THE MIRAGE OF JOURNEY: THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF MARTHA NUSSBAUM’S CAPABILITIES APPROACH

By

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To Eleanor, my daughter
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Martha Nussbaum is one of the most productive, wide-ranging, and influential political thinkers of our time. At the heart of her work is her belief in the incommensurability of human values, her commitment to actionable philosophy, and the reduction of human suffering. These themes emerge in every facet of her oeuvre: from her devotion to classical Greek thought, affection for the ethical value of literature, and her support of international development. The relationship between these facets remains underappreciated and understudied in the academic literature. A true appreciation of her approach to development can only be achieved by placing it in the context of her philosophical and ethical work. Doing this reveals that her position on development, both its desirability and its practical achievement, derive from her philosophical exegesis of ancient Greek texts.

For Nussbaum the realization of universal human dignity, a concept that she attributes to the Stoics, has to do with the provision of the conditions of ten capabilities that she argues are derived from the works of Aristotle. We dignify others by allowing them these capabilities. They are pre-political and universal according to Nussbaum in
that they ought to exist prior to political negotiation or agreement and, in fact, become the very condition for legitimate political exchange.

Narrative can and ought to be, according to her, used to explain to others why these capabilities are important; but according to Nussbaum, one need not recognize non-fictional individuals and their own presentations of their desires in order to solve systemic injustice. This is because of the deforming consequences of adaptive preferences. Additionally, this dissertation brings Nussbaum into direct conversation with the post-development thinkers that she rejects and concludes that her readings of this school of thought are ill informed and politically untenable.

Because of these limitations, Nussbaum recommits many of the intellectual failures of the individualist tradition: the drive to assimilation or erasure. This dissertation disentangles the elements of her thought and challenge her conclusion that Liberal Cosmopolitanism by way of the Capabilities Approach is the only, much less the best, path forward.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Among the great struggles of man—good/evil, reason/unreason, etc.—there is also this mighty conflict between the fantasy of Home and the fantasy of Away, the dream of roots and the mirage of the journey.¹

Many contemporary scholars argue that modern political theories can largely be placed into one of two categories: cosmopolitan or communitarian. I take this as my starting point and consider that many of the failures in the realm of international political engagement may stem from the assimilationist or isolationist features of each approach, respectively. Additionally, the continued reliance on this dichotomous way of thinking fails to account for the complexity that attends to the ethics of political action across borders and cultures. This broad conversation is grounded first and foremost in my exploration of the works of Martha Nussbaum.² Nussbaum has been widely recognized for her role in reigniting the theoretical conversation on cosmopolitanism. The particular form of her cosmopolitan engagement, now called the Capabilities Approach, has become a significant paradigm within the world of development theory and practice. As a theorist of classical Greek philosophy and an important voice within the development community, she serves as a representation of how the Western philosophical cannon is used to justify foreign interventions in the developing world. Her call for an increasingly global and Universalist approach to matters of citizenship and pedagogy has provoked many responses. The responses have been wide-ranging—criticizing her denunciation of nationalism, her failure to grasp the institutional nature of citizenship, her glossing-over of the imperial tone of cosmopolitanism; however, these rebuttals have failed to look at her defense of cosmopolitanism within the extensive scope of her work and fail
to tie her theory to the action of political cosmopolitanism. This project is an attempt to remedy this deficiency.

**Mapping Nussbaum**

Nussbaum’s philosophical orientation questions the very divide between thought and action. As she stated in a *New York Times Magazine* profile, “for any view you put forward, the next questions simply has to be, ‘What would the world look like if this idea were actually taken up?’”\(^3\) Beyond this blurring of lines between thought and action—her philosophy, at its heart, is an indictment of any school of thought that delays or disorients active intervention in the political world. Fortunately for us, this gives us a window into the practical application of her philosophical approach. Moreover, it provides an insight into the value of philosophy for human action. One of the primary themes unifying Nussbaum’s work is her continued insistence that good philosophy is the key to human flourishing. It operates as such both at the individual level, where for Nussbaum good philosophy is the rigorous regime that brings peace and happiness to the weak and fluctuating mind, and at the societal level, where philosophy can create concord from the clash of cultures. Reason out of chaos—no less than this is the promise of philosophy.

Her approach offers the reader a monopile foundation for building an ethical engagement in the world. This dissertation looks to Nussbaum’s own deep foundations and the structure she has raised. While she is an oft-cited source in the disciplines of ethics, law, literature, and political science, very little has been written on her as a holistic thinker. This is partially a response to the sheer breadth of her scholarship but is also the product of the breathtaking yield she has produced in her near forty years as a scholar. Her *vita* includes nearly four-dozen books and edited volumes and over four
hundred journal articles, interviews, and news articles. As a result, this project is merely
an attempt to contextualize her approach to international development by looking more
closely at the philosophical, ethical, and pedagogical thought from which it is derived
and the ways in which she has put her philosophical orientations into practice. The
scope of this dissertation precludes any further discussion of her work on American
legal scholarship, sexual orientation, disability, animal rights, and university reform,
feminism, and religious freedom except in as much as these topics are cross-related
to my stated goal.

While this work can be seen as an introduction to and overview of a particular
wing of Nussbaum’s intellectual compound, it is my goal to use it as a peephole into the
wider world of contemporary Western interventions into the project of non-Western
development. The relationship between the Greek notion of cosmopolitanism and the
Anglo-European quest for global commercial and social “development” are deeply
linked—more often than not, however, the academic turf wars obscure this relationship
by placing cosmopolitanism into the realm of philosophy and political theory while
development studies are pursued in the fields of comparative politics, international
relations, anthropology, and economics. Nussbaum’s (rightful) scorn for these arbitrary
borders allows us insight into some of the crucial links undergirding these two
phenomena. Ultimately, however, the foundation that Nussbaum provides, while
philosophically edifying is not a politically pragmatic tool. Her emphasis on “good
philosophy” abandons the goal of successful politics despite her insistence on the
opposite.
I begin this dissertation with an exploration of the commitments that emerge from Nussbaum’s engagement with Hellenic thought and her early literary turn. It first explores the theme of actionable philosophy—the degree to which a philosophical endeavor is capable of producing action that improves individual’s lives or increases access to such an improved manner of living. Next, I explore the influence of Stoic thought on Nussbaum’s cosmopolitanism and its many limitations as a source of actionable philosophy in Nussbaum’s usage. In the third chapter, I explore the Aristotelian origin of the Capabilities Approach as well as its impact on her approach to narrative and empathetic reading.

The second part looks more closely at Nussbaum’s critique of post-development theory. Here the lines between post-Nietzschean philosophy and post-development theory are laid bare. There is also a consideration of how Nussbaum portrays and ultimately misreads the work of the Frédérique Apffel-Marglin and Stephen Marglin, a widely-recognized couple within the tradition. These misreadings are cast as an example of Nussbaum’s ahistorical approach to critiques of development and how her philosophy continues to exist as an extension of some of the worst practices of modernization theory. Using Nussbaum’s own yardstick for measuring the value of philosophy, whether or not it is indeed actionable, I turn to the practical evaluation of her Capabilities Approach. I argue that her own rejection of identity politics and her inability to recognize political value of “morally irrelevant” communities reduces the efficacy of her claims. Ultimately, I conclude that her approach produces a top-down vision of international development that could be improved through a measured engagement with the very anti-foundationalist thinkers she casually dismisses. The nurturing of local
loyalties need not be seen as undermining human dignity. In fact, such relationships must be seen as the very soil from which democratic empowerment springs.

**Chapter Summary**

In following chapter, I sketch a brief overview of Nussbaum's academic career. It is important to bear in mind that Nussbaum does not come to the question of development from the perspective of economics or politics, but rather from the field of philosophy and literature. Her desire to plumb the depths of the classics for secret to human flourishing sets her apart from her early contemporaries and informs the particular (and sometimes peculiar) path to political reform. Nussbaum is less interested in issues of political institutions and public mobilization largely because she derives her concern for human well-being from a Greek notion of *eudemonia* and an Aristotelian idea of the incommensurability of values.

Chapter three looks closely at the way that Martha Nussbaum deploys the Stoics in her defense of cosmopolitanism. For Nussbaum, the Stoics represent the epitome of good philosophy. They are, she argues, the root of the tree of liberty which subsists, albeit somewhat tenuously, in the West. In her 1997 essay on the intellectual legacy of the Stoics she argues that higher education ought to focus on teaching students to respect a global ethical imperative—to think and, perhaps more importantly, to empathize beyond their borders. The Stoics, she argues, provide the perfect palliative for two important contemporary plagues:

1. The emotional distance and resulting inaction fostered by the post-Niezschean philosophy favored by the academy.
2. The myopic and chauvinistic approach that young Americans have concerning their place in the world.
While Nussbaum’s initial essay provoked many responses, the problem of Nussbaum’s conflation of Stoic, cosmopolitan sentiment and active, global political participation has been ignored. Nussbaum points to Hierocles’ fragment on Stoic relationships, which places the individual in a series of concentric circles, the first encircling the self, then the family, our fellow citizens, and the world at large. He argues, and Nussbaum concurs, that we must “draw the circles somehow toward the center”.\(^{11}\) In this chapter I argue that Nussbaum’s hopes for Stoic cosmopolitanism are at odds with her own reading of stoic apatheia. Far from creating a philosophy of political action, the Stoics offer an apolitical form of cosmic equality. That being said Nussbaum’s reading of Stoic pedagogy offers a very interesting avenue for further reflection regarding the role of narrative in cross-cultural engagements, political and otherwise.

Chapter four is an in-depth look at the philosophical origins and practical implications of Nussbaum’s Capability Approach. I situate Nussbaum on this topic within the particular historical context of the attempt to redefine the international community’s measurement of successful development. I go on to chronicle the development of Nussbaum’s essentialism—specifically her reading of Aristotle and conclusions on human flourishing. This leads me to an analysis of narrative in both her broader work (especially pedagogy and classical philosophy) and her work on international development. Here I look closely at the very divergent place narrative has in her theoretical approach versus her methodology—the latter is best explored by looking at Nussbaum’s work on India and positioning her within the conversation on adaptive preferences. Ultimately, I find that her position on narrative disproportionately favors powerful, authoritative voices over those who she hopes to aid.
Chapter five places Nussbaum’s cosmopolitanism in the context of the 20th century debates on international development. It ties together two distinct yet interrelated conversations: the philosophical disagreement between Individualists and Communitarians that emerged in the 1980’s and the dispute between modernization theorists and defenders of post-colonial self-government. This chapter serves as a continuation of the issue of praxis raised in the previous chapter while also setting up the background for further discussion of Nussbaum’s position in the international community—specifically her work on the Capabilities Approach and her adversarial position vis-à-vis post-development theorists.

In the previous chapters, I have tried to address the classical underpinnings of some of the contemporary approaches to development as well as articulating some of the philosophical and political grounds for their rejection. In the penultimate chapter, I turn to the work of post-development theory—specifically the work of the Apffel-Marglin and Marglin. In multiple works, Nussbaum positions Frédérique Apfell-Marglin and her husband as the epitome of post-modern philosophy run amok. Dr. Apffel-Marglin is a Moroccan-born anthropologist who specializes in indigenous knowledges. Her early work centers on the temple dancers of Jagannath Temple in Orissa. More recently, she founded the Sachamama Center for Biocultural Regeneration (SRBR) in Peru. Her husband, Stephen Marglin, is a Harvard economist critical of what he sees as the normative judgments at the heart of most neo-liberal economic assumptions. Nussbaum and Amartya Sen worked alongside the couple on the World Institute for Development Economic Research (WIDER) in affiliation with the United Nations University. This team collaborated and ultimately butted heads while attempting to redefine development in
the aid community. In what follows, I will examine the theoretical origins of their critique of development as well as their own findings. From this closer analysis, I conclude that Nussbaum’s initial impression of the Apffel-Marglin and Marglin’s’ work and their intent is inaccurate. Furthermore, the inaccuracies highlight many of the problems of Nussbaum’s own work as discussed in the previous chapters. The close reading of these authors is intended, ultimately, to undermine both Nussbaum’s tenuous assertion that post-Nietzschean philosophy is inherently prone to quietism and her overreliance on fictional narrative as the source for the education of empathy.

In the final chapter, I look specifically at the political aspects of Nussbaum’s project and ask if her plans meet the standards she sets forth in her own valuation of actionable philosophy. There is appears to be a gap in her work between her theoretical commitments and her desired goals. That gap is a failure to adequately address the problem of political action. Looking at the political movements that have driven the progress on human rights in the late 20th and early 21st century reveals the importance of identity-based movements. However, contemporary theorists like Nussbaum remain skeptical of their value. Drawing on Isaiah Berlin’s work on values pluralism and political judgment, I argue that Nussbaum fails to appreciate that the absence of needed political action is not simply a product of adaptive preferences. It also reflects the incommensurability of values so central to her earlier literary work and the weakness of community relationships to which her later work, to which her later work, in castigating identity politics, contributes.

Notes

Martha Craven Nussbaum is among the most prolific American public intellectuals. Her work defies traditional academic categories as her current positions at the University of Chicago attests. She concurrently serves as the Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics, appointed in the Law School and the Philosophy; she is an Associate Professor in the Political Science Department, the Classics Department, and the Divinity School; and she serves as a member of the Committee on Southern Asian Studies and the Human Rights Program. Within these diverse fields her topics of study include, but are not limited to, Aristotelian politics, Stoic ethics, the role played by emotion in political and ethical decision-making, narrative and moral education, the value of the liberal arts for shaping democratic citizens, the legal and philosophical aspects of disability and homosexuality, and, more recently, human and economic development in poverty-stricken nations.

In addition to her academic duties, she is an active member of the international development community. Her work in international development began with her appointment to the United Nations World Institute for Development Economics Research. Her involvement with the United Nations and her subsequent collaboration with Amartya Sen led to the creation of the widely popular “capability approach” which seeks to displace the development community’s traditional focus on wealth with a goal of personal fulfillment. Additionally, she is among the founding members of the Human Development and Capabilities Association and her most recent works have continued to pursue themes of globalism and international aid. The fact that she also writes in German, French, and Italian and has had numerous journal articles and books translated into Chinese, Dutch, Japanese, Persian, Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish, means, moreover, that her influence is indeed worldwide. Nussbaum’s considerable intellectual talents have been directed squarely toward the annihilation of the academy’s two greatest boogiemen binaries: the hard distinction between reason and emotion, and between theory and practice.


The turn toward disability as a topic of concern for Nussbaum appears to arise out of the criticism of able-ism leveled at her early work on the Capabilities Approach. Her work on this topic is intertwined with her legal scholarship and her work on animal rights. These works include: "Capabilities and Disabilities: Justice for Mentally Disabled Citizens," Philosophical Topics 30 (2002): 133-65. Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); “The Capabilities of People with Cognitive Disabilities,” Metaphilosophy 40 (2009): 331-51.


Nussbaum’s interest in religious tolerance represents a much smaller subset of her writings but it is notable both for its relationship to international politics, women’s rights, and matters of American constitutional scholarship. For the full list of these works please see the following:

CHAPTER 2
THE HELLENIC AND LITERARY FOUNDATIONS OF THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH

In what follows, I sketch a brief overview of Nussbaum’s academic career. It is important to bear in mind that Nussbaum does not come to the question of development from the fields of economics or politics, but rather from the fields of philosophy and literature. Her desire to plumb the depths of the classics for secrets to human flourishing sets her apart from her early contemporaries and informs her particular (and sometimes peculiar) path to political reform.

**Literary Turn within the Classics**

Nussbaum’s academic career began in Harvard University’s Department of the Classics where she pursued and completed her Ph.D. in Classical Philology. Her earliest published works center on the problem of *psuchê* or “soul” in the works of Heraclitus. She focused on the role of the soul both in life and death (and the possibility of resurrection) in Heraclitus’ thought. She argues that it is likely that Heraclitus was the first Greek thinker to have elaborated a theory of the relationship between *psuchê*, *logos*, and *nous* (the mind).¹ Her dissertation and subsequent publications turned toward the authentication, collation, and retranslation of Aristotle’s *De Motu Animalium*.² While her book-length work on *De Motu* included five very well-received interpretive essays discussing the broader significance of this translation on Aristotle’s corpus, namely his approach to teleological explanation, scientific method, *pneuma*, practical syllogisms, and *phantasia*, this scholarship exists clearly within the traditional field of the Classics Department and within the sub-discipline of philology.³ Upon her appointment as Assistant Professor at Harvard, however, Nussbaum’s work began to take a turn toward literary interpretation.
In 1976, she published “Consequences and Character in Sophocles’ Philoctetes.” This is a pivotal work for Nussbaum, as it sets into motion many of the defining themes of her oeuvre. It is a criticism of two schools of thought that then dominated the approach to Greek drama. The first approach, here represented by Arthur W. H. Adkins, is the belief that the tragedians ought to be read as the reflection of widely held views of the Greek people. Sophocles, on this reading, is no more than the vox populi and there is no need to mine his work for contributions to ethical or political theory. Nussbaum argues that such a view is untenable and rests on the unexamined belief that the dramatists of the classical period were somehow less sophisticated than those of later eras. The second approach is the belief that art and philosophy are fundamentally distinct categories and that to analyze or moralize about art is to pervert the pure aesthetic joy of immersion into another’s vision. “The Greeks of the fifth century,” she asserts, “did not imagine that philosophical inquiry and poetic writing would be separated from one another as Plato and subsequent ages have tried to separate them. A tragic poem was assumed to be a part of the political and moral life of the polis, offered with a view to learning and to action.” Shortly thereafter, in her review of Iris Murdoch’s The Fire and the Sun: Why Plato Banished the Artists, she would begin to flesh out her charge against Plato:

We are brought up to believe that it is important to distinguish works of philosophy from works of literature; and we imagine that we know, roughly, how to make that distinction. Pressed to articulate our institutions, we might observe that literature tells stories that may or may not be true, while philosophy demands the truth; that literature aims at pleasure, while philosophy aims at understanding; that literature is particular, while philosophy is universal; that literature plays on the emotions, while philosophy addresses itself to reason alone; that literature simply presents scenes from life, while philosophy demands that writing give an account of itself, and reach its conclusions by acceptable modes of argument. Each
one of these distinctions can be traced to Plato, who invented philosophy by inventing its distinctness from art.\textsuperscript{7}

Her early career in the Department of Classics at Harvard was largely focused on the dismissal of these two academic errors.\textsuperscript{8} Her rise within the Department of Classics, however, was derailed by a combination of disdain for her discipline-bending literary readings of the Ancients and a dose of good old-fashioned sexism.\textsuperscript{9}

Nevertheless, her production in this early period coalesced into her breakthrough book, \textit{The Fragility of Goodness}, which was widely praised for its scope and ambition. This work introduced three important themes presented in the guise of questions. Each interrogates the way that the good life may be compromised by contingency.\textsuperscript{10} First, as friendship, love, and political action are all subject to external vicissitudes, how much value can a rational person place in such elements? Second, can the individual elements of the good life conflict with one another and thus impair the rational person’s ability to live the good life? And finally, does the passionate nature of the individual need to be extirpated and brought under the control of reason in order for the good life to be lived?\textsuperscript{11} Nussbaum presents this argument as a debate between the early Platonic attempt to insulate the good life from the fluctuation of externals and the Aristotelian acceptance of certain externals as necessary for the pursuit and even the achievement of the good life.\textsuperscript{12} Her readings of the fifth century Greeks in general and of Aristotle in particular are leveled as criticisms of Kantian and utilitarian theories of ethics that she believes are revivals of the Platonic claim for self-sufficiency and non-competition between rival ethical claims.\textsuperscript{13}
Aristotle ultimately emerges as Nussbaum’s champion in this duel and this is the position in which he will find himself throughout the rest of Nussbaum’s decades-long career. She summarizes her reading of Aristotle on this topic thusly,

Each of the human excellences requires some external resources and necessary conditions. Each also requires, more intimately, external objects that will receive the excellent activity. Generosity involves giving to others, who must be there to receive; moderation involves the appropriate relation, in action, to objects (food, drink, sexual partners) who can fail to be present, either altogether or in the appropriate way. Even intellectual contemplation requires the presence of an object of thought whether it is physically present or not’ as long as there is a universe there will be many things to contemplate everywhere; and, finally, as Aristotle adds, thought can be its own object.14

Most importantly to Nussbaum’s argument here, and her future focus on development, is that she reads Aristotle as stating that the most “complete excellence” is the excellence of justice which, “consists in having an appropriate regard for the good of others.”15 This excellence—the excellence—then, really requires that individuals hitch themselves to the lives of others. There is, in Aristotelian ethics at least, no privileging of stability, constancy, or self-sufficiency as found in the Platonic (and Epicurean, Skeptic, and Stoic) tradition; and, because of this, luck is a constituent part of the good life. As we shall see, Nussbaum returns to the wellspring of Aristotle’s philosophy in multiple ways throughout the course of her career. Aristotle, in the confines of The Fragility of Goodness, becomes a defense for taking Attic tragedy seriously as ethical treatise. For her next book, Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature, he provides the justification for addressing the ethical significance of early modern and contemporary literature. In her work on the role of the university in democratic citizenship, he acts as the bedrock upon which she builds her defense of the Liberal Arts. Finally, in her efforts on development he provides the very framework for defining human capabilities.
Briefly now, let us turn to the shift in Nussbaum’s work away from the Hellenic and toward literature more modernly defined. It began very early on in her career with the publication of “Fictions of the Soul” and “Flawed Crystals: James’s the Golden Bowl and Literature as Moral Philosophy” both originally published in 1983 and revised for publication in Love’s Knowledge. At the heart of this work are two simultaneous attacks: the first directed at philosophy’s failure to address the form of literature and the second is the failure of literary criticism to address the forms of life its object seeks to represent. In the case of the former, it is a question of the value of form for the interpretation of content. “Style itself,” she argues, “makes its claim, expresses its own sense of what matters.” This work is Nussbaum’s full-throated defense of literature as a vehicle for the attainment of the Aristotelian concept of practical wisdom. This wisdom is not merely the application of scientific understandings to individuals’ daily lives; it entails a complex responsiveness to particularities of all manner of concrete realities. The choice, then, of philosophical motivated novelists is to portray the world as a rather messy place where character, context, and choice unfold in a manner that allows the reader to hone her ethical sensibilities. Through her reading, she may come to see the plethora of external obstacles and extenuating circumstances that she will face in her decision to live a moral life. Ideally, she moves beyond her ability to simply project herself into the shoes of the novel’s protagonist and eventually is capable of ascribing said feelings, moral aspirations, and conflicts to those around her—in effect affording them the dignity of difficulty she cannot help but see in her own life. It is worth noting here that Nussbaum vehemently denies that this construal of the act of reading is a
defense of viewing morality as a series of “trade-offs” or, worse yet, “an empty situational morality.”

In her exploration of William James’ *The Golden Bowl*, Nussbaum sets out to explore the moral maturity of Maggie Verver. What she finds is that Maggie begins the novel as a young woman deeply committed to her duty to her father and this single obligation drives her so intensely that she is incapable of fulfilling her other duty to her own husband. Nussbaum presents Maggie’s mature self as a jazz player. Unlike the symphony player whose commitments are to the score and the conductor, the jazz player must actively forge continuity through her responsibility to the tradition of the form, her fellow musicians, and her own unique voice. She is more responsible than the score-reader or the rule follower, not less. This actor, however, has not been abandoned to subjectivism or even relativism. “The insistence that deliberated choice must take contextual features into account does not imply that the deliberated choice is correct only relative to local norms,” writes Nussbaum. This is partially because, drawing on Aristotle, she rejects the commensurability of values. The good things that accumulate to us as human beings cannot be measured or valued according to one linear system of measurement—be it pleasure, utility or some other esteemed quality. This means that being good or making the correct choice will not simply be the task of determining which choice gives us the most of the desired good. Living well requires deliberation and this is the wellspring of the ethical value of fiction. Ethical fiction, like the works of James’, reveals how to deliberate well. This reasoned deliberation will reject the cold calculations often associated with reason and accept a vital role for emotion and imagination. It will strive for flexibility and responsiveness not because it is
subjective but because it seeks to conform itself to and accurately measure the
voluptuousness of objective reality. Nussbaum’s relationship to reason and the role that
it plays in her policy prescriptions is complex and it is an issue to which we shall return.

Concerning the second critique, that literary criticism does not take seriously the
human conflicts at the heart of fiction, Nussbaum’s argument is simple,

This sort of concern has been constrained by pressure of the current
thought that to discuss a text’s ethical or social content is somehow to
neglect ‘textuality,’ the complex relationship of that text with other texts;
and of the related, though more extreme, thought that texts do not refer to
human life at all, but only to other texts and to themselves.22

Approaches such as these—approaches she most readily identifies with Derrida—leave
her with a “certain hunger for blood.”23 The urgency of philosophy and ethical readings
of literature will be dealt with further in the next section.

Criticisms of her work in the period can be divided into several categories. First,
and closest to Nussbaum’s original field, there are those who take issue with her
translation and basic interpretation of the classical texts. T. H. Irwin’s brutal review of
The Fragility of Goodness offers an excellent example of this realm of criticism.24 He
argues that at the heart of her attempt to pit Plato against Aristotle is fundamental
misunderstanding of Plato’s argument in The Republic. He was not, as Nussbaum
suggests, arguing that happiness exists independently from contingency; rather, Irwin
notes, he was arguing a far more modest claim—that the just man is always more
happy than the unjust man. Additionally, he takes issue with many of her translations
within the text of the Phaedrus, finally concluding that,

Nussbaum’s treatment of the texts she discusses displays a pattern of
distortion and omission whose cumulative effect is to conceal evidence
that appears to conflict with her general view. Readers will be well advised
to check her translations and paraphrases of Greek texts and her
descriptions of the views of modern philosophers and scholars. The faults in the arguments of this book justify skepticism about its main claims.\textsuperscript{25}

While Irwin’s interest in Nussbaum is primarily directed toward her engagement with classical texts, he also briefly notes that her attempt to read ethical import into fictional texts (both ancient and contemporary) to be misguided.\textsuperscript{26}

The second criticism directed at this period of Nussbaum’s career is that while her translations are both correct and imply new and exciting interpretive visions, her reading of Attic tragedy as ethical philosophy are unconvincing because they do not account for the way it was received by contemporary audiences. A. A. Long, whose work on \textit{Aeschylus} Nussbaum highly praised, wrote of her work that it was both “impressive” and yet lacked evidence that would have upheld her suggestion that these texts—specifically, Aeschylus’ \textit{Oresteia} and Sophocles’ \textit{Antigone}—were interpreted in this manner by fifth century Athenians.\textsuperscript{27} Going further, Sophie Botros argues that Nussbaum fails to understand what Kierkegaard dubbed “inherited guilt” in Greek tragedy. This specific form of guilt, absent in modern tragedy, is ultimately the root of Orestes’ and Agamemnon’s sorrow. It is not a problem of rival ethical claims or a modern reading of luck—it is their birthright as the kin of Atreus. She concludes that, “It is unfortunate that the only way that Nussbaum can maintain that the study of Greek tragedy might change our attitudes to wrongdoing is by ignoring how very different are the beliefs of the Greek tragic heroes, and the social context within which they acted, from our own.”\textsuperscript{28}

This brings us to a third criticism of this period of Nussbaum’s career. Many find her attempt to make literature a source of ethical philosophy hopelessly misplaced. Said criticism takes a number of forms, three of which will be outlined here. The one that she
will attempt to grapple with in her future work on development and the one to which we shall return later, and that is, why does literature occupy this quasi-philosophical place yet autobiography and history do not? This question is further amplified by the concern over the varying motives driving the author and the very real apprehension that only certain voices are recognized in published literature. Additionally, the followers of new literary criticism cast aspersions on the entire goal of this project for its failure to respect the free play and textuality at work. Finally, it is argued, that her approach to literature privileges content over form in a manner that reduces novels (and art in general) to its moral message and thus diminishes its nature as art.

**The Urgency of Philosophy**

Moving from the sources from which we may mine ethical insight to the actual pragmatic urgency of this endeavor, Nussbaum turns back to Hellenic thought in order to better understand exactly how philosophy can aid us in our day-to-day lives. While Nussbaum’s insistence on the practical utility of philosophy is not new, this turn in her work directs us back to the Greeks to show how this approach dominated the main schools of Hellenic philosophy—namely, the Peripatetic, Skeptic, Stoic, and Epicurean—which she, then, in trying her best to stay true to the form as well as the content of tracts, reads mostly Roman sources. Her work from this period, primarily from 1986 to 1993, culminates in *The Therapy of Desire* in which Nussbaum articulates what it would have been like for a young woman to study at the feet of the great sages of these major schools of thought. “They,” she argues,

practiced philosophy not as a detached intellectual technique dedicated to the display of cleverness but as an immersed and worldly art of grappling with human misery. They focused their attention, in consequence, on issues of daily and urgent human significance—the fear of death, love and sexuality, anger and aggression—issues that are sometimes avoided as
embarrassingly messy and personal by the more detached varieties of philosophy.33

“In short,” she concludes, “there is in this period of broad and deep agreement that the central motivation for philosophizing is the urgency of human suffering, and that the goal of philosophy is human flourishing, or eudaimonia.”34

This period is marked by three changes in Nussbaum’s thought. One of the most fundamental shifts that occur here is her pivot away from the centrality of emotion in good philosophy toward a more traditional privileging of reason. This is not to say that she abandons the emotions, only that reason is now highlighted in a way that is absent in her earlier works.35 In her discussion of Michel Foucault’s reclamation of the Greeks as a source of techniques du soi, she argues that what makes philosophy distinct from other such techniques is its insistence that, “the pursuit of logical validity, intellectual coherence, and truth delivers freedom from the tyranny of custom and convention, creating a community of beings who can take charge of their own life story and their own thought.”36 The attempt to distance the self from emotions, especially as found in the Epicureans and the Stoics, is a task that is at odds with her earlier work that found value, both social and personal, in the Aristotelian defense of these movements of the soul.

Yet, here Nussbaum is attempting to square her previous praise of emotion with the Hellenic pursuit of both practical action and emotional detachment. This topic of detachment and action will be returned to at much greater length in chapter three. Suffice it to say here that what ultimately emerges from Therapy of Desire is an assertion on the part of Nussbaum that of the Skeptics, Epicureans, and the Stoics it is the Stoics who “have, far more than the other schools, a developed political theory…”37
This, she claims, is based on their cosmopolitanism, here read as a commitment to the universality of human dignity, regardless of race, gender or free-status. She further commits herself to the pedagogy of the Stoic school because she respects the role that narrative plays in the ethical development of the sage. The Stoics, she argues focus on the concrete through the use of examples. “These views about teaching,” she claims, “have a further consequence: this is that in Stoic teaching narratives and examples will play a central role. There is no moral philosophy in the Western tradition in which this is more evident; it is a constant practice, and it is also a part of the official theory.” Where previously Nussbaum had looked to the dramas of the Attic tradition and contemporary literature for ethical philosophy that captured both the nuances and emotional attachments of lived experience, in the Stoics she finally finds this narrative approach deployed in the service of a traditional philosophical school deeply grounded in reason. *Therapy of Desire* is also striking for the fact that Nussbaum attempts to match form with content. The story of these ancient schools of thought is partially told through the eyes of Nikidion—a fictional young woman seeking relief from the ills of the unexamined life. The focus on the role of narrative in Stoic philosophy—in addition to her commitment to Aristotelian theory and cosmopolitanism—will provide a bridge between her early work on literary criticism and her later work on development practices.

Beyond the brief concluding discussion of the Hellenic schools of thought and their political possibilities in *Therapy of Desire*, Nussbaum, during this period, also began to mine Aristotle as the basis for modern political commitments. She argues that Aristotle lays the intellectual foundations for social democracy—here understood as a form of welfare state democracy in the Scandinavian mold in which the government is...
responsible for the distribution of basic needs. Her argument unfolds as follows. 1) The primary goal of a government is the provision of the good life for its citizens. 2) The good life requires material well-being and education for proper duties of citizenship. 3) Justice demands that these requirements are met according to each one’s need. 4) Everyone has the capacity to live the good life of his or her choice. 5) Thus it is the duty of the state to make provision for the achievement of each individual’s flourishing.\(^{41}\)

While Nussbaum is clear that this reading of Aristotle is actually an extrapolation of Aristotelian principles to a more modern setting, she also insists that this extrapolation is obtained through the application of Aristotelian reasoning; therefore she is merely saying what Aristotle would have said had he consistently applied his own logic to the political world.\(^{42}\)

Just as she is beginning to apply her Aristotelian expertise to the realm of democratic theory she also begins to apply her knowledge of Stoic philosophy to modern debates on cosmopolitanism. James D. Ingram argues that the \textit{fin de siècle} renaissance of cosmopolitan political theory can be traced to a single event: the 1994 publication of Martha Nussbaum’s “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism”.\(^{43}\) In her brief retort to Richard Rorty’s insistence that the American left needs to reimagine patriotism in order to reinvigorate its sagging political influence, she argues that what the people of the world need is not more solidarity with their co-nationals but rather an “allegiance to what is morally good.”\(^{44}\) At this point, her rediscovery of the value of reason and her pivot to politics is also paired with a reversal of her position on Kantian ethics.\(^{45}\) Where Kant has largely been dismissed by Nussbaum as a corrupting influence on Western thought in her previous works, his inhospitality to imaginative and emotive concerns as
well as his crippling insistence on tidy consistency making him an enemy of Aristotelian notions of incommensurability and tragic ethical conflict, in this new phase of Nussbaum as political theorist he is heralded as a noble bastion of rational optimism.

Kant and his inheritors, such as John Rawls, are painted by this politically oriented side of Nussbaum as the force that can inoculate contemporary politics from the nihilism of post-Nietzschean philosophy. The article, “Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism,” published in 1997, is a screed against inaction. Colored, I believe, through her recent experience with the faculty involved in WIDER and the United Nations Development Programme, she becomes increasingly fearful of the impact that post-Nietzschean schools of thought are having on political discourse. Where her earlier criticism in this regard were directed at the absence of ethical theorizing in literature departments, her new involvement with international development centers on countering those who reject the application of a universal idea of reason. These are largely thinkers, like Frédérique Apffel-Marglin and her husband Stephan Marglin, who approach the issue of development from the experience of loss felt by indigenous communities who have had their local ways of life transformed by international aid practices. Nussbaum’s concern for global welfare produced two distinct but deeply interrelated movements in Nussbaum’s corpus: a growing focus on international education in the United States of America and her theoretical grounding of the Capabilities Approach with specific regard paid to Indian women. I will turn to the former first.

**Liberal Arts and Cosmopolitan Citizenship**

Nussbaum’s work on Liberal Arts education dates back to her 1985 defense of the humanities but it is not until the late 1990’s that she becomes a leading
voice in a movement that seeks to protect the academy from the encroaching forces of neo-liberalism while at the same time expanding its mission to include an education for global citizenship. Nussbaum’s original plea for cosmopolitan ethics was merely for an education that placed commitment to moral goodness above commitment to national belonging. In both *Cultivating Humanity* and *Not for Profit*, Nussbaum continues this argument. She paints the Liberal Arts as crucial for the development of cosmopolitan moral citizenship as well as to the continued flourishing of democratic principles and practices. She forewarns of a period in the near future where the university produces no more than “useful machines,” rather than “citizens who can think for themselves, criticize tradition and understand the significance of another person’s sufferings and achievements.” Drawing on John Dewey, Nussbaum argues that a Liberal Arts education ought to be the formalization of the capacity to imagine the inner life of others. Couple this with her growing commitment to global action in the face of injustice and we have the makings of Nussbaum’s philosophical grounding of the Capabilities Approach.

**Capabilities and Development**

In 1985, Albert Hirschman, Paul Streeten, and Amartya Sen, helped found an interdisciplinary institute for the study of development economics now known as the World Institute of Development Economic Research (WIDER) under the auspices of the United Nations University (UNU). The goal was to bring anthropologists, economists, political scientists, political theorists, and sociologists into conversation with one another with the intention of articulating a notion of development that saw beyond aggregate economic data. As noted by Nussbaum, UNU/WIDER was mostly left of center politically but its economics were firmly neoclassical. She joined the team in 1986 on
the Value and Technology Project. She quickly found herself an ally in Sen despite the fact that they come from very different intellectual traditions—hers Aristotelian and his Marxist. According to John M. Alexander, at the heart of this approach is the basic assumption that, "human beings are ends in themselves and must be treated with dignity and respect irrespective of their class, caste, creed and gender." However, in the view of Capabilities Approach\textsuperscript{52} theorists, the dignity and freedom afforded to each of these individuals cannot be reduced to mere non-interference.\textsuperscript{53} Nussbaum’s project, with regard to the Capabilities Approach has been the formulation of a list of fundamental human capabilities that she believes can be derived from the Aristotelian commitment to human flourishing:

1. Being able to live to the end of a complete human life, as far as is possible; not dying prematurely, or before one’s life is so reduced as to be not worth living.

2. Being able to have good health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction; being able to move from place to place.

3. Being able to avoid unnecessary and non-beneficial pain and to have pleasurable experiences.

4. Being able to use the five senses; being able to imagine, to think, and to reason.

5. Being able to have attachments to things and persons outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence, in general, to love, grieve, to feel longing and gratitude.

6. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s own life.

7. Being able to live for and with others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of familial and social interactions

8. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.
9. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. Being able to live one’s [own] life and nobody else’s; being able to live one’s own life in one’s very own surroundings and context.

11. The Aristotelian essentialist claims that a life that lacks any one of these, no matter what else it has, will be lacking in humanness.\textsuperscript{54}

This approach has become the primary counter to both economic strains of development measures and the traditional human rights approach.\textsuperscript{55} It is worth acknowledging at this point that given her early involvement with Amartya Sen (the Nobel Prize-winning economist) her regional focus when it comes to the Capabilities Approach has been India. This emphasis accounts for her current appointment to Committee on Southern Asian Studies at the University of Chicago. This too will be the focus of later chapters. Sen himself continues to refuse “one pre-determined canonical list of capabilities, chosen by theorists without any general social discussion or public reasoning.”\textsuperscript{56} Despite some disagreements within the approach, it has become increasingly influential among both academics and within the international policy community. The approach is taught in courses as diverse as education, public health, gender studies, and political science. Additionally, as of 2004 there is now a Human Development and Capabilities Association which publishes an annual, peer-reviewed journal and holds an annual conference. Furthermore, this framework was the source of the United Nations’ Human Development Index that was established in 1990.

What a student of Martha Nussbaum’s work cannot help but notice is that despite her insistence on the centrality of narrative to philosophy and her frequent foregrounding of her own personal life into her philosophical accounts—there are very few, in fact, only one thoroughgoing attempt to create a comprehensive narrative of
Nussbaum’s own academic trajectory.\textsuperscript{57} This piece attempts to psychoanalyze Nussbaum’s high level of productivity. He argues,

Academics, for whom each hyperscrupulous [sic.] is a separate feat of restrained daring, have two ways of accounting for exceptional productivity. The first is that the writer is a closed-minded narcissist who has established an intellectual framework that generates questions and answer almost automatically, so the time-consuming labor of open-ended research, the sifting of information, the gradual detection of emergent patterns, the generation of conviction and with it a point of view, the articulation of an argument—all this happen with a wondrous but suspect efficiency. The second explanation for unseemly productivity is that the author is a deeply troubled person driven by some unresolved internal conflict that seeks expression in argumentation about some comfortingly, if misleadingly, external object…Nussbaum may be a rare instance in which both accounts are combined.\textsuperscript{58}

Harpham reduces Nussbaum’s position on ethical readings of literature to “the most ‘primitive’ of all readerly responses, identification with fictional characters and dismisses her reliance on the Hellenic thinkers as a reflection of the “mindset of a teenage in love.”\textsuperscript{59} Nussbaum’s wide-ranging career returns with frequency to the theme of the fragility of goodness and to the power of co-feeling as an essential partner to reason in ethical understanding. These topics will be addressed in the following chapters not as the hallmark of an infantilized subject nor yet as a symptom of pathology but rather as both a strength and weakness of an influential, if not perfect, body of thought—a body of thought that is salvageable from within its own intellectual architecture.

Notes


Nussbaum, *Aristotle’s De Motu Animalium*.


These works, revised and with substantial supplemented, will make up a significant portion of her first published work, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*.


It is useful here to note that the phrases “the good life”, “human flourishing”, and “happiness” are all offered as translations of the Greek term *eudaimonia*. Nussbaum is quick to point out that there is something fundamentally different between our contemporary, colloquial understanding of happiness and the particular philosophical import of the word *eudaimonia*. While the former usually connotes a state or feeling of contentment, the latter was imagined by those who used it as an activity—a process of being that is pleasant in comparable to those processes of being which are limiting, stultifying, painful, or shameful. For more on this translation see Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, 6fn.


This ought not to imply that Plato is summarily dismissed or mortally wounded in this têtê-a-têtê. Plato emerges as a defender of the value of the prose drama. His banishment of the poet is read by Nussbaum not as a rejection of the form of poetry but of the content of popular poetry. Plato provides ballast for Nussbaum’s future forays into literary criticism.


15 *Fragility of Goodness*, 351.


18 *Love’s Knowledge*, 55.

20 Love’s Knowledge, 94.

21 Love’s Knowledge, 96.

22 Love’s Knowledge, 170.

23 Love’s Knowledge, 171.


34 *Therapy of Desire*, 15.


36 *Therapy of Desire*, 5.

37 *Therapy of Desire*, 504.

38 *Therapy of Desire*, 339.

39 This is not the first time Nussbaum has attempted to integrate fiction into her philosophical commentaries. See chapter 13, "Love and the Individual: Romantic Rightness and Platonic Aspiration," of *Love's Knowledge*. This short story marks her first attempt to merge form and content.


41 For an exploration of the relationship between the Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach and Aristotle see John M. Alexander, *Capabilities and Social Justice: The Political Philosophy of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008). While Alexander does a nice job of exploring the textual evidence deployed by Nussbaum in her appropriation of Aristotle it does not look more broadly at the role played by emotion, narrative, or the Stoics in her oeuvre.


Nussbaum’s response to Rorty sparked a significance number of responses many of which are captured in the edited volume *For Love of Country? Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996). They include critiques from both the right and left. Kwame Anthony Appiah offers of a plea for a rooted cosmopolitanism that respects local, cultural, and national affiliations (“Cosmopolitan Patriot,” 21-29); Judith Butler, unsurprisingly, critiques Nussbaum for her failure to appreciate the contingent and cultural character of so-called universal values (“Universality in Culture,” 45-52); American conservative icon, Gertrude Himmelfarb, remarks that citizenship has no meaning beyond the state and thus rendering the argument in favor of “cosmopolitan citizenship” moot (The Illusions of Cosmopolitanism,” 72-77); Michael Walzer, however, argues that she neglects the family and the community as the breeding ground for the fellow-feeling required of those who would enlarge their moral responsibilities (Spheres of Affection,” 125-127). In his deeply critical piece, “The Hunger of Martha Nussbaum,” Geoffry Gald Harpham states:

If one were to construct a single comprehensive response, it might be the following: Nussbaum’s brand of cosmopolitanism represents a violently self-deluded form of ‘generous imaging’: it underestimates and undervalues history, ethnicity, religion, family, or indeed any of the special and limited attachments that give us our actual identities; it ignores the most dominant contemporary form of one-world identity, economic globalism, whose version of solidarity is conspicuously empty of moral content; it is blind, too, to the fact that world polity based on cosmopolitan principles could only be a tyranny; and it fails to consider such alternative concepts as ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ that give local attachments their due. (69-70)


48 See fn. 9.

49 Nussbaum, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” 17.


It is sometimes referred to as the “Human Development Approach” or the “Capability Approach.” I have chosen to use the phrase “Capabilities Approach” because it is the one preferred by Nussbaum herself—the plural of capability more accurately capturing the theoretical belief that these goods are plural and qualitatively distinct and therefore irreducible to one measure. For more on this discussion see: Martha Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 17-9.


Over time, Nussbaum has become more comfortable linking her Capabilities Approach to the Human Rights movement. In *Frontiers of Justice* (2006, 284) she argues, that it is, indeed, a “species of the human rights approach.”


“The Hunger of Martha Nussbaum,” 52-3.

CHAPTER 3
STOIC ROOTS OF COSMOPOLITANISM

There has been a movement afoot in political theory of liberal cosmopolitan thinkers who envision themselves the contemporary manifestation of the Stoic tradition. J. Peter Euben has named them the “New Stoics.”¹ Both he and James D. Ingram argue that the fin de siècle renaissance of cosmopolitan political theory can be traced to a single event: the 1994 publication of Martha Nussbaum’s “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism”.² This article was a brief retort to Richard Rorty’s op-ed in the New York Times arguing that the American left needs to reimagine patriotism in order to reinvigorate its waning political influence.³ In it, she argued that what the people of the world need is not more solidarity with their co-nationals but rather an “allegiance to what is morally good.”⁴ This article, published in 1996 along with many responses by noted philosophers in the book For Love of Country, was Nussbaum’s first attempt to resurrect the Stoic notion of cosmopolitanism for the purpose of contemporary reform.⁵ The Stoic vision of cosmopolitanism remains a touchstone for Nussbaum throughout the development of her career especially in her writings on education and the development of her version of the Capabilities Approach.⁶

Nussbaum’s repudiation of nationalism was founded on her agreement with the Stoic stance that characteristics we hold through no fault of our own cannot be characteristics that signify moral worth. She states,

The accident of where one is born is just that, an accident′ any human being might have been born in any nation. Recognizing this, [Diogenes′] Stoic successors held, we should not allow differences of nationality or class or ethnic membership or even gender to erect barriers between us and our fellow human beings…[W]e should give our fist allegiance to no mere form of government, no temporal power, but to the moral community made up by the humanity of all human beings.⁷
What defines “the humanity of all human beings” is twofold according to Nussbaum: “their aspirations to justice and goodness and their capacities for reasoning in this connection.” It is important to remember that this first summoning of the Stoic cosmopolitan position is with regard to the proper orientation of the American educational system. She is not advocating the creation of a global government and the concomitant enshrinement into law of the rights and duties of global citizenship.

She argues that this cosmopolitan project is an imperative of the moral imagination. One need not give up her local affections or identities in order to engage the world with love and openness. Here Nussbaum relies on the Hieroclean adage that the cosmopolitan imagine herself as the center of a series of concentric circles. The first encircles the self, the second encircles the family, the third the extended family, and so on. The task according to Hierocles, and Nussbaum, is to draw the circles, including the outer-most circle representing the cosmos, closer to the self. For Nussbaum this means an education that emphasizes the recognition that one’s own values and preferences are not nature nor are they neutral. An individual learns this through comparison—anthropological, sociological, political, artistic study of the world beyond one’s own borders. In the process, she will come to recognize that a shared humanity lurks under the drapery of local color and thus one will come to excoriate inhumane practices wherever she finds them. While this piece is the article that launched a thousand cosmopolitan ships, as it were, it is the mildest defense of cosmopolitanism that Nussbaum offers.

In 1997, Nussbaum traces the value added of the Stoics to the issues of justice and political action. In this essay, she asks us to reconsider the powerful directive of
Kant’s *Perpetual Peace* by way of an impassioned defense of Stoic thought. She articulates this cosmopolitan vision as a palliative to the ills of an increasingly popular post-Nietzschean position; a position that, in her view, has abandoned principle and reason for a tragic nihilism. Nussbaum argues that these thinkers have sought an alternative to Enlightenment principles in the thought of the Ancients but, in essence, have drawn the wrong lessons. For Nussbaum, the Enlightenment is merely the continuation of the incomplete project of Antiquity. According to this retelling of the Stoic legacy, its roots are reason, virtue, and vigorous political engagement. The Stoics, she argues, have seen beyond the façade of convention. Differences based on gender, class, or free-status, she reasserts, are all so many fallacious pretenses that distance individuals from their true human community.

Here, however, her position extends beyond education and empathy. She argues that the Stoic position is the position of most practical use in the face of globalization. “In short,” Nussbaum contends, “if we want to give the world a paradigm from the ancient Greco-Roman world to inform its engagement with the political life, in a time of ethnic violence, genocidal war and widespread disregard for human dignity, it is this one that we should select.” The post-Nietzschean accounts of ethics cannot solve these problems. Their continued assertion of the problematic nature of the Enlightenment constitutes an “opposition to a hopeful, active and reason-based politics grounded in an idea of reverence for rational humanity wherever we find it.” She charges that the abandonment of Stoic and Kantian defenses of reason is unworthy of the nature of the work that lies before humanity. Without these, foundations, Nussbaum believes there
can be no political progress. The alternative to Stoic and Kantian reason, for Nussbaum, is to “wait somewhat passively for the revelation of Being.”13

What we see emerge in her reverence toward the Stoic tradition is related to the privileged place she gives action within philosophy, as explored in the previous chapter. Good philosophy generates political action that fosters democratic sensibilities, while bad philosophy is either elitist in the action in promotes or is quietist. While I do not quibble with Nussbaum over the influence the Stoics (especially the Roman Stoa) on Kant’s global perspective, I certainly do take issue with the degree to which the Stoic tradition should, or even can, guide our current attempts to navigate the cosmopolitan present.14

A close reading of Stoic thought and its concrete historical influence reveals some troubling limitations and practical problems for the development of a cosmopolitan political practice. These limitations include a troubling privileging of reason, and a rigid and unsuitable conception of virtue. Furthermore, Stoic theory does not provide a clear political imperative. There is such practical ambivalence within Stoicism that it has led commentators to remark that cosmopolitanism produces either cultural imperialism or atomistic quiescence.15 Nussbaum, outside of her Kantian genealogy, engages and grapples with precisely these complexities and thus I find myself reading Nussbaum pace Nussbaum in many places in this chapter.16 Despite the problems inherent in attempting to found a responsible cosmopolitan ethic on Stoic doctrine, Nussbaum’s own reading of the Stoics gestures at an interesting starting point for the construction of a global ethics—as her consideration of narrative, in many ways derived from Stoic pedagogy, is a crucial first step in the parturition of empathy—but it is by no means a
sufficient condition thereof. Such calls to narrative as the source of ethical interaction is still in need of further development. This topic will be covered briefly in this chapter and dealt with at greater length throughout the following chapters.

The Cosmopolitan Vision

The quest to more thoroughly trace the content of Stoic cosmopolitanism is in no way meant to undermine the value of the contemporary cosmopolitan project, which I take to be, in its most limited form, the recognition of a shared humanity and, more expansively, a desire to create a world in which human dignity is not only valued but given the utmost priority in our public and personal lives. This project is often traced back to Diogenes of Sinope and his declaration, “I am a citizen of the world”. The Cynic’s response to the question of his origin and loyalty is intended as a rejection of the conventional value of kinship and political citizenship. Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, accepted the doctrine formulated by Antisthenes, a student of Socrates, that nationality is not a source of moral delineation among men. According to Charles N. Smiley, the foundational doctrines of Zeno’s ethics were the “fatherhood of God” and the “brotherhood of man.” By living according to these doctrines, Zeno argued, one could live life in complete accordance with nature and achieve eudemonia, or happiness. This brief account of early Stoicism should make it clear that cosmopolitanism is not coterminous with Stoic thought, but merely a feature of it. To grasp fully the ethical and political implications of Stoicism, one must come to terms with Stoicism’s ontology, by doing so one can understand the content of the Stoic ethic, its vision of happiness, and its practical politics. Simply divorcing the notion of the “brotherhood of man” from the rest of Stoicism does our cause a great injustice and makes it more likely for us to continue to commit the crimes of the past.
It is useful for our purposes to remember that the Stoic past, despite the many books written on the similarities of the Roman and American Empires, differs in significance from our contemporary situation. The Stoics had a very limited appreciation of the cultural, geographical, and biological features of humanity that the vast majority of our contemporaries hold as fact. The expression of the idea of a shared humanity in the Hellenistic age (and beyond) was radical and its truthfulness was far from self-evident.\textsuperscript{18} The Stoic vision of the brotherhood of man was founded on an abstract vision of the nature of the \textit{Cosmos}, or Universe. Perhaps most clearly articulated by Chrysippus, Stoics generally held that the \textit{Cosmos} is the possessor of a rational soul. The soul is God. Correspondingly, the human soul and its capacity to reason (as distinct from the animalistic force of appetite) is a detached fragment of this perfect cosmic order. While the monotheism of Zeno’s original doctrine was occasionally modified according to the particular Stoic, this set of beliefs (regarding man’s relationship to the \textit{cosmos} and to other men) remains the cornerstone of Stoic ethics.\textsuperscript{19} As stated by Marcus Aurelius, “[a]nd he does live with the gods who constantly shows to them that his own soul is satisfied with that which is assigned to him and that it does all that daemon wishes, which Zeus hath given to every man for his guardian and guide, a portion of himself. And this is every man’s understanding and reason.”\textsuperscript{20} Through the training of and the complete reliance on this faculty, its possessor has the possibility of living in accordance with the nature of the universe.\textsuperscript{21} Virtue then becomes the art of aligning our way of life with the order of the \textit{Cosmos}. Ultimately, it is through reason that we come to know the Cosmic law, through virtue, we find happiness. Much of the fervor surrounding the “New Stoicism,” including Nussbaum’s formulation of the Capabilities Approach as universally
reasonable and applicable, has been the result of substituting liberal notions of happiness and virtue for the original meaning with little regard for the unity of Stoic philosophy.

Rist rightly notes that Hellenic ethics is oriented toward *eudaimonia*. Like Aristotle before them, as well as the Cynics, Skeptics, and Epicureans, the Stoics argue that humans are teleologically driven by the desire for happiness.\(^22\) The Stoics can be distinguished from other Hellenistic schools by their particular definition of happiness and the exacting nature of the disposition required to attain it. Happiness, in its essences, is living in accordance with nature. In his consideration of Zeno’s ethics, Rist argues that the founder of Stoicism defined happiness as a “smooth flow of life” and as a life lived “consistently.”\(^23\) Unhappiness is the result of living in conflict—both within oneself and with nature. Despite these definitions, however, Rist presents Zeno’s account of nature as without positive force. This problem, according to Rist, is owed to Zeno’s early identification with the Cynic School. The Cynics viewed living naturally in opposition to living in accordance with convention and asked only that its students, when finding a logical inconsistency in conventional norms and dictates, seek a more logically rigorous manner of being in the world.\(^24\) The practical and political acts of treating women and foreigners unequally should be eschewed because they are not based on verifiable evidence and are thus unreasonable. If happiness is constancy, such actions will never lead us to our ultimate *telos*.

Despite Zeno’s position, the Stoics, departing radically from the Peripatetic and the Epicureans, generally held a providential understanding of the *cosmos* in which
nature can be understood as the unfolding of a divine and predestined plan. According to Josiah B. Gould,

When one now turns to the Stoic system, one is confronted by an entirely different view [of fate]. This is seen already in three extant Zenonian fragments (I 175, 176, 177) on the subject, brief though they be. Zeno maintains in these fragments that (I 175) “fate is the chain-like cause of existing things or the reason...in accordance with which they are ordered”; that fate (I176) is “the moving power of matter according to identical rules and in the same way and it does not differ from providence and nature”; that (I 177) “some things are in our power...and some are not.”

In a reoccurring Stoic example of this principle, Zeno, Chrysippus, and Seneca all argue that man is like a dog tied to a chariot. If he is a good man, he will run alongside it. A measure of happiness can be extracted from his situation. If he is a bad man, incapable of keeping up or ignorant of the fate of the cart, he will be dragged behind it. Such choices result in permanent intellectual and spiritual disfigurement. They set man against nature and generate resentment, hatred, and fear, in a word, unhappiness. This is not so much a freedom through action as it is instead a freedom of alignment—a freedom of reasonable expectation. The politico-ethical problems arising from this position for Nussbaum will be made clear as this chapter progresses.

**Stoic Virtue**

Where Nussbaum would insist that the primary ethical obligation exists between ourselves and others, the primary ethical obligation derived from the Stoic worldview exists between the sage and the *cosmos*. This obligation begets his duty to others as fellow bearers of universal reason. This framework sets up a necessary conflict between the Stoic’s cosmopolitanism and the community’s parochialism. Stoic virtue requires that we act in accordance with a universal normative standard that may very well defy local law and custom. The City—its laws, norms, and inhabitants—are often obstacles
to knowledge of the *cosmic* Truth.\textsuperscript{28} As noted by Brown, this displacement of law from the city to the *cosmos* and the corresponding expansion of brotherhood from the family and co-citizen to humanity at large lay the groundwork for a crucial reconsideration of justice and beneficence.\textsuperscript{29} The fact that we, as inhabitants of the cosmos, have obligations to one another is well established in Stoic thought; however, the nature and extent of these obligations is disputed. Despite this dispute, which will be addressed later in this chapter, the Stoic understanding of humanity is not derived from a biological claim nor does it exist, *prima facie*, as a defense of cultural or individual pluralism.

Having outlined the proper relationship between the universe and the individual, it is now necessary to flesh out this ontology. The significant characters are in place: the *cosmos* and its progeny, reasoning souls. I use the term “reasoning souls” specifically because the Stoics tend to see the body as a morally superfluous appendage.\textsuperscript{30} Drawing on the works of Stobeaus, Chrysippus, and Zeno, the Stoic position on happiness is that it is complete in virtue. That is to say, virtuous action is the necessary and sufficient condition for happiness.\textsuperscript{31} Furthermore, happiness cannot be attained in the pursuit of material wellbeing. One arrives at the state of happiness only through the rigorous pursuit of virtue. All other things that we may pursue are external to the virtue that may provide us with a sense of tranquility in a world that is largely beyond our control. For this reason, the things we obtain, the relationships we develop, the reputations we acquire, and even the identities to which we are born are called externals. While most of us (along with our Peripatetic and Epicurean forefathers) assert that some measure of external well-being—be it health, wealth, or a sense of
community—is necessary for happiness; the Stoics contend that true *eudaimonia* is independent of all of these things. Seneca eloquently writes,

> For what is more foolish than to praise in a man the qualities which come form without? And what is more insane than to marvel at characteristics which may at the next instant be passed on to someone else?...No man ought to glory except in that which is his own...Praise the quality in him which cannot be given or snatched away, that which is the peculiar property of man. Do you ask what this is? It is the soul, and reason brought perfection to the soul. For man is a reasoning animal. Therefore, man’s highest good is attained, if he has fulfilled the good for which nature designed him at birth. And what is it which this reason demands of him? The easiest thing in the world, to live in accordance with his own nature.\(^3\)

While externals are not constitutive of either virtue or happiness, the Stoics do not proscribe material wealth, honor, or traditional relations. It does not go against Stoic doctrine to prefer these things to poverty, ill-repute, or solitude; but it does mean that virtue should never be compromised in the attempt to attain these things. If such trappings are not a part of the cosmic unfolding, we set ourselves up for disappointment by aligning ourselves against the world in seeking to attain them. The Stoic understanding of happiness as adopting a position of emotional distance from externals and even other individuals seems a far cry from the liberal vision of happiness commonly found among contemporary audiences. It seems inaccurate for Nussbaum to promote the belief that “the values on which Americans may most justly pride themselves are, in a deep sense, Stoic values: respect for human dignity and the opportunity for each person to pursue happiness.”\(^3\) Ignoring the particularly Stoic content of the word happiness renders this comparison meaningless.

For the Stoics, the proper attitude to take towards externals is *apatheia*. Edward Zellar’s 1870 position on the Stoics and emotion remains virtually uncontested. He suggests that, “Emotion or passion is a movement of mind contrary to reason and
nature, an impulse transgressing the right mean. The Peripatetic notion, that certain emotions are in accord with nature, was stoutly denied by the Stoics. Emotions fall into five categories: desire, pleasure, grief, anger, and fear. These emotions are the result of unreasonable attachments to things, people, and events—that which is generally beyond individual control. *Apatheia* is the only orientation to the world that produces tranquility. The *cosmos* unfolds reasonably and we deny our connection to the universe and to our humanity when we refuse to recognize these truths. Our resistance is a needless disturbance within the cosmic order. Even Seneca, renowned among the Stoics for his magnanimity, notes that one should never take life too seriously. The proper response to life’s slings and arrows is to first avoid knowledge of those things that are irrelevant to our personal well-being, and second, failing the first, to “step back quite far and laugh.” And while Seneca’s own life story, his recourse to political resistance in response to Nero’s increasing corruption and incompetence, hardly suggests that he took his own advice, the general tenor of Stoic philosophy does not seem to offer up the humanitarian position envisioned by Nussbaum.

**Stoic Politics**

Nussbaum considers the revival of the Stoics necessary in light of the improper use of the ancients at the hands of post-Nietzschean theorists—particularly Michel Foucault, Martin Heidegger, and their followers. Post-Nietzschean theory, so far as Nussbaum is concerned, can result in nothing but a nihilistic approach to the world. These thinkers are content to sit and “contemplate the horrors” of the world or to “wait somewhat passively for the revelation of Being, the way a poet waits for the voice of inspiration or the believer for the voice of God.” The return to Stoicism provides the foundation for optimism in her view. A Stoic respect for reason, so it goes, will produce
action. A lack of respect for reason, on the other hand, produces passivity. With this in mind, I turn to a brief consideration of the relationship between Stoic thought and political action.

The Stoic concern for the individual appropriately aligning himself with the cosmos produces an active derision of the consideration of the material welfare of others. In his influential book on Stoic and Skeptic philosophy, Edwyn Bevan reveals that, “[p]ity in the sense of a painful emotion caused by the sight of other men’s suffering is actually a vice [in Stoic ethics].”\(^38\) Korfmacher supports this position by arguing that, “…the wise, while themselves giving no offense and working no harm, were without compassion or forgiveness for anyone; they never softened the strict penalties of the law, since yielding to pity and consideration of equity characterized a weak mind…”\(^39\) It is worth noting two features of the previous passage. First, the law to which Korfmacher and his Stoic subjects refer is the legal code not the cosmic law of nature. In the political sphere, the law is the final arbiter and bending the law to the personal circumstances of the law-breaker is an affront to virtue. Second, the Stoics are not concerned with the problem of equity. Each person is dealt his or her lot and must use reason and virtue to eke out a sense of tranquility. One may contribute to the virtue of another by revealing the secrets of freedom from externals but one does not contribute to another’s virtue by altering her status or providing her with material wealth or well-being.

This particularly Stoic way of looking at the conjunction of virtue and praxis led Malcolm Schofield to argue that Stoicism “depoliticized ‘political’ terms, activities, and statuses,” ultimately rendering them moral signifiers.\(^40\) Furthermore, I argue, this has the practical effect of atomizing individuals and limiting the possibility of solidarity that
makes structural change possible. This becomes clearer as we explore the fundamental difference between the Stoa’s philosophical commitments and their politics. The final chapter will link this problem directly to Nussbaum’s own political approach.

It is undeniably true that the primary thrust of Stoic doctrine asserts that conventional distinctions between men and women, citizens and slaves, Greeks and foreigners are irrelevant in the cosmic scheme. These are, as Nussbaum claims, morally irrelevant characteristics. In the section, I challenge the salience of Nussbaum’s political reliance on this particular Stoic ethical commitment. Many scholars trace the theory of gender equality to the Cynics and their Stoic progeny. It is well known that Zeno envisioned men and women wearing the same clothes and engaging in the same activities in his Stoic republic. Both Cleanthes and Musonius Rufus wrote that men and women have the same virtues and thusly should obtain similar educations.

According to E.V. Arnold,

There seems every reason to believe that the equality of men and women, though at the time seemingly paradoxical, was generally accepted by the earlier Stoics and adopted as a practical principle in Stoic homes. The whole treatment of human nature by the Stoics applies equally to man and woman, and points to the conclusion that as moral agents they have the same capacities and responsibilities.

Lisa Hill, arguing that Stoicism is “fundamentally committed to the emancipation of women” even if particular thinkers suffer from lapses, presents two alternatives to this position. The first alternative perspective is that Stoicism provides scant grounds for feminist attitudes. The second suggests that the Stoic position on duty overrides considerations of female emancipation. Along with C.E. Manning, I contend that there is something in the Stoic philosophy that limits its emancipatory possibilities, but I would like to suggest that it is not its particular understanding of duty that does this (although
duty does come to play a role). At the heart of the conflict between women as a part of the fellowship of the *cosmos* and the likelihood of political liberation are the specifics of the Stoic understanding of virtue and freedom—how one goes about being a good “citizen” of the universe.

Seneca provides an excellent description of the Stoic vision of the relationship between the polity and *cosmos*:

> Let us embrace with our minds two commonwealths: one great and truly common—in which gods and men are contained, in which we look not to this or that corner, but measure the bounds of our state with the sun; the other the one to which the particular circumstances of birth have assigned us…which pertains not to all men, to a particular group of them...This greater commonwealth we are able to serve even in leisure, or rather perhaps better in leisure—so that we may inquire what virtue is, whether it is one or many, whether nature or art makes men good; whether this world which embraces seas and lands and things grafted on to sea and lands, is unique, or whether God has scattered many bodies of this sort.47

This passage, with its focus on the way we serve the greater commonwealth, is indicative of the apolitical nature of the *cosmos*. Seneca’s statement implies that the life of a cosmopolitan is not the political life. It is a philosophical engagement with the perennial questions of being. The cosmopolitan attitude toward the classical dualisms of Greek and Roman life does not necessarily entail a political content. When we examine the actual praxis of the Stoics, this becomes evident. When Musonius Rufus advocates for the education of women, he does so on the basis that such education would make them better wives, mothers, and property managers.48 Epictetus’ writings provide support for this reading. He proposes that men and women are different and they appear so by the wisdom of the cosmos. Nothing but folly comes from failing to recognize these physical differences and the internal distinctions that they signal.49 Stoic politics place women firmly in the domestic sphere, ultimately rendering them
secondary individuals and outside of the purview of political citizenship. This politically conservative element also applies to certain other men as well.

While Nussbaum points out that we and our contemporaries are “especially shocked by the Stoics’ general tendency to accept the institution of slavery, if not all of the practices associated with it,” she does so in the context of explaining how progressive the Stoics are on gender equality. The Stoic positions on women and slaves are actually quite similar and are both premised on the importance of tranquility. Addressing Lucilius, Seneca does indeed argue that slaves are men and that most men (even those without masters per se) are slaves to something, be it ambition, wealth or public opinion; he does not, pace Nussbaum, express any ambivalence concerning the institution of slavery. The slave, it must be remembered, has all he needs to be virtuous and happy. He has reason. He does not require manumission, his own wealth, or his own family. He need only learn to run with the chariot. Epictetus, despite being slave, was as capable as any man of becoming a sage. His master’s decision to free him did not make him any more reasonable, virtuous, or happy. There is nothing un-Stoic in recognizing a slave’s ability to reason while also expecting him to attentively abide by his master’s will. The Stoic tradition is philosophically radical. The idea that a woman or a slave is capable both of philosophy and of achieving happiness merely through the practice of philosophy is undeniably broad-minded.

It does not seem out of the question to argue, however, that the sort of changes desired by contemporary cosmopolitans like Nussbaum—global political participation, human rights, economic equity, equal access to work and its rewards—are at odds with the moral thrust of Stoic thought. Such changes would encourage others to place a
false and heretical value on the material world. Epictetus very clearly states that a man cannot be rendered unfortunate by the acts of another, but only his own will. The opposite is also true: a man cannot make another happy. In the very same passage, Epictetus also reminds those who complain about their physical sustenance that if they cannot find food it is god’s own will. It seems we are to set ourselves a part from the city in recognition of the value of the world at large, but the New Stoics stop there; to live the consequences of Stoic reason we must also set ourselves apart from the material world in general. This not only includes wealth and status, but also emotional distance toward family, friends, and community. According to the Stoics, we should not passionately mourn the loss of a child or a friend. And while it is true that the Stoics did not argue against having families, they did not define themselves or their virtuousness by their familial relationships or friendships. The sage’s responsibility toward others springs only from the conventional duties attendant to the particular relationship. In Seneca’s letter concerning anger to Novatus, he argues that motivations directed by emotional attachments to people cause great harm. Reason by itself can direct our responses to offenses committed against others. A virtuous man does not fight a war because he is angry with his enemy. He fights because his country is at war and he must fulfill his duty. To do otherwise would bring shame.

As noted by Julia Annas, the adherence to duty that is professed by the Stoics appears at odds with their commitment to the universal dignity of individuals. The question arises, why would the socially constructed duties of marriage or parenthood still be important if here is no reasonable justification for distinguishing the moral worth of individuals? Why should the Stoics not use reason as the basis for constructing new
social and political relationships? Annas ultimately argues that New Stoic concern for reshaping the global distribution of power, wealth, and well-being is simply foreign to the worldview of the ancients. The ancient Stoics, she argues, “do not turn their minds readily to social reform, or replacing existing social roles, because they lived in a far more static and authoritarian society than we do, on in which such attempts would have been merely quixotic.”

She concludes that the Stoics would have suggested that, “to abandon your family responsibilities in favour of doing good to more people, for example, is romantic self-importance.” What the former argument lacks is an appreciation for the fact that transformative philosophies often arise in “static and authoritarian” conditions. Cynicism and Stoicism develop out of the same historical ground and yet develop along radically different lines.

In the Cynics, we see a rejection of socially accepted duty—a radical reconsideration of that duty in the light of what is “natural” or “reasonable.” This is evident in the coupling of Crates of Thebes and Hipparchia of Maroneia. Both flouted social customs and notions of duty by appearing together in public, dressing androgynously and living a homeless lifestyle. Contemporaries of the Stoics, these two Cynics did not consider it necessary that they continue to abide by the standards of their time. Responding to a student considering adopting the Cynic lifestyle, Epictetus replies with a long list of all that the Cynic must give up in search for equanimity: marriage, children, public office, and all but the barest property. Cynics were renowned for their willingness to turn common understandings of virtue or duty on their heads. For example, they did not condemn robbery because ownership of property corrupted man. Given Cynics’ willingness to redefine human relationships, social mores, and
even legal understandings in order to serve reason, one cannot reduce the Stoic position on duty to their “authoritarian” historical condition.

I think it is more convincing to attribute the Stoic dedication to duty as a conservative evaluation of what lies within the individual’s control. Altering one’s duty will often be an insurmountable task but being good within the confines of our duty is morally available to all actors. While all of the major Hellenic schools of thought place knowledge and reason at the center of their teachings, it is important to remember, at least in the works of Seneca, that apatheia trumps knowledge in any case where knowledge would stimulate the passions. “It is not expedient to see everything, to hear everything,” Seneca explains, “For many wrongs pass us by, and the person who does not recognize them is not touched by many of them. You don’t want to be prone to anger? Don’t be curious.” To be aware of injustice that one cannot actually remedy and to be disturbed by it is to set oneself up for injury. Duty seems to provide reasonable parameters for the individual’s attempts at social and self-improvement.

While it may seem odd that shame can be of value to the Stoic sage because of their general rejection of emotion, it is clear that Epictetus believed that shame was a valuable part of our human nature.

And what is our nature? To be free, noble-spirited, modest. For what other animal blushes, what other comprehends the impression of shame? But pleasure must be subordinated to these as a servant, as an attendant, in order to excite our willingness to keep acting in accordance with nature. Epictetus is far from alone in his valuation of this feeling. While translations vary, the term commonly translated as shame in the works of the stoics can also be translated as “self-respect”, “respect for one’s own conscience,” and “modesty.” Kamtekar argues that shame is understood by the Stoics as a good emotion best defined as “a rational
avoidance of justified censure.” It is only problematic to the extent that it derives from incorrect evaluations of what is good and bad. In particular, shame concerning what is beyond one’s control is shame that gives undue attention to the valuation of others and external goods. The proper source of shame is not the opinion of others, according to Epictetus, but rather the “god within.” Indeed, for Seneca it is an important method for teaching right action. For the pupil who is still capable of blushing can be taught right action through the appropriate harnessing of his natural shame. The shameless pupil, however, will need to be broken down in order to be remolded.

Nussbaum and other cosmopolitan thinkers often point to Hierocles’ fragment on Stoic relationships, which places the individual in a series of concentric circles; the first encircling the self, then the family, our fellow citizens, and the world at large. Invoking Hierocles, cosmopolitans argue that we must “draw the circles somehow toward the center.” Appealing to this Stoic image is incomplete if one does not consider what it would mean to treat all of humanity as oneself. If I am not to be harmed by the loss of my friend or my child or even my hand, it seems unlikely to assume, as do these thinkers, that Stoic cosmopolitanism provides the foundation for strong attachments to everyone and a politically activist attitude toward their plights.

Nussbaum’s later considerations of the utility of Stoic thought for political engagement and social transformation recognizes some of its limitations. She says in an interview:

What I’m wrestling with now…is the problem of being a Stoic cosmopolitan with a non-Stoic set of attachments. The ideal of feeling equal concern for all humanity seems to me good and right. But the Stoic approach, which involves pruning away one’s attachment to the local, is too surgical. Marcus Aurelius writes about trying to overcome one’s feelings at the
death of a child. It’s an effort to become invulnerable, and it doesn’t offer a sense of life that is rich enough to be worth living.\textsuperscript{68}

While Nussbaum’s consideration of limitations of Stoic apatheia are rooted in her notion of what it means to live a good life—a life enriched by the care of others—she does not seem to address the political problems of this manner of approaching the world. Here it is not just that the joys of life are absent, as Nussbaum notes, but that there is no reason to care particularly about the individuals suffering worlds or even inches away. There are also no grounds from which to form the political alliances necessary to affect change even if you could derive a commitment to change from the Stoic position.

To act politically in concert with others, to forge the very sort of solidarity necessary to foment dramatic institutional change, we are asked not to privilege place (the very site of our citizenship), class, or gender as they are all based on morally specious grounds. We are also asked to only perform our duties—to find happiness within the confines of the position granted to us by the cosmos rather in the attempt to transcend this position. According to Epictetus, “For the universe is powerful and superior, and consults the best for us by governing us in conjunction with the whole. And further; opposition, besides that it is unreasonable, and produces nothing except a vain struggle, throws us into pain and sorrows.”\textsuperscript{69} The justice of the cosmos is not our own. Our obsession with injustice and evil in the world is misdirected and will only produce disquiet in our souls and set us in opposition to the ways of the world and its divine reason.

If our relationships to others and the world itself become too strong, we always have one last recourse according to the Stoic sage: suicide.\textsuperscript{70} Apathiea at its very core is a disposition of distance toward life itself. If we have given into irrationality, if we
cannot adopt a virtuously indifferent attitude toward the world and our fellows, we have a virtuous outlet. As Seneca writes in *De Ira,*

> If the soul is sick and because of its imperfection unhappy, a man may end its sorrows and at the same time himself...In whatever direction you may turn your eyes, there lies the means to end your woes. See you that precipice? Down that is the way to liberty. See you that sea, that river, that well? There sits liberty at the bottom. See you that tree, stunted, blighted and barren? Yet from its branches hangs liberty. See you that throat of yours, your gullet, your heart? They are ways of escape from servitude. Are the ways of egress I show you too toilsome, do they require too much courage and strength? Do you ask what is the highway of liberty? Any vein in your body.\(^1\)

The understanding of freedom offered to us by the Stoics undermines the possibility of deriving from it a strong political impulse. It is this fact that necessitates Nussbaum’s (1994) attempt to separate what she calls the “extirpation of the passions” from other Stoic commitments. Such an attempt, however, requires a radical redefinition of the Stoic concepts of liberty, virtue, and happiness. One can best read the development of her list of capabilities as an attempt to do this. This will be addressed in the following chapter.

**Stoic Reason**

In her essay on the progressive legacy of Stoicism—by way of the Kantian categorical imperative—Nussbaum (1997a-b) seems content to set aside all of these Stoic concepts and focus solely on the role of reason in the production of praxis. Those who question the solitary import of reason are complicit in the sins of the world. With this in mind, I would like to explore three facets of reason as it pertains to the historical origins and contemporary manifestations of cosmopolitanism. First, I briefly consider the relationship between reason and exclusion in Stoic thought. In this section, I argue that the Stoics, rather than abolish all hierarchy, actually provide the groundwork for a new
one. Secondly, I present some of the arguments that have been made concerning the relationship between Stoic cosmopolitanism and Imperialism in the Western Canon. And, third, I show how the role of reason in Nussbaum’s cosmopolitanism mimics the imperial tendency within the academy.

As previously stated, reason is at the center of the Stoic definition of the good life. Whereas Aristotle states that reason is the faculty by which we determine what is virtuous, the Stoics equate the use of reason with the act of virtuous and eudemonistic living. Cleanthes wrote that to live in accordance with reason is “to live consistently with (or in conformity to) nature.” According to Josiah B. Gould, reason for the Stoics is the ability to understand what is truly good and what is truly bad—but he concludes that origin of this knowledge is never made clear. Despite Gould’s reticence to define Stoic reason, it seems clear that the Stoic vision of reason is closely linked to its distinction between personal freedom and externals and the proper relationship between the two as addressed previously in the chapter.

Setting aside the exact content of the Stoic conception of reason, I would like to focus on Stoicism’s continuation of a strain of Hellenistic thought that privileges the faculty of reason as the constitutive element of humanity. This is the faculty that Nussbaum’s Stoic turn features as well. This dichotomy—between the reasonable and the irrational—has become the focus of many critiques of Stoic politics. It is generally acknowledged that Ancient Greek society was defined by a series of social dualisms based on language, gender, free-status, and virtue. In his study of the positions taken by various Greek schools of thought on these divisions, H.C. Baldry argues that far from overcoming the dualistic tendency of Greek thought the Stoics actually base their...
politics on the latter dualism: virtue. In fact, he goes so far as to argue that, “there was one division of mankind which played a more dominating part in his thought than any consideration of human unity: no Greek thinker laid greater stress than Chrysippus on the gulf separating the wise from the unwise.” If we keep in mind the intimate relationship between reason and virtue in this discussion, the exclusionary possibilities of Stoic ethics become obvious. Both Zeno’s Politeia and Chrysippus’ On Politeia outline the properties of a community of the wise. Zeno’s work argues that his polis is a haven for the virtuous, to the total exclusion of those who lack Stoic moral wisdom. The irrational masses are “foemen,” “enemies,” and remain “aliens to one another.” In essence, it is only the wise who are capable of telling what is truly good (reason and virtue) from what is truly bad (socially constructed divisions like wealth, gender, and birth and the trapping associated with them). Thus, humans are indeed reasonable animals but not all of them develop their natural capacities and truly become sociable. Only those who do are capable of living as members of the cosmos— independent of the social institutions that define and bolster the reality of the ignorant.

Aside from failing to produce tangible political inclusion for those who had been stigmatized by morally irrelevant features, the belief in a shared-humanity, a unified vision of the cosmos, and skepticism toward socially constructed values also did not produce a benign multiculturalism. Cultural assimilation appears to be the fruit of Stoicism’s roots in reason.

Taking a broadly historical example of this failure, imperialism seems to be the main legacy of Stoicism in the Hellenic, Roman, and Enlightenment Eras. Authors like Anthony Pagden applaud many of the goals of cosmopolitanism while at the same time
acknowledging that there is no unproblematic linear genealogy linking Zeno to Kant to Martha Nussbaum. The reality of the history of cosmopolitanism is irrevocably intertwined with the “civilizing” mission of Western colonialism and imperialism. “It is well to remember,” Pagden writes,

[T]hat just as Cicero was writing as the Roman republic was being replaced by the Roman Empire, so Zeno was writing at the very moment that the independent Greek city-states were being absorbed into Alexander’s ‘world’ empire, that one of the greatest Roman Stoics was also an emperor, and that Seneca wrote for Nero. Far from extending a benign cultural relativity to all possible peoples, Stoicism was, in origin, a philosophy particularly well suited to the spread of empire.79

The belief in a shared-humanity, a unified vision of the cosmos, and skepticism toward socially constructed values did not produce a benign multiculturalism; rather, we see assimilation as the primary fruit of these periods. It seems necessary at this point to note that Nussbaum’s reading of Kant is problematic at best. Far from being a firm believer in the equality and dignity of all peoples, Kant writes with alarming frequency on the barbarism of non-Western peoples. Robert Bernasconi cites Kant’s “Von den verschiedenen Racen der Menschen,”

Among the deviations, that is, among the hereditary dissimilarities that we find in animals that belong to a single line of descent are those called races. Races are deviations that are constantly preserved over many generations and come about as a consequence of migration (dislocation to other regions) or through interbreeding with other deviations of the same line of descent, which always produces half-breed offspring.80

Kant was a firm believer in the scientificity of race. Furthermore, he asserted that race was a morally relevant category and propounded a hierarchy of race and civilization. Kant specifically addresses this hierarchy in his treatise “On the Use of Teleological Principles in Philosophy.” Writing on the location of Native American within this hierarchy he states,
That their natural disposition has not yet reached a *complete* fitness for any climate provides a clear test that can hardly offer another explanation why this race, too weak for hard labor, too phlegmatic for diligence, and unfit for any culture, still stands—despite the proximity of example and ample encouragement—far below the Negro, who undoubtedly holds the lowest of all remaining levels by which we designate the different races.\textsuperscript{81}

In much the same way as earlier Stoics distinguished between the political value of the wise and the irrational in the cosmopolis, the heirs to their thought would also have to posit the existence of those who would remain “foeman” to the empire of reason. While I believe that the Stoics would have most likely rejected the Kantian stance on race, the practical consideration of who gets to act as the gatekeeper of the reasonable polis remains problematic. For Kant, the unwillingness of Native Americans and Africans to submit to the “reasonable” imperative of the protestant work ethic (as propounded by the Western masters who demanded it) revealed that they were unfit for culture—that they exist outside of the ramparts of reason, incapable of experiencing the holy union with the *cosmos* for which we were intended. The only means of addressing such a people is to place them under the care of the wise in hopes that they might be taught virtue. We see this mode of thinking in much of the Western canon often in the guise of natural laws or principles that must be universally applied in order to fulfill the rigorous demands of a cosmopolitan ethic.

This is not an incidental part of the Stoic legacy. Nussbaum quotes Marcus Aurelius as writing,

>Say to yourself in the morning: I shall meet people who are interfering, ungracious, insolent, full of guile, deceitful and antisocial…But I,…who know that the nature of the wrongdoer is of one kin with mine—not indeed of the same blood or seed but sharing the same kind, the same portion of the divine—I cannot be harmed by any one of them, and no one can involve me in shame. I cannot feel anger against him who is of my kin, nor hate him. We were born to labor together, like the feet, the hands, the eyes, and the rows of upper and lower teeth. To work against one another
is therefore contrary to nature, and to be angry against a man or turn one’s back on him is to work against him.82

While it is certainly the case that the other of reason should neither incur the anger of the wise nor have a blind eye turned against him, Sandrine Berges rightly points out the effect of the hierarchy of reason on the proper response of the sage.83 In reference to the Stoic understanding of the irrational as “foeman,” she states that,

Premises which lead to the conclusion that only some human beings are capable of forming an attachment to other human beings—because themselves worthy of friendship—probably should not be expected to yield also the conclusion that we should love and respect all human beings just because they are human.84

She goes on to say with particular regards to Marcus Aurelius’ position that,

Marcus Aurelius goes so far as to say that non-virtuous humans should be tolerated, cared for and also instructed—but his seems to be the most charitable view…And if observing that a person, whilst rational, is not sufficiently so (i.e. not virtuous enough) can cause us to experience a kind of disdain and aversion for that person, then the fact that we are all rational cannot suffice to justify the belief that human beings should respect each other…85

The Stoic attitude is not simply that we are all humans who must love, respect, and live among one another. For the Stoics, being-in-the-world-with-others is a project premised on hierarchy and, where possible, education in the virtues of reason. Such a reading of the Stoics is buttressed by the oft-discussed linkages between Stoicism and Pauline Christianity—especially their shared evangelicalism.86 Or, as Brett Bowden so succinctly states, “the ideal of global citizenship is inextricably linked to the West’s long and tortuous history of engaging in overzealous civilizing-cum-universalizing missions in the non-Western world.”87
Cosmopolitanism and the Conference Room

Nussbaum argues that the Stoic model of education is premised on a relationship of equality between practitioners. Unlike the intellectual centralization of the Epicurean school, the Stoics do not hierarchically differentiate within their community of sages. However, they do create a strong distinction between the reasonable and the unreasonable. J. Peter Euben and Fred Dallmayr argue that the celebration of reason in Nussbaum’s account of Stoicism both obscures the debate between conflicting conceptions of reason and ignores the possibility of the tyranny of reason. Euben argues that the primary problem facing Nussbaum and her New Stoicism is that, it is possible and useful only among ‘reasonable’ people…And who are these reasonable people? They are people like us: Western academics who define what counts as reasonable…it is assumed that those outside the Occident lack the reflective awareness that would protect them from being possessed by their mythical worldviews.

In her discussion on the Cynic origins of Stoic thought, Nussbaum, clearly recognizing the presence of this division, states, “It would appear that these concerns focused on the worth of reason and moral purpose in defining one’s humanity. Class, rank, status, national origin and location, and even gender are treated by the Cynics as secondary and morally irrelevant attributes.” While Nussbaum sees the elevation of reason over other attributes as a victory for humanity, she fails to grasp the very real element of exclusion found in Stoic thought and continues to replicate it in her own work. Her major critique of post-Nietzschean thought lies in its “opposition to a hopeful, active, and reason-based politics grounded in an idea of reverence for rational humanity wherever we find it.” Implicit in this idea is the possibility of an irrational humanity as well as the conclusion that it would not need to be treated reverently. While this idea is certainly disturbing in its exclusivity and its own particularly ironic provincialism, the actual elitism
underscoring the exaltation of reason is even more pervasive. It turns out that even the Western academic is often found lacking in reason—or at least fails to draw the proper substantial conclusions according to her natural capacity. Nussbaum’s own writing replicates the sort of disdain and distancing found in the work of the Stoics.

In her 1992 essay on Aristotle and human functioning, Nussbaum regales her readers with an account of the odd conclusions that liberals begin to draw about the world once they abandon their Enlightenment foundations. She tells of an elegant and well-respected French anthropologist who, in her defense of the Derridean worldview, finds herself promoting misogynistic and mystifying cultural traditions. A woman whose very presence at the conference is owed to a belief in the equality of the sexes finds herself defending the Indian tradition of keeping menstruating women away from public and private labor because they supposedly pollute what they touch. She defends this tradition because, our elegant anthropologist argues, there is a value to “an embedded way of life.” While this anecdote is somewhat amusing for its irony and certainly troubling to anyone who values gender equality, Nussbaum’s derisive response does not help us better approach the problem of anti-essentialism nor does it make her brand of cosmopolitanism any more convincing. While the cosmopolitan tradition may be entirely willing to say that we are a common species, with shared traits, and equal value—the allusion to similarity often flies in the face of our common experiences. Even when our explicit goals are the same we may find ourselves reasonably defending opposing positions—as is the case when feminists debate the symbolic and political power of the hijab.
It seems both categories exist beyond the ramparts of reason. One wonders how convincing the menstruating Indian woman or her husband would respond to such a show of disdain. I expect perhaps not by falling to their knees in thankfulness for having Nussbaum show them the ways of reason. Regardless of the veracity of Nussbaum’s claims concerning the relationship between gender equality and human freedom, the essentialism of her assumptions and privileging of reason without a serious consideration of the role of power in the production of knowledge both serve to place the principle before the person. Zygmunt Bauman forcefully argues that,

> Western civilization has articulated its struggle for domination in terms of the holy battle of humanity against barbarism, reason against ignorance…science against magic, rationality against passion…Western, modern society is defined as civilized society…What in fact has happened in the course of the civilizing process, is the redeployment of violence…violence has been taken out of sight, rather than out of existence.96

Nussbaum seems to suggest in her defense of Stoicism as a guidepost for contemporary cosmopolitanism that there is no violence in the destruction of treasured values and ways of life—that one can devote herself to excising values that do not comport with reason while at the same time maintaining an attachment to “local color” and the warmth of community. This is distinctly at odds with her more thorough analyses of the Stoic tradition. Several of the chapters in Nussbaum’s commanding analysis of Hellenic thought, *The Therapy of Desire*, focus precisely on this problem. Even having accepting the values of the Stoics, her protagonist struggles painfully in the process to extirpate her passions: to give up on the hope of passionate love, to banish anger in the face of inhumane actions, to relinquish her fear of both her own mortality and that of those for whom she cares, to ultimately set aside all of the traditional rituals that have aided in the complex navigation of these powerful drives. The process of
becoming reasonable and virtuous in accordance to Stoic doctrine is a profoundly
disorienting endeavor for one who recognizes it as a desirable goal. The displacement
of such a project from the free individual to the realm of international engagement
suffers from serious failings—the worst of which is the abandonment of the individual
and her own perception of the world, the very reason d’être of Nussbaum’s attempt to
privilege the Stoic position.

Nussbaum’s position at the conference highlights two problems: First, prior to
discourse, her assumption is that there is but one way to value humans as reasonable
and the West has discovered it; second, that those who disagree with her must be (as
expressed by Euben) “mystified” by traditional lifestyles or, worse yet, post-
Structuralism. As previously discussed, the danger of creating an “other” of reason is
present in early Stoicism. Beyond the political othering of those who refuse to recognize
the primacy of abstract reason, there is also a psychological component. The early
Stoics were widely known to have departed from the Platonic conception of the tripartite
soul in which folly could be viewed as a failure to properly order the soul’s component
parts.97 Instead, both Zeno and Chrysippus set up a model of moral action based on the
health/sickness of a unitary personality. If one is passionate/lacks virtue, according to
the early Stoics, one suffers from a disease of the soul.98 The theory of psychological
malady is still a part of cosmopolitan thinking. While this position remains implicit in
Nussbaum’s work, Jason Hill makes it explicit.

The cosmopolitan in the making, one who at the end of her life would like
above all to say, “I am a cosmopolitan,” with full knowledge of all that has
gone into the making of that identity, thinks that such an identity has been
achieved by wringing from her soul those values that superficially bind her
to others and prevent her from knowing them. One forgets and then one
becomes…Ethnic/racial tribalism is pernicious. It is infantile. It is at base
perhaps, as Freud suggests, an instinct in humans but at the same time the most limited and ghettoized way of living. Tribalism, along with its variants, nationalism and racial/ethnic pride or glorification, is psychic infantilism.\textsuperscript{99} 

Hill has diagnosed the opposition to cosmopolitanism. With absolutely no allusion to the fact that such a mindset has been a dominant aspect of the Western tradition for over two millennia with horrifying consequences, he proceeds to claim that all people who cling to community for support and identity are morally immature and actually entitles the following chapter section: “Culturalism and Oppressive Cultures: Do We Obliterate Them?” What follows is an analysis that equates community and tradition \textit{as concepts} with the Ku Klux Klan, apartheid, and chattel slavery. Culturally bound subjects, according to Hill, must distantiate, forget, and embrace cosmopolitanism.\textsuperscript{100} The Western image of the “weaned” artist is portrayed, in the words of Sartre, as “being-for-itself.” This existential individualism, we are told by Hill, is culture-free. We see in Hill’s proposal for “moderate cosmopolitanism” the realization of the Stoic tradition and Nussbaum’s own wish: the development of the mature actor, distanced from community and tradition and those who populate them, realizing his radical freedom, bringing word of it to the psychically immature—the “foemen” of contemporary cosmopolitans.

\textbf{Conclusion}

For even Seneca’s position on mercy in \textit{De Clementia} is, primarily, a consideration of the dual effects of anger and mercy on the soul of the potential Stoic sage. While Korfmacher insists that Seneca’s views on mercy are in opposition to the early Stoa’s notion of \textit{apatheia}, Seneca’s very focus on the soul of the sage and the tranquility of his relationship to the cosmic unfolding (the world-as-it-is) remains as a problematic notion in relationship to the “New Stoic” reading of cosmopolitanism as the
great (morally energetic and politically active) universal brotherhood of man. The core of what is missing is that political activity is a social endeavor and theories that fail to account for the bonds that facilitate or hinder solidarity cannot become politically robust. In the end, the cosmopolitan hierarchy of reason makes it ill-suited as the foundation for intercultural political exchange that does not aim at assimilation or conquest. In the following chapter, I turn to the problem of narrative in Nussbaum’s approach to development. The value that Nussbaum ascribes to narrative partially derives from her reading of Stoic pedagogy but is also the result of her reading of pity in the work of Aristotle. While the importance of narrative in Nussbaum’s work cannot be denied, it is not at the heart of her method. Narrative is a tool for achieving reader’s sympathy rather than a technique for developing philosophical content.

Notes


5 Nussbaum’s response to Rorty sparked a significance number of responses many of which are captured in the edited volume For Love of Country? Debating the Limits of Patriotism, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996). They include critiques from both the right and left. Kwame Anthony Appiah offers of a plea for a rooted cosmopolitanism that respects local, cultural, and national affiliations (“Cosmopolitan Patriot,” 21-29); Judith Butler, unsurprisingly, critiques Nussbaum for her failure to appreciate the contingent and cultural character of so-called universal values (“Universality in Culture,” 45-52); American conservative icon, Gertrude Himmelfarb, remarks that citizenship has no meaning beyond the state and thus rendering the argument in favor of “cosmopolitan citizenship” moot (The Illusions of Cosmopolitanism,” 72-77); Michael Walzer, however, argues that she neglects the family and the community as the
breeding ground for the fellow-feeling required of those who would enlarge their moral responsibilities (“Spheres of Affection,” 125-127).

6 Nussbaum, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism”; “Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism”; Cultivating Humanity; Women and Human Development in the Capabilities Approach; Frontiers of Justice; Creating Capabilities.

7 Nussbaum, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” 7.

8 “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” 8.


12 “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” 3.

13 “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” 3.


16 Reading against Nussbaum in the manner is not intended as an indictment of Nussbaum’s body of work but rather of those who have adopted her history on the Stoic origins of Kantian thought as the genesis of a cosmopolitan present.


18 H.C. Baldry, The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1965), see chapter one.


22 J.M. Rist, Stoic Philosophy, 161.

23 Stoic Philosophy, 162.

24 Stoic Philosophy, 173.


27 The Philosophy of Chrysippus, 146.

28 Dallmayr (2003) argues that the contemporary religious quest for an ecumenical, global ethic and the contemporary cosmopolitanism exemplified by Nussbaum is driven by a logic of exclusion. This is indeed one of my concerns with founding transcultural ethic on Stoic principles. While Dallmayr lingers on the similarities between these two approaches to global ethics, he does not allude to their interlacing historical development. Additionally, the effect of Stoicism on Christianity has been well documented; their mutual influence has been less robustly explored. (For literature on the former see: Charles Smiley, “Stoicism and Its Influence”; Ralph Stob, “Stoicism and Christianity” (The Classical Journal, 30(4) 1935); Marcia L. Colish, The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the early Middle Ages (New York: Leiden, 1990). In the case of the latter, see the early, yet seminal work of James Henry Bryant, The Mutual Influence of Christianity and the Stoic School (London: Macmillan, 1866).

29 Eric Brown, “The Stoic Invention of Cosmopolitan Politics”.

30 As noted by Nussbaum (1994, 342, fn. 24), Hierocles includes the body in his description of the self. He argues that our first ethical duty is to both the preservation of the body and the soul.

31 J.M. Rist, Stoic Philosophy, 147.


37 Nussbaum, “Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism,” 3-4.


It is worth noting, that despite the common reading of Zeno’s Republic as a radical argument in favor of gender equality, David M. Engel argues that the shared dress code was less a function of gender equality than a condemnation of adornment in general. Furthermore, his reading of Zeno suggests that the “community of women” much referred to in the feminist reading of Stoicism is actually a reiteration of male dominance as men continue to determine both the politics of sexual relations and retain choice of sexual partner and timing of the sexual encounter. Such policies, Engel insists, are a continuation of male control of female reproductive capacities (270-272). David M. Engel, “Women’s Role in the Home and the State: Stoic Theory Reconsidered,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 101 (2003): 267-288.


Epictetus, “The Discourses: How From the Doctrine of Our Relationship to God, Ware to Deduce Its Consequences,” *The Works of Epictetus consisting of The Discourses in Four*


57 “My Station and Its Duties,” 117.

58 “My Station and Its Duties,” 120.

59 Epictetus, “Discourses: Of the Cynic Philosophy” in The Works of Epictetus consisting of The Discourses in Four Books, the Enchridion, and Fragments, Trans. Thomas Wentworth Higginson (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company 1865). 3.22. He states that one who would begin the path of the Cynic without divide guidance will be “an object of divine wrath, and would bring public dishonor upon himself.”


61 Martha Nussbaum, The Therapy of Desire, 432 [translation, her own].


64 “ΑΙΔΩΣ in Epictetus,” 138.

65 “ΑΙΔΩΣ in Epictetus,” 138.


The philosophical grounds that allow the Stoics to equate virtue with reason lie primarily on their understanding of the unity of the soul. This topic is pursued at length by J.M. Rist, Stoic Philosophy. A further distinction between Aristotle and the Stoics is the latter’s reliance on the language of nature. For Aristotle, to live in accordance with nature would be to deny the role of artifice in the moral and political development of man.

Gould, Chrysippus, 168-171.


H.C. Baldry argues that Socrates’ position on wisdom sets the foundation of Stoicism. It is in the doxographical accounts of Socrates that we begin to see reason as a dividing factor between men rather than their common heritage.

Furthermore, Baldry (165) asserts that the radical philosophical position propounded by the Stoics—that race, creed, class, and gender are not morally salient distinctions—is more than compensated for by the absence on any political agenda supporting these claims. My discussion of Stoic virtue serves to illuminate his conclusions.


For Baldry and Chroust the fact that a Stoic politics is only possible among the virtuous explains why the political communities imagined by Zeno and Chrysippus can do without legal and commercial institutions and regulations. Baldry, Unity, 161-164. Chroust, The Ideal Polity, 176-178. The political treatises of the Early Stoics merely describe what would happen in a society populated by Stoics. They are not political recommendations that would apply to any existing polity or international organization. (Devine 1970, Pagden 2000)


Cited in “Kant as an Unfamiliar Source of Racism,” 148. Italics in the original.


“Loneliness and Belonging,” 5.


90 Martha Nussbaum, “Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism,” 5.

91 “Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism,” 5.


93 I cannot help but note that the tone of Nussbaum’s description is very much dismissive. The phrase “elegant, French anthropologists” reads like an epithet—one that draws attention to the three categories noted by Nussbaum to be “morally irrelevant”: nationality, class, and gender. Nussbaum’s manner of dressing down Frederique Apffel-Marglin simply reveals that even for those who claim to be above such morally irrelevant identities, they are still powerfully and politically coded categories.


97 Posidonius (135BCE-51BCE) popularized the Platonic position within the later Stoic tradition.


100 *Becoming a Cosmopolitan*, 110-119.
CHAPTER 4
JUDGMENT AND NARRATIVE IN THE CAPABILITY APPROACH

Nussbaum came to the field of development through her own exploration of human suffering in ancient Greek philosophy and fiction. For all of her praise of both Kant and the Stoics, her theoretical research, her writing-style, and her continued involvement in international feminism are infused with a respect for the role that compassion plays in human flourishing. While the distance between Greek thought and contemporary development agendas is enormous, her work on the two topics flows seamlessly into one another both temporally and discursively. She sees contemporary problems—inequality, oppression, and ignorance—as a continuation of the very troubles that first led the ancient Greeks to pursue philosophy; and, so, she turns back again to them for answers. The answer she delivers comes in the form of the Capabilities Approach.

As early as 1986, we can see the seeds of Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach taking root. In her introduction to her book *The Fragility of Goodness*, Nussbaum quotes Pindar: “But human excellence grows like a vine tree, fed by the green dew, raised up, among wise men and just, to the liquid sky”.¹ Pindar’s vine flourishes but it does not do so in isolation. It requires a good heritage, a rich soil, favorable climate, attention from cultivators. Nussbaum extrapolates as follows, “We need to be born with adequate capacities, to live in fostering natural and social circumstances, to stay clear of abrupt catastrophe, to develop confirming associations with other human beings”.² This approach is far from the self-sufficient flourishing favored by many of the philosophers of the time. This side of Greek intellectual life, Nussbaum argues, is primarily concerned with banishing contingency from human life through the sheer force of reason.
That I am an agent, but also a plant; that much that I did not make goes towards making me whatever I shall be praised or blamed for being; that I must constantly choose among competing and apparently incommensurable goods and that circumstances may force me to a position in which I cannot help being false to something or doing some wrong; that an event that simply happens to me may, without my consent, alter my life; that it is equally problematic to entrust one’s good friends, lovers, or country and to try to have a good life without them—all these I take to be not just the material of tragedy, but everyday facts of lived practical reason.³

In this particular reading of luck and excellence, she does not engage the discussion of the luck of birth or constitution, e.g. the role of factors that endow, or limit, the ability of an individual to partake in the good life.⁴ Here she is only concerned with three problems of luck. First, she states that relationships are commonly seen as valuable to a sense of well-being yet these relationships are particularly vulnerable to fluctuation. Ought this to limit the value we ascribe them, she asks. Second, she asks if the values that comprise the good life are all commensurable with one another. Ultimately, her answer is “no”. Third, she considers the role non-rational capacities play in the good life. To this, she will respond, that we cannot call the life of complete rationality the good life.⁵ The conclusion drawn by her ethical inquiry into the meaning of Attic tragedies is that the good life is precariously dependent on a number of things beyond the agent’s control.

As she begins to look more closely at the international politics of development only a short time later, what we see is Nussbaum steadfastly applying her Aristotelian principles. Aristotle, she states, argues that the role of the state is the facilitation of the good life for its citizens. This requires that the state have some idea of what the good life is and how to protect it from the vicissitudes of luck. In a democratic society, this means that the people who participate in government must appreciate the role that luck
plays in our moral development. For her, the key to unlocking the systemic denial of human flourishing is compassion.

According to Nussbaum, the Greek conception of *eleos* is tripartite.

It has three cognitive requirements: first, the belief that the suffering is not trivial but serious; second, the belief that the person who is suffering did not cause the suffering by deliberate fault; third, the belief that one's own possibilities are similar to those of the person suffering. It involves, then, in its very structure, the injunction to recognize common human limits and vulnerabilities; and the plausible claim is that the person who does not recognize him- or herself as sharing a common humanity with the sufferer will react to the suffering with an arrogant hardness, rather than with compassion.\(^6\)

This ability to see oneself *in the role of* another is the *sine qua non* of ethical action for Nussbaum; and the belief that one's own possibilities are similar to those of the person suffering translates to a notion of essential humanness. Describing the relationship between essentialism and globalization Nussbaum states, "I argue that without essentialism of a kind we are deprived of two moral sentiments that are absolutely necessary if we are to live together decently in the world: compassion and respect."\(^7\)

There can be no respect without some form of essentialism and Nussbaum attempts to articulate the content of the essentialism necessary to produce human flourishing.

**Internal Essentialism**

Nussbaum argues that there are two types of essentialism available to philosophers: metaphysical essentialism and internal essentialism. The former is the notion that there is some objectively knowable manner in which the world functions independent of the perceptions and interpretations proffered by individuals. She argues that this position has rightly come under attack, but that the modern skepticism toward this form of essentialism has resulted in a dangerous slide into complete relativism. In its place she offers what she calls "internal essentialism", called thus because the
essentialism is grounded in lived history and is drawn empirically from “within” human experience. Denying this “internal essentialism” is equivalent to accepting pre-Enlightenment ideas of inequality. Anti-essentialists in the academy, despite being nominally progressive, argue, according to Nussbaum,

\[
\text{[A]ll judgment is a matter of power—no good and bad reasons. This implies that one can never give a morally good reason for criticizing the verdicts of established authority: when one does so one is by definition just playing for power and thus no better, morally, than one’s opponent. Where the game is power, weakness is always worse. The poor are losers, and that’s that. A more lighthearted deconstructionist says it is all a matter of free play. So, if I want to play around with torture and slavery and you want to stop me, nothing can be said about the moral superiority of you to me. You have your way of playing, I have mine.}\]

But is this what is really being said? Are the anti-essentialists that she encounters in Helsinki actually advocating this sort of relativism? Are they opting out of making value judgments? Are they suggesting that all attempts to access power are equally morally bankrupt because power is essentially amoral? The problem here is that she turns to thinkers like Stanley Fish, Robert Bork, and Barbara Herrnstein Smith to explain the positions of the post-development thinkers of at the Helsinki conference instead of turning to the work of the thinkers themselves or the other philosophical supporters of post-development thought like Escobar, Marglin, or Apffel-Marglin or their direct influences like Heidegger, Derrida, or Foucault. I will return to these questions after first examining the content of the essentialism offered by Nussbaum in her defense of a global humanist agenda and the role that both fictional and non-fictional narrative play in its development.

She begins by reasonably stating that by abandoning metaphysical realism,

We have everything that we always had all along: the exchange of reasons and arguments by human beings within history, in which, for
reasons that are historical and human but not the worse for that, we hold some things to be good and others bad, some arguments to be sound and others not sound. Why, indeed, should the relativist conclude that the absence of a transcendent basis for judgment—a basis that, according to them, was never there anyway—should make us despair of doing as we have done all along, distinguishing persuasion from manipulation?\textsuperscript{10}

Nussbaum calls her universal account of human functioning the “thick vague theory of the good” or “Aristotelian essentialism.”\textsuperscript{11} This good, she argues, is based on an Aristotelian notion of human flourishing. She proposes a list of characteristics that make one human and thus under the purview of Aristotelian ethics: one’s mortality, the known limits of the human bodies (need for food and drink, shelter, sexual satisfaction, and mobility), the capacity for pleasure and pain, cognitive capability, early infant development, sociability, ability to recognize their natural universe, potential for humor and play, and their experience of themselves as bodily separate from one another. While indeed somewhat vague, this list of characteristics is far from unproblematic. Among the more questionable of her list of vital human characteristics is her insistence that “the aversion to pain as a fundamental evil is a primitive and, it appears, unlearned part of being a human animal. A society whose members altogether lacked that aversion would surely be judged to be beyond the bounds of humanness”.\textsuperscript{12} This assertion strikes me as particularly odd because it seems, if there is one feature that separates humans from the rest of the animal world it is their ability and near universal endeavor to imbue pain with value and to seek it out.\textsuperscript{13} From her reading of Aristotle, she draws the conclusion that the following list of human needs is required for flourishing:

1. Being able to live to the end of a complete human life, as far as is possible; not dying prematurely, or before one’s life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
2. Being able to have good health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction; being able to move from place to place.

3. Being able to avoid unnecessary and nonbeneficial pain and to have pleasurable experiences.

4. Being able to use the five senses; being able to imagine, to think, and to reason.

5. Being able to have attachments to things and persons outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence, in general, to love, grieve, to feel longing and gratitude.

6. Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s own life.

7. Being able to live for and with others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of familial and social interactions.

8. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.

10. Being able to live one’s [own] life and nobody else’s; being able to live one’s own life in one’s very own surroundings and context.

11. The Aristotelian essentialist claims that a life that lacks any one of these,

12. no matter what else it has, will be lacking in humanness.¹⁴

The primary critique she anticipates is that this list overlooks autonomy. Her response is quite eloquent: this is a list of capabilities not of outcomes. Policies ought to “make sure that all human beings have the necessary resources and conditions for acting in those ways. It leaves the choice [to do so] up to them”.¹⁵

She goes on to argue that the Aristotelian conception of capabilities can be prejudicially applied such that women or certain minorities may be denied the humanness of privileged citizens. She states,
One may, looking at a minority whom one hates, speak of them as beetles or ants, and one may carry this refusal of humanity into the sphere of law and public action. Does this undermine our idea that a conception of the human being is a good basis for moral obligation? It seems to me that it does not. For what such cases reveal is the great power of the conception of the human. Acknowledging this other person is a member of the very same kind would have generated a sense of affiliation and responsibility…

What she fails to note here, is that Aristotle himself prejudicially applied his notion of capabilities but not on the basis of humanness. He did not argue that women or barbarians were not human, only that their humanness had different qualities. He insists,

[T]he freeman rules over the slave after another manner from that in which the male rules over the female, or the man over the child; although the parts of the soul are present in all of them, they are present in different degrees. For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has, but it is immature… Clearly, then, excellence of character belongs to all of them; but the temperance of a man and of a woman, or the courage and justice of a man and of a woman, are not, as Socrates maintained, the same.

He never has to suggest that we are not all members of a human family to assert that we have different attributes and different positions within a naturally ordered society. In fact, it is said that Aristotle produced a “universal moral truth” when he stated that justice is geometrically proportional. By which he meant, justice is served when equal things are treated equally; on the other hand, things that are unalike should be treated unequally in proportion to their dissimilarity. Thus, injustice is treating unequal things as though they were equal.

For Aristotle, the designation “human” does not mean that all humans are equal and his work is seriously deformed if one suggests otherwise. In his analysis of the Aristotelian notion of equality, Peter Westen notes that the concept of equality is without
moral content unless we can specify what is alike, what is unalike, and what the proportion of the difference is.\textsuperscript{21} The universal truth is inapplicable without practical judgment—Nussbaum’s claim that “human” constitutes a class of equals is itself a moral judgment rather than an empirical fact. Such a claim flies in the face of much human experience and a significant amount of political theory. In an essay on the need for a theoretical basis for the animal rights movement, she argues that her Capabilities Approach is superior to the both the Kantian and Rawlsian liberalism precisely because it does not commit itself to the “split between humanity and animality.”\textsuperscript{22} She goes on to argue that this lack of clear distinction between the two gives the Capabilities Approach a leg up on the issues faced by mentally handicapped children and adults. She, herself, acknowledges the blurred and somewhat arbitrary category of humanness and yet insists that an interior essentialism can provide the basis for an approach to human flourishing that is safe from the dangers of moral relativism. Such a claim appears an act of crypto-normativity masquerading as objectivity despite the attempt to tie it to a non-homogenous Aristotelian category.

Furthermore, Nussbaum is particularly trying to address the role of women in international politics.\textsuperscript{23} Correctly, she notes that women are a particularly vulnerable international class. Either legally or culturally, women tend to be at a disadvantage around the world. They often lack access to land, capital, and political power. They frequently work longer hours more often than not with less pay. Inheritance and divorce laws usually favor men. Lacking access to financial and political power structures the world over, women are of course more likely than men to lack access to basic human necessities. They are more likely to lack access to adequate nutrition, proper
healthcare, and education; and they are more likely to find themselves subjected to
slavery, violence, and sexual abuse than their male counterparts. This inequality cannot
be addressed through Aristotelian frameworks without an explicit reconsideration of
Aristotle’s hierarchy of flourishing. This inequality cannot be addressed through
Aristotelian frameworks without an explicit reconsideration of Aristotle’s hierarchy of
flourishing and human virtue that do make distinctions between the nature of men and
women.

But this is not the only way the Nussbaum bends Aristotle to her will. In her book,
*Women and Human Development: the Capabilities Approach*, she expands upon the
previous list of human requirements while still arguing that the list is essentially
Aristotelian in nature. To the aforementioned list, she adds the ability to support oneself
through work.\(^{24}\) While I believe that this particular addendum is an absolute necessity if
one is concerned with improving women’s status, attaching it under the guise of
Aristotelianism seems off as Aristotle himself was critical of the deformations of the soul
that result from the tedious nature of manual labor. Farmers, artisans, laborers, and
traders, because their time is taken up by work rather than contemplation, cannot not be
citizens in the best form of government. According to Aristotle, their characters cannot
flourish/attain excellence and they are unfit for political participation.\(^{25}\) Much like
Aristotle’s assertion of inequality, this facet of his conception of human flourishing is not
explored by Nussbaum as it relates to the problem of human development.\(^{26}\)

Another pertinent feature of her Capabilities Approach is that despite
Nussbaum’s repeated assertion that what lies at the heart of her approach is a
commitment to political liberalism, these necessities are pre-political. When discussing
activities that may disrupt or destroy the listed capabilities there may be some
disagreement, she acknowledges. These issues, like whether one ought to be permitted
to sell her organs or use hard drugs, “are not so grave, and thus in many such cases
the approach has little to say, allowing matters to be settled through the political
process.”27 The role of politics and indeed political action more broadly speaking will be
returned to in later chapters.

**Narrative and the development of Empathy**

Nussbaum has been delving into the project of narrative for many decades now. Her understanding of morality, Stoic philosophy, pedagogy, legal judgment, and citizenship are all premised on the idea that narrative is the imaginative source of empathy and compassion. She argues that both Marcel Proust and Henry James have offered compelling reasons to reject the hard distinction between reason and emotion that has dominated much of the Western cannon. James’ position was that removing narrative from our understanding of life and replacing it with logical rigidities removed our insights about life from the actual practice of living. Furthermore, Proust insisted that emotions themselves actually have a cognitive structure that is, at least partially, narratively informed. Or, as Nussbaum herself summarizes the position, “we need a story of a certain kind, with characters of a certain type in it, if our own sense of life and of value is to be called forth in ways the way most appropriate for practical reflection.”28 Narrative in literature then becomes the training ground for ethical engagement and altruism.

How does fiction come to play this role in our lives? Nussbaum argues that it invites the reader to open herself to the complexity and particularity of others. She writes, “Allowing oneself to be in some sense passive and malleable, open to new and
sometimes mysterious influences, is part of the transaction [of reading novels] and part of its value...And it is in part because novels prepare the reader for love that they make the valuable contribution they do to society and to moral development."^{29} Her investigation into the moral value of literature and fictional novels in particular, leads her to suggest that reading has a threefold benefit. Novels reveal that:

1. Things of value are not necessarily commensurable.
2. Judgments ought to be context-sensitive.
3. Emotions provide insight into what it means to live as a human.^{30}

Essentially, this position boils down the idea that ethical self-understanding is not merely self-regarding. What she seems primarily concerned with revealing is the danger of solipsism. Novels provide a palliative for this danger by placing the reader in new and perhaps previously unfathomably positions.^{31}

This particular strength of literary fiction, Nussbaum argues, can be helpful in the attempt to forge what she refers to as “world citizenship”. The role of literary fiction in implanting and nurturing such a tendency is imparted on the reader both through treatise-like argument in *Cultivating Humanity* as well through the story of Anna. In Nussbaum’s primary work on the American university system, Anna is a bright student who is attending university in flyover country. Upon graduating, she ends up working for a firm in Beijing. She must work with both American and Chinese employees, both men and women. According to Nussbaum, it would be best if Anna was well-versed in recent Chinese history and how the Cultural Revolution shaped worker’s dispositions. She needs to understand how the Chinese value male labor over female labor (although if she is from America, this should not come to much a surprise to her). Preferably, she
should know about Confucian traditions and have a firm idea of how China relates to other nations internationally on issues of human rights. Her education, however, was not particularly focused on international diversity, nor did it prepare her for the challenges of cross-cultural engagement. According to Nussbaum, Anna’s Western Liberal Arts education did not foster her imaginative capacity.32

The mandatory curriculum should have developed Anna’s imaginative capacity through an exposure to literature that reflected cultural and historical diversity; but the diversity should not be premised on granting minorities the ability to affirm their group loyalties. Nussbaum presents identity politics as the gravest concern facing the teaching of literature.33 The University of Nevada at Reno as attempted to ameliorate this deficiency by requiring students to complete one core course in “World Civilizations” and an elective in an area of human diversity. Nussbaum correctly points out that such a curriculum reform, while better than nothing, leaves much to be desired.34 A woman who has taken a class on 20th century African-American literature will not necessarily be any better prepared to work in her company’s Moscow office. An alternative to this approach is the course entitled American Pluralism and Search for Equality developed by the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1992. This course is not intended to provide multicultural content so much as it serves as “an introduction to the basic concepts and methods for approaching diversity.”35 Multi-cultural curriculum and even a systematic approach to teaching diversity is not enough, according to Nussbaum, to create fully equipped global citizens if the basic impulse of compassion has not been primed by literary fiction. As she states, “[T]he great contribution literature has to make to the life of the citizen is its ability to wrest from our frequently obtuse and blunted
imaginations an acknowledgment of those who are other than ourselves, both in concrete circumstances and even in thought and emotion.”

Adaptive preferences and the unreliable narrator

Leslie Paul Thiele, in his wide-ranging book on *phronesis*, argues that, “Nussbaum has done more than any other contemporary philosopher to champion the development of ethical sensibilities by way of literature. She rightfully emphasizes the importance of emotions and the limitations of rationality in the cultivation of practical judgment.” However, her contribution to the destruction of this specious, and indeed pernicious, dichotomy is not without its pitfalls. Thiele points out that her focus on the affective development attendant to the exposure of literary fiction assumes that this process takes place at the level of conscious activity; whereas, he suggests that this process occurs in the tacit register through the cultivation of implicit knowledge and skills. Additionally, a perhaps more importantly, he argues that Nussbaum’s view of intersubjectivity is far too focused on human suffering and misery. While sympathy is an important component of empathy, it fails in two important ways: first, it requires wholly identifying with the subject which can make its agent prone to projection, and, second, it fails to engage the wide range of human emotions such as joy and pleasure. This second feature, as we will see in Nussbaum’s work, makes it difficult for the agent to understand the positive attachments individuals have to their ways of life.

Additionally, Richard Kearney argues that her approach to literature is naïve. He believes that despite the many benefits of narrative on moral education, narrative is never innocent. Kearney argues that Nussbaum (along with other thinkers, like Alasdair MacIntyre) fail to appreciate the conflict of interpretation and the necessity of a “hermeneutics of critical suspicion. Narrative remembrance, he argues, “is not always
on the side of the angles.”

Robert Eaglestone, drawing on Derrida, accuses Nussbaum of phonologocentrism. He argues that she neglects to acknowledge the “textuality of texts” and, thus, privileges the meaning-intention of the author/character over the grammatological features of the novel. While I think Derridian readers are in some way correct to criticize the reduction of literature to its moral, my primary interest here is in the inconsistency with which she approaches narrative—mainly the distinction that she makes between the ethical value of fictional narrative and her expressly stated distrust of personal narrative. It has been established that Nussbaum believes that fictional literature is key to developing empathy and moral judgment. She advances this idea within her writing on classical Greek and Roman thought, pedagogy, citizenship, and legal scholarship. When we turn toward her writings on international development and the Capabilities Approach, we see a very different role for narrative.

Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen developed the Capabilities Approach in response to what they saw as the development community’s overly economistic approach to determining well-being. In particular, they were critical of measures of development that were solely reliant upon GDP, GDP per capita, and GINI coefficients. While they attribute the basic idea that there are preconditions for human flourishing to such thinkers as Aristotle, Adam Smith, and Karl Marx; they were the first to articulate it under this heading and for the particular purpose of addressing international development. As noted above, this approach, especially as articulated by Nussbaum, contains a number of human “functionings” that must be acknowledged by society and then the polity must provide individuals with the opportunity to exercise those capabilities. To hedge on these provisions would be to become morally culpable for the
absence of human flourishing. An individual may choose not to develop her capabilities, but society is morally obligated to provide them with the possibilities.42

The Capabilities Approach admits some room for disagreement over the exact capabilities that it entails and is agnostic on the specifics of the policies that would be required to create such state, but both thinkers and their followers insist that the capabilities that are necessary for human flourishing are pre-discursive. More than just a response to the overreliance on economic rubrics, the Capabilities Approach is also a critique of those development activists who hew to an account of subjective well-being that looks at personal preferences and personal accounts of happiness. Like the Rawlsian and rights-based approaches, the Capabilities Approach insists on treating each individual as an end and criticizes Utilitarian accounts of the social goal on this account. Like these critiques of Utilitarianism, the Capabilities Approach does not consider preferences to be a necessary condition of making something a social goal: deprivations that do not register in awareness are a major concern of the approach.43

Jon Elster, writing in a volume edited by Sen, argues that Utilitarian theories of the good, like Rawl’s, assume preferences are given and static, when in fact they are dynamic and affected by historical processes.44 He argues that preferences do change and that they can change in autonomous (reasonable) or non-autonomous (unreasonable) ways and that preferences, for this reason, not be taken as given. The former is the result of an intentional reconsideration of wants independent of manipulation by others, while the latter is the result of habituation, resignation, or manipulation.45 Sen describes the dangers of adaptive preferences using the following example.
It has often been observed that if a typical Indian rural woman was asked about her personal “welfare”, she would find the question unintelligible and if she was able to reply, she might answer the question in terms of her reading of the welfare of her family. The idea of personal welfare may not be viable in such a context. However, personal interest and welfare are not just matters of perception; there are objective aspects of these concepts that command attention even when corresponding self-perception does not exist.  

He continues by stating that the assessment of the needs go “beyond the primitive feelings” of the individuals in question. The focus on adaptive preferences has been widely used in feminist critiques. So-called deformed desires are the product of oppression and reduce the imperative to alter the very conditions of oppression. Nussbaum goes beyond both Ester and Sen’s approach to capabilities by arguing that the subjective well-being (also called “wefarism”) approach actually has some advantages. First, she sees that “wefarism” comes from a good place. It shows a general respect for people and their choices. However, she believes that this position does not provide any solid ground for critique—i.e. it provides no protection against the possible slide into relativism. Second, she argues, pace Elster, that adjustments of preferences to realistic outcomes can be positive. She uses the overly simplistic example of becoming accepting of physical limitations: “We get used to having the bodies we do have, and even if, as children, we wanted to fly like birds, we simply drop that after a while, and are probably better for it.” Elster’s theory cannot tell us when adaptive preferences are good or bad because Elster, himself, does not develop a proper theory of what people have a right to have as options. A people’s liberty cannot be measured by whether or not they get to do all the things they want, but rather by “the extent to which they want what human beings have a right to want” and Nussbaum tells us exactly what that is. The things that a human has the right to want are articulated in
Nussbaum’s Aristotelian conception of human functioning. The issue that must be resolved, however, dates back to Nussbaum’s claims about the advantages of cosmopolitan theory. Nationalism, she argues, is premised on the reconstruction of the idealized relationship between the child and the parent. The patriotic citizen finds in the “image of a group or nation a surrogate parent who will do one’s thinking for one.” She adds, “Cosmopolitanism, by contrast requires a nation of adults, who do not need a childlike dependence upon omnipresent parental figures.” One is left wondering if the recognition of Nussbaum’s enumerated capabilities is what marks the transition of an individual from her childlike dependence on cultural values to an adult whose voice can be a trusted source of her own experience and desires.

In the opening chapter of Women and Human Development, Nussbaum writes of two women who she met in India; or as she begins: “To that narrative material I now turn”. Vasanti is a woman who was once a victim of domestic violence who left her abuser and, through an organization called SEWA (which stands for Self-Employed Women’s Association), got a loan and opened up her own business making saris. Jayamma, on the other hand, worked as a brick carrier at a kiln and because she was a woman was never able to advance into less-physically demanding labor. Thus, in her sixties, she was forced to retire because she was no longer able to meet the physical demands of her work. Widowed and out of work, she finds herself unable to draw her widows pension because she has able bodied sons who should be taking care of her—yet are not. These women, Nussbaum argues, had to come to see themselves as “rights bearers” and thus reject their previously maladjusted preferences. These women find their narratives anchoring Nussbaum’s attempt to define women’s needs and yet
hardly, if at all, factor into Nussbaum’s conception of human development. They appear largely as multicultural window dressing for a book that is otherwise about the trajectory of Western thought on the idea of how they ought to live and value their lives.

Susan Moller Okin points out the primary concern with Nussbaum’s engagement with the problem of human development:

Nussbaum says at the outset of her argument that feminist philosophers should not only focus on the urgent needs of women in the developing world, but that they should do so “in dialogue with them.” So it seems odd that, in three hundred page book, each of the Indian women who she interviewed—Vasanti and Jayamma—speaks for herself, being directly quoted, only once.57

When one considers Nussbaum’s position on adaptive preferences, it is not surprising to see this absence of voices of the poor in her work. A woman who has adapted her preferences to meet her conditions will hardly have anything interesting to say to Nussbaum. Or, as she puts it herself,

The list of Central Human Capabilities that forms the core of my political project contains many functions that many people over the ages have preferred not to grant to women, either not at all, or not on a basis of equality. To insist on their centrality is thus to go against preferences that have considerable depth and breadth in traditions of male power. Moreover, the list contains many items that women over the ages have not wanted for themselves, and some that even today many women do not pursue—so in putting the list at the center of a normative political project aimed at providing the philosophical underpinning for basic political principles we are going against not just what other people’s preferences about women, but, more controversially, against many preferences (or so it seems) of women about themselves and their lives.58

If an under-nourished woman says that she has plenty of food so that her children may eat more, she has malformed expectations of what the world, and specifically her government, owes her. Yet, Nussbaum only speaks of this problem in the hypothetical like when she asks the reader to consider, “Suppose Jayamma were to say on our poll that she feels satisfied with her educational attainment (which is nil), on the grounds that
it is just right for the type of labor she has been performing all her life, and that she doesn’t see what point there would be in learning superfluous skills. Well, that is a plausible reply. Perhaps it is, perhaps it is not. Either way, this is not Jayamma’s reply. Nussbaum never asks. What we do know, however, is that when presented with the opportunity of education and mobilization through SEWA, she took the opportunity. In fact, Vasanti was unhappy with her husband’s abuse, left him, and started her own business. She was unhappy being in debt to her brothers so she became a member of SEWA. Jayamma recognized the unfairness of being denied her widow’s pension while also being unaided by her sons. She did suffer under the burden of discrimination at her workplace but she is similar to millions of women the globe over in this regard.

Based on Nussbaum’s telling of Jayamma’s life, we have no reason to believe that she thought it was “fair” any more than we have reason to believe that she did not like the conditions but recognized that bad work was better than no work. If the former were the case, perhaps we could speak of malformed preferences. If the latter is the case, perhaps the problem is not malformed preferences per se, but rather a perfectly reasonable ordering of preferences. In fact, with regards to working conditions, Nussbaum tells us that “[Jayamma] feels she has a bad deal, but she doesn’t see any way of fixing it.” Furthermore, when speaking of the customary modesty expected of Indian women, she states that, “neither Vasanti nor Jayamma comes close to defending such traditions.” If it is that case that Nussbaum believes one’s preference to be malformed because one does not seek to change her condition through political agitation—that seems a matter of addressing an individual’s sense of civic efficacy
instead of her preferences. But, in the case of these two women, they did, in fact, seek
to address their perceived disadvantages.

The only example she provides of an Indian woman’s malformed preference is in
the epigram of her chapter on adaptive capabilities:

The doctor was rightly upset about [the unsanitary conditions in the
women’s quarters]; but he was wrong in one respect. He thought that is
was a source of constant pain for us. Quite the contrary…To those with
low self-regard, neglect does not seem unjust, and so it does not cause
them pain[...] Whatever the condition that you kept us in, it rarely occurred
to me that there was pain and deprivation in it.63

This epigram was not taken from interviews with Vasanti or Jayamma—it is a quote
from Rabinranath Tagore’s fictional short story “Letter from a Wife”. The epigram that
follows, however, states:

When we make videos, and women like us watch them, we get confidence
to try and make changes. When we see women like us who have done
something brave and new, then we get the confidence that we can learn
something new too. When poor women see other poor women as health
workers on the video, they say, “I can also learn about health and help
solve these problems in my neighborhood.” When other self-employed
women see me, a vegetable vendor, making these films, they also have
the confidence that they can do things which at first seem impossible.64

This quote does not come from a fictional character. It comes from Lila Datania, a
member of SEWA. Note that she does not say that that when women watch SEWA’s
videos they respond by saying “those are not problems, those are traditions.” These
women recognize the problems. The use of these two quotes perfectly illustrates the
problem of Nussbaum’s particular brand of narrative strategy. She ignores what women
actually say in favor of what fictionalized women written by men say about them even
when the real women are telling her they want the very capabilities that she is outlining.

This approach has been rightly criticized by other feminist thinkers who question
the overarching political and moral value of failing to ascribe to oppressed women their
own rationality or agency. Presenting women as dupes fails to account for the fact that adult women ought to be seen as people living under oppressive circumstances who are simply making the best of an unfair situation. Uma Narayan has shown that Sufi Pirzada women are in fact keenly aware of their own social constraints within a patriarchal society. This problem, of taking women at their word, will be returned to in the following chapter.

These differences are all very difficult to get at in this version of the Capabilities Approach because there is no systematic attempt to inquire into the preferences of the women in question much less to aggregate these preferences in any rigorous way. She does state in many different works that her Aristotelian conception of flourishing is a “vague” theory of the good, subject to alteration and global input. It is worth noting that Nussbaum’s initial conception of human flourishing in 1992, partially theorized as early as 1987, is almost exactly the same as the list that she currently advocates. The only addition that has been made, explored earlier in this chapter, is the addition of the ability to support oneself through one’s own labor. This is a crucial addition to her list of capacities. It is unfathomable that individuals would be able to flourish in the current global, economic climate without access to work; but, she does not address the source of this addition. She never discusses the voices of the individual women that brought about this fundamental revision of her Aristotelian capabilities. Furthermore, Nussbaum’s distrust of both culture and identity politics makes it very difficult for her to acknowledge that any of these preferences, once documented, could be practices, desires, or values that are regional or ethnic in origin. This may be precisely why she avoids the problem in the first place.
Nussbaum, in her early discussion of *philia* in the works of Aristotle must and does explain her choice not to translate the term as “friendship” as has traditionally been done but rather to deploy the term “love” in its stead. She argues that one of the intractable problems of this translation is that in English, love is linguistically divided into passive and active terms. “[W]e have ‘lover’ or ‘person who loves’, and we have ‘loved one,’” Nussbaum, adds moreover, “Greek *philos* makes no active/passive distinction. And mutuality will in fact be an important part of Aristotle’s conception of *philia* and the *philos*.”

This problem of mutuality marks a very significant problem in Nussbaum’s turn toward the Capabilities Approach. In her initial reading of the role of externals in the achievement of Aristotelian excellence, she rightly notes that each type of human excellence requires an object. Furthermore, Aristotle, in discussing justice, seems to claim that, “with only solitary concerns, without the excellence that consists in having an appropriate regard for the good of others, a human being will lack not just one important human end, he will lack all of the excellences…” The women portrayed in *WHD* are suspiciously absent from their own story. This is because *WHD* is not their story. It is the story of Nussbaum’s excellence. It is a story that reveals to the reader that Nussbaum’s excellence has an object. It appropriately regards the good of others, and as such is “complete excellence”.

**Novel Assimilation**

The problems in her theory of The Capabilities Approach is compounded by her automatic distrust of local identities—which as noted in previous chapters depends on her valorization of Stoic and Cynic philosophies. In the first instance, her distrust of local identities allows her to project the term “culture” onto to those who live differently than herself (and her cosmopolitan compatriots). Secondly, her mistrust of local identities
clouds her approach to politics and may actually render her subjects less politically efficacious. I turn to these issues in the following chapters. What I have tried to show in the previous pages is that there is an odd tension at work in Martha Nussbaum’s broader corpus. Her argument that fictional narrative prepares us emotionally and imaginatively for the act of empathy is at odds with the skepticism with which she approaches the personal narratives of actual people. Absent the full range of choices that the liberal cosmopolitan deems necessary for “real” preference formation to occur, the voices of the already marginalized are further dampened. In her discussion of the centrality of human dignity to her Capabilities Approach, she argues that one of the central features of her approach is human dignity—and then asks “what does a life worthy of human dignity require?”. The bare minimum is the ten capabilities she has articulated consistently over the last twenty-five years. But, what is the value of basic human dignity—the dignity that is already always inherent in a human being, if a person’s own voice can be so readily dismissed?

I believe Thiele’s discussion of the complex emotional continuum on which empathy takes place may provide insight into Nussbaum’s skepticism concerning the value of marginalized voices. He argues that Nussbaum focuses too narrowly on suffering, often ignoring the wide range of human emotions that comprise the full act of empathy. I think that it is this focus on suffering that limits Nussbaum’s ability to see people’s own positive evaluations of their life. As noted earlier in this chapter, Nussbaum’s understanding of eleos is largely based on her reading of Aristotle. Turning to his discussion of eleos in Rhetoric we can see that it “may be defined as a feeling of pain caused by the sight of some evil, destructive or painful, which befalls one
who does not deserve it, and which we might expect to befall ourselves or some friend of ours, and moreover befall us soon.”71 There is not only a “what” of eleos, but also a “who” of eleos. Three different categories of people can be the subjects of our pity: 1) those with whom we are acquainted, 2) those who are like us, and 3) those who experience things that we fear. It is unavoidably proximate and self-oriented. Aristotle states:

The people we pity are: those whom we know, if only they are not very closely related to us—in that case we feel about them as if we were in danger ourselves...Again, we feel pity when the danger is near ourselves. Also we pity those who are like us in age, character, disposition, social standing, or birth; for in all these cases it appears more likely that the same misfortune may befall us also. Here we have to remember the general principle that what we fear for ourselves excites pity when it happens to others).72

I believe these features of pity provide insight into Nussbaum’s difficulties with the voices of others in a cosmopolitan setting.

First, as noted previously, Nussbaum draws on Adam Smith’s notion of human relationships as presented in a series of concentric circles. Our dearest kin occupying the circle closest to us, then our friends, our neighborhood, our communities, our nations, and the world as a whole each getting progressively more distant from ourselves and encompassing more and more individuals. The primary aim of her cosmopolitan agenda is to draw the concentric circles of human relations more closely to ourselves so that the world exists much more closely to us in our affective sphere.73 But, how can one do that? How can one have same degree of compassionate concern for someone whose life is completely foreign and who lives halfway around the world? Clearly, Nussbaum does not mean for us to adopt the Stoic method of indifference; for why then would we care about their suffering? Why would we act to save the lives of
others if we adopt indifference to the conditions of our very own? It seems that Nussbaum wants to substitute acting as if we “know” someone for the real condition of knowing them. We cannot know if the distant other is similar to us, but if we can formulate a list of human requirements, if we can state for a certainty what they must need and desire, then we do not need to actually know them. However, if we take seriously what they want for themselves and they want things that are foreign to us, then we are left with the possibility of a pity deficit. In this formulation, the alternatives appear to be erasure or indifference.

Secondly, if we look more closely at the third condition of pity, we can see clearly that pity is the result of projecting our own fears onto the lives of others. The following quote is an obvious manifestation of that desire:

[Post-development theorists] do not appear to be able to delve very deeply into the lives in question, imagining for themselves what it really is like to be told that you really cannot work when you have your period or that you must pray to a terrifying goddess to avert a life-threatening disease. There is both distance and a certain condescension in this refusal of imagination and acknowledgment. But anything more would require the admission that it is relevant to ask themselves how they would feel in that situation. And there theory forbids them to do so.74

When Serene Khader illuminates several "occupational hazards" of those who deal in the theory of Adaptive Preferences, she notes that Nussbaum confuses difference for deprivation.75 This is one way of putting it but it is a shallow analysis of what is really at work. It is not only that she mistakes difference for deprivation, it is that she believes her idea of deprivation is thoroughly objective rather than recognizing that she is actually assigning her pity in accordance with Aristotelian principles. She would want to see a Western doctor for her medical problems. She would prefer to be treated as though her menses are an extraneous feature of her personhood. Post-development theorists do
not care how they would feel if they underwent these practices, they care about how their subjects experience these phenomena. This is the real act of imagination where Nussbaum’s is merely an act of projection.

This is the very danger that Thiele alludes to when he argues in favor of substituting empathy for sympathy (or pity) in these ethical conundrums. Sympathy is important but empathy goes beyond just identifying with or becoming absorbed in another person’s suffering. It involves understanding the complex relationships between a myriad of emotions: fear, anger, helplessness, and joy, delight, and excitement. As he states,

A good judge is capable of intersubjectivity, both feeling with others and thinking from their points of view. But she does not succumb to identification with them. Identification is very prone to projection—imagining that others incarnate one’s own desires and demons. Herein the other is burdened with the darkness of one’s own shadows… Projection represents an actual disabling of empathy: one ceases to think and feel from another’s perspective, superimposing instead one’s own disposition.

Instead of fostering intercultural dialogue, she favors the engagement of literary fiction without addressing how the reliance on fictional descriptions of ourselves and others reinforces a rather narrow conception of what it means to be human. Quoting Aristotle, Nussbaum defends literature as showing us “not something that has happened, but the kind of thing that might happen.” But, going back to the criticism proffered by Kearney and Williams, literature comes from somewhere. It does not spring, magically, from the well of collective imagination. “Every story,” they write, “is told from a certain point of view, presupposes certain interests and anticipates certain ends. No narrative is presuppositionless…In this respect, it seems that certain advocates of narrative ethics—e.g. MacIntyre and Nussbaum—tend to underestimate
The abusive potential of narrative.” The abuse, to me, is that to which we are not exposed. Published fiction is a very rarefied world. We hear from a small number of voices and, even if those voices are global, we are only hearing voices of an elite, literary class. And, even if we are reading about the experiences of the marginalized, those voices are filtered through the imaginative, political, and ideological lenses of the author—authors who wish sometimes to change the very names of those voices for their convenience.

**Conclusion**

The assumption that there is a fixed set of policy objectives that governments throughout the world ought to pursue and that this agenda can be determined by academics divorced from the will of the people precisely replicates the anti-democratic tendencies found in modernization theory. Furthermore, connecting these capabilities to one’s humanness produces a profoundly troubling hierarchy in which the person who disagrees with this agenda is not merely wrong but also inhumane. Such an approach seems, while generally good intentioned, to reproduce many mistakes of both colonization and modernization theory. As noted by Fred Dallmayr, thinkers as far back as Aristotle himself recognized the fundamental disconnect between rules and *praxis*. Even if we could all agree on general conditions for human flourishing, the application of those conditions in real political environments would encounter number of difficult obstacles from details of implementation, regulation, financing, and prioritizing. These issues in turn raise further questions—questions for which Nussbaum’s approach do not and cannot account: “Who has the right of interpretation? And in the case of conflict: who is entitled to rule between different interpretations? This right of competence cannot simply be left to ‘universal’ theorists or intellectuals—in the absence of explicitly
political delegation or empowerment.” Any approach to the ethical praxis must also engage in a serious debate about the nature of discourse and role of public will-formation. A theory that takes as its foundations the belief that people cannot be expected to form opinions about their own life-styles until certain political/biological/educational benchmarks have been passed leaves very little room to have a meaningful discussion about how such benchmarks may be raised outside of the context of re-colonization. In the following chapter, I situation community in the current discourse on development and discuss the value of community and embeddedness in the construction of political action.

Notes

1 Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, 1.

2 Fragility of Goodness, 1.

3 Fragility of Goodness, 5.

Additionally, it is worth noting that A.A. Long in his review of Nussbaum’s Fragility of Goodness refutes this reading of Pindar. Where Nussbaum argues that Pindar’s position is that human goodness is desirable precisely because it is fragile, Long argues that it is precisely because it is so fragile it is deserving of praise. A.A. Long, Review of Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy, by Martha Nussbaum, Classical Philology 83, No. 4: 361-369.

4 Fragility of Goodness, 6fn.

While this is a question that she leaves aside here, later in her career, she returns to it. For more on the role of disability and human flourishing see Martha C. Nussbaum, 2006 Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership, Cambridge: Harvard University Press and Martha C. Nussbaum, 2009, “The Capabilities of People with Cognitive Disabilities,” Metaphilosophy 40(3-4): 331-351.

5 Nussbaum, Fragility of Goodness, 5-8.


7 “Human Functioning,” 205.

8 “Human Functioning,” 207-209.
Nussbaum's account can be differentiated from Rawl's "thin theory of the good" because she is less concerned with those goods that give the individual the means to achieve the good than she is with the ends of the good life itself.


Nussbaum, "Human Functioning," 221-222.


These themes are addressed in some of her earlier work. In *Fragility of Goodness*, she asserts that Aristotle would have come to more generous conclusions concerning women if he had applied his own method more judiciously (371) and Nussbaum is actually careful to point this out in *Therapy of Desire*, as she has to explain to the reader why her philosophical protagonist, Nikidion, must disguise herself as a male in order to attend Aristotle’s Academy (1994, 54-55). The issue of labor and its role in eroding the individual’s ability to attain excellence and the undesirability of laborers’ participation in the excellent state are absent her discussion of transforming Aristotle into a Social Democrat.


*Nicomachean Ethics*, 537.


For a full account of Nussbaum’s writing on women and Capabilities Approach see Chapter One, fn.10.


27 Nussbaum, Creating Capabilities, 27.


29 Nussbaum, Love’s Knowledge, 238.

30 Love’s Knowledge, 390.

31 Nussbaum is far from alone in the assertion that democratic values can be fostered through contact with fictional literature. In fact, Richard Rorty dismisses Nussbaum’s “internal essentialism” by arguing instead that the impulse to shape narrative and the capacity to be shaped by narrative is the very heart of ethics. Good reasons are persuasive stories and persuasive stories constitute good reasons. For more on this topic see “Universality and Truth” in Rorty and his Critics, ed. Robert B. Brandom (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1-30.

32 Nussbaum, Cultivating Humanity, 50-52.

33 Nussbaum argues that respect for diversity cannot arise from groups pressing for recognition of their own values, histories, or struggles unless they have taken pains to tie their own struggle into the broader goals of human respect and social justice. Essentially, the possibility of respecting and admiring diversity gets lost when demands for inclusion rest on local group identities (Cultivating Humanity, 67). She does not, however, specify the degree to which a culture must sublimate their own history under the meta-narrative of global human progress or whom they ought to ask to validate their claim for dignity.

34 Cultivating Humanity, 70.

35 Cultivating Humanity, 72.

36 Cultivating Humanity, 112.


38 The Heart of Judgment, 188-189.


41 The following texts included: Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, “Internal Criticism and Indian Rationalist Traditions” WIDER Working Papers (Helsinki: World Institute for Development

42 Nussbaum, “Human Functioning,”

43 Nussbaum, Creating Capabilities, 51.


45 “Sour Grapes,” 238.


47 “Gender and Cooperative Conflicts,” 126.


49 Nussbaum, Women and Human Development, 117.

50 Women and Human Development, 137.

51 Women and Human Development, 138.

52 Nussbaum, “Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism”, 11.

53 Nussbaum, Women and Human Development, 15.

54 Nussbaum notes in a footnote that Vasanti does not actually refer to herself using that name. Her real name—the one used by her friends, family, and herself—is Vasantibehn (fn. 16). The westernization of this woman’s name for the sake of the convenience of the author, publisher, or western reader is emblematic of the larger problem within the development school. Self-representation is sacrificed to the assimilable.

55 SEWA is an Indian trade union for women developed in 1972 that was inspired by Mahatma Gandhi and the women’s wing created by Anasuya Sarabhai in 1952.


Nussbaum, Women and *Human Development*, 62.

*Women and Human Development*, 16.

*Women and Human Development*, 19.

*Women and Human Development*, 42.

*Women and Human Development*, 111.

*Women and Human Development*, 111. Both of these epigrams are also used in Nussbaum, “Symposium on Amartya Sen,” 67.


Additionally, Narayan argues that a position of relative autonomy ought to be adopted. This means that the default position ought to be autonomy. “A person’s choice,” she argues, “should be considered autonomous as long as the person was a ‘normal adult’ with no serious cognitive or emotional impairments and was not subject to literal outright coercion by others” (429).


One must, of course, wonder, in the absence of explanation, if Nussbaum’s elevation of work to the list of capabilities is merely the result of her own adaptive preference toward labor in light of the hegemonic capitalist ideology in which she herself has been culturally indoctrinated.

Nussbaum, *Fragility of Goodness*, 354

*Fragility of Goodness*, 351.

Writing about the role of compassion in her notion of human functioning, Nussbaum substitutes “compassion” for the Greek *eleos* and “pity” (1992, 46 fn 68).


*Rhetoric*, 1386a17-28. Italics are mine.


*The Heart of Judgment*, 189.

Martha Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 86.


“Cosmopolitanism,” 434.

Re-colonization may seem like a political impossibility at this point but there are currently individuals seeking to create city-states that are subject to the governing will of Western individuals and principles. For more on this issue see Paul Romer’s 2009 TED Talk on building Charter cities in Honduras reported by Adam Davidson, “Who Wants to Buy Honduras?” *New York Times*, May 8, 2012.
CHAPTER 5
COMMUNITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

The gravest and most painful testimony of the modern world, the one that possibly involves all other testimonies to which this epoch must answer (by virtue of some unknown decree or necessity, for we bear witness also to the exhaustion of thinking through History), is the testimony of the dissolution, the dislocation, or the conflagration of community.¹

In the previous chapters, I explore the Hellenic and Roman influences on Nussbaum’s cosmopolitanism and her approach to international development. Here I attempt to situate Nussbaum vis-à-vis the debate between Communitarian and Individualist approaches to political theory. Furthermore, I lay the groundwork for considering the Capabilities Approach in light of post-development theory. This approach, supposedly antithetical to cosmopolitanism, and much maligned by Nussbaum, argues that the liberal tradition and those who argue for its expansion fail to understand the importance of location and tradition in the creation of meaning and as a source of self. Communitarianism has been, somewhat unfairly, linked with the practices of parochialism; however, it is also necessary to view it as a signal of Third World resistance to hegemonic Western values—values that have often failed to deliver on their promises. Additionally, this project involves placing Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach in the context of the history of development aid in postcolonial states.

As Peter Euben notes in his analysis of New Stoicism, we cannot reasonably reject the fact that we share a planet with others and that this planet is afflicted with a number of literal and metaphoric plagues that transcend the political boundaries of the nation-state.² Our interventions into these cosmopolitan problems cannot be successful if bound by the limits of our traditional political organizations; nevertheless, Euben is correct to note that, “there is something parochial about this cosmopolitanism.”³ What
we are left with here, then, is how to proceed according to one cosmopolitan value—it’s respect for the dignity of the individual—without real recourse to its Hellenic foundations. How do we, those who have largely remained aliens to one another, forge an ethical bond that can save us from the global catastrophes that face us?

Nussbaum is very careful to locate the Capabilities Approach as an alternative to previously reigning models of development and to provide a theoretical account of how she came to adopt her position. The latter is the subject of the previous two chapters. Nussbaum sums up the former in the chapter of Creating Capabilities entitled “Necessary Counter-Theories”. In this chapter, she discusses the GDP-focused approach, the Utilitarian approach, resource-based approaches, and human rights approaches. Here she systematically weighs the pros and cons of each approach in terms of the substantive improvement in the quality of life they provide and their ability to measure what it is they perceive to be providing. Unfortunately, the school of thought that she disparages the most is also the one that she addresses the least and that is the challenge to these development proposals offered by post-development theorists. Taking their cues from hermeneutic, communitarian, anti-colonial, and post-modern theorists, post-development theorists question the value of the project of development as led by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the United Nations—the very institutions in which Nussbaum places her hopes.

**Home and Hearth**

The source of the privilege of the local is not difficult to explain. American children experience it everyday when sent to school, or the community pool, or dropped off at the local mall—each child is admonished to avoid “stranger danger.” They are taught not to talk to or otherwise engage with “strangers”—those they do not personally
know. The extent of the fear of strangers can be attested to by the dwindling number of children riding their bikes on city streets or even attending the movies without the supervision of adults. The fear of the unknown individual and his possible impact on the safety of our community is a pervasive cultural attribute.

One of the foundations of democratic politics in Ancient Athens was familiarity. Both political actors and philosophers of the time recognized that a political community required trust to sustain itself. Not only was it difficult for them to imagine a political community of strangers, it was also difficult to imagine a political community outside of the bonds of friendship. As noted by Peter Euben, Theban law barred individuals from political appointment for a decade if they had made a profit from transactions with fellow citizens. Such laws existed to limit activities that would injure the norms of reciprocity requisite to the functioning of a political community. The Republican tradition, from Aristotle to Rousseau and beyond, has asked that we limit the population and geographic size of the political unit in order to foster reciprocity and trust in the public sphere. The desire to recapture the intimacy of Hellenic democracy—to rebuild politics on a foundation of friendship and trust—continues to drive many contemporary visions of politics, from the original development of the New England style town meeting to the present-day attempt to recapture this moment of the American past as seen in the turn toward “deliberative democracy.” As noted by Baldry and Chroust, Greek democracy and the radical inclusiveness of its discursive sphere were premised on many rigid social dichotomies. These dichotomies (between men and women, freemen and slaves, Greek and barbarian, reasonable and unreasonable) firmly upheld the power and influence of the paterfamilias, strengthening the sense of shared responsibility
conferred by citizenship and stabilizing the realm of politics by confining the boundaries of the political to one category of person.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Cynicism and its Stoic progeny both sought to tease out the dichotomy of the reasonable/unreasonable from its traditional context. In other words, these schools of thought sought to show that men, women, freemen, slaves, Greek or barbarian could all conceivably participate in the unfolding the cosmos through the deployment of reason. The polis, the site of politics, was implicated in the peoples’ preoccupation with traditional hierarchy. Even had the polis accommodated the political aspirations of women and slaves, it still was the source of patriotism, jingoism, and xenophobia. Its cultural, political, and geographical divisions are an affront to the natural unity of the cosmos.

The Cynics, specifically, were harshly critical of custom and traditional ways of thinking. Their criticisms did not simply take the form of political debate nor were they limited to the political sphere. They were widely known to behave beyond the pale of accepted Greek lifestyles. While the word Cynic is thought to denote the fact that the school’s founder was an instructor at the Cynosarges gymnasium in Athens, critics of the school used the literary bite of the word kynon (meaning dog-like) to insult what they saw as the Cynics shameless rejection of traditional mores. Crates and his wife Hipparchia were famous for their marriage premised on equality (which he referred to as cynogamy). They both wore the durable and plain wardrobe adopted by the Cynics, they dined together in public houses, and, according to some sources, copulated in public. Both rejected the traditional roles foisted on them by Greek custom in favor of living a natural and philosophically engaged existence—he rejected the life of public
service through politics while she refused to live within the domestic confines of the
_oikos_. The escapades of Diogenes of Sinope also scandalized his community. In his
discussion of Cynic morality, John Mole argues that the aggressive public displays of
the Cynics were attempt both to draw attention to their arguments and to illustrate the
ease of the actions that they prescribed. Diogenes’ famous act of masturbating in the
market was intended to reveal how easily sexual tension, the source of so much
psychological and social conflict, could be eliminated. Ultimately, the Cynics
demanded a fundamental reevaluation of how people lived from day to day and argued
that nature provide the basic guidelines for this new life.

The Stoics, much influenced by the philosophy of nature developed by the
Cynics, adopted a more lax attitude toward the outright rejection of custom. As
previously noted, the Stoics declared that while virtue was the only path to happiness,
the adoption of traditional lifestyles could be engagements of indifference to virtue. One
could conceivably serve one’s country, marry, procreate, or otherwise engage in
socially-encouraged ways of life without endangering one’s attempt to live in harmony
with the _cosmos_. The important feature of Stoicism was that the sage, while living a life
in harmony with his or her duties, must also demonstrate the _apatheia_ required by
recognizing the ultimate unfolding of the _cosmos_ and his or her limited power to direct it.
This much more moderate stance was, nevertheless, seen as an affront to the
customary conception of virtue which maintained that all virtue was public virtue and
that service to one’s country before the eyes of one’s fellow countrymen was the _sine
quo non_ of moral worth. This line of moral reasoning came under fire by both the Cynics
and Stoics because it failed to address the universal moral value of each individual and
inadequately comprehended the universality of virtue whose source should be seen as the *cosmos* itself rather than human negotiation. Intellectually and physically transcending the arbitrary boundaries of the *polis* is what Crates (365-285 B.C.E) sought to do when he declared, “I have no one city…but the whole world to live in” and chose a life of self-imposed exile from the *polis*. For thinkers like Martha Nussbaum, Kwame Anthony Appiah, Jason Hill, Lawrence C. Becker, Jeremy Waldron and many others, Stoicism and its rejection of communal values in favor of its Universal conception virtue and assertion of the human capacity to attain virtue through philosophical reason are the basic building blocks of modern human rights. For others, however, the march of progress represented by this (albeit simplified) notion of individual worth has, in making a Home of the World, left behind some of the warmth and affection which may provide both the meaning and the sense of personal integrity that allows one to truly engage the world rather than simply reside in it. Nussbaum frequently refers to this as local color. “Cosmopolitanism…” she states, “offers only reason and the love of humanity, which may seem at times less colorful than other sources of belonging.”

**Communitarianism**

Markate Daly captures the basic premise of Communitarianism when he suggests that these philosophers take “community rather than the individual as their basic theoretical concept.” That being said, the label Communitarianism lumps together a wide range of theoretical approaches, historical traditions, ethical imperatives, and political ideologies. In their impressive collection of essays that attempts to define the various points of contention between Communitarians and Individualists, Avineri and De-Shalit include in their list of the former: Michael Sandel,
Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Walzer, and David Miller; to which Patrick Neal and David Paris add Robert Bellah and Benjamin Barber. The criticisms of the individualist perspective, as noted by Avineri and de-Shalit, can be divided into two (not wholly discrete) categories:

One is methodological, the communitarians arguing that the premisses of individualism such as the rational individual who chooses freely are wrong or false, and that the only way to understand human behaviour is to refer to individuals in their social, cultural, and historical contexts...The second sphere is the normative one, communitarians asserting that the premisses of individualism give rise to morally unsatisfactory consequences.

Communitarian thinkers deny the existence of an Archimedean individual who is capable of rising above culture in order to either condemn the lives of others or to live in harmony with the eternal nature of the cosmos. The life one wishes to lead may be influenced by many factors (cultural and otherwise) but they are inextricably linked to a subjective notion of the good. Furthermore, they are united in their belief that individualist conceptions of the good life are inadequate. Human dignity, they argue, cannot be best achieved, nor even truly understood, when that human is disembodied, decontextualized, and/or isolated from others.

The political agenda of the Communitarian strain of thought has come to be called 'multiculturalism'. As noted by Michel Wieviorka, the early uses of the term 'multicultural' appear political and social science literature in the 1960’s and 1970’s. The initial use of this term was merely descriptive of states that contained distinct cultures and often deployed in the consideration of how to understand the politics of the newly de-colonized political South. By 1991, however, the word had begun to be included in social science dictionaries as more than just a descriptor. The word became the signifier for a policy agenda that both acknowledged cultural differences and
promoted cultural variety—especially the defense of minority cultures from hegemonic cultures. Such policies included the defense of minority languages and the legal recognition of traditional clothing as expressions of religious freedom. In addition to sparking a defense of cultural diversity in the West, Communitarianism also became a philosophical rallying point for non-Western countries attempting to avoid the pitfalls of re-colonization under the guise of globalization and the West’s exportation of neoliberal policy through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

The Charges against Communitarians: Relativism, Passivity, and Parochialism

Contemporary philosophers who attest to the ontological importance of community, and especially those who argue in favor of the normative worth of communal ties, find themselves battling charges of both passivity and relativism by Martha Nussbaum. While these concepts are related, one’s relativism supposedly providing the grounds for one’s inaction, they will be addressed here as separate issues because of the inadequacy of suggesting the truth of the alternative—that the belief in a having access to foundational truths provides both necessary and sufficient grounds for action. Additionally, the liberal cosmopolitan critique of constitutive identity and their high valuation of free choice also produce the general opinion that communitarian projects are necessarily backward. This final accusation tends to displace the idea of community onto the Orient—an intellectual endeavor that sets critiques of atomism developed within the geographical West outside of the concept of the canonical West further troubling the already confused postcolonial landscape. To simplify, the charge leveled at the Communitarian is that because they refuse to acknowledge a universal truth they are incapable of providing good reasons to act and thus are likely to sit by passively in the face of all types of human atrocities.
Martha Nussbaum argues that when contemporary philosophers turn their backs on the Stoics and their philosophical legacy, they are re-embracing the politics of place that actively reifies the oppressive traditions of Greek culture. The notion that true meaning, value, and identity are socially constructed rather than given by the cosmos and ascertained through reason is, for Nussbaum and those who claim the mantel of the Kantian Enlightenment, in effect the same as actively promoting just the sorts of prejudice valued by a small-minded parochialism. Both Communitarians like MacIntyre and “post-Nietzscheans” like Heidegger (whose philosophical legacy has become crucial to the communitarian position) are engaged in the shameless dismantling of “progress”. In its place, according to Nussbaum, they propose inaction—the mindless waiting for the revelation of being, all the while allowing the continuation of irrational horrors.

Nussbaum’s dismissal of those whom she considers bearers of this nihilistic multiculturalism is best captured by her engagement with the work of husband and wife academicians, Stephen A. Marglin and Frédérique Apffel-Marglin whose philosophical approach she labels “extreme relativism.” As noted earlier, in 1986, Nussbaum began working with the World Institute of the Development of Economic Research (WIDER) of the United Nations University (UNU). Her first exposure to the program was a summer conference on “Value and Technology” during which she presented a paper co-authored with noted development scholar, Amartya Sen. The conference was co-directed by Stephen Marglin, a leftist economist, and his wife Frédérique Apffel-Marglin, an anthropologist specializing in gender constructions in India. She and Sen came to view the husband and wife as “intellectual adversaries”. According to
Nussbaum, this couple represented all that is unseemly about the intellectual distance adopted by Western academics. Nussbaum states,

From what struck Sen and me as a vantage point of secure distance from the real sufferings of people, they romanticized such traditional practices as menstruation taboos, child temple prostitution, traditional gendered divisions of labor, and even the absence of smallpox vaccine—which, in an extraordinary moment, Frédérique Marglin blamed it for having eradicated the cult of Sittala Devi, the goddess to whom one prays in order to avert the disease.24

"Reactionary traditionalism" is what Nussbaum calls such an approach. Such an approach is characterized by postmodern jargon and knee-jerk defense of tradition on the grounds that there is no Archimedean point from which to judge the behavior of other cultures. Nussbaum’s response to this position was to demand that the conversation be injected with a little bit of philosophy. For there is no better remedy to the assertion “it’s always been that way and so it shall remain” than the Socratic rejoinder “Why?” Philosophy, for Nussbaum, represents the interrogation of practice, thought, being, and its own methods and inquiries in a systematic manner that is sorely lacking in other disciplines.25 Tradition is the other of philosophy. The manner in which Nussbaum would have us advance philosophy within the international development community will be the topic of the following chapter. For the moment, however, I think we should explore the “extreme relativism” of Apffel-Marglin and Marglin—both what it stands for and what it consists of.

Community in International Context

The rise of Communitarian philosophy can be traced back to the critical response received by John Rawl’s landmark 1971 book, A Theory of Justice. The Communitarian critique of the text challenged Rawl's assumption that the primary task of government is to secure and distribute the goods required by individuals to lead freely chosen lives.
The label “Communitarian” was applied to these critics because they argued that such an approach devalued the role of community in constituting identity. In the post-War period between 1945 and 1970, the idea of the Western subject as a normative concept was at its height. Furthermore, there was widespread consensus that the natural habitat of this species was a consumer-driven, capitalist, liberal democracy. The political events of the late sixties and the global recession of the early seventies caused several cracks in these foundational assumptions. The Communitarian critique leveled against Rawls represented a groundswell of doubt about both the ontological possibility of the atomized individual as well as the desirability of the space in which such an individual was thought to thrive. This ontological battle extended far beyond the pages of mere journals, conference halls, and publishing houses. The frontlines of this battle cut across borders and cultures and were peopled by individuals with very real socio-economic skin in the game.

The immediate post-War period was characterized not only by the Western pursuit of these goals but also by their export by the newly created United Nations Development Program, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Having successfully reconstructed Europe, the West turned its eye for development to the former colonies of Asia, Africa, and Central and South America. There was virtually no dispute over the contents or desirability of this development. It was understood to include rising standards of living, increased technological growth, improved health, education, and ultimately the rise of personal autonomy. At its height, modernization theory represented the domination of the quantifiable measurements of economic accumulation over the more qualitative assessment of quality of life and was the most
prevalent Western approach to the newly decolonized global South. It was an interdisciplinary movement that included theorists like the sociologists Talcott Parsons and Edward Shils, political scientists Gabriel Almond and Martin Seymour Lipset, as well as economist Walt Whitman Rostow.

The development theory of the 20th century was praxis oriented. Its goal was to set the foundation for the immediate improvement of the newly liberated colonies. Colin Ley suggests that the urgency of this project led to “an even higher degree of conscious commitment to intervention than is usual in most other branches of social science.”

While there were many brands of modernization theory (which ran the gamut from left to right in ideological origin), the work of W. W. Rostow is widely regarded as the field’s leading theorist not least because he was also one of its most vociferous advocates in American policy during the Kennedy administration. As an academic he held positions at Oxford University, Cambridge University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His major work, *The States of Economic Growth: A non-Communist Manifesto*, delineates the liberal interpretation of development and provided the foundation for the American policy on foreign development for the following three decades. His theory draws heavily on the linear trajectory of development borrowed from the Scottish Enlightenment—in which the civilized world emerges from the mists of backwardness and tradition through the mechanism of trade. Where the Scottish model proposed four stages of development, Rostow’s vision of development was posited as having five stages of growth:

1. “Traditional Society”: Individuals are unaware of their own ability to manipulate their environment and thus have limited productive capabilities.
2. “Preconditions for take-off”: Gradual awareness of human possibility among an elite few.

3. “Take-off”: The possibility of human control and ability to create becomes widespread and produces rapid economic growth.

4. “Maturity”: Nearly limitless production coupled with optimal use of technology and high levels of entrepreneurship.

5. “High Mass Consumption”: Economies are driven by the provision of services and durable goods.\(^{30}\)

According to Rostow, traditional societies were not completely static. He acknowledged that agricultural acreage could expand and that \textit{ad hoc} inventions could increase output. Furthermore, he noted that trade between traditional societies could flourish and fluctuate. The defining feature of traditional societies was the socio-political stasis brought about by technological limitations that forced them to pursue subsistence economies. The amount of effort required to keep populations fed produced hierarchical social structures and what he referred to as “long-run fatalism”—that is the “assumption that the range of possibilities open to one’s grandchildren would be just about what it had been for one’s grandparents.”\(^{31}\) The expansion of access to technology would create the possibility of economic equality (both entrepreneurial and consumer) which would further the cause of democratic equality. Overall, the final stage of development would be the widespread expansion of choice in the public as well as private sphere.\(^{32}\) Political democracy and civilized comportment would ultimately arise in the wake of technological and economic development.

Until the moment when appropriate technological advancements naturally awakened the democratic impulse, modernization theorists consider inclinations toward self-government either superfluous to or inhibitive of economic development. Prior to the post-World War II push for development, democracy was largely considered a threat to
the protection of private property and thus to the development of commerce. Scottish philosopher James Mackintosh argued that the extension of suffrage to the working classes would result in a “permanent animosity between opinion and property.” Thomas Macaulay argued before the Chartists that ultimately universal suffrage would be “the end of property and thus of all civilization.” Edmund Burke, widely regarded as the father of modern Conservatism, argued that democratic government would not only limit economic development but would undermine civilization and the natural order. Conservatives lamented the threat that democracy posed to property in the early 19th century while socialists and communists eagerly awaited the destruction of the capitalist order that they believed would follow shortly on the heels of universal suffrage. Marx argued that the success of the Chartists in the United Kingdom would be tantamount to the political supremacy of the working class and would constitute the beginning of the end of private property in the country. While the fears of the demise of private property at the hands of the working class would be found to be wildly exaggerated, the development theorists of the 20th century continued to be skeptical about the possibility of democracy improving the conditions for economic growth.

Modernization theory emerged in the post-war era primarily as a response to decolonization. Western nations were keen on bringing the newly liberated countries of Africa, Asia, and Latin America back into their sphere of influence in order to stave off the spread of Communism and thus thwart the rising power of Soviet Russia and Maoist China. Modernization theory provided a convenient theoretical grounding for the increasingly problematic position in which the West found itself. Western powers very much wanted to export democracy, but often found themselves stymied by the election
of democratic leaders who did not unabashedly embrace the tenets of free-market economics and in some cases were inclined toward socialist economic policies. The meta-historical narrative provided by modernization theory made available a logic that asserted that attempts to build democracy on top of “traditional” economies was the equivalent of building a house upon sand. Western governments (especially the United States of America) used this reasoning to defend its interventions in the politics of developing countries.\(^{37}\)

According to modernization theorists, modern society was cosmopolitan, mobile, controlling of the environment, secular, welcoming of change, and characterized by a complex division of labor. Traditional society, by contrast, was inward looking, inert, passive toward nature, superstitious, fearful of change, and economically simple. All of the countries of Latin America, Asia, and Africa were unified within the single category of ‘traditional’...when they did draw nonlinear distinctions between underdeveloped countries, it was in spite of their theory rather than because of it.\(^{38}\)

Given the geopolitical situation between the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union, it was widely accepted by modernization theorists that democracy could be postponed—indeed such complex institutional arrangements and participatory engagement would be wasted on the “backwards” social characteristics of those who populated the developing world.\(^{39}\)

While colonialists had argued that the “barbarians” needed to be civilized by a firm hand before being allowed self-rule, modernization theorists now asserted that, “Weber may have been right when he suggested that modern democracy in its clearest form can occur only under capitalist industrialization.”\(^{40}\)

Adam Przeworski and Fernando Limongi point out that the fear that motivated modernization theorists was not the idea that property rights would be threatened by socialist masses—they had already witnessed the strength of this particular value in the face of universal suffrage. Development would, according to them, be stymied by the
masses’ need for immediate consumption, which then would slow savings and investment.\textsuperscript{41} Essentially, democratic pressure is often particularistic and functions to undermine “state autonomy” and weaken developmental policy.\textsuperscript{42} In this way, modernization theorists, much like Marxists, acknowledge that capitalist accumulation benefits specific class interests rather than specific state interests. Ill-timed democracy can actually weaken states and undermine international order. For such reasons, the primary movers of American foreign policy in the mid-20th century argued against democratization abroad whenever it was thought to impede state strength or international political relationships.

Furthermore, it should be noted that Marxist scholars were ambivalent about self-governance too, even when its policy results were socialist. Goran Hyden, reflecting on the failures of the policy of \textit{Ujamaa} in Tanzania under noted socialist Prime Minister Julius Nyerere, argued that developing nations could not hope to bypass the necessary social developments that accumulated under the capitalist stage of growth—including, but not limited to, urbanization, industrialization, and, most importantly to Hyden, the weakening of the so-called “economy of affection.” This economy of affection is more or less what it sounds like: the reciprocal bonds of kinship, tradition, and economic nepotism. The very process of development, if we are to see the socialist Valhalla, must include the rending of customary ties.\textsuperscript{43} This Marxist approach to development simply adds an extra step onto the linear progress espoused by the modernization theorists. As noted by Hyden, Marx had to “assume the capacity of capitalism to complete its historical cause: to erase all traces of pre-modern social formations by achieving an accelerated transformation of the means of production.”\textsuperscript{44} Essentially, development \textit{is}
the disruption of cultural ties, social structures, and economic traditions. He asserts the argument that Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx made over 150 years ago: that the conditions for a socialist revolution arise only when the working class is irrevocably caught up in exploitive and alienated relations of production.

S. N. Sangmpam argued that such Marxist scholars are virtually indistinguishable from the pioneers of modernization theory in their understanding of “primitive societies.” He states,

In both [Marxism and Modernization theory], capitalism is posited in teleological terms as the ‘more complex form,’ or the yardstick for progress. In an evolutionary fashion, it is construed as the natural/inevitable ending state of development to be reached by stagnant precolonial societies that are both the ‘common’ and ‘simple’ forms in the evolutionary chain. Precolonial societies thus are passive, lifeless, and ‘transient’ entities waiting for their ‘differentiation' and metamorphosis into the ‘superior’ and complex form, capitalism, which is given unlimited and exclusive power to make and break them.

The notion of the ‘backwards’ foreigner who can be brought into alignment with the natural order is an old tale. As noted in the previous chapter, it is very similar to the Stoic narrative of the necessary conversion of the misguided emotional individual whose over-identification with her own cultural partialities prevent her from giving herself over to the inevitable unfolding of history. And while the parochialism of the Athenian citizen is a fine historical analogy for the notions that motivated Western foreign policy in the Cold War era and beyond, for those recently decolonized peoples who were the objects of this modernization policy the much more immediate association of this new progressive imperative was the ‘white man’s burden’ that motivated the so-called “noble” intentions of colonization.

The colonizers of the 18th and 19th centuries, the modernization theorists, the Marxists, and even contemporary liberal cosmopolitans like Martha Nussbaum, have
labeled those who have not heard the good news of modernization or have shown skepticism toward its status as a comprehensive cure-all parochial and passive. Third World communities and intellectual critics of universal individualism all have been stamped with the ultimate modern pejorative: backwards. The characterization of their cultures as a “transient steps” in the path toward a fully-realized way of being in the world, made (and continues to make) the newly decolonized countries of the world suspicious of these universal narratives and their Western proponents. The modern era has seen many attempts at cultural retrenchment in the colonized world. In the following pages, I shall briefly discuss the reclamation of local histories as embodied by the politico-literary phenomenon of Negritude, and, more expansively, the recent rise of post-development theory. This necessarily truncated history of Third World resistance should illustrate absolute inadequacy of labeling communitarian philosophical and political discourses as inescapably passive or reactionary. The language of Communitarianism cannot without substantial violence to its philosophy and its history be made into the Other of Cosmopolitanism.

The term Négritude was first coined by Aimé Césaire in his book Cahier d’un retour au pays natal in 1939, but the “black light” of this movement had begun to shed light on African culture as early as 1932 with the publication of the journal La Revue du monde noir. While there was already a strongly articulated anti-colonial presence throughout the African colonies, this movement concerned itself with more than the economic and political inequities of European oppression. The goal of this work and the movement that it birthed was the reclamation of the history, poetry, and politics of blackness from the racism of imperialist ideology. It is a rejection of white supremacy—
of brutality in the name of civilization. It seeks to throw a wrench in the ‘forgetting machine’ of Western progress and assert, not merely the existence of African civilizations, but also the worth of those civilization, and in doing so attempt rehabilitate the worth of African individuals. Others, like and Partha Chatterjee and Gary Wilder, argue that the problem with Négritude is that it merely replaced European humanism with Black humanism and suggested the possibility of a Black modernity. Such thinking is then seen as complicit with Western notions of subjectivity and domination that are foundational to modernity.

The primary criticisms of this movement have been largely aimed at its “backwardness,” most notably its reactionary primitivism and its biological essentialism. For many African critics of Négritude, like Frantz Fanon, the colonized African finds himself in the difficult position of throwing off both the legacy of colonization and pre-colonization in one great convulsion. The poets of Négritude, he argued, have seen to it that, “the unconditional affirmation of African culture has succeeded the unconditional affirmation of European culture.” For example, Senghor argues that the European and the African have a racially distinct manner of being in the world. The European approaches the world as an object, himself as a tool to shape it; whereas, the African looks first and foremost, not at the way he may differentiate himself from the world, but at the ways in which he is connected to the world, and furthermore seeks to expand and develop those connections. This manner of being is not contingent upon cultural development or materialist factors for Senghor—it is the essence of Blackness. Fanon rejected this idea for both its ahistoric characterization and, most vehemently, because it made Africans think that their future was somehow to be found by looking into their
past cultures rather than by shaping their own cultures. Fanon argued that the struggle for liberation is a cultural phenomenon. The throwing off of colonization was enough to re-establish and transform African culture as something of value—there was no need to draw on surrealism’s image of the *bon sauvage*; indeed, there were many reasons to avoid it. While criticisms of negritude most commonly came from those who saw it as reactionary, there are also those who categorized the proponents of anti-colonialist nationalist movements as collaborators with the failed project of Western humanism. In his analysis of post-colonial nationalism, Partha Chatterjee asserts that “derivative discourse” is an intellectual failure that ultimately engenders the same impulse to domination found in Western thinking.\(^{51}\)

To argue that the theorists of *négritude* were merely reactionary or merely assimilationist is to overlook their thoughtful engagement with European culture. This movement was no knee-jerk defense of tradition. Setting aside what he calls the “Christian pedantry, which laid down the dishonest equations of *Christianity = civilization*, *paganism = savagery*,” Césaire states,

I admit that it is a good thing to place different civilizations in contact with each other; that it is an excellent thing to blend different worlds; that whatever its own particular genius may be, a civilization that withdraws into itself atrophies; that for civilizations, exchange is oxygen; that the good fortune of Europe is to have been a crossroads, and that because it was the locus of all ideas, the receptacle of all philosophies, the meeting place of all sentiments, it was the best center for the redistribution of energy.\(^{52}\)

As Alioune Diop asserted in his opening address to the Second Congress of Negro Writers in 1959, one of colonization’s greatest acts of violence was its denial of the “joy of creating and of being appraised at our true value.” The great political effect of this
largely literary and philosophical movement was the first step of reasserting the voice of an entire race by revealing and reveling in the mere existence of their shared history. What both types of criticisms have in common is that they fail to address the philosophy of négritude a socio-historical movement. The problem set that motivated these thinkers was not a simple philosophical question. It was not about finding the logical linchpin of Western reason, removing it, and bringing a final end to the danger of the human will to dominate. This was not the project to which these men and women of letters set themselves (indeed, such project will never bring anything but failure). Wilder correctly asserts,

The Negritude circle recognized that because the colonial project itself worked to fix African difference, it was inadequate to critique only the universalizing side of colonial racism by affirming cultural difference. Conversely, because the colonial project used bourgeois individualism to undermine African societies, it was inadequate to critique the particularizing side of colonial racism by insisting on individual human rights. These writers sought to recuperate the emancipatory possibilities contained in both universalism and particularism.

Wilder’s point, naturally restricted by his subject matter, gestures at the broader difficulty facing this debate between cosmopolitans and communitarians. The professors of the black mystique were looking to shift the outlook of an entire continent by simultaneously producing a shared pre-colonial language of meaning and emboldening African peoples (and diasporic communities) to claim it as their own. The end goal was to increase the possibility of self-determined action by rearranging the discursive world within which that action would be interpreted. And the oppression faced by the colonized peoples of Africa was far more complex than a simple threat from a totalizing discourse of Western universality or defense of nativist particularism. These thinkers had to “prepare” Africa, her Diasporas, and her oppressors for her liberation. For, as Quentin Skinner forcefully
notes, no matter how radical an idea may be, the revolutionary must attempt to show that, "some of the existing range of favourable evaluative-descriptive terms can somehow be applied as apt descriptions of his own apparently untoward actions." For this reason, "every revolutionary…is obliged to march backwards into battle."55 It will become clear as this project progresses that this difficult maneuver is not merely tactical—it is essential to the project of liberation. But as independence was achieved, both from imperial decline and revolutionary violence, the emphasis of political discourse has shifted away from talk of liberation and independence toward poverty reduction and development.

In much the same way the "civilizing mission" of colonization was ruled a failure—a global failure, a moral failure, an economic failure; so too, these charges have been leveled at the 20th century project of development. While there have been many noted successes, the Asian Tigers obviously spring to mind; the economic and culture impact of modernization theory in places like Africa, Central America, and the Caribbean have been “tragic”.56 Furthermore, when one looks beyond the key measure of economic growth, the Gross Domestic Project, the figures of physical and cultural displacement as well as rising inequality lurk in the shadows of lived experience. To understand the work that Nussbaum and her cohort at the WIDER project were considering, the failure of this mission—the mission of development—must be accounted for.

Prior to the 1990’s, there was very little doubt that the project of development was flawed. After a brief improvement in post-colonial economies in the 1960’s, the collapse of the primary commodity markets and the oil crisis of the 1970’s devastated
the nascent markets in both Africa and Latin America. Between 1970 and 1990, the lower prices for primary commodity exports in Africa meant a cumulative loss of 120% of GDP. These losses were exacerbated by IMF and World Bank supported policies of import-substituting industrialization (ISI) and a failing debt regime. There were many attempts to address the economic failures of development theory, from the rise of dependency theory to the imposition of structural adjustment programs. Nothing during the period of the eighties and nineties appeared to jumpstart the economies of the least developed countries. In fact, as late as 1997, in all “southern” regions, aside from the highest performing Asian countries, real overseas development aid per capita was on the rise. In the cases of the most underdeveloped countries ODA made up as much as 70% of GNP. Development theory cannot be separated from the instruments of its implementation. The Bretton Woods agreement and the trading regimes that followed were based on a very simple premise: modern civilization would result if only economic growth occurred first and the proper agents of actions were states and state action could be incentivized by conditions set on international aid. Even as the statist approach to development revealed its weaknesses and came to be replaced by neoliberal economic policies, the belief that economic growth and Western values went hand in glove continued to be the dominant moral paradigm undergirding the international aid community.

In addition to economic depression, post-colonial societies found their traditional ways of life under attack from industrialization, urbanization, and direct action on the part of Western development agencies and nongovernmental organizations who sought to civilize the peoples of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and Middle East in order to provide
a more modern standard of living. In the case of the latter, it is clear beyond doubt that this goal was motivated by a deep and sincere desire to have a positive impact on the lives of those they deemed less fortunate. In many cases, like the one I explore in the next chapter, these NGOs were eager to fix the mistakes of the past. They sought to decouple the idea of the good life from the basic economic indicators that had dominated the previous era of development theory.

Conclusion

While necessarily brief, this chapter highlights the historical context of Nussbaum’s engagement in the world of development studies. Her intervention to halt the usage of simplistic economic data to measure development is laudable, but her inability or unwillingness to situate her intervention in the colonial and neocolonial practices of the 20th century is striking. It is especially problematic with regards to her inability to conceptualize the political significance of community.

Notes

1 Jean-Luc Nancy, The Inoperative Community (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 1.


4 Although it seems that we frequently fall back upon the Aristotelian quip that, “if people are friends they have no need of justice”. Such simplification obscures Aristotle’s broader point that the justice of friendship is the most just form of justice and thus the aspiration of the political (Nicomachean Ethics, 8. 9.37).


6 Communitarianism, often traced to Aristotle and discussed as the source of the Republican tradition, can also be seen in the works of St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Edmund Burke.
Deliberative democracy has come under attack for a number of different reasons. First, it is said that certain norms of speech and presentation are implicit in public discourse and that these norms covertly protect the existing social and political hierarchy. Second, the extent of the expansion of economic and political issues that transcend local communities makes a politics that is premised on co-presence inadequate to the tasks that face us. For this argument see, John B. Thompson, *The Media and Modernity: A Social History of the Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 236.


The belief that Antisthenes was the first Cynic is widely accepted. See Philip Merlan 1972, “Minor Socrates,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 10(2): 143-152. Derek Kruger, 1993, “Diogenes the Cynic among the Fourth Century Fathers,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 47(1): 29-49. There are, however, scholars that believe that the presentation of Antisthenes as the founder of Cynicism was merely a yarn told by Stoics to solidify their pedigree as the inheritors of the Socratic tradition—Antisthenes having been a student of Socrates. For this argument see Farrand Sayre, “Antisthenes the Socratic” *The Classical Journal* 43(4): 237-244.


Martha Nussbaum, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism”, 15; “Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism”, 8;


It is striking, however, to see such a list laid out. They are, to a man, Western. This is particularly worthy of note because, as we shall see, it is often the case that the site of community is shipped overseas. “Community”, “Communalism”, and “Communitarianism” are frequently shorthand for the Orient—either in its homeland or its Diasporas. Furthermore, multiculturalism almost never refers to a multiplicity of Western European cultures (the notable exceptions to this rule are the politico-linguistic dispute between the Flemish and Wolloons of Belgium and the issue of Quebec separatism). This is a subject to which I will return shortly.

Avineri and de-Shalit, *Communitarianism and Individualism*, 2.

One of the primary difficulties facing Communitarian thinkers is that their approach often seems relativistic while at the same time they defend the cultures of people who believe their culture promotes the one proper manner of living. Thinkers like Stanly Fish argue that such approaches are inescapably troubled by the problem of tolerance for intolerance.

19 Martha Nussbaum, “Kant and Stoic Cosmopolitanism,” 3-4.

20 I reject the notion of the homogenous “Enlightenment”. While there was a strong tendency toward scientism in the Enlightenment, many of the most important thinkers of this period expressed a hesitance to overstate the role of reason in healthy individual and social functioning. See both David Hume and Jean-Jacques Rousseau for examples of Enlightenment thinkers who were extremely skeptical about the role of reason in human flourishing.

21 Bruce Frohner, *New Communitarians and the Crisis of Modern Liberalism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1996) states that Heidegger and his student, Hannah Arendt, are the “patron saints” of American Communitarianism. While it is largely accepted that Heidegger’s understanding of *Dasein* has contributed to the development of Communitarian thought, Jonathan Salem-Wiseman, 2003 “Heidegger’s Dasein and the Liberal Conception of the Self” *Political Theory* 31, no. 4: 533-557 argues that the Heideggerian understanding of the self in relationship to his community is actually more similar to liberal approach.


23 Frédérique Apfel-Marglin is, of course, the very same French Anthropologist to which I obliquely referred in the previous chapter.


25 "Public Philosophy," 775.


31 *Stages of Economic Growth*, 4.

32 *Stages of Economic Growth*, 48-49.


37 The list of such American interventions is fairly long but include: Syria 1949, Iran 1953, Guatemala 1954, Indonesia 1958, Cuba 1959, Democratic Republic of Congo 1960, Vietnam 1963, Brazil 1964, Chile 1973, and Nicaragua 1981. For more on the role that modernization theorists played in the development of these policies of intervention see Nils Gilman, Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); and P. Ish-Shalom, “Theory gets Real.”

38 Nils Gilman, Mandarins of the Future, 5.

39 Modernization theorists (much like Marxists) found themselves torn concerning the meta-historical nature of their project. Was modernization merely the natural progression of materialist factors that would inevitably produce a desirable political outcome or was it a social good that required elite-lead intervention? The rhetoric tended toward the former, but few theorists were willing to risk standing idly by awaiting the world’s deliverance from traditional economic and political arrangements.


This argument was put forward by both Walter Galenson and Karl De Schweinitz, and was popularized in 1968 by Samuel Huntington in his seminal work Political Order. While Huntington is often lumped in with modernization theorists, it is important to remember that he remained aloof from many of the major features of modernization theory. First, he did not have any hope that there was any “natural” or linear progress leading from tradition to modernity. Second, he rejected the modernization theorist’s goal of egalitarian democracy and was known to have referred to himself as a “Burkean-Leninist”.

42 “Political Regimes and Economic Growth,” 56.


44 Goran Hyden, Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and the Uncaptured Peasantry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980): 245. It is worth noting that Hyden’s position on this topic had altered dramatically in the interceding years. Where he formerly argued that the success of socialist regimes in Africa were stymied by the cultural capture of the state, he now argues that it is the state’s independence from society that hampers its ability to provide for its people.

46 “Sociology of ‘Primitive Societies’,” 612.


53 As early as 1964, critics of negritude were arguing that it was both clearly a form of chauvinism (a long standing criticism) and that the idea that Africa had no history was “obviously foolish” and thus there was no need to reassert or reclaim said history. See: Austin J. Shelton, “The Black Mystique,” *African Affairs* 63, no. 241 (1964): 115-128. However, into the fifties and sixties, African students were systematically denied pre-colonial history classes. For a full account of the development of the concept of “African history” in the 20th century see Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994).


56 Colin Leys, *Rise and Fall*, 188.


60 *Rise and Fall*, 26.
CHAPTER 6
THE VOICE OF (AN)OTHER

This chapter focuses on the limitations of Nussbaum’s criticism of post-
Nietzschean theory. In order to achieve these goals, I will begin by highlighting the primary criticisms that Nussbaum has leveled at the work of Frédérique Apffel-Marglin and her husband, Stephen Marglin. I argue that Nussbaum’s position regarding their scholarship is woefully misleading. This section will focus primarily on Nussbaum’s misreading of Apffel-Marglin and Marglin’s research on Smallpox and the Indian cult of Śītalā although it will also bring to light Nussbaum’s misreadings (or, more likely, presumptuous non-readings) on the couple’s work on menstruation taboos, and cultural homogeneity more broadly. In the second section of this chapter, I show how the intellectual lineage of the post-development critique emerged in order to highlight Nussbaum’s own misunderstanding the deployment of post-modern theory within the movement. In the third section, I explain Nussbaum’s recent critique of the practice of female genital mutilation and show how its ontological shallowness and overreliance on legal institutions (both features of her Capabilities Approach) limit its viability.

Misreading the Marglins

While I have alluded to Apffel-Marglin and Marglin in previous chapters, I would like to here state why they have assumed such a presence in this volume. Nussbaum’s first two published articles in her role with WIDER-UNU were written directly to counter the voices of Frédérique Apffel-Marglin and Stephen Marglin in the conference.¹ She has also provided a dramatic retelling of their initial confrontation at the conference held at the conclusion of the WIDE-UNU 1987 meeting in multiple articles and books.² For much of her career, Nussbaum has used the example of Apffel-Marglin and Marglin and
their scholarship as emblematic the anti-essentialism plaguing the academy—the plague to which her Capabilities Approach must act as remedy. She has even asserted that Apffel-Marglin and Marglin’s’ scholarship is what “provoked” her codification of her Capabilities Approach. Let us now turn to the criticisms that Nussbaum levels at their scholarship and some of the problems of Nussbaum’s reading.

Nussbaum and Sen’s first coauthored paper was a methodological musing focused on the importance of hearing voices of critique when a tradition is described. The purpose of this paper was to challenge Apffel-Marglin and Marglin’s’ homogeneous notion of “Indian Culture” as Nussbaum and Sen believed it was presented at the Helsinki conference. They argue that there has historically been a tendency both among popular authors and among “Indologists” to overly focus on the mystical aspects of Indian thought and tradition as an alternative to the rational, utilitarian, and objectifying character of the West. They further argue that the portrayal of cultures as closed systems contributes to a dangerous understanding of culture—one that silences minorities and fosters reactionary politics. Essentially, what occurs is the most powerful members of traditional communities become the mouthpieces for what “traditional” means for the broader society. This particular methodology reinforces the power of traditional leaders while undervaluing the voices of the marginalized within the tradition thus reifying historical hierarchies. While I completely agree that culture is a fractured and porous construct, a) Apffel-Marglin and Marglin would not argue otherwise, and b) I do not believe such a critique actually gets at the heart of what communitarian-oriented thinkers are trying to express—which is merely that traditional cultures often offer both meaning in their own right as well as successful strategies for dealing with modern
problems—something Nussbaum herself should readily understand considering her frequent recourse to Greek and Roman texts. The problem seems to stem from Nussbaum and Sen’s perception that post-development theorists and philosophical communitarians give too much emphasis to non-rational or religious elements of traditional societies.

They attribute the mystical image of Indian culture to Enlightenment era intellectuals; and, while appreciating the significance of Indian religious heritage, argue that post-development theorists give far too much credence to the mystic and religious elements of Indian society while neglecting the more “rationalistic” and “analytical” features. They point to historical investigations that divide the philosophical controversies between the first and fourteenth century of Indian thought as between three positions: “skeptical,” “phenomenalist” and “realist”. They also list a number of Indian philosophic texts, poems, and fables that highlight the political, scientific, and otherwise “earthly” concerns of Indian writers. This systemic bias against non-mystic aspects of Indian culture relates to ignoring the intellectual products generated in Indian urban centers. Nussbaum and Sen attribute this to bias confirmation. I, however, think that this bias is probably much more likely the consequence of the specific types of populations who find themselves under the lens of development. When looking at how to urbanize, industrialize, and otherwise normalize indigenous peoples, development agencies focus largely on rural areas and the people who occupy them, the people most likely to hold traditional religious beliefs and those who have had the least contact with urban intellectual centers. And when discussing the role that technology plays in the alteration of traditional communities, the beliefs of these rural peoples are those that are
likely affected most directly and adversely by “modernization.” It is worth noting at this point, that despite their assertions that traditional Indian thought contains the seeds of rational self-critique, cosmopolitan worldviews, Universalist value systems, and even atheistic thought, Nussbaum and Sen, in their quest to “sketch a method for the evaluation and criticism of tradition” turn not to an Indian philosopher or Indian philosophical system but rather to Aristotle.\(^8\)

The argument of the working paper is essentially that Apffel-Marglin and Marglin and other post-development scholars are too concerned with how the modernization agenda of the West adversely influences Indian culture without being aware of the presence of “rational” and “scientific” aspects of Indian intellectual history. They point to “skeptical” and “realist” traditions in Indian philosophy, Indian achievements in mathematics, as well as developments in statecraft and economics.\(^9\) They argue that a proper appraisal of culture must be aware of and value as authentic both the mystical and the rational products of a culture, otherwise the “othering” endemic to the Enlightenment will continue. What Nussbaum and Sen neglect to note here is that post-development theorists are not particularly interested in articulating an alternative location or discourse from which to universalize. In fact, their intent is to undermine the macro-histories that so often drown out the voices and experiences of marginalized peoples.\(^10\) When we look closely at the work of Apffel-Marglin and Marglin and other post-development theorists, we do not find the sort of totalizing, static, or agonist approach to culture that Nussbaum and Sen suggest they hold.\(^11\) The Marglins themselves are very careful never to villainize “the West” as the sole source of cultural
imperialism nor to represent Indian culture as homogenous or impervious to change.

Marglin specifically writes,

> Cultural imperialism is not limited to the West. In India, Hindutva represents the attempt to homogenize a tremendously diverse patchwork of cultures into a highly politicized Hinduism. Although defeated in the last general election in 2005, the party espousing Hindutva remains a strong force in Indian politics. The Chinese government has been even more thorough in imposing Han culture on its minorities. At the same time both India and China routinely decry the cultural imperialism of the West.¹²

For her part, as early as her first contribution to the WIDER-UNA series, Apffel-Marglin has argued that the adoption of the technique of variolation from Arab civilization by Indian communities is a “clear-cut example that traditional systems of thought and action are not closed and are open to innovations, whether bought from the outside or indigenously developed.”¹³ In a later version of the essay she adds, “there is no single structure of Hinduism, and that a notion of a unified religious or culture…is a creation of orientalist scholarship.”¹⁴ Borrowing from Eric Hobsbawm, Apffel-Marglin has suggested that much of the meta-narrative on troubling culture customs, like the idea of widow burning known as sati, are the result of the “invention of tradition.”¹⁵ Both Marglins repudiate the search for authenticity. The notion that Apffel-Marglin and Marglin are attempting to deny the rational traditions of Indian society misses the primary purpose of their scholarship. The goal here is not to “prove” that the West has ruined the authentic cultures of the global south but to capture a more complete picture of the locations and traditions that they study and to, in some small measure, capture alternative ways of being and knowing that can provide palliative counter-knowledges to the totalizing features of post-modern, capitalist preoccupations with rational order, efficiency, and monetization and the resulting afflictions of anomy and inefficacy.
Nussbaum’s qualms about the Marglin’s agenda are most vociferously stated in response to Apffel-Marglin’s work on Smallpox and the Indian cult of Šītalā Devi. Much like Gandhi (and for many of the same reasons), post-development theorists are accused of anti-modern tendencies. In particular, they are often criticized for being “anti-science”. While, like Gandhi, post-development theorists reject the encroachment of science into realms beyond its concern (much like Habermas rejects the colonization of the lifeworld by instrumental rationality), they are primarily critical of the use of science to defend Western preferences. As an example, let us return to Nussbaum’s criticism of Apffel-Marglin and Marglin. Under the heading of “anti-essentialist conversations”, she recounts the following episode:

The French anthropologist [Frédérique Apffel-Marglin] now delivers her paper. She expresses regret that the introduction of smallpox vaccination to India by the British eradicated the cult of Šītalā Devi, the goddess to whom one used to pray in order to avert smallpox. Here, she says, is another example of Western neglect of difference. Someone (it might have been me) objects that it is surely better to be healthy than ill, to live rather than die. The frosty answer comes back: Western essentialist medicine conceives of things in terms of binary oppositions: life is opposed to death, health to disease…What we see in such cases is an odd phenomenon indeed. Highly intelligent people, people deeply committed to the good of women and men in developing countries, people who think themselves as progressive and feminist and antiracist, are taking up positions that converge…with positions of reaction, oppression, and sexism. Under the banner of their radical and politically correct “anti-essentialism” march ancient religious taboos, the luxury of the pampered husband, ill health, ignorance, and death.

This does sound alarming. To deprive communities of access to important medical technology for the preservation of reverence for a particular deity does seem troublesome; however, this presentation of Apffel-Marglin’s argument is profoundly misleading.
Apffel-Marglin’s study of the smallpox vaccine in India was published in a collected volume of work by the WIDER-UNU conference participants. In it, Apffel-Marglin is looking at the difference between two systems of knowledge: drawing on the Derridean tradition of deconstruction, she presents Western science as logocentric in that it uses structural oppositions to produce meaning. Rationality gets its meaning and value in opposition to the devaluation of irrationality. Health, then, is understood in the West as the opposite of, and better than, illness. Non-logocentric modes of thought, on the other hand, do not require an absolute boundary between two related terms. Thus she considers the Indian goddess, Śītalā, who is both the presence and the absence of smallpox, as a non-logocentric symbol of Indian thought. The ritual act intended to ward off smallpox involved both the worship of Śītalā and “variolation,” an act that inoculated one against smallpox through the pricking of the skin with a needle impregnated with human smallpox matter. According to Apffel-Marglin, “the two aspects of the treatment were not experienced or thought of as being separate or as belonging to two different modes of thought and action”. Variolation is a thousand year old form of inoculation—albeit one that was not developed in the West and of which the West was highly skeptical. Despite the fact that this ritual involves both the religious element of worship and scientifically verifiable medical treatment, Nussbaum (and the colonizers in the 19th century) dismisses it as a “colorful and poetic ritual.”

Let me begin with an explanation of Apffel-Marglin’s argument that life and death ought not to be seen as in opposition to one another. From Nussbaum’s characterization of this dichotomy it is seems patently absurd that one would not see life/death as both opposites but also that one would not be seen as infinitely more
preferable than the other. I would like to deal here with the practical limitations of what to Nussbaum seems merely like common sense. Apffel-Marglin relies on the scholarship of Robert Jay Lifton. She sums up his arguments as they pertain to her work thusly:

> The dichotomizing of disease and health into mutually exclusive categories in the scientific medical discourse corresponds to a dichotomizing of death and life. Death is the outcome of unsuccessfully treated disease whereas life, as opposed to death, implies health and vigor. The logic of the scientific medical system makes death the enemy to be conquered as it makes disease an enemy to be destroyed.\(^{21}\)

This approach to life/death abounds within the field of development, she argues (and I believe Nussbaum would say this is rightly the case). She describes a development expert (here I believe she is referring to Amartya Sen) as saying that death always represents a failure of aid. Apffel-Marglin continues,

> Such a view corresponds to social conditions in the advanced industrial countries in which the old are no more than unproductive members of society, kept out of sight in old folks [sic.] homes. The old uncomfortably remind the productive members of approaching death, hence the efforts to keep them invisible...Lifton’s argument, backed by psychiatric case studies and anthropological evidence, goes far beyond the usual moral condemnation of putting away the old. He shows both a social and psychological link between death denial or death avoidance and violence.\(^{22}\)

The idea that the life/death and health/disease distinctions are bad is not simply premised on some fashionable reading of post-Nietzschean philosophy, but rather on the empirical evidence that such an opposition undermines quality of life. Furthermore, a simply understanding of how both inoculation and vaccination work—the controlled introduction of the virus in order to prevent the full destructive capacity of the virus—reveals that the absolute opposition of health/disease is medically untenable.
Apffel-Marglin notes that the practice of variolation existed in Arab communities in the Middle East and China, in addition to India; however, this technique, while reported on in Europe, was never practiced there. At the onset of colonization, Šītalā worship and its concomitant practice of inoculation were widely reviled by the English and eventually variolation was banned in India in 1865 and replaced with a regiment of forced vaccination despite popular resistance. Apffel-Marglin argues that, “Given the similarity in technique and type of knowledge involved in variolation and vaccination, the Indians’ strong preference for the former during the nineteenth century cannot easily be attributed to blind adherence to superstitious tradition or obscurantism as has often been done”.23 The initial vaccination pilot was unsuccessful, while at the same time the continued the ban against variolation only exacerbated the epidemic and created more skepticism toward the British colonizers. The practice of variolation had been “an effective, cheap, popular and grass-roots method of disease control.”24 Following the early failure of the British government’s pilot program, they redoubled their efforts by using force and intimidation. Apffel-Marglin cites a report from Brilliant and Brilliant:

In the middle of the gentle Indian night, an intruder burst through the bamboo door of the simple adobe hut. He was a government vaccinator, under orders to break resistance against smallpox vaccination. Lakshmi Singh awoke screaming and scrambled to hide herself. Her husband leaped out of bed, grabbed an ax, and chased the intruder into the courtyard. Outside, a squad of doctors and policemen quickly overpowered Mohan Singh. The instant he was pinned to the ground, a second vaccinator jabbed smallpox vaccine into his arm...While two policemen rebuffed him, the rest of the team overpowered the entire family and vaccinated each in turn. Lakshmi Singh bit deep into one doctor’s hand, but to no avail.25

Numerous documents show that those who administered the vaccine were not a part of the communities they attended to, nor were the communities represented at any level of the decision-making process. Furthermore, the vaccinators, and administrators that
directed them, believed that their knowledge was “vastly superior” to those who they were treating.

Apffel-Marglin points out that Indian resistance to British vaccination mandates was largely a political act—one that rejected the legitimacy of colonial rule—and that this defiance coupled with the presence of a successful and traditional inoculation against smallpox actually constitutes a thoroughly reasonable rejection of Western medical intervention rather than a backward and superstitious orientation. She points out that it was not until the World Health Organization and the government of India began partnering with local anthropologists and community organizations in 1970 (fostered a spirit of co-engagement), that they made real headway into stymieing the spread of smallpox. This approach expressly forbade adopting deprecatory or arrogant attitudes toward the local people’s cultural practices. In less than seven years after the onset of this new technique India was declared smallpox free.

Ultimately, the refusal of the British colonial administration to take seriously the work performed by the variolators was directly related to the priests’ association with a supernatural model of disease causation. The dualism of Western thought thus prevented medical specialists from recognizing the variolators’ crucial role in the containment of smallpox.

Ultimately, Nussbaum’s argument against post-development theory reads much like the British rejection of variolation itself. She does not probe either the science of the cult of Śītalā nor does she consider the efficacy of working within local epistemic frameworks. When Nussbaum casually dismisses the dangers of dualist thinking by asserting that she, herself, certainly “hold[s] that death is opposed to life in the most binary way imaginable, and slavery to freedom, and hunger to adequate nutrition, and ignorance to knowledge,” she does so out a dislike and distrust of a particular brand of
philosophy rather than out of any reasoned or empirically-based principle. As Apffel-Marglin notes the dualism of logocentric language is especially problematic in ecological approaches to disease control that we have come to recognize as necessary. Śītalā, the goddess of smallpox, is both the presence of disease and the absence of the disease—illness and cure, just as the vaccination of a disease is an antigen. The dichotomy of presence/absence is a simplified heuristic in many areas of medicine and in no way exhaustive to the study of epidemiology. Lifton’s analysis of Western conceptions of death and how they influence medical treatment, explores precisely how the Western distinction between life and death produces suboptimal social responses to illness, such as the removal of the aging and infirm from social life and the constant (and costly) pursuit of youthfulness. Much like Apffel-Marglin, he concludes that, acceptance and integration of death both psychologically for the individual and communally for the society produces an increase in vitality and wellbeing.

Both Nussbaum and Kiely argue that Apffel-Marglin’s position on vaccination is that it should be abhorred because it was an act of cultural imperialism that ultimately led to the eradication of the cult of Śītalā. This, however, is far from her actual argument as Apffel-Marglin notes in her original piece for WIDER that,

Traditional religious practices, far from disappearing, are on the contrary asserting themselves quite visibly and often aggressively. Religious buildings are multiplying at an increasing pace; for example their number in Delhi has risen from 580 in 1980 to over 2000 in 1987…The predictions of the modernizers have been totally confounded. With the eradication of smallpox in 1977, Śītalā, the goddess of smallpox has not only not vanished but has made a spectacular comeback in the heart of an industrial urban center.
Clearly, the cult of Śītalā has not been eradicated and Apffel-Marglin is aware of this. Nussbaum reiterates her original interpretation of Apffel-Marglin’s work as late as 2003 (no corrections have been forthcoming). She writes,

I criticized a paper by anthropologist Frédérique Marglin [sic.] that attacked the practice of smallpox vaccination in India on the grounds that it had eradicated the cult of Sittala Devi [sic.], the goddess to whom one prays in order to avert smallpox. I can now announce that Sittala Devi [sic.] is alive and well in Bihar. Indeed, she flourishes under the patronage of Laloo Prasad Yadav, who believes that she cured him from a liver ailment.33

Apparently, at no point did Nussbaum bother to read Apffel-Marglin’s actual argument which would not be that troubling except that Nussbaum over and over again cites it as an example of the philosophical foeman of reason who must be banished from the table of development.

So if Nussbaum is both wrong about why Apffel-Marglin despairs of the attack on the cult of Śītalā, why, then, does she believe the actions of the British colonial administration in India were problematic? Let us look at what she actually wrote: “the resistance to vaccination in India was in the name of the goddess of smallpox, it was labeled obscurantist and superstitious. Such a position needs to be challenged not only because it is fallacious but also because it is dangerous (as well as morally arrogant).”34 She divides the dangers into three categories: political, social and moral, and physiological. In the first instance, she argues that the dangers are two-fold.

The first aspect concerns the fact that the targeted population has no voice in the decision-making process. In other words it is disenfranchised...The second aspect has to do with the people’s reactions...In the face of such marginalization, practitioners of older forms of thought and action tend to react defensively, often rigidifying and reifying their practices.35
With regard to the second category, the social and moral danger, she argues, referring to Robert Bellah’s *Habits of the Heart*, that modernization has produced anomy and social fragmentation and that this merits that we reconsider some of the earlier systems of signification that have been destroyed. Additionally, she argues that the absolute separation of scientific knowledge and religious belief may be a serious obstacle to the efficacious delivery of medical treatment.36

This brings to light one of the primary concerns of both Apffel-Marglin and Marglin and other communitarian thinkers: how do we achieve our goals politically if our bases of solidarity have been eroded? This is the primary question posed by Stephen Marglin in his study of embedded labor practices, a study that at once highlights the goals of post-development thinkers and Nussbaum’s willful misreading of their project. He argues that class struggle is an important factor for determining how work is organized and valued in industry, but also that the parameters of that struggle are shaped by how the culture values work. Addressing the role of work in Western cultures, he suggests, “In the West work stands outside, if not actually opposed to, life.”37 This orientation, what he calls the “disembeddedness of work,” makes it difficult for individuals to organize against a capitalist class that seeks to devalue their workers’ labor for profit. Nussbaum, however, regards this piece as a defense of menstruation taboos.38 What one sees upon a closer reading, however, is that menstruation taboos are mentioned once and no valuation (much less a full-throated defense) is offered. He notes that traditional Nuapatna weaving is conducted within a broader religio-political framework such that the purification rituals are applicable to the work done—it is not an act of mere labor for cash. “The weaver of these temple garments,” he observes,
Must take special care that the work is perfectly executed, and even more care not to pollute cloth destined for Lord Jagannatha or his brother or sister. His diet is restricted to pure foods, to one meal of rice, boiled vegetables, and ghee; meat, fish, and vegetable oil are specifically forbidden. He may not chew betel nut or talk while weaving for fear of polluting the cloth with his saliva. The weaver cannot have his hair cut or his face shaved, again for fear of pollution. He must abstain from sexual intercourse. He cannot weave the Gitagovindakhanduā if a birth or death occurs in the house—even a birth, although auspicious, involves the household in ritual impurities...Nobody else touches the cloth or the loom, and even the weaver himself avoids touching the frame of the loom with his feet (the pedal excepted). Small children may be ritually contaminated by bodily excretions as well as contaminating their mothers and other caretakers, so both must be kept away from the loom. Menstruating women are particularly polluted, and to be on the safe side all women are kept away from the loom and the tantaghara...³⁹

This is clearly not an argument in favor of menstrual taboos. Nor does the rest of the article provide any clear argument that this particular form of embedded labor is desirable or unchangeable. In fact, he argues that despite the weavers resistance to change (namely the mechanization of their craft), they have made several innovations to the technical production and organizational procedures of production over the course of the decades.⁴⁰ Nussbaum’s appraisal of Marglin’s work here seems to suggest that a description of cultural behavior that does not meet her definition of justice must be taken as an endorsement of that behavior and that an approach that does not start from the position of condemnation toward such practices is itself morally compromised.⁴¹

She has also accused Apffel-Marglin and Marglin of rejecting literacy education on the grounds that some traditions are non-literate and the introduction of literacy would create cultural undesirable upheaval. She states,

On the one side is Amartya Sen, who, with Jean Drèze and other supporters, has long stressed the pivotal role of literacy in enhancing women’s bargaining position, On the other side are thinkers of various kinds who urge us to defer to local norms, and who cast aspersions on literacy as a value of Western origin.⁴²
She then goes on to cite Apffel-Marglin and Marglin’s’ edited volume *Dominating Knowledges*. “Such an approach,” she argues, “is invoked to cast aspersions on the idea of making literacy a central goal of public policy in a number of different places.” She goes on to equate their position with the arguments made by Rajiv Gandhi, former Prime Minister of India, who once argued that there was no need to increase female literacy because the common people had their own sort of wisdom.43 A close reading of the essays within *Dominating Knowledges* reveals that there is no mention of education policy or the value of literacy. There is an assertion by Arjun Appadurai that he, and his fellow post-development theorists, are “opposed to what I have called the position of radical cultural protectionism, which would suggest that the preservation of any coherent cultural system is a prime value, which requires no further justification.”44 He further argues that the search for the “authentic native” is a misguided and orientalist endeavor and that such radical cultural protectionism can (and often is) used to justify deplorable practices.45 Furthermore, the only reference to Rajiv Gandhi in the works of Apffel-Marglin or Marglin is the concluding statement in Marglin’s essay on the cultural conditions of labor resistance where he states, “If India is to build a society on the foundations of democratic and participatory work organizations, it will do better to follow the impulse of Mohandas Gandhi and his kind to look to India’s own tradition than to follow the impulse of the ilk of Rajiv Gandhi to look to the West.”46

Ultimately, Nussbaum profoundly misunderstand the goals of post-development theory. She argues that these theorists,

reject most of what is usually called “development”—that is, most agricultural, technological, and economic change and most educational change as well—and supporting as good ways of life in which it is unlikely
However, as Marglin states quite clearly in his introduction to *Dominating Knowledges*, “Our criticism is directed against development and modernization, not growth. The chapters that follow have nothing to say *against* longer life-spans, healthier children, more and better-quality food and clothing, sturdier and more ample shelter, better amenities.” He continues by noting that development can be defined in several ways. It may merely mean the capacity to create consumables and expand capacity to consume. It may be defined as access to basic needs. Alternately, it could be defined, as it is by Nussbaum and Sen, as the presence to fulfill certain individual capabilities and functionings. “For our purposes, however,” he adds, “it is less the goals of development than the processes that matter…” What should be clear by this point is that Nussbaum’s engagement with the anti-essentialist literature as it relates to development is insufficient. Given that her work is a self-described repudiation of it, I believe we must dig deeper into what it actually stands for in order to better grasp how it can speak to Nussbaum’s broader purpose.

**Putting the Post in Post-Development Theory**

Despite the good intentions of its proponents and the devolution of the development strategy from states to communities, there was a growing sense that there was something rotten in the very framework of development theory. In response, many other approaches arose: dependency theory addressed the question of institutionalized global inequality, alternative development focused on increasing popular participation in development projects, and human development argued that investment should cultivate individual growth. Only post-development theory offered a criticism not just of the tactics
of development, but of its very goal. Only post-development theorists argued that the very project was neocolonial to its core. Its advocates insist that,

The idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crime have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work. Moreover, the historical conditions which catapulted the idea into prominence have vanished: development has become outdated.\(^{50}\)

In many ways, the project against development can be seen as a globalization of the more regional “nativist” movements like that of négritude. While the field is very diverse, its proponents rarely offer an outright rejection of the goals of development on philosophical grounds; but, instead, proffer a rejection of the uncritical privilege of those goals in the face of local resistance.\(^{51}\)

In her analysis of the Stoic origins of contemporary cosmopolitanism, Nussbaum argues that this strain of thought—the strain that sees forward progress as desirable and possible—must persist in the face of post-Nietzschean skepticism toward the notion of progress.\(^{52}\) Absent this particular notion of progress, too much ground is ceded to cultural relativists like the proponents of post-development theory, Stephen Marglin and Frédérique Apffel-Marglin. She is right to link the two, even if the consequences of their philosophical stance are dubiously asserted. Post-development theorists undeniably emerge out of a post-Nietzschean vocabulary of hermeneutics, power/knowledge, and embeddedness as first articulated by thinkers like Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Clifford Geertz, Michel Foucault, and Charles Taylor.\(^{53}\) As this is not disputed by either side, I’d prefer to set it aside for the moment in order to examine another source of post-development thought. Describing post-development theory, Meera Nanda argues that it can be seen as,
[A] marriage between anti-modern communitarianism of Gandhi and neo-Gandhians, with the poststructuralist epistemology of Foucault. This union results in two sacrosanct meta-level sociological assumptions, namely difference and resistance, with the former related to the latter as a means are to ends: local communities resist the forces of modernization in order to maintain their particularities and differences.54

This union of Gandhian anti-modernism and Foucauldian post-modernism is really quite apt. While she intends to insult post-development theory—I believe a close reading of both Gandhi and Foucault actually clarifies Nanda’s misgivings as well as Nussbaum’s misrepresentations of the approach. On one hand, the marriage of these two thinkers makes clear that the post-development movement cannot easily be labeled a “nativist” or “non-Western” movement because it reflects a hybridization of knowledge that cannot easily be regionalized. Both Nussbaum and Nanda believe that the post-development approach is obsessed with cultural purity and authenticity. But this is simply not true. On the other hand, neither can the philosophies of Gandhi nor Foucault be classified as “anti” or “post” modern in any but the most facile of ways. Do Gandhi and Foucault offer critiques of modernity? Without a doubt the answer is, “yes.” Does either offer an outright rejection of modernity? Clearly, the answer is, “no.”55

Briefly, let us turn to the Gandhian position on modernity, as it is illustrative of the broader approach to post-development theory.56 For Gandhi, truth was not an issue of scientific discovery. He equated truth with the godly—or that which transcends human knowledge. Truth is always revealed to a fallible human mind and voiced through an inherently inadequate language. So as each person struggles with the truth, they produce many truths that must be acknowledged and respectfully approached. Accordingly, this epistemology ought to foster practices of caution and humility in the face of other’s beliefs and practices.57 Furthermore, he asserts that each human is
endowed with both the transcendent cosmic spirit as well as the *swabhava*, or the uniqueness of disposition, temperament, and inclination that makes her herself.\(^{58}\) To summarize, all humans are interdependent and are composed of aspects that both unify them through their relationship to the cosmos and divide them through their separate paths to knowledge and fulfillment. The danger of modernization then is, for Gandhi, the subsumption of *swabhava* by the rational or scientific. But this need not be inevitable. In fact, Gandhi noted three benefits of modernity: 1) the vitalization of the spirit of inquiry, 2) greater understanding and control of the natural world, and 3) the cultivation of social relations through intentional organization.\(^{59}\) Maintaining difference in the face of hegemonic forces is a matter of defending individuality and thus a diversity of paths to the truth for Gandhi, rather than a mere rejection of modernity.\(^{60}\)

Gandhi’s work, and the movements based on his deep commitment to vernacular sources of resistance to oppression and violent exploitation, is highly praised by post-development theorists like Apffel-Marglin and Marglin as well as Wolfgang Sachs.\(^{61}\) Even Ashis Nandy, who is often denounced by Martha Nussbaum directly alongside Apffel-Marglin and Marglin as being a complete cultural relativist and servant of parochial forces, places the life and thought of Gandhi as the wellspring for an Indian source of resistance to a form of Western secularization that limits the ability of Indians to mobilize politically within the modern state structure.\(^{62}\) He is seen as a testament to the notions of self-help and grassroots organizing. For these post-development theorists the embrace of indigenous peoples is not about the reification of traditional culture but rather about whether these individuals and communities will be seen as active sources and agents of change or whether they will be reduced to “target populations”—passive
objects of the development projects whose cultural immaturity prevents them from taking center-stage in their projects of local improvement.\(^6^3\)

Beyond the source of the change, Gandhi is also seen by many post-development theorists as emphasizing different modes of change. Some post-development scholars emphasize the idea that freedom-as-autonomy is closely related to freedom-as-control—Gandhian movements that stress control over oneself as a prerequisite to freedom come under praise for rejecting control over the environment and others.\(^6^4\) Furthermore, change, in the post-development approach as well as in the works of Gandhi, is not something only expected of the marginalized—a burden that is often seen in itself as unfair. Wolfgang Sachs, in his preface to the second edition of the *Development Dictionary*, writes,

> At any rate, the quest for fairness in a finite world means in the first place changing the rich, not the poor. Poverty alleviation, in other words cannot be separated from wealth alleviation.

It was in October 1926 that Mohandas Gandhi already sensed the impasse of development. In one of his columns for Young India, the mouthpiece of the Indian independence movement, he wrote:

> “God forbid that India should ever take to industrialization after the manner of the West. The economic imperialism of a single tiny island kingdom (England) is today keeping the world in chains. If an entire nation of 300 million took to similar economic exploitation, it would strip the world bare like locusts.”

Nearly eighty years later this statement has lost none of its relevance. On the contrary, its significance has exploded since today there are, just between India and China, no longer 300 million but 2,000 million setting out to imitate Britain. What would Gandhi say if he met Hu Jintao at the inauguration of the 2010 World Expo?\(^6^5\)

Post-development theorists, while often critiqued for not supplying their own universal pathway towards improvements in the quality of life for the world’s population, feel certain that any path forward must place the goals, voices, and empowerment of the
people before the centralization of the state, totalizing forms of knowledge, and the globalization of mass consumption.

Gandhi saw religion as supplying a very important corrective to these challenges. Nussbaum herself echoes this resistance to rationalization. She has, throughout her career defended both the emotive and a spiritual aspects of human life. As discussed in previous chapters (namely chapter one and chapter five), she claims that emotional attachments are at the very core of what it means to be human and how we develop ethical ways of living; additionally, she makes both the ethics of care and religious affiliation important features of her Capabilities Approach. She even notes this valuable feature of Gandhi’s work in the *The Clash Within.*66 This has been a special concern for Apffel-Marglin whose early fieldwork in India centered on ritual dance and the Goddesses of Orissa.

Quoting Vaclav Havel’s famous indictment of modern rationality, Marglin argues that,

> The expertise informing development projects earns its label precisely by being ‘based on the premise that the world is objectively knowable, and that the knowledge so obtained can be absolutely generalized.’ The knowledge of the experts—engineers, technicians, economists, anthropologists, and many others—can be exported world-wide and applied in varying contexts because of this premis [sic.]. Local knowledge, in contrast, is just that, local. Universality is the privilege of this modern mode of thought. It is this privilege which has enabled this mode of knowing to confidently override local ways of knowing and doing, secure in its ability to deliver superior results.67

The Marglins and other post-development theorists resist the tempting, yet dangerous, presumption that the experts have solved the problems of human kind’s ills and that all that is necessary is docile subjects to welcome their word. They believe that when the state and commercial forces are empowered at the same time communities (and the
traditions and rituals that hold them together) are rejected wholesale as false consciousness or adaptive preference what remains is not the groundwork of democracy but rather a wreckage of the possibility of political and social efficacy in the face of the twin pillars of modern domination.

Modernity and its vision of progress have produced paths to development that not only scar the environment but also destroy the diversity of human forms of life and thought. While such a claim is often met with the dismissal that it is merely diversity for diversity’s sake or some post-modern political correctness, Marglin points to the ever increasing philosophical, ethical, and scientific clamor that suggests the last worldview standing is neither sustainable nor desirable. Such divergent (and one might even say, adversarial) thinkers as Habermas and Foucault reject the unchecked spread of rationalization. It often goes without saying, for who quotes the voiceless, that said rationalization is also opposed by those whose cultural livelihoods are under direct threat. Alternative solutions to our societal ills are being cleared away and lost to history in much the same way that possible life-saving cures are vanishing in the wake of deforestation. Now, it might well be that the immediate clearing of the forest will give way to more economic opportunities for the inhabitants of the land but we do ourselves no favors when we ignore the long-term costs.

As noted by Maria Erikson Baaz, Apffel-Marglin and Marglin, like many other writers critical of the development agenda, use the trope of the “noble savage.” These thinkers, instead of resisting the dualistic thinking attendant to the hierarchies of Western development theories, often simply flip the narrative by valorizing all aspects of non-Western cultures and denigrating Western values. Rather than discussing the
specificities of a certain case, there is a tendency to speak in terms of broad
generalizations about what occurs in the West versus what occurs in the East. Marglin
writes,

An example may help. Development has generally meant an increasing
focus on the commodities one consumes as the source of the meaning of
one’s life. Thus, large numbers of people in the West are able to choose
between Buicks and Hondas, but few can choose meaningful work.
Lacking control over the work process and its product, most of us can
endow our work with no more meaning than the pay-cheque at the end of
the week. Even fewer of us would lay claim to transcendent social
meaning of our work. By contrast, the humblest worker in Western society
might once have found deep meaning as a participant, say, in the
construction of a cathedral, as many people in non-Western societies
regularly find transcendent meaning even in day-to-day activities.\textsuperscript{70}

This view is not as romantic as some others, but it still captures the evolutionary view of
development offered by Modernization theorists.\textsuperscript{71} The only difference is that the
timeline is characterized as devolution away from a more authentic way of life. The use
of phrases like “large numbers,” “few,” or “many” reflect the lack of precision attendant
to these meta-historical tales. Furthermore, the use of “once” to show that such a
meaningful way of life had been available to people in the past in Western societies
reinforces the notion of descent. Such characterizations ignore the large number of
people both around the world and throughout time who have worked only for their
livelihood, as well as the number of the people in the West who had previously been
blocked from meaningful employment on the basis of gender, age, and sexuality. The
complexities of history should not be sacrificed for the sake of convenient story-telling.

Despite the gulf that separates them, we can see the substantial overlap in her
work and the work of post-development theorists when looking at Nussbaum’s own
writing on Gandhi in her recent work on Indian politics. “At a deeper level,” she affirms,
the thesis of the this book is the Gandhian claim that the real struggle that democracy must wage is a struggle within the individual self, between the urge to dominate and defile the other and a willingness to live respectfully on terms of compassion and equality, with all the vulnerability that such a life suggests.72

This approach is very much at the heart of the post-development project. This does not merely apply to those who are the subjects of development though. It is also central to the role of the researcher/expert to open herself up to the possibility that knowledge may be transformative of herself and not just her objects of study.73 While I believe Nussbaum would agree with this theoretically, her unwillingness to fairly represent or even read the work of the “anti-essentialists” that she defiles leads me to believe at its core her philosophy is antithetical to this transformative process while as the same time maintaining it as a core aspiration.

In praising Gandhi’s respect for the equal dignity of all human beings, Nussbaum commends Gandhi’s political strategy of satyagraha. She correctly notes that, “the essential idea of satyagraha is to confront one’s oppressor without taking up the oppressor’s weapons.”74 While Nussbaum dwells her on the specific resistance to violent methods, post-development theorists apply this theory to the problem of other weapons of oppression: expert orientations that devalue or utterly ignore local knowledge, notions of progress that devalue ecological approaches to being, and presentation of marginalized voices with whom one disagrees as immature or irrational.75 Nussbaum herself engages in this critique inadvertently when she rejects the Huntingtonian rhetoric of the “clash of the civilizations”. “What we call ‘Western civilization,’” she writes,

[C]ontains many incompatible ingredients, as we easily see if we survey the history of the twentieth century, with its aspirations to universal human rights and its descent into horrific cruelty. (When asked by a British
journalist what he thought of “Western civilization,” Gandhi said, “I think it would be a very good idea.” Elsewhere, however, he mentioned Ruskin and Tolstoy as two of his primary influences.)...The category “non-Western” is still less helpful. The nations of Asia and Africa have little in common with one another as a group.

This critique has been at the heart of post-development theory since its origin and has its foundation in the Foucauldain interrogation of normalizing practices. Farzana Naz, summarizing the influence of Foucault on Arturo Escobar writes the following,

The effect of this representation is twofold. First, it serves to erase differences within the third world. The essential characteristic of all third world countries is their lack of development; they are all poor, illiterate, primitive, and so forth. In this way, the street vendor in Dhaka, Bangladesh, the South African miner, the Landak family in the Himalayas, the Kikuyu in Kenya become one and the same: poor and underdeveloped. Second, the structuring of discourse around a series of absences legitimizes actions and interventions in the third world. Absences appear as deficiencies, or abnormalities, to be remedied and rectified through development...In this way, development promises not only an end to the deficiencies of the third world, but also the third world itself as it becomes more like the first.76

Post-development theory, as a practical extension of communitarian philosophy, asks that the current inhabitants of the globe reconsider their support of development for the very same reasons. Nussbaum, by failing to even seriously engage with the critique offered by post-development theory engages in the very same process of which Mudimbe accused colonial champions: She expresses “…otherness in the name of sameness, reduce[s] the different to the already known, and thus fundamentally escape[s] the tasks of making sense of other worlds.”77

Female Genital Cutting: Beyond “right” and “wrong”

Nussbaum writes that there are three arguments against her Universalist approach. The first is the argument from culture. She provides the following example: “[I]t says that Indian culture contains, in both Hindu and Muslim traditions, powerful
norms of female modesty, deference, obedience, and self-sacrifice that have defined women for centuries. We should not assume without argument that those are bad norms, incapable of constructing good and flourishing lives for women.” Second, there is the argument from diversity. This is the idea that diversity of values and discourses on values is either good on its face or that failures within the Western value system and other systems of value offer up important sources of critique. And, finally, the argument from paternalism. She summarizes this argument thusly: “This argument says that when we use a set of universal norms as benchmarks for the world’s various societies, telling people what is good for them, we show too little respect for people’s freedom as agents (and, in a related way, their role as democratic citizens.” (51). Here I’d like to pivot from Nussbaum’s critiques of post-development work to look more closely at the manner in which her own argument is formulated on a specific application of the Capabilities Approach. I will then turn to some criticisms of this piece from my own post-development perspective.

In the last twenty years feminist scholars have begun to consider the problems that arise in the attempt to understand the experiences and perspectives of ‘Third World Women’. It has been argued that the exportation of Western feminism to the third world functions as a continuation of the Imperialist project inaugurated by liberalism’s totalizing and universalizing premises.78 From this perspective, global feminism, in its attempt to liberate women along the lines of Western liberal values, appears as an extension of Western oppression rather than as a liberatory practice. The concern that Western feminists feel toward the plight of ‘Third World Women’ must be reconfigured to
take into account the experience of neo-colonial domination in a period of oppressively hegemonic Western values.

While neo-colonialism and the structure of international hierarchy of states functions in such a way as to significantly order social meaning, such an inter-statist, or even inter-culturalist, approach remains insufficient as a conceptual tool for grappling with the generalized problems of oppression and suffering facing much of the global population. With this in mind, my aim is to demonstrate how social meaning and identity are caught up in a necessary and invaluable economy of pleasure that not only orders but also creates the possibility for meaningful experience through a close analysis of the ritual of female genital mutilation. There has been a critique of the amount of attention received FGM in the academy. S. L. Gilman argues that focusing on genital cutting to the exclusion of other pressing feminist issues amounts to a continuation of the longstanding interest in sexualized African bodies. While I take this issue to heart, I also believe that theorizing which takes as its objects bodies and pleasure is fundamental to a recognition of the crucial role that embodiment and desire play in the construction of social meaning. Drawing on psychoanalysis and Foucauldian theory, I posit a way to view such practices in a manner that neither exalts nor vilifies—but, rather, opens up the opportunity for meaningful dialogue and possible change.

Female genital cutting, often referred to as female genital mutilation (FGM) or female circumcision, has become a popular and sensational topic within both feminism and cultural studies in the recent past. The mere utterance of the phrase tends to incite debate, as the terms frequently used to describe the procedure tend to embody judgment. The phrase ‘female genital mutilation’ clearly carries with it the connotation of
a violent rupture of a natural body, whereas ‘female circumcision’ bears both a clinical content and cultural reference to the more widely accepted form of male circumcision. In this essay I have chosen to employ the less used term ‘genital cutting’ in an attempt to evade the value judgments that have come to be associated with the previously described terminology. Obviously, the issue of FGM does not exhaust the wide range of issues facing women’s movements in developing countries but it is a procedure that is located at the crossroads between feminist and culturalist concerns. As such, this topic was chosen for four reasons: the manner in which the procedure is seen as a brutal act of patriarchal authority, the degree to which the matter has become a focal point for colonial paternalism and nationalist sentiment; the fundamentally embodied nature of the procedure; and, finally, because it is a widely practiced ritual in the developing world. Concerns expressed about FGM must not simply envision the end of this procedure as marking the transition from traditional to modern values (as is frequently portrayed); nor should it serve as a naïve marker of hegemonic masculinity whose abolition will ‘free’ women; finally, it also ought not be defended merely on the grounds that traditions should be respected at all costs. It is fundamental to a critical understanding of the topic that we begin to move beyond the blunt instruments of dichotomizing theories.

FGM has been practiced for 2500 years and continues to be practiced in over forty countries whose distribution is nearly global. The age at which the ritual occurs differs from place to place and culture to culture, ranging from a few weeks after birth to after the birth of the first child. However, most procedures are performed on girls between the ages of three and eight.
The practice of ritual FGM cutting can be divided into four basic forms, here listed in order from least to most invasive. The first form (Type IV) is referred to a ritual circumcision. In this case the clitoris is simply nicked with a blade to draw blood. Rarely does this type FGM cause long-term damage. In the second form of FGM is called circumcision (Type I). During this procedure the clitoral prepuce (or, as it is commonly referred to, the clitoral hood) is removed. In some traditions the tip of the clitoris is also cut off. The third type of FGM is known as excision. In this case, a full clitoridectomy is performed along with the removal of part or all of the labia minora (Type II). Finally, the most severe form of FGM, is called infibulation (Type III). This practice involves the removal of the entire clitoris, labia minora, and the inner labia majora. The edges of the labia majora are then sutured together with acacia tree thorns and sewing thread. A small sliver of reed or wood is often inserted into the wound to allow for an opening after the healing. Directly following the procedure, the girl’s legs are bound together and she is forced to rest anywhere from one week to over a month for healing to occur. If the procedure is performed correctly and no complications follow, the desired result of infibulation is that the pubis is “smooth and beautiful like the back of a pigeon.” However, complications frequently follow and the severity of the complications is one of the many reasons that the genital cutting provokes outrage among its opponents. Women who have been infibulated are more likely to die in childbirth and to give birth to stillborn children and death from infection is an immediate possibility. This has changed over time as the international community has focused on educating communities about the health consequences of the practice. The medicalization of the
procedure has reduced short-term health implications (hemorrhaging and infection) but do not address problems of future pain and/or sexual impediments.  

The reasons given to support the practices are diverse. The first is traditional and religious control of female sexuality. Since the practice predates both Christian and Islamic religions, textual evidence to support the practice has been largely discredited; however, the importance of virginity prior to marriage and monogamy after marriage are clearly significant to both religious traditions and support is frequently given by religious leaders. This particular reading of FGM presents the intent as the reduction of female sexual pleasure. It is also argued that the result of infibulation is a more pleasurable sexual experience for the male partner. A third reason that the ritual is deemed necessary by practitioners is that the female genitals have negative hygienic and ritual characteristics. Many believe that the genitals of an uncut woman are dangerous to the masculinity of the man with whom she sexually engages. It is also widely believed that uncircumcised genitals produce foul odors and secretions. The fourth, and most difficult to address, justification for FGM is the ontological view that it structures gender identities. While Alison Slack dismissively refers to these reasons as mere “myths.” Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, among others, has argued that, beyond sexual purity and social control, FGM exists as an ideological ordering device. In her analysis of FGM in Sudan, she has revealed how the practice is related to an understanding of gender formation in which a woman does not become a ‘real’ woman and a man does not become a ‘real’ man until they have been distinguished by the ritual of circumcision. This belief places individuals who are not cut beyond the possibility of socially sanctioned partnerships and precludes them from the possibility of reproduction. There
is also a widespread belief that the clitoris is a masculine organ and that if it is not cut or
removed that it will continue to grow and become more and more like a penis. As
Abusharaf states,

In a society where a strong belief about the clitoris being homologous to
the penis exists, it is not surprising to encounter strong feelings of fear,
anxiety, and discomfort over the possibility of clitoral growth. Not only is
excision an effective way of removing an excessive organ, but the surgery
also comes to represent the ultimate seal of femininity. The flat patch of
skin created through clitoral excision and infibulations becomes that
“symbolic wound” which speaks volumes to the specificity of cultural
constructions of gender and womanhood.93

When a practice becomes linked to the social production of a traditional and cherished
way of viewing the world (i.e. the social production of gender relations) the social
investment in the practice tends to exceed the merely individualistic approach that
liberalism tends to take. And it is to the liberal feminist viewpoint to which I now turn.

Feminist critique is commonly understood as the exposure and analysis of
systematic oppression based on gender. Typically, gender is read dichotomously in
terms of women and men and the inequality that structures their relations. When dealing
with the contentious issue of FGM it is not difficult to imagine a situation in which the
discourse could be reduced to the control of women’s bodies by men who seek to
control their sexuality through the direct defacement and maiming of a woman’s sexual
organs. Nussbaum’s work is typical of this viewpoint. Like Allison Slack, writing on this
issue a decade before her, Nussbaum first moves to ‘prove’ false the myths and values
that justify the continuation of this practice. Where myths do not “represent accurate
information” they should be dispelled. While she does note that myths are evident in all
societies, she tends to avoid the discussion of the significance of myth for the
functioning of communities in general. Feminists and other Western human rights
activists tend to argue against FGM on the grounds that the practice violates universal human rights: the right to health, the right to children, and the right to bodily integrity. Nussbaum goes further and argues that the impediment of sexual functioning should be at the heart of our rejection of the practice. But such a position naturalizes pleasure in a way that often ignores women’s own description of their desires. According to Foucault, there exists no “pathology of pleasure,” no “abnormal pleasure”. Those who scoff at the idea that circumcised, even infibulated, women claim to experience sexual pleasure as a defensive lie or an symptom of false consciousness are implicitly making a claim about the naturalness and normalness of pleasure and it is just such claims that Foucault seeks to dispel. In fact, studies done on the sexual responsiveness of women who have undergone FGM have found that it is not uncommon for circumcised women to enjoy sexual relations.

Medical examination of infibulated women has shown that in some cases nearly all of the nerve endings in the external area of the genitals had been destroyed. However, even where that is the case, the psychological sexual drive is not always diminished and one Sudanese study revealed that approximately 90% of the women tested were indeed orgasmic. Abusharaf’s interviews conducted with Sudanese women who have undergone infibulation also support the claim that infibulated women can experience sexual pleasure. Some have taken these findings and the theoretical position of Foucault as an argument that the politics of pleasure cannot be based on a naturalized, prediscursive body. But our actual problem here stems from centuries of bad science. In her piece, Nussbaum describes clitoridectomy as the equivalent of the amputation of penis and infibulation as the removal of the entire penis, its roots of soft
tissue and part of the scrotal skin. However, we now know that this medical analogy is misleading. In 1998, urologist Helen O’Connell and her colleagues published a paper revealing their discovery that the internal structures of the clitoris were over twice the size as anatomy texts had previously shown. Their research revealed that loss of sexual pleasure due to pelvic surgeries in which this structure was not taken into account was not uncommon. Furthermore, in 2009, Odile Buisson and Pierre Foldès used 3-D sonograms to reveal that those internal structures are directly involved in arousal and that the internal clitoris is the sources of what have previously been termed G-spot orgasms (whose previous possibility had been contested by doctors). The self-reported sexual pleasure and orgasms reported by women who had undergone various levels of FGM was not delusion, false conscience, or adaptive preference. It was sexual pleasure. Abdulahi An-Na’im has suggested that “unless international human rights have sufficient legitimacy within particular cultures and traditions, their implementation will be thwarted, particularly at the domestic level, but also at the regional and international levels.” It takes very little imagination to argue that the continued insistence on the part of development practitioners that the experiences (with regards to culture, ritual, and the very body itself) of the target population are “wrong,” “impossible,” or “unreasonable” undermines that legitimacy. The utter absence of humility when faced with the lived experience of another person lies at the heart of the inadequacies of Nussbaum’s approach.

Nussbaum states that the strongest argument supporting the practice of FGM is the argument of cultural continuity. She points to the position of Jomo Kenyatta, first president of Kenya, and his position that foreign interference in community standards
and values plays an ultimately disintegrative effect on the bonds of community. She adds that Kenyatta’s own position was that a gradual process of persuasion and education would be better for the people of Kenya than an outright legal ban. Furthermore, she notes that some sixty years after, “we see widespread evidence of resistance from within each culture, and there is reason to think that the practice is kept alive above all by the excisers themselves… It is not obvious that the type of cohesion that is effected by subordination and functional impairments is something we ought to perpetuate.” For Nussbaum, the strongest excuse for the continuation of the practice is not particularly important given her other concerns and the fact of internal dissent casts doubt on the earlier concern. Let’s look now at some of the historical context surrounding the issue.

In the context of the nation, the bodies of women frequently become symbols of both biological and cultural reproduction. Given these symbolic functions the circumcised woman becomes a signifier of clan tradition, a tradition that is under attack by the values and tastes of Western Imperialism. The body of woman becomes the site for the battle between revered tradition and imposed modernity. The image of “modernity versus tradition” as a framing lens has the immediate impact of politicizing the circumcised (or potentially circumcised) female body. Her genitals represent a battleground in which the last stand against colonization is fought—her circumcised genitals becoming a flag of patriotism and of cultural authenticity.

At the time of independence, this view was common in the political rhetoric and fictional writings of anti-colonial thinkers. In Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s novel, *The River Between*, a young Kenyan woman raised by Christian parents who did not have her cut
as a child decides to undergo excision as an adult. Raised in the “white man’s faith,” she feels as though something of her Africanicity is at stake by remaining uncircumcised. Uncut, she is un-African. Such a stance is far from surprising given the hardline stance that many colonizing countries took against the practice. In Kenya, many missions (especially the Church of Scotland Mission) vigorously condemned the practice of FGM on the basis that it was both brutal and obscene. In the case of Kenya, attempts to eradicate the practice served as a lightning rod for nationalist, anti-colonial sentiment. According to one British report,

The only results of all the controversy [over female circumcision] have been a vastly increased membership of the Kikuyu Central Association, an extreme distrust of the Mission by the people, and almost universal antagonism to the Pastorate Committees. Nothing whatever has been achieved in the direction of the abolition of the rites or towards purging the church of pagan customs.

While this manner of understanding female circumcision complicates the simple gendered description above, by making homogeneous both the colonial and national positions on FGM it overlooks the internal debates that existed in the precolonial period and within colonial regimes. That is to say, there have existed both indigenous debates and colonial/external debates about the desirability of this practice that must keep us from viewing the support for female circumcision as an unproblematic extension of nationalist sentiment. In Kenya, while this debate is often overlooked in the more general literature, churches and local ruling commissions were often at odds with each other over the issue of FGM. The Church of Scotland Mission demanded the practice be outlawed while the Church Mission Society and the Anglican Church only made rejection of the procedure a condition of church membership. At the Le Zoute Conference in 1926, the Kenya Missionary Council, after much debate and a formal
schism, decided that it was no longer proper to denounce African customs out of hand. The final report argued “Christianity comes to Africans with greater power when it is shown to be not destructive but a fulfillment of the highest aspirations which they have tried to express in their beliefs and rites.”

This is an example of the variety of viewpoints toward the procedure held by colonialists.

In Sudan, where infibulation is the most common form of FGM, there has existed a strong internal opposition to the procedure since the turn of the 19th century. Muslim cleric, El Sheikh Hassan wad Hassona attempted to distance Islam from the practice of infibulation. He taught that women could be sexually purified (which inhibited the growth of the clitoris and negated its negative effects on the male member), through a ritual purification that does not involved cutting at all. Such indigenous debate over the topic precludes any approach to this tradition that amounts to a rigid and reactionary defense of the procedure as an essentially nationalist act. Emmanuel Eze has pointed to the tendency of early colonialists and colonial scientists and anthropologists to report that,

> The “African mind” is “prelogical,” “mystical,” and “irrational;” or, when it is recognized as “logical” (such as by Evans-Pritchard), it is still compared and considered “inferior” to the “Western” scientific mind—as if all Westerns’ minds are scientific, or as if all Africans must have the scientist’s mind in order to be rationally human.

The simple reminder that precolonial discourses concerning the value and desirability of certain traditions existed serves to help us avoid stagnant and “irrational” views of the tradition of FGM. To not treat such issues as topics up for discussion and revision represents the revival (or, continuation) of the belief that “premodern” cultures are “mystical” and “prelogical,” and thus cannot be approached from a “Western” rationality (as if rationality does not exist outside of the West). The non-homogenous nature of the
stances taken on FGM by both the (neo)colonizer and (neo)colonized should make us weary of any approach that attempts situate this division as the exclusive political position for viewing this procedure.

The current debate over FGM, there has occurred a continuation of the colonized versus colonizer mentality. Contemporary Western feminist who seek to eradicate the ritual of genital cutting are, according to Chandra Mohanty, working within a hegemonic Western system of values and that their attempts to position ‘Third World Women’ according to this system amounts to a paternal act of recolonization. This argument is the very same style of argument that is rejected by Martha Nussbaum and other Capabilities Approach advocates. Roksana Alavi’s analysis of FGM, expressly working within Nussbaum’s system of analysis, reflects some of its problems. Beginning her argument with the phrase, “In many African countries…” She does not further differentiate between the practice as it exists in separate countries or cultures nor does she acknowledge that it exists well beyond the boundaries of the African continent. Such broad generalization does not end there. She continues to argue that that there is one reason that the practice exists—for men to dominate women. Ethnographical arguments have shown that there are many reasons (listed above) that account for the procedure and that not all societies in which FGM is practiced are patriarchal and in many both sexes undergo some form of ritualized genital cutting. Nussbaum’s final conclusion is that, “we should be ashamed of ourselves if we do not use whatever privilege and power has come our way to make [FGM] disappear forever.” Yet she does not provide clear examples of how our privilege and power ought to be deployed to do this. Alavi, on the other hand, is clear that she believes criminalization is the
correct path and if it has not worked thus far, it is because better enforcement and “stiffer penalties” should be pursued.\textsuperscript{118}

Studies have shown, however, that legal bans in general have proven to be inadequate to the task of cultural change. Nussbaum and Alavi both fail to note that bans in both Sudan and Kenya resulted in the retrenchment of practices of FGM. Furthermore, individuals and anti-colonial movements not only reaffirmed the practice as situated at the center of authentic identity but intimate policing of young women’s bodies and the punishments (fines, jail time, and hard labor) can further impoverish communities already existing at the margins of survival.\textsuperscript{119} In Sudan, the banning of infibulation actually caused an increase in the practice. Even fears of the passage of such legislation have been known to cause a rush to get daughters circumcised (in some cases as early as infancy). Many local arguments against legislation have centered around arguments similar to the abortion debate (safe, legal, and rare) because bans have in some countries forced the procedure underground—increasing rather than adumbrating health risks and making it less likely that circumcised girls and their families will avail themselves of medical expertise in the case of life-threatening damage.\textsuperscript{120} Human rights agencies that have sought to criminalize FGM locally and internationally have frequently been met by a stanch defense of the practice, its roots, and its symbolic values.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The body (especially the bodies of women) are central to the discussion of cultural transmission. No matter how liberal the society in which we live, our bodies are more than just our own. Our bodies are bearers of cultural knowledge as much as they are of personal identity. Nevertheless, our bodies are more than just packages that
display clan and national loyalties or that reveal our gender or sexual identification. They link us to the world around us—commonly serving as the means by which we engage the world and as representations of the very way we structure our reality. More than being a nationalist attempt to preserve local culture against the 'modernizing' impact of imperialism, even beyond the *ritual* practice of FGM, the procedure exists as a way of making oneself a part of the larger cosmological scheme. It is the ontological differences that undergird many ritual practices that pose the most difficult problem for reformers. This issue, ultimately, places the scholar (both Western and non-Western) in a problematic relation to the subject.

It is worth noting, as do the Margins, that the level of expertise assumed by the development specialist is often read as hubris. The dismissal of a widely practiced and successful form of inoculation as pure religious mysticism by both colonial officials and Nussbaum and the further dismissal of women’s voices in the FGM debate as pure false consciousness appears to post-development theorists and many target populations as endemic to the entire project of development. Often, capitulation is not the local responses to such efforts. Instead, the result is the further retrenchment of unwanted practices—sometimes in the face of previously declining support. Such outcomes obviously run counter to the liberal reformer’s intention. For this reason, more attention needs to be paid to the pragmatic mechanisms of political change rather than simply the desired set of outcomes. In the following chapter Nussbaum’s approach to political engagement will be assessed and compared to the procedures and practices developed by post-development theorists.

Notes


3 Nussbaum, Women and Human Development, xvi.

4 Nussbaum and Sen, “Internal Criticism,” 4-6.

5 These include but are not limited to the Susruta-samhita, Hitopadesa, Pancatantra, Ramayana, and the Mahabharata.

6 “Internal Criticism,” 4.

7 “Internal Criticism,” 9.

8 “Internal Criticism,” 15. Additionally, Rahul Roa (2007, 21) briefly discusses the problem of attributing cosmopolitan thought to the West. He argues that there are several strains of cosmopolitanism—Gandhian, Hindu, and Muslim—that each universally proselytizes a particular set of parochial values.

9 “Internal Criticism,” 10.


11 This will be explored in greater length in the following section.


20 Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 134.


22 “Smallpox,” 27.


24 “Smallpox,” 18.

“Smallpox,” 21.

“Smallpox,” 22.

Nussbaum, “Human Functioning,” 204.

At one point Nussbaum obtusely notes that, “opponents of such oppositions have not explained how one can speak coherently without bounding off one thing against another, opposing one thing to another.” Nussbaum, “Human Functioning,” 244fn.18. This displays a clear lack of understanding of what Derridians are criticizing when they take aim at logocentric systems of knowledge as it’s hardly the “bounding off” of ideas from one another as the systematic and often unreasonable ordering of the paired concepts that is troubling.

Robert Jay Lifton, The Broken Connection.


“Smallpox, 3.

“Smallpox, 4-5.


Nussbaum, WHD, 176; “Human Capabilities,” 64.


“Losing Touch,” 277.

Given the presence of menstrual taboos in Jewish traditions, one wonders how she could justify her own conversion.

Nussbaum, Women and Human Development, 295.

Women and Human Development, 295fn.71. This argument is also made in Nussbaum, “Women’s Education,” 341fn.33.


“Technology and Reproduction of Values in Rural Western India,” 186.


“Toward a Decolonization of the Mind,” 2.


Nussbaum, “Kant and Stoic.” Nussbaum’s charge that those who, like the Marglins, are critical of development theory (both its methods and its goals) are merely parochial defenders of barbarous traditions closely resembles Habermas’ (1985) accusation that post-modernism is merely neo-conservativism wrapped in the jargon of progressive academia.

It is important to keep in mind that not all counter-Enlightenment thinkers, even those in the 20th century, are heavily indebted to the Nietzscchean thought. The work of Isaiah Berlin is a case in point. I will turn to his “values pluralism” in the following chapter.


Escobar, early in the shift toward post-development, draws on the work of Foucault, specifically the Janus-faced characteristic of the “Enlightenment”. Using a Foucauldian notion of discourse and his method of interrogation, Escobar believes that the languages and practices of development can be better understood and its failures explained. First, such an approach reveals that “development” is culturally and historically contingent and has its roots in a language similar to the colonial dualism of modern/backward cultures and that it was enacted through American political and economic domination in the 20th century. Second, Escobar focuses on “how” the project of development invents a subject (i.e. the “target population”) and how this invention is hostile to the personal self-identification of that population and to the homogeneity of Third World experiences. Finally, he uses this approach to ask about the power structure of the discourse and explore the real beneficiaries of the discourse. The rank failure of development, he concludes, leads us to believe its beneficiaries are to who we are led to believe they are.

56 Obviously the meaning of Gandhi’s work is highly contested. Arguments have been made that he is anti-modern, modern, reformist, post-modern. Not to mention his disposition, both politically and spiritually, changed over time. For a thorough catalogue and explorations of interpretations of Gandhi see Douglas Allen, *Mahatma Gandhi* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011). For a slightly different manner of interpreting the faces of Gandhi see Ashis Nandy, “Gandhi After Gandhi,” *The Little Magazine* 1.1(2000): 38-41. Here Nandy presents Gandhi’s work as four different Weberian ideal-types: the Indian nationalist, the saint-like protector of folk ways, the Gandhi of the eccentrics and subversives, and, finally, Gandhi as the mythic global symbol of non-violent struggle.


60 Ronald Tercheck argues that Gandhi’s anti-modernist stances, as posited in *Hind Swaraj*, are actually rhetorical. *Gandhi: Struggling for Autonomy* (Landham, MD: Romwan and Littlefield, 1998).


64 Stephen A. Marglin, “Towards the Decolonization of Mind,” 11. Frédérique Marglin and Tariq Banuri


69 *The Paternalism of Partnership*, 158.

70 Stephen A. Marglin, “Toward a Decolonization of Mind,” 5.

71 Baaz (157) reserves most of her ire for Thierry Verhelst. His approach to post-development is to deeply romanticize the “cosmocentric” approach of Third World peoples. He argues that the Western “ego-centric” individual could regain contact with their bodies and spirits at the feet of Third World peoples.

72 Martha Nussbaum, *The Clash Within*, ix.

73 Apffel-Marglin has been especially vocal about this. In her collected essays on her research in Orissa she writes of fieldwork that “so profoundly transformed me, and taught me not only ‘about’ themselves, but as significantly about myself and about ways of being with them and with the world in general that were totally unsuspected by the person I was then” (*Rhythms of Life*, 2). Positions like this are a testament to the influence hermeneutics have had on post-development theory: specifically, the works of Charles Taylor, Clifford Geertz, and Paul Rabinow.

74 Translated as “truth-force” and often referred to a “passive resistance.”


80 As David Fraser rightly argues, “[W]hat is at stake in each deployment, each signifying debate, is clearly a battle over the characterization of a complex and nuanced set of social and
cultural practices which will best capture the ‘reality’ of what is ‘happening. In other words, the terminological debate is occurring in the rhetorical sphere of political and ideological phenomenology. At the same time, the linguistic strategy is also to obtain and maintain a canonical textual interpretive status, to define and to confine, to establish the boundaries and borders which in turn define strategies of exclusion and alterity” (338-39).

81 Despite the spatial specificity of this comment, it is important to note that FGM did occur in the United States of America during the late 19th and early 20th century. Removal of the clitoris was recommended as a cure for female masturbation and as a mechanism for saving husbands from the ‘demanding explosive sexuality’ of their wives. In F. Hosken, The Hosken Report: Genital and Sexual Mutilation of Females, 4th ed. (Lexington, MA: Women’s International Network,1993): 254.

82 As noted by Hosken, while FGM is primarily found in the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Mexico, Peru, Brazil, parts of Russia, and among aboriginal peoples in Australia, the increase of global migration has brought the practice to the both Western Europe and the United States of America. On November 2, 2006, an Ethiopian man was convicted of aggravated battery and cruelty to children and sentenced to ten years in jail for performing a clitoridectomy on his daughter in Lawrenceville, Georgia. This is the first criminal case concerning FGM in the United States. (“Dad Sentenced in First Female Genital Cutting Trial in U.S.” CNN Law Center. HYPERLINK “http://www.cnn.com/2006/LAW/11/01/female.circumcision.ap/index.html” http://www.cnn.com/2006/LAW/11/01/female.circumcision.ap/index.html.)


84 This practice is also known as ‘Pharaonic’ circumcision because it is believed to have originally been practiced in ancient Egypt.

85 Allison T. Slack, “Female Circumcision,” 446.

86 (Quoted in Abusharaf 2001, 122). It is worth noting that infibulation makes up an overall small proportion of FMC globally but in Sudan there are three ethnic groups, the Hedarib, Afra, and Nara, in which the practice is nearly universal. It is also worth noting, in Sudan this practice has been illegal since 1940. For more information, see United Nations Children’s Fund, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: An Exploration 2005, 15-16.

88 UNICEF, Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, 13

89 Slack, “Female Circumcision,” 446.


92 “Virtuous Cuts,” 124-7

93 “Virtuous Cuts,” 124.

94 “Virtuous Cuts,” 117.


97 Slack, “Female Circumcision,” 455-56. Abusharaf’s interviews also support the claim that infibulated women can experience sexual pleasure culminating in orgasm.


100 Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice*, 119.


103 It is worth noting here that Pierre Foldès pioneered reconstructive surgery to women who have undergone FGM. An article in the BBC highlighted the work of one of his protégés in Barcelona. In it, the author tells of a twenty-year old woman from Guinea Bissau who opts to have the reconstructive surgery in spite of the fact that she was capable of sexual arousal from exterior stimulation without painful side effects. She wants most to look like the other women around her. Two-weeks post-surgery she has not regained full sensation but says, “Now I feel like a woman.” I tell this story not to undercut her desire for the surgery but to highlight the social implications of belonging and the complex relationship it has with desire and pleasure. Linda Pressly, “The Surgeon Helping Women after Genital Mutilation,” *BBC News*, 25 July 2013, [http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-23287032](http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-23287032).


108 Oddly, in districts in Kenya that had high levels of abortions, many missions took a stance that included decreasing the severity of the form of female genital cutting while at the same time encouraging that the procedure take place on younger girls. It was believed by many church officials that cutting would decrease female sexual activity and thus result in fewer abortions if girls were cut before the onset of menstruation. For more details see Lynn M. Thomas, “Imperial Concerns and ‘Women’s Affairs’: State Efforts to Regulate Clitoridectomy and Eradicat Abortions in Meru, Kenya, c. 1910-1950,” *Journal of African History* 39 (1998): 121-145.


111 Quoted in “The Lambert Papers,” 94.


116 “Female Genital Mutilation,” 1.

117 Nussbaum, Sex and Social Justice, 129.

118 Roksana Alavi, “Female Genital Mutilation,” 25 fn.56.


CHAPTER 7
AMBIGUITY IN ACTION

This chapter turns away from the theoretical sources and historical background of Martha Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach toward the problem of political action. The first section of this chapter will explore the position of action within Nussbaum’s philosophical approach. Having established the centrality of “actionable philosophy” to Nussbaum’s work, I will then turn to the issue of Nussbaum’s portrayals of political engagement and compare her positions to those adopted by post-development thinkers. Such a comparison is primarily useful for establishing the grounds on which Nussbaum rejects post-Neitzschean theory as quiescent or outright nihilistic. The section that follows will look specifically at the political methods at the heart of the implementation of the Capabilities Approach. This will examine both the role of action at the international, state, and individual levels while also considering the pre-political valuation of the individual capabilities put forth by Nussbaum. The third section will address Nussbaum’s claim that anti-essentialist philosophy is ultimately nihilistic and crippling. This claim will be viewed from the perspective of post-development theorists’ role in grassroots organizing and, more specifically, by looking at the post-academic works of Frédérique Apffel-Marglin. This section will point to the larger problem within Nussbaum’s work—a propensity to put philosophy before politics—a problem that undercuts her stated goals for the Capabilities Approach. Finally, I will point to possible solutions to these problems both from within Nussbaum’s own early literary turn and advances in ethnography and its application to political problem-solving.
Highlighted in this chapter is Nussbaum’s fervent and career-long belief that good philosophy produces good actions while bad philosophy produces inaction or misplaced action. This belief can be traced back to her reading of the Greeks on the usefulness of philosophy. Her philosophical orientation has always been to question the very divide between thought and action. As she stated in a *New York Times Magazine* profile, “for any view you put forward, the next questions simply has to be, ‘What would the world look like if this idea were actually taken up?’”1 Beyond this blurring of lines between thought and action—her philosophy at its heart is an indictment of any philosophy that delays or disorients active intervention in the political world. Fortunately for us, this gives us a window into the practical application of her philosophical approach. One of the primary themes unifying Nussbaum’s work is her continued insistence that at its heart good philosophy is the key to human flourishing. It operates as such both at the individual level, where for Nussbaum good philosophy is the rigorous regime that brings peace and happiness to the weak and fluctuating mind, and at the societal level, where philosophy can create concord from the clash of cultures. Reason out of chaos—no less than this is the promise of philosophy. From these engagements I explore what “good philosophy” is according Nussbaum, how it can be perverted, and what impact it has for reading Nussbaum’s *oeuvre* more broadly. In these pieces she is often perceived as attacking to the right and the left respectively.2 This simplistic characterization fails to understand the root of Nussbaum’s critique. I argue that Nussbaum’s approach only becomes legible through the aforementioned lens of what good philosophy is.
While Nussbaum’s assertions that the purpose of philosophy is for living well dates back to her discussion of Plato and Aristotle on shame, her most thorough consideration on this topic resides in *The Therapy of Desire.*

As she writes in her opening sentence,

> The idea of a practical and compassionate philosophy—a philosophy that exists for the sake of human beings, in order to address their deepest needs, confront their most urgent perplexities, and bring them from misery to some greater measure of flourishing—this idea makes the study of Hellenistic ethics riveting for a philosopher who wonders what philosophy has to do with the world...[These thinkers] practiced philosophy not as a detached intellectual technique dedicated to the display of cleverness but as an immersed and worldly art of grappling with human misery.

This text explores how various Hellenic schools of thought—Aristotelian, Epicurean, Skeptic, and Stoic—approach the problem of living. While each school of thought takes a different approach to the art of teaching, the *telos* of human nature, the role of custom in good living and many other topics, Nussbaum is buoyed by their shared interest in improving the human condition. "In short," she concludes, "there is in this period of broad and deep agreement that the central motivation for philosophizing is the urgency of human suffering, and that the goal of philosophy is human flourishing, or *eudaimonia.*" While Nussbaum’s commitment to cosmopolitanism emerges from her reading of the Stoics, more generally her thought returns to the work of Aristotle. This is partially to do with her own intellectual development but can largely be traced to Nussbaum’s distrust of the Epicurean, Stoic, and Skeptic retreat from politics. "In all three schools," she writes, "the truly good and virtuous person is held to be radically independent of material and economic factors: achieving one’s full humanity requires only inner change." Aristotle, on the other hand, rejects the idea that virtue alone is sufficient for *eudaimonia.* For Nussbaum, the political project presented to us is the
creation of a *polis* that provides the conditions of our flourishing while at the same time mitigating against the fluctuations of moral luck—philosophy, when done well, is at the service of this project. She states that philosophy entails three specific assumptions beyond the accumulation or study of knowledge. First, philosophy must be practical. Its primary purpose is, “through reflection, the amelioration both of the individual and the, through the choices of educated individuals, of the surrounding society.” Second, philosophy seen thusly is an active rather than merely “intellectual” endeavor. It is the education of the “rational soul” and not the passive accumulation of knowledge. Finally, the act of philosophizing is appropriate to all humans and therefore philosophical education ought to be broadly distributed. Philosophers who abandon this project or engage in it in a way that does not produce real gains toward its goal or who propose that this goal is less than universally applicable (both within or across cultural or national boundaries) are, as the Stoics put it, the foemen of philosophy. They are false prophets who ought not be dignified by the appellation of philosopher. In the previous chapter, we looked at how post-development theorists are boxed out of Nussbaum’s approach. These are the criteria that provide the basis of her critiques of both Allan Bloom and Judith Butler as well.

In his widely-read, if not well-regarded, *The Closing of the American Mind*, Allan Bloom starts from a position to which Nussbaum is highly sympathetic, namely that philosophy has a central role to play in the formation of the rational soul and the construction of a properly functioning society. However, Nussbaum finds herself at odds with Bloom over the issue of traditional philosophic readings and the proper audience for philosophy. Utility, she argues, cannot be privileged over careful and analytical
readings. Additionally, she sees his entire approach to philosophy as elitist and contrary to the spirit of democracy. Nussbaum sees Bloom as engaging in a style of thinking that attempts to reveal timeless truths. This approach to the philosophical canon undermines practical reason and ultimately draws gifted students away from the hard work of social change.⁹

The enemy of philosophy, according to Bloom, is the rampant spread of relativism through contemporary college campuses. He holds that this relativism constitutes a fundamental shift away from the Socratic project in service of the search for the best human life. This is a position that Nussbaum herself argues in her own treatise on American higher education, *Cultivating Humanity*. Nussbaum argues that Bloom presents the “high intellectual tradition of nineteenth-century continental Europe”—thinkers like Nietzsche and Max Weber—as the sole causes of the failure of the university in the late 20th century. She bemoans the fact that “Bloom, surprisingly, is silent about the influence of utilitarianism on American cultural and economic life…”¹⁰

While, indeed, the index of Allan Bloom’s book does not include a reference to utilitarian philosophy and there is no particular chapter devoted to the problems of utilitarian thought, Bloom is hardly silent on it and its pernicious effects on the American psyche and its turn toward relativism. He refers to it as a “narrower and more self-satisfied version of earlier liberal thought.”¹¹ He also charges that the liberalism of John Stuart Mill teaches that we do not need to search for or elucidate natural rights and “this turn in liberalism is what prepared us for cultural relativism…”¹² But the real meat of Nussbaum’s critique of Bloom is not his complaint about the Nietzscheanization of the left, to which we will return, but his argument that philosophy is the preview of a narrow
elite and that the goal of the philosophical life is to withdraw from the vicissitudes of lived experience—to “find rest” as it were.\textsuperscript{13} This passage in Bloom, however, points to the inner life of the philosopher that cannot be seen by those to whom the philosophical life appears at best “petty” and at worst concerned with “immoral nonsense”.\textsuperscript{14}

While she notes that his use of “find rest” is drawn from his reading of Maimonides, she fails to note that Bloom argues that this feeling of discovery—liberation through knowledge—is the province of “Man as man, regardless of nation, birth or wealth…[all are] capable of this experience. And it is the only thing men surely have spiritually in common.”\textsuperscript{15} He notes that universities are places where we come into contact with philosophers who devote their entire lives to this manner of thinking and that all can learn from them even if they do not devote themselves so thoroughly to the contemplative life. While I think Nussbaum overstates the undemocratic sentiment within Bloom’s book, I do not think it is because they have a fundamental disagreement of about what philosophy is. For Nussbaum, the goal of philosophy is the revelation of the good life—the dismantling of the myths of culture and nation that prevent humans from developing their highest faculty. This is the very project at work in her Capabilities Approach. It is at the core of her resistance to any political project that privileges identity, location, or culture over reason; so, too, for Bloom. Although Nussbaum presents him as a “profoundly religious man,”\textsuperscript{16} Bloom (in his discussion of Thales and the appearance of the philosopher) states the fulfillment offered by philosophy is a satisfaction, “not depending, for the fulfillment of what is highest in himself, on other men or opinions or on accidents such as birth or election to power, on anything that can be taken from him.”\textsuperscript{17} Additionally, these moments of philosophical clarity debunk the
poetic and mythical accounts of the world. “Freedom from the myths and their insistence that piety is best permits man to see that knowing is best…” The two agree that philosophy is by its nature universal. We have seen Nussbaum’s commitment to this universality in previous chapters. Bloom, too, is adamant about this fact. “The good life and the just regime…” he writes,

[knew] no limits of race, nation, religion or climate. This relation to man as man was the very definition of philosophy. We are aware of this when we speak of science, and no one seriously talks of German, Italian, or English physics. And when we Americans speak seriously about politics, we mean that our principles of freedom and equality and the rights based on them are rational and every applicable.

This assertion mirrors the assertions made by Nussbaum in defense of the universal applicability of her Capabilities Approach and the fundamental premise of her attempt to construct them.

The primary difference between these two thinkers seems to rest on the ability of these ideas to be translated into progressive social movements. Nussbaum's remaining critique, and in my mind the only critique that holds water, is directed against Bloom’s insistence that the philosopher’s duty is not toward the movement of “the people” into the philosophical life. She suggests this elitism proves that he “despises the search for social justice.” This he is adamant about as we can see in his discussion of the allegory of the cave and its significance for contemporary politics.

The entire difference between the ancients and the moderns concerns the cave, or nonmetaphorically, the relationship between knowledge and civil society. Socrates never suggests that, even in the unlikely event that philosophers should be kings and possess absolute wisdom, the nature of the cave could be altered or that a civil society, a people, a demos, could do without false opinions.

At the end of the day, a philosopher must seek truth and may use it to improve the lives of others; but it may not be in the people’s best interest to remove what Edmund Burke
has called the “decent drapery” of cultural and civic myths. These illusions, Burke and Bloom suggest, are what make life livable for those without the intellectual or social power to change their position within an unjust world. Ultimately, Nussbaum believes he, through selection bias and willful misreadings of classic texts, reduces the efficacy of social movements by making the work seem unphilosophical. These failures lead Nussbaum to state, “How good a philosopher, then, is Allan Bloom? The answer is, we cannot say, and we are given no reason to think him one at all.”23 Such a dismissal of a thinker as “unphilosophical” seems to lie less in his method (or lack thereof) than in his apolitical conclusions.

Nussbaum’s critique of Judith Butler follows a similar trajectory. Indeed, the culmination of her criticisms concerning Butler’s style, method, and sources lead her to question whether Butler’s work belongs within the field of philosophy. The rejection of writers with whom she disagrees as existing outside of the realm of philosophy is commonplace. Nussbaum’s review of Butler’s work includes critiques on four texts: Excitable Speech, The Psychic Life of Power, Bodies that Matter, and Gender Trouble. The title alone, “The Professor of Parody,” should prepare the reader for the level of derision that lies within. In regards to Butler’s work, Nussbaum does not argue, as she does in her critique of Bloom, that her position is simply anti-democratic; instead she argues that Butler’s writing style is both anti-democratic and unphilosophical as well as insufficiently oriented toward mass social mobilization whose goal is primarily the improvement of the subject’s material condition.

The anti-democratic nature of Butler’s prose lies in its obscurity, according to Nussbaum. This is perhaps unsurprising. Butler did win an award in 1998 in the fourth
annual Bad Writing Contest sponsored by the journal *Philosophy and Literature* for a sentence excerpted from her essay “Further Reflections on the Conversation of Our Time.” It is, she charges, obfuscatory to the point ridiculousness. Her language is abstract and notoriously difficult even for the philosophically initiated. Furthermore, Nussbaum is critical of Butler’s casual allusion to philosophical figures, ideas, and schools of thought. Nussbaum would prefer attempts at direct representation of what was initially intended. Her manner of writing leads Nussbaum to states, “one should ask whether it belongs to the philosophical tradition at all, rather than to the closely related but adversarial traditions of sophistry and rhetoric.”\(^{24}\)

The most interesting of Nussbaum’s criticism concerns the political output of Butler’s philosophy. While Butler offers a set of tools for change—namely parody—Nussbaum rejects this approach due to its limited scope. By failing to promote “mass movements of resistance or campaigns for political reform,” Nussbaum argues that Butler not only speaks the language of elitism but also ultimately condemns the “hopefulness of democratic processes.” In fact, she says, that Butler, by ignoring the material conditions of human suffering in favor of the symbolic processes of oppression, “collaborates with evil.”\(^{25}\) What seems missing from Nussbaum’s case against Butler is the very same misstep she accuses Butler of making; namely, that Nussbaum provides no account or analysis of the impact of Butler’s writing. The reader is only left with Nussbaum’s impression of how liberal, college-educated women use life-style feminism as a way of maintaining radical credibility while avoiding the hard work of social change. We do not see any discussion of how women enact Butler’s philosophy, how they imagine their parody affects change, or whether the language of critical gender studies
has had any effect on the way gender identity or heteronormativity operate in American culture. Over the past twenty years, the United States of America has made great legal and cultural strides on recognizing the validity of homosexual and bisexual rights. More recently, transgender and non-binary gender rights have been mainstreamed. It has been noted that these latter groups are advancing more quickly along the path to legal normalization than the groups that came before them. Many trace this phenomenon to the popularization of Butler’s vocabulary of performativity. While some, like Nussbaum, see Butler’s deployment of philosophical jargon as obscurant, others believe that it fundamentally reshaped the language of gender normativity in ways that allowed a broader public to re-imagine or imagine for the first time the fluidity of these seemingly eternal binaries.  

26 Given that Nussbaum’s analyses of other philosophers have hinged both on their ability to foster democratic social movements and to get legal results, I believe it is necessary to turn toward these aspects of Nussbaum’s own work.

**Practicing the Capabilities Approach**

At the heart of Nussbaum’s project is a commitment to practical measurement rather than mere abstract musing. The Capabilities Approach was created and advanced in order to provide an alternative to simplistic economic calculations of development used by major intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank. Until the late 1980’s, development assessments focused almost exclusively on GNP per capita. Such measures masked extraordinary inequalities among classes, races, and genders.  

27 Nussbaum’s project, with regard to the Capabilities Approach has been the formulation of a list of fundamental human capabilities that she believes can be derived from the Aristotelian commitment to human flourishing. This approach has become the
primary counter to both the economic strain of development measures and the human rights approach. While this list has been expanded upon in the thirty years since its original publication, it remains at the core of her contemporary work. The success of her life’s work can be measured in the ability of her writing to persuade others of the value of these capabilities as well as on her ability to generate political change toward these ends.

While Nussbaum considers herself a cosmopolitan, she claims she is not a political cosmopolitan in the sense of desiring the replacement of the international system of sovereign states with a world government. Nussbaum opposes the creation of a world state on the grounds that it is “very unlikely to have a decent level of accountability to its citizens.” That being said, she does believe that the Capabilities Approach should be pursued at the global level by a “thin and decentralized” world order. This global structure should operate under ten principles according to Nussbaum. There are two issues of significance that are raised by the political aspects of Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach. The first is Nussbaum’s failure to recognize her approach as moving well beyond ethical cosmopolitan into the realm of a substantial and awfully thick political cosmopolitanism. The second is her continued inability to see the extraordinary political mobilization her project entails and to account for the empirical rise of such a movement. Here I will address the first issues. The second will be approached in the section on identity politics and progressive action. As she notes on multiple occasions in this list, it will be up to these bodies to use sanctions, funding, and coercive interventions to promote these goals. Additionally, this “thin and decentralized” world system,
should include a world criminal court...to deal with grave human rights violations; a set of world environmental regulations with enforcement mechanisms, plus a tax on the industrial nations of the North to support the development of pollution controls in the South; as set of global trade regulations that would try to harness the juggernaut of globalization to a set of moral goals for human development, as set forth in the capabilities list; a set of global labor standards for both the formal and the informal sector, together with sanctions for companies that do not obey them; some limited forms of global taxation that would effect transfers of wealth from richer to poorer nations...; and, finally, a wide range of international accords and treaties, once ratified by the nations, can be incorporated into the nations’ domestic systems of law through judicial and legislative action.31

This is not a particularly weak governing system that Nussbaum is proposing here. Such a government would be a radical expansion of the powers of the current global system. Nevertheless, Nussbaum treats it as if it were already an obvious course of action that is feasible within the current international political environment.

This is far from being the case. At the writing of this chapter, the International Criminal Court, a fragile thing to begin with due to the United States of America’s refusal to ratify it, is on the precipice of disaster. Less than six months after the completion of the ICC’s new $240 million headquarters, South Africa, Gambia, and Burundi have announced plans to exit the court. The Gambian Information Minister, Sheriff Bojang, called for rejecting the ICC on the grounds that “it should be called the International Caucasian Court for the persecution and humiliation of people of color, especially Africans.” He cited the court’s decade-long record of indictments: amounting to 39 individuals all of whom happen to be African. These defections were followed less than a month later by Russian President Vladimir Putin’s announcement that Russia would be “unsigning” the founding treaty as well.32

The national mood toward international governance in the United States of America seems no better. While the USA has rejected the legitimacy of the ICC since
the court’s founding, the country is now seeing a further turn away from internationalism. The current President-elect has called for the USA to reject the recently agreed upon Paris Climate Agreement that would have brought two-hundred nations together toward the goal of dramatically reducing carbon emissions. He has gone so far as to state that he wants to bypass the four-year exit procedure for the country. Additionally, he has questioned the very existence of the United Nations calling it both “just a club for people to get together, talk and have a good time” and accusing it of causing more problems than it solves. The government is currently discussing reducing United Nations funding by up to fifty percent.

The goal of consolidating, expanding, and increasing the powers of the current world government appear to be direct opposition to the general historical epoch in which we are living. The failure to recognize the radical and even revolutionary nature of her political program diminishes the seriousness with which we can take Nussbaum’s philosophizing. David Harvey fears that Nussbaum’s program should be read as cosmopolitanism from above and that in the absence of a more comprehensive recognition of cosmopolitanism from below Nussbaum’s position dangerously imperialistic. The current mood would seem to suggest that it is not dangerously imperialistic but merely politically toothless and increasingly irrelevant.

**Democracy and the Capabilities Approach**

For the time-being, we will set aside the relevance of Nussbaum’s globalism in an increasingly nationalist present to look at the role democracy plays in Nussbaum’s assessment of political institutions. She frequently invokes the importance of democracy in her writing. In this chapter, we explored how Nussbaum assesses the value of other authors’ work on the basis of their contribution to democracy. In the case of Allan
Bloom, Nussbaum argues that his vision of the philosophical life for the elite student is at odds with the values of democratic citizenship. With regards to Judith Butler, she states that it is both Butler’s failure to use popularly accessible language in her writing as well as her inability to create a philosophy whose outcome is large-scale social movement toward material equality that renders her both insufficiently democratic and thus insufficiently philosophical. Nussbaum has, additionally, argued that the continuing value of the liberal arts education is the manner in which it prepares the pupil for democratic citizenship going so far as to say that its agenda should only be defended if it is “worthy of our conception of democracy and worthy of guiding its future.”

What, then, is democracy according to Nussbaum? Of what does it consist? What is the value that it provides in light of her uncertain attitudes to the voices of others?

In her discussion of practical reason and the role of consensus in establishing the political program of her Capabilities Approach, albeit one relegated to the footnotes, she states,

to build democracy into the ground level of the conception of the human from the start prevents us from raising later on the question of what political arrangement will best secure to citizens the list of human capabilities, in a wide variety of circumstances. It may turn out that the answer will always be ‘democracy.’ But even then, I think it will rarely be just democracy (ancient Athenian or New England town-meeting style).”

This strikes one as ever so odd given Aristotle’s own position regarding the centrality of deliberation to the human condition. Noting this discrepancy, Seyla Benhabib argues that Nussbaum’s approach slips into welfarism and,

[Nussbaum’s project] ends up in a non-Aristotelian spot: a disjunction emerges between mere life and the good life, for Aristotle as well, the life of praxis in common association and deliberation with others was the humanly highest form of life. As he told us, the Gods need no politics for they are self-sufficient; the beasts do not need it for they do not enjoy language; it is only needy, finite and dependent creatures like ourselves.
who need politics both to sustain life and also to enjoy the good life—the life primarily of acting and speech in the ethico-political community. When reflecting on a global scale as well; welfare and democracy, the sustenance of life and the pursuit of the good life should not be separated from each other. Aristotelian social democracy would have to be both social and democratic.37

It should be noted that between the publication of “Human Capabilities” in 1995 and *Frontiers of Justice* in 2006, Nussbaum extended Capability 10a to include not only freedom of speech and assembly but also the ability “to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life.”38 Clearly, overtime, she has come to regard political participation as a necessary facet of the good life, or the life worthy of human dignity as she calls it, but a philosophical or empirical defense of its inclusion remains absent. It may appear to stem from Nussbaum’s own appreciation of Aristotle but such a defense is not articulated in her work. While it is clear that the primary goal of her approach is to shape politics, her corpus is missing an analysis of the work of politics.

In the absence of a theory of political engagement, Nussbaum’s list of capabilities seems to exist in her writing as pre-political or exterior to politics. She writes,

> In general, then the Capabilities Approach, in my version, focuses on the protection of areas of freedom so central that their removal makes a life not worthy of human dignity. When a freedom is not that central, it will be left to the ordinary workings of the political process.39

When discussing her list of capabilities as the fundamental preconditions of a life worthy of human dignity she argues that for a country to be considered “minimally just” it must provide constitutional protections or “supramajoritarian protections” for these entitlements.40 What seems missing from this consideration of the protection of such rights—not to mention their implementation in the absence of such constitutional provisions—is the actually work of politics. While she states that deliberation in her
model is only limited by its support that these fundamental entitlements be put beyond
the reach of majoritarian inclinations she seems to miss the very political grounds on
which these entitlements would have to be accepted by the people, politically promoted,
turned into policy, and ratified.41

She does seem to acknowledge that her vision of how political institutions
balance the need for democratic respect for agency against the need for basic
protections is a weakness in the Capabilities Approach.42 I would argue that the
Capabilities Approach need also take into consideration the problem of political action
and social movements. There is not a consensus on the values offered by the
Capabilities Approach within generally liberal societies nor is there consensus among
the transnational cosmopolitan elite. In order for the Capabilities Approach to gain
ground it needs to operate from a position of an empirical understanding of
democratization, democratic consolidation, and political savvy.

**Nussbaum’s rejection of identity politics**

The problem of identity politics for Nussbaum appears to be her assertion that at
the heart of all identity politics is a belief in the fundamental and irreconcilable difference
between groups of people. As she writes in *Cultivating Humanity*, “The goal of
producing world citizens is profoundly opposed to the spirit of identity politics, which
holds that one’s primary affiliation is with one’s local group, whether religious or ethnic
or based on sexuality or gender.”43 This definition is largely at odds with most of the
political literature on the subject.44 For Nussbaum, one ought not to be valued because
one is Black or Queer or Female but rather because one is a human and humanness is
deserving of respect.45 This is not an uncommon line of thought. Dorothy Roberts writes
of those that reject identity politics,
For these writers the nationalist vision not only misperceives human nature; it also prevents human interaction that transcends racial and ethnic differences. By placing undue weight on distinct racial experiences, the worry goes, demands for separate cultural institutions block channels of mutual understanding…by this logic it is black nationalists’ preoccupation with race that prevents progress toward racial harmony.  

Roberts explicitly includes Nussbaum within this category by citing Nussbaum’s first meditation on identity politics. In it, she states her fears thusly, “conceding that a morally arbitrary boundary such as the boundary of the nation has a deep and formative role in our deliberations, we seem to be depriving ourselves of any principled way of arguing to citizens that they should in fact join hands.” She goes on to add,  

As David Glidden, philosopher at the University of California at Riverside, expressed the point, “the ability to admire and love the diversity of human beings gets lost” when one bases the demand for inclusion on notions of local group identity. Why should one love or attend to a Hispanic fellow citizen, on this view, if one is oneself most fundamentally an Irish-American?  

Nussbaum’s description of identity politics, like many of her criticisms of contrary claims, seems to miss the mark—her rejection of the concepts emerging prior to a genuine description or thorough analysis.  

She nowhere explores the nature of identity politics nor does she provide any empirical evidence that identity politics precludes valuing humans as humans or reduces empathy for those outside of the identity. While identity politics are often based on a shared history of oppression—they need not have anything to do with essentializing difference. Indeed, many of the post-development theorists with whom she disagrees explicitly deny the possibility of closed and/or naturalized culture. It may be the case that such politics—a politics based on identity-based grievances—may reify the identity over time or even fetishize the historical wound but they appear to be the primary means for achieving political ends, at least in rights-based political systems.
This is a fact of which Nussbaum should surely be aware given her many claims for viewing women’s transcultural shared experience of oppression as central to her capabilities thesis.

While definitions of identity politics vary, largely it is considered an alternative mode of political organization where a group organizes on the basis of a shared experience of injustice within a particular political/religious/cultural system rather than on the basis of economic class, political ideology, or belief system. What Nussbaum, along with other philosophers of identity, fails to understand both here and in “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism” is that identity in this day and age is rarely defined as closed characteristic or an insistence of ontological priority. Looking backward to the identity politics that emerged out of second wave feminism, Christopher Martin Carver, in his analysis of the work of the Combahee River Collective, rightfully notes that,

[Identity politics] is not, then, an epistemological judgment about identity (what should be afforded people on the basis of their identity, how we define identity, or what group is most deserving). It is the judgment that a claim to be recognized as “levelly human” within a field of politics that marginalizes certain races, sexes, sexualities, and classes is a radical one…The experiences “condition” but do not “determine” their lives.  

The practice of identity politics is then an attempt to forge a political community in the shadow of hegemonic practices that systematically deny the value of a group of people. This community can then name their oppression and speak it, denounce it, in solidarity with one another. Identity politics and the creation of spaces for particular groups of people are often the only site where awareness of oppression comes into being. This can particularly be seen in the role of consciousness-raising among women where their oppression is often conditioned on their isolation from one another.
While Nussbaum tends to treat the issue of identity politics as a modern challenge to the recognition of universal human rights, we must keep in mind that that the notion of deploying identity politics in defense of a group’s shared personhood is not new nor is its only (or obvious) outcome retrenchment. As the scope of Nazi violence against Jews was becoming undeniable, Hannah Arendt addressed the necessity of a military Jewish resistance to the forces of anti-Semitism. Arendt argues,

One of the inalienable rights of the Jews is the right to live and if need be to die as a Jew. A human being can defend himself only as the person he is attacked as. A Jew can preserve his human dignity only if he can become human as a Jew. For a Jew—in a time when his people are persecuted and the scraps of desert land that he has turned into fertile fields through the work of his own hands are threatened—that means fighting for the freedom of his people and the security of his land.  

To demand that the Jewish person denounce his Jewishness, or even state that it is a superfluous feature of his personhood, is ultimately to further degrade him.

The Jewish example poses an interesting paradox for the relationship between particularism and universalism. For Arendt, part of the uniqueness of the Jewish identity is the degree to which their particularity is tied to their cosmopolitanism. The danger of “Jewish Cosmopolitanism” was the target of attacks by both Nazis and Bolsheviks in the early 20th century. In the late 1940’s the word “cosmopolitan” was used as a code word for Jews who attempted to protect their Jewish identity. Jewish peoples, by virtue of their diasporic character, “transcend the bounds of nationality and weave the strands of their Jewish genius into the general texture of the European life…” according Arendt. Rather than the “admission of Jews as Jews to the ranks of humanity,” their countries demanded assimilation and self-denial. This “treacherous promise of equality” seems to be the product again on offer by contemporary liberal cosmopolitans like Nussbaum.
What Arendt appeared to realize that Nussbaum either overlooks or undervalues is that the regime of human rights to which she claims allegiance emerges from the defense of particularism in the face of totalizing ideologies of erasure. This regime evolves not just as an outright rejection of the clash of nationalisms in the early 20th century but as a defense of the identities of those who were crushed beneath the wheels of totalitarianism and imperialism. The protection of particularism and the defense of both “pariah peoples” and other oppressed groups must remain central to the ambitious program of ensuring the human dignity of all individuals. Furthermore, the codification of these values in the founding charter of the United Nations (the organization that Nussbaum argues should be central to the implementation of her Capabilities Approach) enshrines human rights at the very same time that it preserves the centrality of the sovereign state.\textsuperscript{56} While this certainly stems from the recognition that states would be reluctant to become signatories to a treaty that denied them sovereign status, it is also a pragmatic measure in another sense. As noted by Arendt in *On the Origins of Totalitarianism*, the deprivation of rights—and of humanity—begins first in the act of making people stateless. She writes,

> No paradox of contemporary politics is filled with a more poignant irony than the discrepancy between the efforts of well-meaning idealists who stubbornly insist on regarding as ‘inalienable’ those human rights, which are enjoyed only by citizens of the most prosperous and civilized countries, and the situation of the rightless themselves.\textsuperscript{57}

The development of the state and the notion of shared political identities are essential to the recognition and protection of human rights. For Arendt, the human stripped of belonging is not just isolated or lacking a life of “color” offered by what Nussbaum terms “morally irrelevant identities,” she is in a deeply dangerous situation. Where Nussbaum presents the culturally embedded individual as childlike and the cosmopolitan as a true
adult, Arendt imagines the embedded life (being in the world with others) as the only way to guarantee the grounds and the freedoms of mature political expression. This notion is aptly expressed by Serena Parekh’s reading of Arendt,

That human rights are not given by God or found in nature does not mean they are simply conventions. The right to have rights is part of the human condition since belonging in the human community is necessary to guarantee plurality—the equality and difference that is so essential for political life. Yet human rights are not already found in the world, but like all institutions, are built through work and action. Thus the right to have rights can only be guaranteed through collective action that generates the power to support this institution.58

Arendt, while recognizing the importance of identity, also refused to accept that identities could ever be singular, hierarchical, or closed.59 The attempt to isolate and organize identities in this manner is a feature of the attempt to institutionalize totalitarian domination and calls to mind the assignment of gold Stars of David and pink triangles. Identity is, and must be imagined as, open to the transformative process of political interaction. Such assignations are necessarily entangled in an effort to simultaneously fix a particular aspect of a person’s identity as salient for political purposes and to designate that identity’s position within a socio-political hierarchy. This is a trap that must be avoided. I am not first an American, then a woman, then a mother, then a Floridian, then a cosmopolitan citizen of the world at all times on every day. Some days, when I’m waging the battle for reproductive rights, I am a woman first. When I’m reaching out to Doctors without Borders to aid Syrians caught in a civil war beyond their control, I am a citizen of the world. When I urge fellow American citizens to embrace legislation that protect Syrian refugees, I am an American first who uses the rhetoric of American values to encourage outreach across borders. When I neglect all other duties to make sure my child is delivered through a life-threatening illness, I am a mother first.
In the process of engaging others in these conversations, what it means to be each of these identities can be transformed for me. Identity is often situational. In fact, even within large-scale identity-based political movements the emphasis on differences with the broader society or similarity to the broader society shift in response to a number of contextual factors: the structure of the social movement’s organization, access to power within the polity, and the type of systemic opposition that the group meets. Identity politics needs to be understood within the broader category of collective action.

Nussbaum also rejects identity politics on the grounds that many of the identities with which we identify are what she calls “morally irrelevant.” While this may be the case, they are certainly not politically irrelevant. In her opening criticism of Richard Rorty’s call for a Leftist reimagining of American identity, Nussbaum calls attention to Rabindranath Tagore’s powerful novel, *The Home and the World*, which she describes as a “tragic story of the defeat of a reasonable and principled cosmopolitanism by the forces of nationalism and ethnocentrism.” She further writes,

> Once someone has said, I am an Indian first, a citizen of the world second, once he or she has made the morally questionable move of self-definition by a morally irrelevant characteristic, then what, indeed, will stop that person from saying, as Tagore’s character so quickly learn to say, I am Hindu first, and an Indian second, or I am an upper-caste landlord first, and a Hindu second?

The answer, one hopes, is political and moral judgment—the same sort of judgment that would prevent a cosmopolitan citizen of the world from dismissing her interlocutors as unreasonable because they value an historical or politically salient identity. While there is an element of this argument that must appear facile or dismissive of the overall problem posed by competing sources of identity, this problem is political. In her discussion of the early relations between Israeli Jews and Arabs, Arendt writes, “A good
peace is usually the result of negotiation and compromise, not necessarily of a program." I believe what she is tapping into here is the inability of programmatic thinking (or ideology) to provide adequate solutions in the political sphere. In the instance of adjudicating between the validity of identities, no philosophy is going to be able to determine good action in all (or maybe any) cases.

As noted by Isaiah Berlin, political theory that seeks to circumscribe or even eliminate the realm of political agonism is doomed to failure. "Where ends are agreed," he writes at the beginning of "Two Concepts of Liberty",

the only questions left are those of means, and these are not political but technical, that is to say, capable of being settled by experts or machines, like arguments between engineers or doctors. That is way people who put their faith in world-transforming phenomenon, like the final triumph of reason or the proletarian revolution, must believe that all political and moral problems can thereby be turned into technological ones.65

The difficulties attendant to the struggle for economic development, political legitimacy and the conference of a "life worthy of human dignity" is not simply a question of adopting an appropriate ethical orientation, as Nussbaum’s emphasis on “good philosophy” suggests.

Furthermore, Berlin acknowledged that a central desire among individuals is a desire to be properly recognized—to be seen as an individual who is only intelligible within the terms of the social networks of which she is a part.66 “Paternalism,” he writes, is despotic, not because it is more oppressive than naked, brutal, unenlightened tyranny, nor merely because it ignores the transcendental reason embodied in me, but because it is an insult to my conception of myself as a human being, determined to make my own life in accordance with my own (not necessarily rational or benevolent) purposes, and, above all entitled to be recognized by such as others.67

This desire to be “somebody in the world” can often lead, according to Berlin, for a preference for being “rudely treated by a member of his own race or nation, than when
he was governed by some cautious, just, gentle, well-meaning administrator from outside." The failure to concede this recognition will simply displace conversations about other political and social values.

What is particularly disappointing is that Nussbaum herself seems to tacitly acknowledge the value of identity politics in her own work. In both her edited volume, *Women, Culture and Development*, and her monograph, *Women and Human Development*, Nussbaum begins by highlighting the shared struggles facing women world-wide. She rightly notes, “Women, a majority of the world’s population, receive only a small proportion of its opportunities and benefits. According to the 1993 UN *Human Development Report*, there is not a country in the world in which women’s quality of life is equal to that of men..." For these reasons, she urges Third World feminists to abandon their insistence on difference in order to focus on the pressing needs of the entire gender by looking specifically at women’s needs, gender-based injustices, and women-led movements for equality. This is identity politics: it is a research agenda and policy initiative based on a morally irrelevant identity which has been the basis for innumerable historical wounds, the widely-felt nature of these wounds becoming the grounds for which redress in the form of a new equality is demanded.

Additionally, Nussbaum’s critique of identity politics appears to emerge without consideration for the fact that identity politics are nearly always in response to identity-based oppression. The reclamation of value on the basis of that oppressed identity is often a doorway to the very possibility of political efficacy. In her comprehensive study of identity politics in the social sciences, Bernstein finds that the general consensus among researchers is that “to act politically, all social movements need identity for
empowerment or an oppositional consciousness to create and mobilize a constituency.” Furthermore, studies have shown that social movements that fail to create an identity are simply incapable of producing political claims at all. There is also a growing literature within the social sciences that suggests that whether a group defines itself as essentialist or invokes (strategically) the language of essentialism in defining its identity is dependent upon the political context of how their identity had been “repressed, delegitimized or devalued in dominant discourse.” Armstrong argues that identity politics is a type of “political logic” along with “interest group logic” and “redistributive logic”. The former’s purpose is to overcome alienation through constructing and affirming group identities in the face of alienation and devaluation. While there is some evidence that some identities can prevent future coalition-building, there is also mounting evidence that organizations based on identity politics can socialize individuals into the world of activism and that they become more open to future activism outside of the original identity-based group and increase an individual’s sense of political efficacy.

In “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” Nussbaum writes that, “becoming a citizen of the world is often a lonely business.” She sees in the Cynic and Stoic life a kind of exile from the comforts of tradition and local truths. She attributes to the writing of Marcus Aurelius a sense of “boundless loneliness”. However, she argues that the pursuit of something “warmer” or more “colorful” is akin to constructing “an idealized image of a nation as a surrogate parent who will do one’s thinking for one.” While she may wish to idealize the solitary work of the philosopher, she seems incapable of acknowledging that the work of political action involves solidarity, trust, and community.
For Nussbaum is truly one of the cosmopolitan elite. When she speaks, someone listens. In fact, her voice is often welcomed and even invited by those who would hear her. Be it as academic lecturer in an elite classroom, expert witness before a judge, or development advocate in the international committees of the United Nations or European Union, Nussbaum is the very archetype of a cosmopolitan agent. However, for those with fewer resources, less prestige, and systematically silenced voices the realm of politics is still a realm of numbers versus power. The outright rejection of identity politics on the basis of philosophical rather than empirical grounds undercuts Nussbaum’s claim to promote political action and social transformation. To put it another way, because identity is the necessary ground upon which solidarity is built, Nussbaum’s particular brand of cosmopolitanism is much more likely to foster a politics of elite technocratic control than it is to build a bottom-up politics of democratic development.

Achieving the goals of the Capabilities Approach are not a matter of getting the list of capabilities precisely right. It is not a matter merely of appropriate philosophical justification for the list, nor yet is it merely determining the proper framework of opportunity or experience. Achieving the goals of the Capabilities Approach will require direct political action. While using Nussbaum’s guidelines in crafting human development measures at the level of the United Nations may put pressure on governments to reconceive how they define and attend to the development of their own peoples, ultimately these goals will remain both unachieved and possibly unwelcome without the bottom-up demand.
With this in mind, the new cosmopolitanism ought not commit itself to either the destruction or denigration of communities, as these are not merely the site of local color or immature attachments. They are the very bedrock of political action. This becomes clear when we look at attempts to mobilize political action in both urban centers and rural areas. Dislocation, isolation, and social anomie—the very effects of economic development—reduce the agency and efficacy of citizens. Often times, before the practical action of political organization can take place, community development must occur. Drawing on conclusions made by Emile Durkheim, Harvey Griesman argues that community is critical for avoiding both alienation and political apathy.\textsuperscript{75} Thinkers as diverse as Jane Addams, Saul Alinsky, and Robert Putnam all argue that community is the foundation for political action. For this reason, Nussbaum must address the issue of community with more nuance and consider the significance of community-based political organizing.

When the expert approaches these communities, direct action toward the achievement of development goals work best when the expert does not use strategies of authoritative intervention. Gene Summers, in his discussion rural development in the United States, argues that the best approach is one where,

\begin{quote}
All people are believed to be inherently active in searching for ways to satisfy their needs. Their behavior is purposive, and experiences in their daily lives are continually and seriously evaluated for their usefulness in satisfying their needs. People can learn from their experience and evolve workable systems of beliefs, values, and behaviors. Thus, their experiential learning is a method of truth seeking and reality testing not unlike the scientists’ experimentation. [Recognizing this is key to] the long-term improvement in the human condition.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

While Summers does note that the improvement of nutrition, health, and sanitation can often be achieved by way of top-down, authoritative intervention;\textsuperscript{77} it has also been
noted that following the creation of such policies and institutions, effective implementation and continued responsiveness are highly correlated to the strength or cohesiveness of the impacted community. In Berlin’s consideration of political judgment, he writes, “we rightly fear those bold reformers who are too obsessed by their vision to pay attention to the medium in which they work”. He continues thusly,

Most of the suspicion of intellectuals in politics springs from the belief, not entirely false, that, owing to a strong desire to see life in some simple, symmetrical fashion, they put too much faith in the beneficent results of applying directly to life conclusions obtained by operations in some theoretical sphere. And the corollary of this overreliance on theory, a corollary alas too often corroborated by experience, is that if the facts—that is, the behavior of living human beings—are recalcitrant to such experiment, the experimenter becomes annoyed, and tries to alter the facts to fit the theory, which, in practice, means a kind of vivisection of societies until they become what the theory originally declared that the experiment should have caused them to be.

This vivisection does not just deform the body politic but can cripple it—rendering communities less capable of pursuing their interests in local, national, and international arenas.

**Cosmopolitanism in Action**

My engagement with the works of Martha Nussbaum stems from a place of deep respect and a fundamental support of the values of inclusivity, egalitarianism, and democracy. The concerns presented are intended to improve our ability to expand access to these three goods that while all valuable, do not necessarily arrive in one tidy package. We proceed into an era increasingly dominated by reactionary voices. As Russia becomes further consolidated in its brand of oligarchic totalitarianism, as democratic Turkey slides towards strongman politics, as the rise of neo-fascism grips Europe and the United States, as violent strains of Wahabism take hold globally, we must double down on our commitment to the value of human dignity while at the same
time examining our processes and assumptions so as to become more effective messengers.

First, Seek new voices and listen well. I have previously shown how frequently Nussbaum either misreads or mischaracterizes those post-development theorists with whom she disagrees. It would be ungenerous of me to suggest that she does not see the problems with the colonizers’ inability to attach value to other ways of being. In her introductory discussion of Nkiru Nzegwu’s contribution to Women, Culture and Development, Nussbaum writes, “The cultures of the Enlightenment have frequently been unjustly contemptuous of the traditions of the people they have colonized, and obtuse about discovering that [sic.] those traditions are.” In practice, however, her approach tends to neglect dissent. Through her casual dismissal of complex defenses of tradition and the concomitant tales of what it means to be culturally disenfranchised, and her reliance on fictional narratives rather than actual voices which may be tainted by adaptive preferences she shows a disregard for the hard work of political persuasion.

While Nussbaum continues to stress the idea of ethical obligations as concentric circles, she has acknowledged the boundaries that can prohibit us from dangerous and counter-productive othering. She has stated, “I think the challenge is to build concentricity in a way that really does extend outward, rather than drawing the line somewhere, so that who demonize those who are outside that boundary.” This extraordinary task needs to begin with the how we read, listen, interpret, and define those with whom we disagree.

There is perhaps nothing more urgent, in a world increasingly driven by multinational corporations and the power motive that is built into their operations, than to articulate a set of humanly rich goals for development,
and a set of more general attitudes about the purposes of cooperation that will be needed to sustain people in the pursuit of these goals.\textsuperscript{81}

Her approach could be greatly improved by an engagement with recent developments in hermeneutics (especially the works of Fred Dallmayr and Richard Bernstein). Such an engagement, however, would have to acknowledge the possibility that there could be value in so-called post-Nietzschean or anti-foundationalist approaches to intercultural dialogue. So long as Nussbaum continues to ignore, preemptively condemn, or willfully misread those who question the value and legitimacy of contemporary regimes of development, she falls short of achieving her own calls to inclusivity.

Second, recognize that differences of opinion concerning the good life and the immediate ends of government may emerge not from a lack of reason, ignorance or adaptive preference but rather from the incommensurability of values. Nussbaum’s early philosophical career dwelt heavily on the notion of the incommensurability of values and the nature of human tragedy. As early as 1986 we can see the seeds of Nussbaum’s Capabilities Approach taking root. In her introduction to her book *The Fragility of Goodness*, Nussbaum quotes Pindar: “But human excellence grows like a vine tree, fed by the green dew, raised up, among wise men and just, to the liquid sky”.\textsuperscript{82} Pindar’s vine flourishes but it does not do so in isolation. It requires a good heritage, a rich soil, favorable climate, and attention from cultivators. Nussbaum extrapolates as follows, “We need to be born with adequate capacities, to live in fostering natural and social circumstances, to stay clear of abrupt catastrophe, to develop confirming associations with other human beings”.\textsuperscript{83} This approach is far from the self-sufficient flourishing favored by the philosophers of the time. This side of Greek intellectual life, Nussbaum
argues, is primarily concerned with banishing contingency from human life through the sheer force of reason.

That I am an agent, but also a plant; that much that I did not make goes towards making me whatever I shall be praised or blamed for being; that I must constantly choose among competing and apparently incommensurable goods and that circumstances may force me to a position in which I cannot help being false to something or doing some wrong; that an event that simply happens to me may, without my consent, alter my life; that it is equally problematic to entrust one’s good friends, lovers, or country and to try to have a good life without them—all these I take to be not just the material of tragedy, but everyday facts of lived practical reason.  

In this particular reading of luck and excellence, she does not engage the discussion of the luck of birth or constitution, e.g. the role of factors that endow, or limit, the ability of an individual to partake in the good life. Returning to the incommensurability of desire is in Nussbaum’s best interest moving forward. Nussbaum is far from showing that her list of capabilities is internally commensurable. Rather than infantilizing the subjects of development as she does through her reliance on the language of adaptive preferences, she should turn toward the very real danger of incommensurability and the often unavoidable tragedy of living a life embedded with others. Our commitments to certain aspects of our lives, through no fault of our own, often push us into conflict with other, no less deeply held, commitments.

Despite some contemporary talk in upwardly-mobile urban centers, most people cannot choose their family and build intentional-communities without abandoning other deeply held commitments and identities. To the extent that we can, we are almost always limited by distance, time and money to those proximate to us. A person’s commitment to her family may place her at odds with other values like autonomy or creativity or religious observance or political activism. It would perhaps be best to look
for ways in both domestic politics and international politics to alleviate the incommensurability or engage the incommensurability of certain political, social or economic actions rather than dismiss individual choices as mere adaptive preferences or false consciousness.

While in the past Nussbaum has dismissed Isaiah Berlin for providing too thin a conception of liberalism, it is worth considering both the origin of Berlin’s commitment to pluralism and where Berlin’s own notion of the incommensurability of values led him.\textsuperscript{86}

Sounding much like Nussbaum in her early career, Berlin writes,

\begin{quote}
The notion of the perfect whole, the ultimate solution, in which all good things coexist, seems to me to be not merely unattainable—that is a truism—but conceptually incoherent. I do not know what is meant by a harmony of this kind. Some among the Great Goods cannot live together. That is a conceptual truth. We are doomed to choose, and every choice may entail an irreparable loss.\textsuperscript{87}
\end{quote}

While individuals like Leo Strauss have accused Berlin of moral relativism, Berlin himself denied that label, arguing instead that there are not infinitely many ways of living.\textsuperscript{88} William Galston argues that while approaching moral life this way may necessarily entail a vision of the political realm as ad hoc and agonistic, it is worth remembering the Berlinian pluralism is not a form of irrationalism. Just because two values are incommensurable does not mean that they are incomparable. Making ordinal judgments concerning the relative weight of this value or that value is possible given a particular circumstance.\textsuperscript{89} The conflict between values is not indicative of false consciousness or adaptive preference but rather an inseparable part of the human condition.\textsuperscript{90}

Third, we must keep practical action at the heart of our research. Writing about what he calls the “phantasmal relations” between theory and practice, Bonaventura de
Sousa Santos argues that there is a growing disparity between the Eurocentric philosophies of social transformation and the transformative practices occurring in the global south. This divergence, he argues, stems from a failure to recognize that these political struggles involve social groups rarely recognized in Western theory (including indigenous peoples, peasants, the unemployed, and other marginalized groups). They often pursue their political struggles through a combination of activities that are largely rejected by liberal, academic elites: deployment of identity politics, calls to tradition, emphasis on intergenerational connections between the living, dead, and yet-to-be-born, commitment to the idea of an ecology of knowledges. Such activities, ontologies, and epistemologies are often rejected as ignorant, inferior, particular, or unproductive. We have seen Nussbaum use several of these adjectives to dismiss post-Nietzschean defenses of local knowledge. There is something particularly assimilationist is the merely referring to calls to reassess the value of traditional knowledges as post-Nietzschean—claims to the value of non-Western ways of being are even described under the rubric of the Western canon.

Recognizing the practical application of these approaches is particularly important given Nussbaum’s desire to write off all post-Nietzschean philosophy as quietist and all traditional modes of thinking as backwards. There are several excellent examples of social movements that emerge from the critique of essentialism, for example, Frédérique Apffel-Marglin’s work with the Sachamama Center for Biocultural Regeneration.

In 1992, Apffel-Marglin made contact with an organization called Proyecto Andino de Tecnologias Campesinas (PRATEC). Three Peruvians who had careers in
development throughout the 1970’s and 80’s and ultimately came to reject the Western-made models of development had created this organization. Explaining the origin of the organization, Apffel-Marglin writes,

The realization was not simply that development had failed, but that development consisted of a package of practices, ideas, and epistemologies and ontologies that came from the modern West and were profoundly alien to the native peasantry. They had become convinced that native agriculture and culture was not only adequate to the environment but was alive and vibrant, despite the efforts of development, education...For them, Andean culture embodies a totally different mode of being in the world, of being a person, of relating to others, both humans and non-humans, as well as different notions of time, of space and of nature.92

Apffel-Marglin presents this way of engaging as fundamentally distinct from both the liberal development agenda and the radical left of the Shining Path and other Marxist revolutionaries.93 The organization also rejects the authoritative voice of anthropology—the discipline that inscribes in outsiders the right to determine what is and is not authentic about a culture or its practices. Instead they favor an understanding of culture that is porous and subject to intercultural cross-pollination.94 Ultimately, her commitment to the PRATEC position of de-professionalization led Apffel-Marglin to reduce her teaching load and establish the Center for Mutual Learning at Smith College and begin the work of direct action.95 Far from producing a position of relativism and nihilism, as expected by Nussbaum, Apffel-Marglin would become increasingly active in community service. In 2009, she developed the Sachamama Center for Biocultural Regeneration (SCBR). The goal of this non-profit is to reclaim the Pre-Colombian practice of black earth and biochar agriculture by bringing together academics, students, and indigenous Kichwa-Lamistas to improve local agriculture and mitigate the climate crisis.96 The work of post-development theorists indicate that the alternative to
development practices based on universalism and human rights need not be a relativistic lack of commitment or engagement. The substitute may be as simple as removing the mask of expertise and engaging with populations at home and abroad as co-members of a shared project.

Fourth, we must begin thinking beyond the categories of East/West and Developed/Undeveloped. In many ways, Nussbaum’s approach to development stems from her early readings of the classics. Her appreciation of Stoic pedagogical methods is based on the idea that the sage should begin teaching to the student with a complete understanding of the student’s concrete situation. This entails “being keenly aware of the pupil’s particular history, experiences, and immediate situation.”

Nussbaum notes that this medical model in the Stoics, where the sage provides narrative instruction to improve the pupil’s moral orientation, is asymmetric. While she does argue that this harshness is softened, at least in the works of Seneca, by an emphasis on mercy, the application of this sort of worldview to a global dialogue sets the foundation for troubling power relations. The perception in the development world that this is a one-sided engagement, where the modern scholar or expert attempts to develop the post-colonial subject, both evokes the asymmetrical power relations of the colonial period and furthers resentment.

So often in the development literature attention is focused squarely upon the conflict between modernity and tradition in developing countries. In Nussbaum’s edited volume entitled Women Culture and Development, a section at the end is devoted to case studies. These include perspectives on women and equality in China, Mexico, and...
India, and Nigeria. Agreeing with Martha Chen’s analysis of Bangladesh and India, Selya Benhabib writes,

*In these societies* there is a clash between the political and legal modernization adopted by nation-states, with their democratic and egalitarian constitutions, and the rural communities whose value systems are clearly much less progressive and egalitarian than these national constitutions.

There is often an urge to (dis)place the issues of development and human functioning to the post-colony. While the urge is premised on well-meaning intentions—the desire to help the least fortunate and to rectify the wrongs of colonization—the continued use of this particular lens simply reinforces the image of neocolonial meddling. Additionally, such a view obscures the reality that this battle between political and legal modernization and traditional and/or values are in conflict in nearly all states. The failure to appreciate how peoples in the developed world relate to and value their own traditional ways of life and cultural integrity has perhaps lead to the largest wave of Western nationalism since World War II. To the extent that the Capabilities Approach can be salvaged, it must move away from this tendency to reify distinctions between East and West and back away from the implicit (some times explicit) notion that the Western scholar is the sage helping to inculcate modern virtue in the underdeveloped world.

**Conclusion**

In the previous chapters, I have endeavored to show how Nussbaum’s early works on the Stoics, Aristotle, literary criticism, and narrative have shaped her Capabilities Approach. While I believe there is little wrong with the list of capabilities that Nussbaum has developed over the last three decades, the particular manner of their emergence and their defense poses problems for their realization.
In response to these limitations, I have suggested a manner of approaching
development that puts the lived experiences of global subjects front and center. In the
concluding paragraph of Nussbaum’s most recent book-length attempt to reach out to a
non-academic audience, she writes that, “our world needs more critical thinking and
more respectful argument. The distressingly common practice of arguing by sound bite
urgently needs to be replaced by a mode of public discourse that is itself more
respectful of our equal human dignity.”¹⁰⁵ I would like to second Nussbaum’s motion and
encourage Nussbaum and other thinkers to take a step toward genuine dialogue by
consciously foregoing colonial modes of discourse. It may be instructive to view Martha
Nussbaum’s corpus through the lens of Isaiah Berlin’s cartography of liberty. The
Capabilities Approach and its concomitant reliance on the mechanism of adaptive
preference falls under Berlin’s critique of the liberty of the authentic-self. As he writes,

I may declare that they are actually aiming at what in their benighted state
they consciously resist, because there exists within them an occult
entity—their latent rational will, or their “true” purpose—and that this entity,
although it is belied by all that they overtly feel and do and say, is their
“real” self, of which the poor empirical self in space and time know nothing
or little…¹⁰⁶

It is difficult for one to imagine beginning an authentic conversation—a conversation
where the conclusion is not predetermined—in this manner. The language of adaptive
preference seems to me to be a method of discussing others rather than beginning a
discussion with them. Nussbaum’s own body of work contains the key for retooling this
approach. Her work on the incommensurability of values is an excellent device for
understanding why individuals pursue goals in ways that sometimes confound others.
This starting point allows us to enter into conversations in which we have not already
presumed our interlocutors are dupes.
Recognizing that top-down approaches to development will both have their limits and often be perceived as a form of neo-colonial meddling, ground-level practical political action should be put front and center. Modes of understanding that strip individuals of the connections and solidarities that make these politics engagements possible must be eschewed. For this reason, the Capabilities Approach needs to explicitly theorize the undertaking of political action and have a sense of how political transformation (and the work required to get there) is at odds with other needs and values.

Finally, by looking at the capabilities enumerated by Nussbaum as political goals, we can begin to recognize the diversity of thoughts, intentions, and actions that will be attendant to their realization. In this way we can avoid alienating potential allies across cultures and academic schools of thought. The value of our political efforts lie less in their philosophical origin or purity and more in their practical outcomes. The sheer magnitude of the task set by the Capabilities Approach—dignifying the individual within her own worldly existence—will require an assortment of approaches. Preparing ourselves for potential (if not unavoidable) disagreement within our own ranks will afford us the opportunity to avoid willful misreadings and bad-faith portrayals of the lives and works of others.

Notes


2 Boynton, “Who Needs Philosophy?”.


5 *Therapy of Desire*, 15. She is particularly fond of Epicurus’ quotes “Empty is that philosopher’s argument by which no human suffering is therapeutically treated,” 13.

6 Nussbaum underappreciates the significance of politics to Epicurus and ignores the role that Epicurean thought has had on early modern American political rhetoric and the notion of intentional communities. See Jennifer Forshee and Dustin Fridkin, “Epicurean Roots of American Democracy,” Forthcoming.


9 “Undemocratic Vistas,” 37.

10 “Undemocratic Vistas,” 38.


15 *The Closing*, 271.


18 *The Closing*, 271.

19 *The Closing*, 153.


21 He argues that the allegory of the cave illustrates that culture is the cave and thus the best way of living cannot be found by mining other caves for best practices. “Nature should be the standard by which we judge our own lives and lives of peoples. That is why philosophy, not history or anthropology, is the most important human science” 38. Interestingly, Nussbaum seems to share this view despite the fact that she adopts Aristotle (a philosopher who looked beyond Athens for answers to the questions of eudemonia or at least the political conditions under which it was best served) as her guidepost for her project.

22 Bloom, *Closing*, 265.


“The Professor of Parody,” 215.


Nussbaum, “Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings,” 93

Much has been written on the typologies of cosmopolitanism: political, economic, social, and economic. For more on Nussbaum’s position within these typologies see James Ingram, *Radical Cosmopolitics: The Ethics and Politics of Democratic Universalism* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2013).


*Frontiers of Justice*, 314.

*Frontiers of Justice*, 320.


Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity*, 112.

Nussbaum, “Human Capabilities, Female Human Beings,” 75 fn40.


Since the original formulation of the enumerated capabilities in 1986, Nussbaum has stipulated that they are open to amendment. Unfortunately, while several versions of the capabilities have appeared they rarely are presented with a notice of alterations much less a rigorous philosophical defense of the alterations nor an empirical account of them. While she defends the inclusion of education in her list by way of Adam Smith’s assertion that the deprivation of education makes people “mutilated and deformed in a[n]…essential part of the character of human nature”, her addition of “having a right to seek employment” in capability 10b is not explored in light of its direct defiance of Aristotle’s own vision of employment despite her
continued insistence that the Capabilities Approach is Aristotelian in nature. Aristotle, it’s important to remember, believed that the best regime could not be comprised of artisans and tradesmen because “such a life is ignoble and inimical to excellence” (Politics 1328b32-41) and that “[crafts and trades] debase the mind and deprive it of leisure” (Politics 1337a10-11). The inclusion of employment in the list of capabilities seems to stem primarily from the work of Martha Chen’s “A Matter of Survival: Women’s Right to Self-Employment in India and Bangladesh” in WCD 37-57 as explored in WHD 40-42 and “Women and Equality: A Capabilities Approach,” International Labour Review 138(3): 235-237.

39 Nussbaum, Creating Capabilities, 31.

40 Creating Capabilities, 73.

41 Creating Capabilities, 75.

42 Creating Capabilities, 180.

43 Nussbaum, Cultivating Humanity, 109-110.

44 Definitions of identity politics vary but largely it is considered an alternative mode of political organization where a group organizes on the basis of a shared cultural experience of injustice rather than on the basis of economic class, political ideology, or belief system. This phenomenon has been criticized by post-structuralists as well as cosmopolitan liberals. Post-structuralists offer a range of criticisms: that it reduces political solidarity at the national level (Richard Rorty), that it denotes an artificial form of authenticity (Judith Butler), that its logic compels a perpetual attachment to the wound of injustice and reinforces discourses of victimization (Wendy Brown).

45 Nussbaum argues that the result of identity politics is a situation in which only the group in question can “write well or, perhaps, even read well about that group’s experience” (Cultivating Humanity, 111). She does not cite any individual who argues this though.


47 Nussbaum, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” 3.

48 Nussbaum, Cultivating Humanity, 67.

49 Apffel-Marglin, Marglin, Escobar, Santos.


The relationship between identity and dignity was addressed in the earlier section on Negritude. As dignity is such an important foundation of the Capabilities Approach, I believe this can be a bridging concept for cosmopolitans and post-development theorists.


54 “Hannah Arendt,” 200.


59 Hannah Arendt, On the Origin of Totalitarianism.


61 Should we find ourselves in need of enlisting the power of the mighty dead, might we consider our identities as externals—the self-same type that Aristotle welcomed as necessary to our happiness if not to our moral correctitude.


63 “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism,” 5.


65 Isaiah Berlin rightly notes that “where ends are agreed, the only questions left are those of means, and these are not political but technical, that is to say, capable of being settled by experts or machines…That is why whose who put their faith in some immense, world-transforming phenomenon, like the final triumph of reason…must believe that all political and moral problems can thereby be turned into technological ones.” Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in Four Essays on Liberty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971): 118.


68 “Two Concepts,” 157-158.


“Rural Community Development,” 363.


Scott McLemee, “What Makes Martha Nussbaum Run?”


*Fragility of Goodness*, 1.

*Fragility of Goodness*, 5.

Additionally, it is worth noting that A.A. Long in his review of Nussbaum’s Fragility of Goodness refutes this reading of Pindar. Where Nussbaum argues that Pindar’s position is that human goodness is desirable precisely because it is fragile, Long argues that it is precisely because it is so fragile it is deserving of praise. A.A. Long, Review of *Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, by Martha Nussbaum, *Classical Philology* 83, No. 4: 361-369.

*Fragility of Goodness*, 6fn.

While this is a question she leaves aside here, later in her career she returns to it. For more on the role of disability and human flourishing see Martha C. Nussbaum, 2006 *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press and Martha


While Nussbaum wrote this paper for a conference on Isaiah Berlin, she does not actually address Berlin’s own work; instead she looks at the work of Joseph Baz who, she argues, has “developed a closely related set of ideas with great explicitness and clarity” and dismisses Berlin’s arguments by proxy (3).


93 “From Fieldwork to Mutual Learning,” 351-2.

94 “From Fieldwork to Mutual Learning,” 356.

95 “From Fieldwork to Mutual Learning,” 364.

96 Sachamamacenter.org.


98 *Therapy of Desire*, 496.


100 Margarita M. Valdes, “Inequality in Capabilities between Men and Women in Mexico,” 426-432.
Gene F. Summers, “Rural Community Development.” Following World War II, many sociologists with an interest in community turned their attention to the cities, calling themselves urbanists, while many rural sociologists concerned with rural community and their development engaged in the task of “modernizing” the Third World. But the waning of sociologists’ attention to rural community development in the United States did has not meant that communities ceased to exist in rural America, that local community sentiments have become extinct, that locality-oriented decision-making has been rendered meaningless by the large-scale organization of mass society, or that the rural standard of living has achieved parity with urban industrial America. (366-7)


LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jennifer Forshee received her Ph.D. in political science from the University of Florida in the fall of 2017. Her academic specialties include political theory and development studies. She received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Kansas with a dual major in political science and history and a special focus on sub-Saharan Africa. She is currently an assistant professor of political science at Santa Fe College where she is devoted to the mission of open-enrollment colleges and the advancement of the norms of global citizenship. She resides in Gainesville, Florida with her husband and colleague, Dr. Dustin Fridkin, and their daughter, Eleanor.