

**Martha Nussbaum. *Cultivating Humanity*.**  
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Martha Nussbaum's *Cultivating Humanity* is a powerful argument for diversity studies, or "intercultural education," in the liberal arts curriculum. Through an examination of gender, cultural, and African-American studies in widely different settings in higher education, she elucidates what works and how. She begins with the conviction that liberal education aims to produce the free person. Education frees the person for active citizenship by freeing the student's mind, that is, by helping him or her reach a critical distance from inherited opinions, often those opinions that most divide us as citizens. Received opinions also lead us to direct our activity toward maintaining our class position rather than acting for the good of the whole. As she notes, we think of education as designed to give students access to advantageous places in society:

Like Seneca, we live in a culture divided between two conceptions of a liberal education. The older one, dominant in Seneca's Rome, is the idea of an education that is *liberalis*, "fitted for freedom," in the sense that it is aimed at freeborn gentlemen of the propertied classes. This education initiated the elite into the time-honored traditions of their own society; it sought continuity and fidelity, and discouraged critical reflection. The "new" idea, favored by Seneca, interprets the word *liberalis* differently. An education is truly "fitted for freedom" only if it is such as to produce free citizens, citizens who are free not because of wealth or birth, but because they can call their minds their own . . . They have ownership of their own thought and speech, and this imparts to them a dignity that is far beyond the outer dignity of class and rank (293).

Nussbaum thus begins from the ancient, Socratic position that thinking leads to virtue, especially to the self-discipline that makes civic discourse possible. The aim is always a distance from one's own interests or that of one's group—a distance that makes it possible to include the perspective of the other as equally deserving of respect:

If one comes to see one's adversaries as not impossibly alien and other, but as sharing certain general human goals and purposes . . . this understanding will lead toward a diminution of anger and the beginning of rational exchange (65).

Now, Nussbaum's distinctiveness is to point out that empathy—especially empathy cultivated through the study of other cultures, races, and genders—works to achieve this essential civic understanding while also serving the Socratic goal of calling into question received wisdom. The free person is the person whose acts are characterized by freedom from stereotyped ideas about the superiority of cultures and races. This does not guarantee the justice of his or her actions, but it does remove the blinders that assure us that we are doing "right" even as we violate and dominate the other. Nussbaum is very careful to argue that intercultural education is not relativist—it does not regard all cultural practices as equally good. It compares cultures and their practices in order to allow students to appreciate unfamiliar cultures by seeing that all humans confront certain common problems—fear of death and the regulation of appetites, for example. Our culture offers one way of approaching those issues. Carefully examining other ways allows students to respect alien cultures as human, and to gain some freedom from their own. The aim is that otherness will awaken curiosity rather than hostility as students graduate and move out to a diverse national and international world.

Nussbaum's emphasis on civic freedom and civic friendship links intercultural education to the founding concerns of the Western tradition. In the face of post-modernism, she insists on the free and responsible human. The book is an exciting and encouraging journey, and a guide to practice. Like Aristotle's works, it is a conversation between good principles and good practice, asking what people are doing and why what they are doing does or does not make sense. The excitement, energy, and professionalism of the teachers featured by Nussbaum provide a model for emulation. Nussbaum's conviction that education can lead students to real freedom is a challenge and a reminder of the task on which we are engaged.

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