

competing protection agencies from arising. Perhaps not; but he gives no argument that a monopolistic agency is desirable. Rand also comes under assault because she opposed taxation, a governmental activity Robbins considers entirely justifiable.

Finally, I must strongly protest the following passage: "Murray Rothbard, a Jewish atheist, hated Calvinism passionately, and favored Catholicism. The anarchist Rothbard favored the totalitarian Roman church" (pp. 230–31). This is bigoted and coarse. ♦

WHAT TOWER? WHAT BABEL?

Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education

Martha C. Nussbaum
Harvard University Press, 1997, 338 pgs.

Conservatives and leftists often characterize the struggle over the contemporary university in the same way, though of course accompanied by opposing value judgments. On the one side stands the traditional curriculum, with subjects such as classics, philosophy, history, English, foreign languages, mathematics, and the sciences. Opposed to this is the new multiculturalism, whose advocates

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To secure the interests of blacks, Asians, Hispanics, women, homosexuals, and various other hitherto silent sufferers, new subjects are necessary: Black Studies, Women's Studies, Gay Studies, and so on and on. Among the main forces the new disciplines aim to combat, according to many of their practitioners, is that supreme instrument of white male oppression—Western logic and reason.

Classics, the study of Latin and Greek, occupies a central place in the traditional view; and one might anticipate that an eminent classicist writing on the university would have little good to say about multiculturalism. Martha Nussbaum, a well-known specialist in classical philosophy, seems ideally qualified to champion the old values. Surely the eminent author of *A Commentary on Aristotle's "De Motu Animalium"* and *The Fragility of Goodness* will not look with favor on efforts to replace Plato with LeRoi Jones in the classroom.

But Nussbaum cuts across conventional expectations. She maintains that devotion to the values of classical philosophy, especially as Socrates and the Stoics embody these values, mandates multiculturalism.

The first step in her argument seems to me unquestionably right. Students need to learn to think logically. They must be able to analyze discourse critically, discerning whether an argument's premises validly imply its conclusion. Nussbaum rightly instances Socrates as a prime advocate of this style of thought, and she has some appropri-

ately severe things to say about deconstructionists and others who question the binding force of logic.

"What is deeply pernicious in today's academy, then," she writes, "is the tendency to dismiss the whole idea of pursuing truth and objectivity as if those aims could no longer guide us.... Postmodernists do not justify their more extreme conclusions with compelling arguments.... Derrida on truth is simply not worth studying for someone who has been studying Quine and Putnam and Davidson" (pp. 40–41).

I have so far left unstated a fact crucial if one is to understand Martha Nussbaum. She is in my view an unscrupulous propagandist, avid to de-

fend her opinions by fair means or foul; and I regret to say that this aspect of her *modus operandi* soon surfaces in the book.

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After defending logic, she briefly describes a cosmopolitan view that she derives from her study of Stoicism. This she insinuates without proof is demanded of someone adequately trained in critical reasoning. She states: "The education of the *Kosmou politēs* [world-citizen] is thus closely connected to Socratic inquiry and the goal of an examined life. For attaining membership in the

world community entails a willingness to doubt the goodness of one's own way and to enter into the give and take of critical argument about ethical and political choices" (p. 62).

Whatever one thinks of the Stoic goal, or for that matter of Socratic questioning, it should be clear that this is not to be identified with logical thought. Why cannot, say, a religious believer, who accepts his creed as axiomatically true, think in entire accord with the rules of logic? It is not a principle of logic, Professor Nussbaum to the contrary notwithstanding, that "all questions are open questions."

And surely Professor Nussbaum knows full well that this very issue

has occasioned much discussion in contemporary analytic philosophy. Alvin Plantinga and others have famously contended that it is *not* a requirement of rationality that a “properly basic belief” be supported by argument. Nussbaum no doubt disagrees: but surely she had a duty to inform her readers of the existence of controversy on the point. She omits to do so, instead proceeding rather like this: logic → Socrates → Stoicism → The Good.

Indeed, Nussbaum has a habit of eliding facts inconvenient to her thesis. She never bothers to inform us

that the Stoic defense of cosmopolitanism often rested on metaphysical doctrines that, to say the least, are highly controversial. As an example, many Stoics were cosmopolitans because they believed that human beings all contain sparks from the same divine fire. She thinks it unnecessary to mention

that her beloved Marcus Aurelius was a worse persecutor of Christians than Nero, nor does she quote Seneca’s “humanitarian” statement that it is natural to recoil in horror at the sight of a poor man. Readers dependent on her will not learn that her account of Socrates as a democrat, though backed by the eminent authority of Gregory Vlastos, is controversial.

Though it is a bit by the way, I shall give two more examples from other

sources that show Nussbaum in her true colors. In her sworn testimony at a trial in Colorado involving that state’s ordinance banning affirmative action for homosexuals, she found herself in dispute with John Finnis, a Roman Catholic legal theorist from Oxford. She claimed, against Finnis, that a Greek word used by Plato in *The Laws* should not be taken as critical of homosexuality. In support she cited an outdated edition of the standard Greek lexicon, Liddell and Scott. She did not inform the Court that the current edition of Liddell-Scott cites the very sentence at issue

in *The Laws* as an instance of the word’s pejorative use.

Again, in a recent dispute, Roger Scruton questioned her reliance on Gary Comstock for claims about violence toward homosexuals. In response to Scruton’s claim that Comstock is biased, Nussbaum remarked that there is no

evidence in Comstock’s book that he is in fact homosexual. In point of fact, Comstock is a leading “gay theologian.” Surely Nussbaum must have come across Comstock’s *Gay Theology Without Apology*. Her carefully worded remark—not in *this* book—is disingenuous or, at best, ignorant in the extreme.

To return to *Cultivating Humanity*, it appears at first glance that Nussbaum’s slippery way with truth avails her nothing. She defends Stoic

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cosmopolitanism and Socratic questioning; but what have these to do with multiculturalism? Are not the supporters of identity politics and postmodernism opponents of the Stoicism she admires?

But this difficulty proves amenable to our author's methods. She describes a number of multicultural courses in which, she claims, the values of critical thinking occupy a high place: "At Harvard University, Amartya Sen offers a course called 'Hunger and Famine.' Standard topics in development economics are given a new twist, as students learn to think about the relationship of hunger to gender and also to democratic political institutions in areas of the world ranging from Africa to China to India" (p. 78).

No doubt Sen, a world-famous economist, offers a valuable course; and Nussbaum mentions a few other offerings that sound promising. But how can a few instances, described by someone with a proven record of tendentiousness, counter the fact,



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known to every informed observer, that multiculturalism is synonymous with leftist slogans and racial strife? (Readers who doubt this should consult *Literature Lost*, reviewed elsewhere in this issue.)

Once more our author is equal to the task. Critics of multiculturalism practice a fatally flawed method: "is the feminist classroom a place of indoctrination instead of a place of reasoned debate? [Christina] Hoff Sommers' claim has been echoed by former women's studies professors Daphne Patai and Noretta Kortge [sic—the correct spelling is Koertge] in their book *Professing Feminism*.... Like Hoff Sommers, they base their conclusions on a small number of anecdotes, and professors interviewed for the volume make their comments anonymously" (p. 202).

Professor Nussbaum has really outdone herself here. The whole basis of her roseate view of the new courses consists of a few anecdotes of her own, told in the unbiased way we have already examined. But it is her *opponents* who lack methodological rigor. Oh, brother! ♦

ISLAND OF SANITY

Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities

John M. Ellis
Yale University Press, 1997, x + 262 pgs.

Like Martha Nussbaum, whose *Cultivating Humanity* is addressed above, John M. Ellis is concerned with multiculturalism. His excellent book, taken together with her less than excellent one, enables readers to gain a firm grasp on the new style of education.

A common argument for multiculturalism proceeds in this way. The humanities have been for too long cramped by a narrow canon of acceptable works. Multiculturalism does not debase education; it expands the humanities by exposing students to new perspectives.

Ellis, a distinguished scholar of German literature and the author of the best analysis of deconstruction, quickly locates the flaw in this argument. (His earlier volume is called *Against Deconstruction*—see whether you can guess his view of that movement.) Race-gender-class scholars do indeed consider works not previously studied in humanities departments. But they do not analyze these works in order to extend their knowledge. Quite the contrary, they impose on all works a distinctive set of political concerns. All literary works wind up

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The context of race-gender-class critics "is merely a different context, wider, to be sure, in the sense that it encompasses more phenomena than literature, but also narrower, in that it addresses nothing but a single strand that runs intermittently through that widened body of phenomena. In the relevant sense, then, this context is narrower, not wider" (p. 43).

And not only is the context narrower, literary works that fall within its purview are analyzed according to a bizarre system that our author amusingly terms PC logic. This sophisticated system has two main components. Following Michael Foucault, PC theorists hold that "covert relations of power are the driving force in human situations" (p. 161). Nothing else matters. Against this, Ellis makes a commonsense point that unfortunately seems far beyond