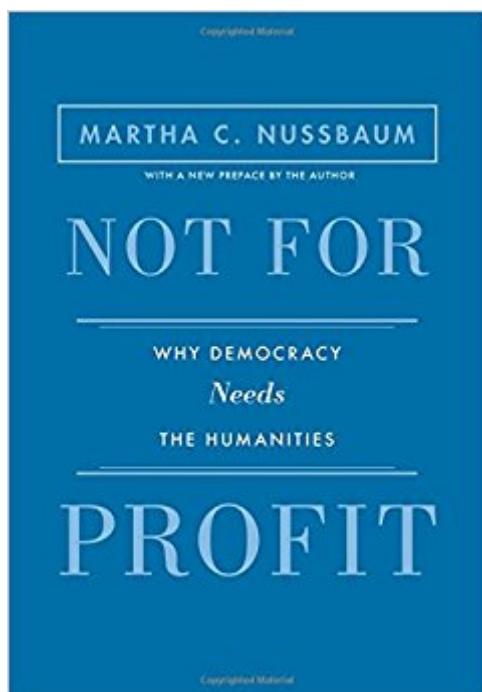


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# Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs The Humanities (The Public Square)



## Synopsis

In this short and powerful book, celebrated philosopher Martha Nussbaum makes a passionate case for the importance of the liberal arts at all levels of education. Historically, the humanities have been central to education because they have been seen as essential for creating competent democratic citizens. But recently, Nussbaum argues, thinking about the aims of education has gone disturbingly awry in the United States and abroad. We increasingly treat education as though its primary goal were to teach students to be economically productive rather than to think critically and become knowledgeable, productive, and empathetic individuals. This shortsighted focus on profitable skills has eroded our ability to criticize authority, reduced our sympathy with the marginalized and different, and damaged our competence to deal with complex global problems. And the loss of these basic capacities jeopardizes the health of democracies and the hope of a decent world. In response to this dire situation, Nussbaum argues that we must resist efforts to reduce education to a tool of the gross national product. Rather, we must work to reconnect education to the humanities in order to give students the capacity to be true democratic citizens of their countries and the world. In a new preface, Nussbaum explores the current state of humanistic education globally and shows why the crisis of the humanities has far from abated. Translated into over twenty languages, *Not for Profit* draws on the stories of troubling and hopeful global educational developments. Nussbaum offers a manifesto that should be a rallying cry for anyone who cares about the deepest purposes of education.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A spirited if unremarkable defense of the value of a liberal arts education and of the humanities in general against the encroachment of economic growth-oriented paradigms on global learning practices. Distinguished philosopher Nussbaum (*Hiding from Humanity*) argues that education for profit has displaced education for citizenship, and with the sidelining of the humanities, critical thinking, empathy, and the understanding of injustice are neglected. Moving deftly between analysis and polemic, the author draws on education practices in India, experimental psychology, the works of such liberal education proponents as Dewey and Tagore to emphasize the importance of critical pedagogy for the development of individual responsibility, innovation, and self-examination. However, while Nussbaum admirably defends liberal humanitarian education, little in the book is new, and she is only moderately successful in pinpointing precisely how educational practices might be reformed or, more importantly, how decision makers might be convinced of the necessity of such reformation. Nonetheless, in advocating educational curriculums that recognize the worth of personal development and creative thought, this slim book is itself a small but decisive step in the effort to broaden and enrich current pedagogical practices. (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Worries about the economy and the need to advance technology are threatening liberal arts education in the U.S. to the ultimate detriment of our democracy, laments philosopher Nussbaum. She explores the long history of emphasis on humanities in education in the U.S., exploring the influences of Horace Mann, Bronson Alcott, John Dewey, and others, including India's Rabindranath Tagore. She devotes a separate chapter to Socrates and his teachings that have figured prominently in developing a sense of citizenship in democracy; the connectedness of individuals; and the importance of the ability to question, analyze, and argue points of view. Nussbaum offers examples and case studies from the U.S. and India of the shift from the "human-development paradigm" to the "growth-oriented paradigm" and what nations are at risk of losing. She analyzes the role of the arts and humanities in developing language skills and encouraging curiosity about other cultures and sympathy for other individuals. This is a passionate call to action at a time when the nation is becoming more culturally diverse and universities are cutting back on humanities programs. --Vanessa Bush --This text refers

to an alternate Paperback edition.

'Humanities' is not just a term describing the subject of study - human beings and civilization. It also has the implicit purpose of turning students of the humanities into informed, enlightened, and better human beings. Nussbaum's book 'Not for Profit' is a reflection of the importance of the humanities. It is also about education. She cites numerous criticisms of rote-learning which turn students into 'passive vessel[s] of received cultural values'. Nussbaum reminds the reader of the connection citizens have, not just with one another in a country, but also across borders. Education should thus be teaching a student not only to be a responsible citizen, but a responsible citizen of the world. Cultivating the imagination, independence, and compassion are the worldly syllabi. A child who knows how to do things for herself, Nussbaum writes, 'does not need to make others her slave.' The subtitle of the book is 'Why Democracy Needs the Humanities'. She propounds this theme with vigour in the final chapter of the book. Her objective is best summed up in the following paragraph (at page 141): 'Today we still maintain that we like democracy and self-governance, and we also think that we like freedom of speech, respect for difference, and understanding of others. We give these values lip service, but we think far too little about what we need to do in order to transmit them to the next generation and ensure their survival. Distracted by the pursuit of wealth, we increasingly ask our schools to turn out useful profit-makers rather than thoughtful citizens. Under the pressure to cut costs, we prune away just those parts of our educational endeavor that are crucial to preserving a healthy society. What will we have if these trends continue? Nations of technically trained people who do not know how to criticize authority, useful profit-makers with obtuse imaginations. As Tagore observed, a suicide of the soul.'

Democracy is not without flaws but it requires enlightened minds to see through those flaws, work at them, and correct them, thereby keeping it alive and healthy.

I have yet to finish this book--I have instead been caught in several meaningful sections that have given me cause to think and understand my profession much better. Nussbaum offers a very learned and passionate defense of what is rapidly becoming vacant in public and state-run schools: purpose that befits the human person. I don't identify with the political posturing of folks who either want to see this work as conspiracy against or for their causes. What a waste of time. Instead, I look at this in terms of what the author argues we are missing in educating our children and young adults. Deep examination of ideals (not subjective "ideas") that form not only everyday happenings but extraordinary ones that we call on our leaders, thinkers and defenders to participate in. No

institution, belief system or assertion is above examination, but we have mostly purged our educational system of it in favor of training students to accept the dominant thinking of the time. Dominant thinking is nothing more than what the current powers are promoting and can just as easily wrong or right. Only through examination can a person truly appreciate and work with ideals. We have lost a huge amount of intelligence in our jettison of the arts, and even more in Socratic pedagogy in the humanities. It's not too late, but may well come a point of no return. Skilled apologists for the cause are too few, but Nussbaum is very good. Not simply persuasive, but sound and accessible.

Such an important and essential read if we have any hopes of creating a better society of tomorrow

This is an extremely important text, especially in the context of current transformations experienced by our system of higher education.

This is well written and spirited in its own way, but adds nothing to the conversation. This adds nothing that Sheldon S. Wolin hasn't said with more provocative insight and oomph. . I really expected much, much more from this extremely talented woman philosopher who's been to India and even tries to look at education from a broader perspective than the average well informed PTA member. She completely omits the "inner" aspect of education. Maybe she's swayed by the private language argument that there can't be a private language. It's unfortunate--she should have learned about this from Tagore and from spending time in India. Surprises never cease to occur.

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