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NUSSBAUM'S PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION AS THE FOUNDATION FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: The author of the paper investigates Martha C. Nussbaum's philosophical concept of education in which education is considered key to all human development. In the first part, the author focuses on some of the more interesting ideas in Nussbaum's philosophy of education regarding the growth, development and improvement of the individual, community, society, nation, country and humankind. The second part is a critical exploration of the individual in education, looking specifically at the general development of humankind and the shaping of abstract cosmopolitan world citizens, which are the main political goals of Nussbaum's philosophy of education.

Keywords: Nussbaum, education, human development, human being, capabilities approach

Introduction

The individual and social forms of human development have occupied an important position in philosophical and ethical discourse since philosophy began. A great number of remarkable philosophical ideas have emerged throughout history, starting with the work of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics, and including the grand social projects of the 19th and 20th centuries. Scholars writing on human development in the latter half of the 20th century include the French philosophers Pierre Hadot and Michel Foucault, who were concerned with the ancient tradition of the ethics of care of the self (Ucnik, 2018), as well as Amartya Sen and Martha C. Nussbaum, who are interested in human capabilities and formulating human development goals in the context of options and opportunities.

Sen's thinking on human development is more economic both in direction and substance (notwithstanding its important philosophical and ethical dimension), since he is primarily an economist and the bearer of a Nobel prize in economics (1998). Nussbaum's thinking has a clear philosophical and ethical basis, grounded in the ancient tradition, stretching back to Socrates, Aristotle and the Stoics, but also takes account of the modern philosophy and ethics found in the work of Adam Smith, Immanuel Kant, Karl Marx, John Stuart Mill and John Dewey. It builds on the Socratic pedagogy of critical thinking, Aristotle's view of man as a social being and the Stoic and Kantian emphasis on the equality of human dignity. From the work of Adam Smith she takes his focus on the importance of emotions in human life,

and from Mill and Dewey their views on the role education plays in human development, which feed into what Marx, in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844,* called a life worthy of dignity, involving the capacity to function in a truly human way and which is characteristically rich in human needs, specifically, the irreducible need for multiple opportunities in life.

For Nussbaum the point of philosophy lies in human development or *eudaimonia*, as conceived of by the Epicureans, Sceptics and Stoics—a perspective in which philosophy is about achieving a flourishing life through contemplation and argument (Nussbaum, 2009). Nussbaum reminds us of Aristotle's view on ethics, "if it makes human lives no better, it will be deservedly ignored" (Nussbaum, 2009, p. 59). Ethics is reliant upon human experience, which amongst other things means describing a good human life and within this characterising the capabilities and forms of life. A good human life must in the first place be one that is liveable, that is, it must be both possible and attainable for human beings (Nussbaum, 2009). Nussbaum further claims that the political goal of the nation must be to develop all its members, regardless of their abilities, as it is essential all people are treated equally, since we all have the same human dignity and we must help those who most need it to develop, including the disabled (Nussbaum, 2011).

Nussbaum holds that human development relies upon ten fundamental functional abilities and opportunities: life-supporting capabilities (people live for as long as normally expected, not dying early, or having a life so reduced it is no longer worth living); physical health (capable of being healthy, including having good reproductive health), physical integrity (capable of exercising free movement, protected from harassment, including sexual abuse and domestic violence), being able to use the senses, imagination and thought (capable of using these in a truly human way, formed and shaped through an adequate education, not just limited to basic knowledge), emotions (capable of forming relationships with things and people outside themselves, love etc.), common sense (able to come up with a conception of good and think critically about life plans), connections (capable of living with others and, in relation to them, manifest an interest in others, which requires a social basis for self-respect and avoidance of abuse, which also means being treated as a respectful person of the same value as others. This includes protection from discrimination). It is also about the person's relationship to other species (capable of having an interest in animals, plants and nature), play (capable of play, laughter, pursuing leisure activities) and having control of one's political and material environment (capable of effective participation in political elections controlling their life and is able to own property and immovables and exercise ownership rights in the same way other people do) (Nussbaum, 2000). A life that is deprived of any of the above capabilities is not a good human life (Nussbaum, 1995).

The aim of this paper is to critically consider Nussbaum's philosophical and ethical thinking on education as the "engine" of human development in both its individual and social forms.

Positive implications of Nussbaum's philosophy of education

One of the positive implications of Nussbaum's philosophy which we can agree with is the suggestion that the Socratic model of education could be an example of how to

develop critical thinking. Critical thinking is about subjecting ourselves to critical scrutiny, recognising our strengths and weaknesses, ascertaining how we should live or how we can live better lives, both by studying the opinions and experiences of others and through personal inquiry and seeking our own answers to questions about the good life. This applies equally to the social level, so it is also as communities, nations, societies and countries that we should make these enquiries and be sincere in our attempts to find the answers. At the same time, we must recognise that there is no single model of the good life, no single value system that we all have to recognise and follow. The diverse nature of the world and the people in it is reflected in the variety, or multitude, of ideas about the good life, how it can be attained and the values that should inform it. It is, however, important that all models of the good life should serve the common good, so as to benefit the individual, the community, the nation, society, the country and, ultimately, humankind, or at the very least, so as not to directly contradict, suppress or destroy them.

Equally, we can agree with Nussbaum and, picking up on the work of Socrates and the Stoics, state that knowledge and critical thinking both liberate and strengthen the human capacity for decision making and acting. Nonetheless this does complicate our lives, as we are "forced" to critically analyse, reason and make decisions in our pursuit of the optimum solutions to the problems we face in our lives as individuals and as societies. Socratic thinking can be identified in a particular kind of reflective moral agent, while Socratic pedagogy or education can be considered the basis for creating such an agent.

An approach that combines Socratic thinking with the Stoic idea of developing and improving the individual can be achieved in two ways: either on the basis of external motivation or internal motivation through education and upbringing. In early childhood, external motivation dominates as exerted by compulsory schooling and family upbringing. This external motivation exists from the outset and applies to everyone. Later internal motivation may prevail, depending on the person's talents, abilities, opportunities and potential, and it has to do with the person's own learning, education, development and improvement to some extent it depends on the person's volition, but also on their intellectual, cognitive and mental abilities. The internal motivation to develop, acquire and improve upon talent and ability can therefore be viewed more as the domain of the reflective moral agent. This also ties into (albeit to a different degree) the Socratic pursuit of getting to know oneself, as a person's development entails having the capacity to analyse one's strengths and weaknesses, as well as the opportunities and risks. Without this, it is hard to see how a person's efforts to develop can succeed. Part of knowing and developing oneself is about searching for answers to question about the meaning of life, but equally it is about setting short, medium and long-term goals which ultimately serve as guides for action.

Nussbaum asserts that one of the features of a Socratic education is its emphasis on the practical, but this should in no way be confused with the neoliberal idea of education as a means of ensuring good labour market prospects through the acquisition of the practical skills required to perform a job competently. She views this stress on the practical through the optics of John Dewey, as meaning that we should concentrate on the daily life requirements of the individual, community, society and humankind, on the person's ability to understand the complexity of the world and life in it (Gluchmanová, 2013). Nonetheless we have to recognise that the Socratic, or reflective, approach to the world and life complicates

people's lives, as it "forces" them into not unthinkingly accepting information from the outside world. At the same time though, it encourages them to spend more time critically analysing, assessing and judging information and on making decisions that follow on from their earlier contemplations. In this era of hectic, instant and liquid modernity (Bauman, 2000), a considerable amount of willpower, time and self-discipline is required to resist the temptation to minimise this process. Of course this cognitive and intellectual process then has to be followed up with action, the practical realisation of our decisions.

Relating to this idea of education as a tool for developing and improving both individuals and humankind is Ingrid Robeyns' analysis of Nussbaum's philosophy of education, in which she reflects upon the extent to which education contributes to quality of life and the role it plays in social justice (Robeyns, 2016). The relationship between education and quality of life is two-fold: firstly, at the individual level, particularly in relation to ethics, education creates the conditions under which a person's personality grows and develops, which helps enhance quality of life. Secondly, it has a social dimension, since improving education levels in society also creates the conditions for raising quality of life in society, and it does this by refining and spreading knowledge and understanding, which in turn help to spread the values of humanity[1], human dignity, a person's moral right to life and to grow and develop, as well as the values of justice, responsibility, tolerance and obligations to society and country.

In relation to Nussbaum's suggestions, I would argue that education in its noblest form should cultivate humanity in us, manifest primarily in our relationships with others. That is why, before we can be human to others, we must first of all be human to ourselves, which means knowing and developing our strengths, for we can only fully exercise these by cooperating with other people in our social and moral community. Our humanity is manifest in our feelings and statements, but above all in our actions (in both active and passive humanity). In Nussbaum's thinking there is clearly a direct link between humanity and human dignity, which is seen as forming the core of a moral community. I think to this we can add a person's moral right to a dignified and meaningful life that translates into opportunities for growth, development and improvement. Picking up on Nussbaum's ideas, I consider these three values to be the foundation of the social and moral community that provides the conditions for the functioning of human society within all its various cultures and religions.

Following Nussbaum, I agree that fostering humanity can be considered an essential part of education, but one that we are unfortunately increasingly less aware of. This is because in today's consumer-oriented and purpose-driven society the primary focus in education is utilitarian and on how much education contributes to the immediate economic or material advancement of society, and to improving productivity, economic growth, profits and so forth. Education is assessed using narrow criteria on its immediate and measurable benefits for the economic and material growth of society. The intangible and long-term influence education has in shaping the consciousness of the individual and society is overlooked, including the teaching of moral, cultural and spiritual values that cannot be measured or assessed in terms of their immediate benefit. Instead professional and technical education

[1] I use the term humanity to mean the moral value of humaneness throughout the article.

is prioritised in the obsession with the growth and development of society and country. The importance of a broadly conceived education in the humanities is both overlooked and unacknowledged, as the aim is not merely to acquire the skills required for a specific profession, or certain types of behaviour, but to teach people to help themselves think critically and to grow, develop and improve from within, and to help the community, society, nation, country and, indirectly, humankind to do the same. Only a broadly conceived education in the humanities can help overcome prejudices rooted in customs and traditions, and to help society develop and understand the needs of humankind as a whole.

Thus, we can agree with Nussbaum that knowing other cultures, religions and ways of life is important, as it is a means of enriching ourselves and our lives and is an opportunity to assess whether our way of life and our values really are good enough to be held up as an example for others. Without this knowledge, we remain shut up in our ivory towers, living under the illusion that our exceptional way of life and our values are best.

Critical thoughts on Nussbaum's philosophy of education

Nussbaum's idea that the main goal in education should be to contribute to the general development of humankind sits very well within her model of human development informed by the capabilities approach. It is primarily a socio-political goal, but one that has an important socio-ethical dimension. The reason for developing people's critical thinking is to enable them to benefit humankind. The needs and interests of the individual are continually juxtaposed against those of humankind. This is unquestionably an important role for all education systems, as they have great potential to help spread mutual understanding and remove, or at least reduce, the cultural and religious barriers arising from differences in for instance historical, social, cultural and political development.

This is particularly important given current developments across the world and because of the need to overcome prejudice extending from ethnocentrism and for example racial, cultural, religious or political exclusivity, including anthropocentrism. I am, however, convinced that we can only achieve this if we have the strength and the intellectual, cognitive and emotional prerequisites to do so, as well as a clear awareness of our strengths, weaknesses and abilities. Otherwise, the project of human development is built on poor foundations.

The shortcomings of 20th century political liberalism can be seen in Nussbaum's thinking and in her idealised view of the individual or human species as possessing all the necessary abilities to achieve lofty goals. Any problems and shortcomings are seen as occurring beyond the reach of the person or human beings generally. It follows then that the reason some individuals do not realise their abilities or fulfil their potential is down to external circumstance. The answer then is to change the circumstances or create the conditions so that humans can truly develop. Countries and governments are obliged to do all they can to ensure humans can develop freely and without impediment. First of all, we have to recognise that there are natural limits to and differences in a person's intellectual, cognitive, mental and emotional abilities. This will ultimately enable us to form better, more realistic, expectations of what human development entails and of what the associated goals and opportunities might be. Overlooking natural differences leads to social and political visions that are ultimately

counterproductive and either do not solve or gloss over problems caused by the way the model and goals are articulated.

Nussbaum is primarily concerned with the social and ethical dimension of human development, and with establishing the requirements for achieving the external conditions for human development, which necessarily include the conditions and equal opportunities for all to receive an education – something that is the responsibility of countries and governments. For her the focus should be on creating the social, economic, political, ideological, cultural, religious and other conditions for human development. People will then have the freedom to choose the extent to which they exploit these conditions for their own development. One could accuse her of optimism in claiming that education is the key to all human capabilities, specifically where there is no clear definition of the individual's obligations and responsibilities for developing his or her own capabilities and realising his or her options and opportunities. In this case the claim that education is key to all human capabilities and human development exists only as a potentiality, which may, but need not, be exploited through individuals' efforts and actions to take up these options and opportunities and develop their capabilities for their own benefit and for the benefit of friends and family, community, society, country and ultimately humankind.

In Nussbaum's view, education is more of a political value or a means of realising political goals to do with the formation and building of a civil democratic society. She views education through a macro-social lens, as a tool or instrument for achieving general human development, or that of a country and society. This is especially true of the requirement for countries and governments to create the right conditions for education and for achieving equal dignity for all through the possession of equal rights, options and opportunities for human development.

For Nussbaum, human development is not the end goal; it is merely a means of achieving the development of humankind. The role of the individual is about how he or she can contribute to the development of humankind as a whole. It is about the pursuit of global development, and the individual's role is to strive to achieve the capability of being a cosmopolitan world citizen. She therefore concentrates on the global goals of human development. The same is true of all theories of development ethics, of those by Amartya Sen, Denis Goulet, Des Gasper, David A. Crocker, Asunción Lery St. Clair and others, as their primary focus is on the global social issues of the development of humankind (Crocker, 2014; Dower, 2008; Gasper, 2008; Goulet, 2006; Sen, 1987; St Clair, 2007).

Nussbaum is highly critical of utilitarianism, preferring Mill's non-utilitarian consequentialism (Nussbaum, 2011; 2016), but I think she applies a particular kind of utilitarian model, as she is concerned to raise the average level of happiness of all people, rather like Bentham's model of the maximum happiness for the greatest number of people (greatest happiness principle) (Bentham, 1983). The question is how that can be achieved. On the one hand, we have John Stuart Mill's art of life (part of his non-utilitarian consequentialism), which is primarily about developing and improving the abilities of the individual and harnessing these for the advancement of others; the emphasis though is on the development of the individual (Mill, 1974; 2001). On the other hand, we have Nussbaum's model of human development focusing on the global development of humankind, which is not fully compatible with Mill's art of life.

Melanie Walker comes close to identifying the essence of Nussbaum's philosophy of education in her capabilities and opportunity model of human development, pointing out that Nussbaum is primarily concerned with the social and ethical aspects of education and its consequences for achieving general human development goals, that is, the development of humankind as a whole. Walker thinks this is primarily about ensuring there is an intercultural sensitivity and awareness in education, targeted at what human beings are capable of doing in this respect and how higher education can help achieve this. Walker's interpretation of Nussbaum attests that, although Nussbaum is primarily interested in the development of critical thinking in individuals, the ultimate goal concerns the individual's ability to use this to help solve issues regarding the global development of mankind (Walker, 2012). Nussbaum's philosophy of education is clearly aimed at developing a person's intellectual, cognitive and emotional abilities and talents, but this is not the end goal, merely a means of achieving global goals of human development. The individual is therefore a vehicle for creating and achieving development goals for human beings in the abstract, for cosmopolitan world citizens (Robeyns, 2016).

Nussbaum sees humanity in its totality; in other words, she views it in the context of global human development rather than individual development. My view is that individual humanity only features in her thinking to the extent that individuals are able to contribute to global human development, exploiting their abilities and the potential or opportunities for the overall development of humankind and the world, that is, to the extent that individuals are world citizens. The role of education then is to enable individuals to develop an awareness of themselves as members of the global human race and as world citizens. This is key to and indeed the main goal of Nussbaum's philosophy of education as part of the theory of human development.

Felix J. Lozano, Alejandra Boni, Jordi Peris and Andrés Hueso were also close when they pointed out that the goal of Nussbaum's theory is to prepare people for citizenship and life, adding that in essence this is about world citizenship and human life, not the individual. Critical thinking clearly plays its part in Nussbaum's theory, but from the perspective of shaping global citizenship, and of accepting and ensuring equal respect and human dignity, and thereby overcoming racial, ethnic, religious and other types of prejudice that impede human development or the realisation of humanity. In other words it is about achieving full humanity. Lozano, Boni, Peris, and Hueso are quite right to suggest that Nussbaum's theory of human development provides us with an idealistic view of human nature which is then used to create ideal capabilities and goals for achieving human development.

On the other hand, I have to disagree with the claim that ethical values are central to Nussbaum's philosophy of education (Lozano et al, 2012). In her discussion of human dignity, Nussbaum states that ethical values are merely the starting point for articulating a political doctrine and the political values associated with the pursuit of liberalism in relation to human development (Nussbaum, 2006). In this context, education is a means of achieving the liberal thinking and goals associated with global human development (Nussbaum, 2007; 2013), which undeniably have a socio-ethical dimension, but this is not central to her theory. If we turn to her book *Not for Profit*, I think we can see that political goals related to the need to defend and promote the democratic values of civil society take precedence over ethical goals that form the basis for articulating ideas about equal respect and human dignity for all

human beings regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ideology, ethnicity and so on.

Ben Saunders is right to say that Nussbaum (like neoliberals but for other reasons) justifies the need to teach humanities on the basis that it is essential to the democratic development of society and the protection and functioning of democratic values, rather than on the basis it should be taught for its own sake (Saunders, 2013). Nussbaum's position is, however, understandable because when debating the need to teach humanities the arguments used must be of equal weight to those referring to the economic or technological development of society. Her aim then is to highlight the usefulness of the humanities and how they benefit and are required in a functioning and evolving society. Today's political, social and economic debates are heavily influenced by neoliberalism, while arguments that justify or defend education in terms of education for its own sake or out of a desire for knowledge have little weight (Liessmann, 2006). So in this sense, it is entirely understandable that Nussbaum should think about and justify society's need for humanities and arts in this way, linking it to how they can benefit the future of human society and especially democratic societies.

I strongly agree with Saunders' point that the humanities should be taught at all levels and taking all people into consideration (Saunders, 2013). This applies especially to Nussbaum's justification of their importance and value to society, as a means of protecting and enabling the further promotion of democratic values in civil society, as this concerns all members of society, not just young people with degrees. Nonetheless, it is a fact that in developed countries more than half the population in each cohort enters into higher education. Another reason for emphasising the teaching of humanities in higher education is that graduates often not only teach children and young people (from preschool to university), but also become parents and raise their own children. Young people with degrees represent an especially important social group who have great potential to influence events in society, both now and in the long term.

In *Cultivating Humanity* Nussbaum looked at the current teaching of the social and ethical dimension of education, paying particular attention to the extent to which education programmes at American universities help improve the understanding of for example cultural, religious, racial, gender and sexual differences and raise tolerance levels in American society. Similarly, in her *Not for Profit* she looked at examples from some Indian states. Equal human dignity and respect play a particularly important role in her philosophy of education, which underpins all of Nussbaum's thinking on human capabilities and opportunities. This is the important contribution her theory makes to articulating and implementing social justice in society, beginning with the idea of equality in human dignity, and education as a means of improving quality of life and ensuring social justice on both the individual and social levels, but particularly the latter.

Developing the individual and humankind is largely dependent on the extent to which education can articulate and foster the values required for human development and the ability to be a reflective moral agent, that is, the ability to lead a reflective life as conceived of in Socratic critical thinking. The question is whether this is possible, and if so, how the reflective moral agent can be related to Nussbaum's theory of human development. Her theory is universal not "elitist": it does not target a small group of people, or moral agents.

However, it does concentrate on key features in its descriptions of conformist types and reflective moral agents. Reflective types exhibit certain elements of conformist thinking, decision making and action, while conformist types exhibit some degree of analysis, reflective behaviour and action; however, in neither case do these dominate.

For Nussbaum, education's role is to foster a reflective type of thinking, decision making, behaviour and action in all human beings, including those with mental disabilities, within the scope of their intellectual, cognitive, mental and volitional skills and abilities. One could say that growth, advancement and human development are universal goals that can be achieved in various ways depending on the abilities and resources of the individual, including whether he or she is a reflective or conformist moral agent. Thus defined, education can be considered to lie at the heart of all human development, at the level of individual and/or social development, and thus at the level of the individual, community, society, country and humankind.

Nonetheless, we should note that Nussbaum's theory is not just about developing capabilities, but about education having a significant role to play in fostering a sensitivity to the creation of opportunities for development and improvement, and the implementation of these within the practical life of the community, society and country. It is also about social justice, including access to education as prerequisite to growth, development and improvement at all levels in the life of the individual, community, society, country and humankind.

Nussbaum's thinking has to a large degree been influenced by Dewey, particularly in the focus on everyday life and the needs of a democratic society and its values; however, what Dewey was attempting at the level of American society, and with great difficulty, Nussbaum is trying to do within new relations both in the USA and in the world. This could prove problematic because civic democratic values can only be upheld through the liberal model of education in countries which have the political conditions in place to support this and the development of civil society. But in many third world countries where there is tribal politics, corruption, nepotism and so forth this could turn out to be very difficult if not impossible. The question is whether we should resign ourselves to implementing change and pursuing the development of individuals, communities, societies and countries using the means, goals and visions encapsulated in Nussbaum's theory. Or whether we should look for a model that takes account of the reality of the particular community, society or country, and that would create opportunities for individual growth, development and improvement based on, for instance, the social humanity and responsibility that informs Hans Küng's global ethos (Küng, 1998).

Conclusion

Having critically reviewed Nussbaum's philosophy of education, we can say that all our efforts in education should be about developing and improving thinking, reflecting, decision-making and hence the behaviour and actions of human beings. The goal is to produce critically-thinking individuals who engage in public affairs and in the events that concern both them but also other members of their community, region, nation, country and above all humankind. The difficulty is that Nussbaum has not set out these tasks, obligations and

responsibilities in relation to the individual and to personal development. Responsibility for creating the conditions for an adequate education lies with states and governments, but liberal thinking leaves the human being, or citizens, free to decide whether they should exploit their capabilities, potential and opportunities, that is, whether they should use them for their own development, growth and improvement (and that of humankind) or whether they should disregard them.

Nussbaum's attempts at articulating the ideal cosmopolitan education certainly deserve recognition; however, they may raise questions and uncertainty, as the human sense of kinship may be lost in the pursuit of abstract ideals. I think it would be preferable in this context to discuss a form of universal education aimed at a common humanity and shared responsibility, one which would in my view provide better conditions for envisioning or imagining what a common humanity (humaneness) might mean, rather than the abstract ideas of a cosmopolitan liberal education. The concept of a liberal education is a western construct and as such it encounters opposition and rejection in many parts of the world and in other cultures. But the idea of a common humanity and shared responsibility is likely to be better received in cultures and religions beyond the western world than the liberal model of education.

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