Nussbaum does not have a specific program to promote. Rather, she reflects on the state of American undergraduate education and advocates continued change and reform as part of a commitment to the core values of liberal education. (P.G. Altbach *Choice*)

If Socrates had come back to help us think through the culture wars, he would have written Martha Nussbaum's brilliant, grounded book. (Vartan Gregorian, President Emeritus, Brown University)

Martha Nussbaum has skillfully used her familiarity with the classics of Western philosophy, particularly the ideas of Socrates and Seneca, to demonstrate both the educational aptness and the imperative importance of the study of non-Western cultures, gender, and race in liberal education today. Her study provides an excellent refutation of the views of those who would mummify the great authors of the past instead of learning and teaching in their true and timeless spirit. This is a valuable guidebook for educating "citizens of the world." (Nannerl O. Keohane, President, Duke University)

Cultivating Humanity is as important a book on the nature and needs of higher education as I have read in the past decade. Deeply grounded in classical thought, it demonstrates a remarkable openness to the ongoing experience of human history and culture. This is a book not only of luminous intelligence, but of compassion and love. (J. Robert Barth, S.J., Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Boston College)

Martha Nussbaum defends a Socratic view of education, which places the examined life at its heart. Her vision also has elements rooted in Stoic cosmopolitanism and stresses the centrality of the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself. Because she is not only a fine philosopher but also a distinguished classicist, Nussbaum roots her argument in a serious defense of the deep continuing relevance of classics. This is a marvelous book, which should be read by all who care about the present and the future of the university. (K. Anthony Appiah, Professor of Afro-American Studies and Philosophy, Harvard University)

This is a vital, timely, and much needed contribution to the debate on the nature of undergraduate education. Few people are more qualified than Martha Nussbaum to write on this topic. Here she manages to combine a fine appreciation of what the past teaches us, and what we need to create for the future of liberal education. (Walter E. Massey, President, Morehouse College)

Review

If Socrates had come back to help us think through the culture wars, he would have written Martha Nussbaum's brilliant, grounded book. (Vartan Gregorian, President Emeritus, Brown University)

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