

Martha C. Nussbaum. *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, Harvard University Press, 1997. Pp. 301. \$28.50

Martha Nussbaum argues that the purpose of liberal education is to cultivate humanity. In her view, this is the same as educating for world citizenship. But, what does it mean to cultivate humanity? According to Nussbaum one cultivates humanity by developing three capacities. The first is the capacity for critical self-examination and critical thinking about one's own culture and traditions. The second is the capacity to see oneself as a human being who is bound to all humans with ties of concern. The third is the capacity for narrative imagination – the ability to empathize with others and to put oneself in another's place. As one develops these capacities one becomes increasingly suited for world citizenship.

One of the strengths of *Cultivating Humanity* is the way in which Nussbaum ties these capacities together and shows that they function as an organic whole. The capacity for narrative imagination and the capacity for identification with humans are obviously enhanced by studying other cultures, but this also deepens the capacity to examine one's own culture and traditions. As Nussbaum points out, studying other cultures may show one that what had been taken simply as natural is in fact a cultural artifact. In addition, Socratic criticism when applied to other cultures is actually a way of respecting them. Narrative imagination is also vital for seeing oneself as a human among other humans. The person who develops these capacities is becoming a world citizen with narrative understanding for other cultures, identification with humanity and a critical understanding of his or her own culture. If Nussbaum is right, international study, including study abroad, is at the heart of liberal education and not merely an ornament that contributes to the overall quality of a liberal education.

A second strength of *Cultivating Humanity* is the extent to which Nussbaum's vision has historical roots. She shows how arguments regarding the curriculum were already being fully engaged at the time of Socrates. Her explanation and defense of narrative imagination and the importance identifying with humans is rooted, at least in part, in the work of Marcus Aurelius and other Stoics, and her emphasis on self-examination is tied to Socrates' vision of philosophical thinking. Throughout *Cultivating Humanity*, Nussbaum ties her argument to the works of classical thinkers. The classical grounding of her

argument gives her a way of answering both academic conservatives who appeal to classical education and postmoderns who sometimes ignore the lessons to be learned from classical thinkers.

Nussbaum's vision rests on significant and controversial philosophical commitments. She argues against chauvinism and simplistic moral relativism by calling attention to shared human life. Her discussion assumes that in general terms there is something that constitutes human flourishing. Humans, according to Nussbaum, face similar problems regarding mortality, appetites, property and planning their own lives; and these problems need to be addressed in order for them to flourish. Without this foundation it is difficult to see why identifying with humanity in general plays such an important role in her vision of liberal education. It is, in fact, difficult to see how it even makes sense to talk of the cultivation of humanity if there is no common thread running among all humans. While there may be very vague and abstract concepts that can be applied to humans generally, when these are given a more specific interpretation in light of various cultures it is not clear that humans have enough commonality to support the cultivation of humanity in the way Nussbaum presupposes.

Nussbaum also presupposes that the optimal form of government is deliberative democracy, as opposed to democracy construed as a mere conflict of interest groups as well as to non-democratic forms of government. Nussbaum is clearly right that liberal education is intimately tied to democracy and that the unexamined life threatens democratic freedoms, but her vision of democracy needs more defense than it receives in *Cultivating Humanity*. This is especially true in light of recent controversies surrounding defenses of deliberative democracy by Amy Gutmann, Dennis Thompson and others.

Finally, Nussbaum's argument rests on tremendous faith in reason. She assumes that value conflicts will not simply end at loggerheads with no way to adjudicate. Nussbaum makes a convincing case for the central role of Socratic reasoning in cultivating humanity and world citizenship. At the same time, critical reasoning can erode religious belief and engender skepticism in a variety of areas. *Cultivating Humanity* would have benefitted from more discussion of the potential corrosive effects of reasoning. This is especially true of her chapter on religious colleges and universities.

In defending these commitments she argues against postmodern and conservative writers who would call into question the importance of reasoning. One of the more interesting points of her discussion is the extent to which it makes clear the commonality among postmoderns and conservatives.

Both ideologies undermine the sort of Socratic reflection necessary for deliberative democracy and liberal education.

Nussbaum notes that conservative writers who criticize the new initiatives in the humanities often call the humanities in general into question and that this leads to an emphasis on vocationalism, which she also sees as a threat to liberal education. She is right that vocationalism can be a problem. At the same time, however, it is important to note that cultivating humanity and educating for world citizenship suits one for a variety of vocations. An emphasis on vocations is an enemy of cultivating humanity only when it replaces or supersedes it.

Nussbaum also argues against identity politics which she sees as undermining identification with humanity by holding that primary loyalty is to one's local group. In their most extreme form, Nussbaum notes, advocates of identity politics hold that only members of a particular ethnic group are able to write with insight about that group. It is clear why identity politics poses a threat for Nussbaum's vision of world citizen, but Nussbaum needs to do more to say just where it is that identity politics goes wrong. It is surely true that respecting persons requires respecting the cultures that form their identity. Nussbaum takes account of this, but does not explore in sufficient detail how the insights of identity politics can be captured without undermining the cultivation of humanity. There is a tension between identifying with humanity and identifying with one's local culture, and this tension needs more philosophical exploration than it receives in *Cultivating Humanity*.

In spelling out a compelling vision of liberal education in terms of cultivating humanity and world citizenship, Nussbaum makes it clear that there are certain underlying philosophical and political commitments that need to be accepted. She does a convincing job of this, though there are places where more justification would be helpful. If Nussbaum is right, what emerges is that liberal education cannot be defended apart from a set of moral and political commitments that include cosmopolitanism, respect for persons, and deliberative democracy.

Cultivating Humanity was published in 1997 at the height of the culture wars over the curriculum. The purpose of the book is to defend scholarship and curricula in areas such as African-American studies, women's studies, human sexuality, and multiculturalism from a variety of attacks. As these areas have matured, produced excellent scholarship and become increasingly incorporated into the academic structure, the furor has subsided. This gives the book a somewhat dated quality, but it would be a mistake to dismiss the book. Nussbaum's view of what it means to cultivate humanity and her philo-

sophical defense of this is still relevant and well worth considering. Her book should not be viewed merely as further conversation in the academic culture wars, but as a powerful vision of liberal education with deep historical roots and fascinating philosophical foundations. Because of this, the book is of interest to philosophers and scholars of education as well as to lay persons for whom the book was also written.

The sections on multiculturalism and the chapter on the study of non-Western cultures have special significance for those interested in study abroad. For the readership of *Frontiers*, *Cultivating Humanity* can be seen as a sophisticated philosophical defense of the importance of study abroad.

Martin Gunderson
Macalester College

Ania Loomba. *Colonialism/Postcolonialism*. The New Critical Idiom Series. New York: Routledge, 1998. Pp. 289. \$16.95

Robert J. C. Young. *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. Pp. 178. \$9.95

Ania Loomba, a professor of English, utilizes multiple Shakespearean examples to illustrate postcolonial theory (*The Tempest* in particular). Robert J. C. Young, also a professor of English, instead uses a montage approach, providing “real world” examples of postcolonial theory before working backwards towards a definition or some exposition on power relations. A middle road between these two authors’ works might be one that quotes not Caliban (the postcolonial posterchild) but his master/oppressor, Prospero. Referring to the duplicitous brother who overthrew him as Duke of Milan, Prospero describes Antonio as “one/Who having, unto truth by telling of it,/ Made such a sinner of his memory,/ To credit his own lie,—he did believe/He was indeed the duke.” In other words, Prospero’s brother, by performing the duties associated with the Duke, came to believe that he *was* the Duke. Antonio’s hierarchical relationships—with his brothers, with his peers, with his subjects—led to the creation of a specific type of knowledge. In this realm of knowledge, it is right for Antonio to seize power from Prospero. This enforced paradigm shift (Antonio’s actions creating the parameters in which “truth” is created) was labeled by Nietzsche as “will-to-knowledge.”

The unearthing of this will-to-knowledge between colonizing powers and their colonies is the basis for postcolonial theory and literature. The