

Chapter 1: The Silent Crisis

Summary Nussbaum identifies a major change for the worse in education across the world in democratic societies. Radical changes in how we teach the young have not been well thought through. At risk are courses in the arts and humanities seen as useless frills to this neo-liberal hijacking of the curriculum. These courses are being cut away in virtually every nation in the world at all levels of instruction. Worse is what seems to be happening within the learners "soul," or the thoughts and imagination that makes us human. Teaching for profit reinvisions our students as future wage earners, profit centers, or employees. It obliterates the human dimension of their being while teaching them to treat each other as objects in an economic world of means and ends. To be sure, Nussbaum does not object to good science and technical education. What is at stake is that other abilities taught in the arts and humanities are just as crucial to employers and essential to building healthier democracies. While education is not just for citizenship but also can prepare our students to live meaningful lives which includes satisfactory employment, this book will focus on educating a citizen student for democratic participation.

Discussion

- > What is this silent crisis the author alludes to in chapter 1 and from which she takes the title of this book?
- > Why is it silent?
- > Why is it a crisis?
- > How does this silent crisis undermine democracy
- > "Producing economic growth does not mean producing democracy" (of course not!).
- > What, then, does teaching for profit produce? What kind of student-subject is created when curriculums are radically changed for national economic gain, job skills, and the like?
- > "I do not at all deny that science and social science, particularly economics, are also crucial to the education of citizens. But nobody is suggesting leaving these studies behind" (7)
- > Beyond the "uselessness" of arts and humanities courses, are there other reasons lurking behind these cuts?
- > "One way of assessing any educational scheme is to ask how well it prepares young people for life in a form of social and political organization where everyone is different" (9).
- > "[. . .] although it is clear that a strong business culture requires some people who are imaginative and critical, it is not clear that it requires all people in a nation to gain these skills. Democratic participation makes wider demands, and it is these wider demands that my primary argument supports" (11).

Beyond the chapter

- + How can we reassess our curriculums in light of educating our students for democracy rather than for profit?

Chapter 2: Education for Profit, Education for Democracy

Summary The author discusses two models of education, one oriented toward economic growth or profit and the other toward human development. The former is relatively new; the latter is under threat. The United States is unique in its educational model. Students are not forced to specialize as soon as they enter college. Instead, they are given two years (just two years!) to explore a variety of courses. The development of the mind and character through these courses has been a hallmark of higher education in the US since its origins. Now, under neoliberal ideology, it is being replaced by a system oriented toward results, skills and job markets that imagine students as future earners, employees, profit centers, etc rather than as broader human subjects. An education for democracy must insist on a broader, more traditional approach that emphasizes learning in arts and humanities courses.

Discussion

- > producing economic growth does not mean producing democracy
- > human development paradigm vs. an economic growth model
- > what should it mean for a nation to advance?
- > the United States has never had a pure growth-directed model of education, until now?
- > the uniqueness of the U.S. model. See Delbanco, pp. 36-66
- > "It is easier to treat people as objects to be manipulated if you have never learned any other way to see them" (23)
- > "Art is the great enemy of that obtuseness, and artists (unless thoroughly browbeaten and corrupted) are not the reliable servants of any ideology, even a basically good one-- they always ask the imagination to overstep beyond its usual confines, to see the world in new ways" (23-24).

Beyond the chapter

- + If educators insist on a human development model then certain abilities seem essential to teach our students. How can we teach these abilities in our assignments, lectures, advising sessions, etc that Nussbaum lists on pp. 25-26?

Chapter 3: Educating Citizens

Summary Nussbaum analyzes a range of psychological studies to offer deep insights into human nature. These insights pose certain difficulties for the creation of healthy and stable democracies. She illustrates the need to balance, overcome, manage, negotiate [you pick your verb] our moral and anti-moral emotions, our immaturity with maturity, our child with our adult selves. This endless dance plays out throughout our lifetimes and our better selves can be severely compromised if we are not aware of specific situations. Dissent and personal accountability become critical strategies, (morals?) in certain contexts where violence and domination must be defeated.

Discussion

- > the narrative of human childhood
- > the conflict between human nature and democracy

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- > the need for moral emotions (positional thinking leads to sympathetic emotions); compassion
- > the recognition of human weakness as a starting point for general (liberal arts) education
- > what social norms and dominant forms of adulthood interfere with the formation of a compassionate, tolerant, and helpful person?
- > How can schools reinforce or undermine the achievements of the family, either good and bad?

Beyond the chapter

- + how might we incorporate the lessons from this chapter (pp. 45-46) into our pedagogical tool kits, course objectives, programs, departmental and divisional goals, or institutional mission statements?
- + how can we help our students to develop genuine compassion for others, particularly those different from themselves

Chapter 4 Socratic Pedagogy: The Importance of Argument

Summary Nussbaum calls for the return of the Socratic ideal for our classrooms. This approach, she warns, is on the brink of collapse in democracies all over the world. Socratic pedagogy is student-centered. It relies on the natural curiosity, ability, energy or creativity of learners to begin to think for themselves. Educators should not force-feed students like the owner of Tagore's parrot who perishes because he chokes on pages of books. Educators ought to learn how to employ Socratic pedagogy, details for which Dewey and Tagore failed to outline, to develop more student participation and "skin in the game" both in the classroom and later as citizens in threatened democracies.

Discussion

- > Why isn't Socrates' warning of the worthlessness of living an unexamined life obvious to most people?
- > Democracy by lottery. A good idea for today's nonparticipants?
- > Effects of the unexamined life -- failure to reason well, unclarity about goals, too easily persuaded, "Yes" people, etc. (49).
- > How can a liberal arts curriculum teach Socratic values?

Beyond the Chapter

- + Consult the following chapters in *The New College Classroom* (Davidson and Katopodis, Harvard UP, 2022) for specific activities that apply the Socratic pedagogical ideals discussed by Nussbaum:
 - "Structure Active Learning"
 - "Activities for Any Day of the Term"
 - "Democratic and Anti-racist Pedagogy"
- + How can we structure a Socratic classroom, department, division or institution?
- + On an idea to do informal humanities teaching see "A Renaissance from Below"
<https://thepointmag.com/forms-of-life/a-renaissance-from-below/>

+ On the idea of fixed growth and structural inequality see "Bad Education"
<https://thepointmag.com/forms-of-life/bad-education/>

Chapter 5 Citizens of the World

Summary Upon finishing chapter 5, I begin to write this summary not fully realizing today's date. I am writing this summary during the morning of July 4, 2023. I cannot ignore the irony presented at least to me between chapter 5 and a *national* holiday to celebrate political independence. As I continue to write and think about this chapter I begin to hear questions Nussbaum poses:

How can you think about July 4 in the United States not just as a citizen of your own nation but of the world?
What themes surrounding this holiday can be thought of as universal or global?
How does the political struggle for freedom in my country compare to that of others

I quickly realize that freedom and independence are universal strivings. I wonder how an individual's or a nation's freedom is another's unfreedom? As Nussbaum makes clear in Chapter 5, it is not enough to educate our students within their own national traditions. We cannot just create democratic learners who only understand their lives, histories and traditions in a narrow sense. Doing so presents a false narrative of a nation's realities. Nussbaum acknowledges that students should still spend a lot of time understanding their native cultural traditions, histories, politics, etc., but must do so with an international perspective. A student must fully realize that a nation's history and current reality is tied up with a lot more stuff going on outside of it "as part of a complex interlocking world" (91). Students and educators cannot allow a nationalist ideology such as "America First" or other exceptionalist ideas to impair the creation of a global citizen. We must thoroughly internationalize our curriculums to mirror a truly international reality. We are all connected in the smallest and largest ways possible, and to understand these connections requires a great amount of unpacking, explaining, and compassion to function as a concerned citizen of the world. As Nussbaum argues, to educate a global citizen we must teach our students the histories, languages, cultures, artistic, religious and philosophic traditions of many different groups with whom they share similar problems. With the proper foundation that ought to begin early, college graduates might be able to engage in a global public debate on issues that concern the entire world: climate change, economics, policing, civil rights, and the like. As citizens of the world begin to practice an international perspective they will understand a great deal more about themselves and their own nations. They become a stronger democratic citizen at home critically informed about the wider world around them.

Discussion

- > Nussbaum makes an often overlooked point when she observes that "our daily lives put pressure on the global environment. It is irresponsible to bury our heads in the sand, ignoring the many ways in which we influence, every day, the lives of distant people" (80).
- > Do you believe that students today compared to when you were a college student are more understanding of cultures or groups different from themselves?

- > Education for profit operates under the assumption that business is a global perspective always searching for new markets. But the corporation is entirely un-democratic institution. How can we unpack this contradiction for our students?
- > Comment: "In the absence of a good grounding for international cooperation [. . .] our human interactions are likely to be mediated by the thin norms of market exchange in which human lives are seen primarily as instruments for gain" (80).
- > How can we begin early in a child's education to combat simple cultural stereotypes of different peoples of other nations?
- > Nussbaum observes the un-democratic reality of today's global economy mentioning the history of colonialism, foreign investment (IMF), and multinational corporations all of which exemplify anti-democratic behavior. As she states, these arrangements "were not chosen by local inhabitants but can determine their life opportunities" (83).
- > To what degree was your education international?
- > Some good news: "In India, for example, the highly prestigious Institutes of Technology and Management have been in the vanguard of introducing humanities courses for all their participants" (93).

Beyond the Chapter

- + How can we do the work of internationalization across our campuses?
- + How might we alter our syllabi to include a more comparativist perspective?
- + How can we disarm students' fears of the unfamiliar?
- + Which courses might be missing from our curriculum that could cultivate a citizen of the world?
- + What strategies can we think of to create more TT lines (as they continue to disappear) dedicated to the languages, histories, arts, philosophies, religions, etc of Asia and Africa?

Chapter 6 Cultivating Imagination: Literature and the Arts

Summary A healthy democracy requires sympathetic citizens. Democratic citizens need the ability to imagine what it might be like to be a person different from themselves. As Nussbaum states in the previous chapter, logic and factual knowledge alone cannot do the work of sympathy nor are they enough for a democratic subject to relate to a complex world. Nussbaum acknowledges that the capacity for genuine concern for another person requires a few preconditions such as knowing how to do things for oneself, recognizing that total control is neither possible nor good and that we share a world with other imperfect beings who have their own desires, lives and needs. We are not the center of the universe and we must cultivate the ability to imagine what the experience of another might be like. The importance of play for small children in shaping sympathetic democratic citizenship is one strategy, but what is the approach for young adults and adults? Nussbaum argues convincingly for the use of the arts such as music and dance "to cultivate capacities for play and empathy in a general way, and to address particular cultural blind spots" (108). Cultivating the imagination either through dance, music or poetry can not only develop sympathy but actually, in some cases, help to heal mental illness.

Discussion

- > If we are to imagine another's experience on what basis do we proceed? What do we need to know to prevent an incorrect image, seem patronizing or be stereotypical?
- > What are some examples of cultural blind spots on our campuses?
- > Comment: "It is all too easy to have refined sympathy for those close to us in geography, or class, or race, and to refuse it to people at a distance, or members of minority groups, treating them as mere things?"
- > Tagore's notorious dance performance was disarming because it was delightful and beautiful. How can we disarm our students narcissism and fear to get them to understand the importance of equality and justice for all and not just themselves or people like themselves.

Beyond the Chapter

- + The solution to a more sympathetic democracy cannot just be simplified as to reading lots of stories, singing in a choir or writing poetry. Nussbaum also calls for teachers to do things differently. Like what? (119)
- + How can we convince stakeholders that the arts and humanities are just as important as math and science at this time. Hasn't the emphasis on STEM and Business completely overshadowed the everpresent validity of arts and humanities?
- + How can we build bridges with our colleagues in Business to encourage students to take more courses in the arts and humanities in order to cultivate critical thinking and sympathetic imaginations, essential skills for economic growth?

Chapter 7 Democratic Education on the Ropes

Summary In this final chapter, Nussbaum offers a mixed picture of liberal arts education in Western democracies. While she acknowledges that the United States has cultivated a long tradition of this type of education the European system is different. She freely admits that U.S. private and elite institutions will be fine since they have a strong philanthropic support. State schools and smaller liberal arts colleges (which she does not mention) suffer more cuts in the humanities than elsewhere. Overall, Nussbaum offers a fairly positive assessment for the liberal arts in the U.S. but she also writes that they are endangered because of the emphasis on instrumental learning rather than teaching for meaning, perspective and understanding. In Europe and India the situation is far worse barring a few exceptions. Likewise, the lack of critical and imaginative learning in the United States has worsened because of testing and rote learning, or teaching to the test. Nussbaum also criticizes the Obama administration for its overemphasis on STEM which favors job growth and quantitative outcomes, market-driven curriculum, and the like, information all politicians exploit to get votes. If these trends continue, as they have, democracies are certainly on the ropes as educators continue to train useful profit-makers. Threats come from inside and outside (such as global competition) to our campuses but ultimately the battle is waged locally.

Discussion

- > Do you share Nussbaum's positive and negative assessments of the liberal arts she articulates in the chapter? What is she missing?
- > Have universities and college "become too captive to the immediate and worldly purposes they serve" (122)?

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- > How do we balance a curriculum that cultivates meaning, understanding and perspective with career readiness or job preparation? Isn't this a distinction without a difference?
- > Are Nussbaum's international comparisons in this chapter helpful to understanding our own liberal arts tradition and the way instructors work within them?
- > Interesting to note that donors and alums seem to be more sympathetic to humanistic learning than administrators. Different set of priorities?
- > Comment: "We like (take for granted?) democracy, individual rights, self government, and the like but we think far too little how to preserve them" (141).

Beyond the chapter

- + How can a liberal arts curriculum (general education) and our humanities programs survive given the market model (neo-liberal) for designing curriculum and running a college or university? Are there better models?
- + What do you think about developing a course on democracy? Which texts would you assign? How would you approach and teach it?

Afterword (2016): Reflections on the Future of the Humanities -- at Home and Abroad

Summary Nussbaum's first edition was published in 2010. The paperback edition came six years later. In the afterword to the 2016 edition, Nussbaum offers some thoughts since the original publication of *Not for Profit*. She claims that she has "learned a lot" but repeats her somewhat irritating observation that "liberal arts colleges and the liberal arts portions of private universities are in a reasonably healthy state . . ." (146). Elite universities and colleges will always survive tough times, and, in fact, can even flourish during them. Nussbaum seems to be completely clueless about smaller liberal arts colleges which are clearly beyond her experience. At Millsaps, for example, cuts to tenure track lines in the humanities continue on pace. While our donors are exemplary and continue to support the college, we have fewer students and humanities majors in the history of the college. Nussbaum offers private funding models but isn't this contrary to a democratic notion of education? Should education be a public good rather than survive on the private sector surplus for its livelihood?

Discussion

- > While Nussbaum acknowledges private funding (with four conditions) she also argues that we need to do a lot more to bring in the larger community (149).
- > Teaching Plato and Tolstoy while pursuing a STEM major are not mutually exclusive (149). Faculty know this but how can we convince students that philosophy, literature, etc is just as important for their future job?
- > "Will faculty in Europe and elsewhere be willing to do the type of labor-intensive teaching of undergraduates that a liberal arts model requires?" (150).
- > "Will politicians and bureaucrats be willing to hire enough faculty to offer such instruction in small classes?" (150).
- > "Its [the book's] main function is to be a catalyst for the more precise and immersed arguments of others" (154).
- > Does Nussbaum really make a case for the humanities?

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Beyond the Chapter

+ Nussbaum concludes that preserving the liberal arts is a struggle that must be waged locally. What strategies have you and your colleagues employed to not only preserve but grow your programs, curriculum's, divisions, etc, in a way that fosters democratic learning or learning to live a good life?

Further reading / Read - Alikes

Andrew Delbanco, *College: What it Was, Is, and Should Be*. Princeton UP, 2012.

Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis: The Humanities in a Disenchanted Age*. U of Chicago Press, 2021.

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Arnold Weinstein, "Don't Turn Away From the Art of Life." Op-Ed. *New York Times* 23 Feb. 2016.

Stanley Fish, "Displaying Value: The Case for the Liberal Arts Yet Again." Op-Ed. *New York Times* 23 Apr. 2012.

Abraham Flexner, *The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge*. With a companion essay by Robbert Dijkgraaf. Princeton UP, 2017.

Bertrand Russell, *What I Believe*. Routledge, 1996. Orig. published 1925.

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Nuccio Ordine, *La utilidad de lo inútil. Manifiesto*. Con un ensayo de Abraham Flexner. Trans. Jordi Bayod. Acantilado: Barcelona, 2013.

David Foster Wallace, *This is Water. Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life*. Little, Brown and Co., 2009.

Cathy M. Davidson and Christina Katopodis, *The New College Classroom*. Harvard UP, 2022.

Reading Guide to *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* by Martha Nussbaum.
Reading guide by David Wood