

The Importance of Martha Nussbaum's View on Education for Democracy to Alleviate Gender Norms in the Philippines

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Abstract: Education epitomizes the amalgamation between the private institution and the public institution; hence, education plays a vital role in honing and designing an individual's character for the benefit of future society. Martha Nussbaum identifies that the modern society faces a silent crisis: education for profit. Education for profit is problematic not only because of its tendency to alter the purpose of education, but also because it strengthens discrimination against minority especially against women. Nussbaum posits that the purpose of education must not be for profit but for the promotion of democracy. Education must provide a more inclusive environment that will encourage students to hone reflective thinking without the presupposition of gender-related roles and norms. This paper aims to highlight how education for democracy can be utilized to help build a future Philippine society emancipated from gender norms. By the end of this paper, I will answer the following questions: 1) How can education for democracy help alleviate gender norms? and 2) What is the relevance of education for democracy in the abolishment of gender norms?

Keywords: education, Martha Nussbaum, gender norms, feminist philosophy

INTRODUCTION

Martha Nussbaum is an American philosopher known for her notable works in various strands of philosophy ranging from Ancient, Moral, Political, and Feminist philosophy.¹ This paper focuses on Nussbaum's perspective and argument based on political and feminist philosophy. In Nussbaum's work, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* Nussbaum highlights the importance of education to shape individuals' active, empathic, and reflective thinking for the future society. Nussbaum argues that education's purpose is to prepare every individual not only for their individual endeavors and aspirations but also on how individuals will become complete citizens who will participate in the public sphere. However, problem arises when education leads to a different purpose: an education for profit. If education's purpose becomes for profit, it is not only problematic because it reduces individual's worth to profit but it also tolerates hierarchy and domination against the minority. This paper aims to analyze how education for democracy that highlights Socratic pedagogy and reciprocity, as opposed to education for profit, will help build a society that values every individual as end in themselves and not only as means to gain profit. This paper will focus on how Filipino women can be emancipated from gender norms with the aid of Nussbaum's theory of education for democracy.

THE UNNOTICED CRISIS

Martha Nussbaum warns in her book *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* that we are currently facing a crisis—a crisis that is damaging for the future of democratic society. Nussbaum talks not about economic global crisis, but a crisis that goes for a long period of time

¹ David Gorman and Kenneth Womack, "Introduction: Cultivating Humanity with Martha Nussbaum," in *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies*, 19:2 "Special Issue: Cultivating Humanity: The Literary and Moral Thought of Martha Nussbaum" (2017), 146.

without getting noticed.² This is the crisis that is taken place in education—when education focuses on profit.³ This means that the purpose of education is stipulated as a means to gain profit. We have built an understanding that education is a very important tool to design the future society; this crisis in education (education for profit) reflects a nation that is thirsty for gaining profit in which they focus the innovation on fields of education that has the potential to help them gain more money. If education for profit continues, it will lead to a society full of individuals living together who no longer engage and belong in a community, but only live together by proximity. Togetherness amongst people will no longer be the norm. And people will no longer possess empathy towards one another, but will only treat each other in the manner of utilizing others as means to achieve a certain end for themselves. Nussbaum pointed out that there are the pathological symptoms we can identify that education is gearing towards for profit only. Nussbaum noticed how humanities were slowly being removed in some universities, and some even deemed humanities to be useless in the modern society.⁴ For instance, humanities⁵ as a college program is often stereotyped as a potential degree that will not allow an individual to gain profit. Hence in the modern society where profit and money are what constitute it, humanities as a degree is deemed useless. If

² Martha Nussbaum, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2010), 5.

³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁴ Most society favors science and technology. This do not entail that science and technology must not be innovated and humanities is superior to the sciences. Nussbaum only emphasized that both the science and humanities must be given equal importance because a field of science without the humanities will also fail. It will lead to a society wherein people will no longer capable of democracy, in such a way that people will no longer think on their own. People will only become robots being controlled by the profit-earning nations who may or may not be complete individuals. This is also to posit on the notion that even people who engage in the field of sciences like engineers, physicians, or scientists need the humanities in order to become complete individuals and citizens not only for the success of the sciences itself but also for the community.

⁵ Humanities is the area of studies that focus on social sciences, art, and a critical analysis on how the society works.

an individual wanted to earn a lot of money in the future, that individual must not pursue a degree belonging to the humanities and must only pursue a career path that is more inclined to science and technology. Evidently in the traditional Filipino household, career choices are often not decided by an individual, but it is pre-determined by their parents based on what type of job will let a person earn more income.⁶ Filipino parents often put normative pressure on their children to take college programs not for the purpose of learning but solely to get a diploma—a ticket for their children to earn job security. It is not ethically wrong to look at education as the tool to earn money; it is necessary in a modern society to have stable jobs and to make sure that they survive financially. It is very important that one must be able to get a decent job after graduating from higher learning institutions, especially in developing countries such as the Philippines. However, the problem with this notion of education is that education treats economy and profit individually as an end in itself rather than a means towards an end. For example, earning a lot of money *per se* shall not be the goal of an individual. On the contrary, money must be used in order to achieve individual and societal goals such as getting a master's degree, owning a house, efficient public health care system, free access to education, democracy, and so on. Especially in developing countries like Philippines, critical thinking can be of better use to combat poor quality of life that is not entirely the fault of people. The governance and the society play a vital role on how the country as a whole will work. Another reason why it is problematic to use education solely for profit is because when you treat people as means toward your ends, you are not acknowledging them as another complete individual who have rights equal to your own. Education for profit allows hierarchy and domination against the minority to prevail, when we allow education for profit it also means that we allow some people to use the minorities as a tool for their own profit.⁷ This means

⁶ Chiara Chastina Paz, "Making Meaning of Parental Influence among Pinays in College," in *UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 7:1 (2011), 3.

⁷ See Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs Humanities*, 12.

that education for profit allows some people to dominate and some people to be considered as the *Other*.⁸ In gender related issues, women are seen in this case as the *second sex*.⁹ Contrary to this perspective, education for democracy recognizes that all people are equal and no one shall be allowed to use others as a tool towards their own ends. Education for democracy will be beneficial for the people because it will help them improve the quality of life of the future society. To simply put, education for profit is stripping away the most significant purpose of education which is for persons to learn and be prepared to participate in public. Nussbaum argues that humanities is an important discipline because through humanities, people will learn how to act as human beings who are capable of reflective thinking and being a humane person, and not just a useful cog in the machine who is slaved by money and industry.¹⁰

GENDER NORMS IN THE PHILIPPINES

Traditionally, males and females are often differentiated based on the things that they can and cannot do, and the basis of these differences is often claimed to be “natural.” This means to say that the difference among men and women is justified because it is a natural occurrence. However, gender norms rooted from social norm theory¹¹ was conceived by feminists to address this difference between male and female. According to Iris Marion Young, the difference between male and female is not a natural

⁸ Minorities are considered as the *Other* when the minority is bluntly distinguished from the established group of people that set standards on how a society must flourish. In this paper, women are considered the other because the structure of the society is patriarchy. Cf. Michèle Le Doeuff, “Engaging with Simone De Beauvoir,” in *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Critical Essays*, ed. by Margaret A. Simons (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2006), 19.

⁹ The female sex is considered as a subordinate under the male sex.

¹⁰ See Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs Humanities*, 2.

¹¹ Social Norms are established to identify preference and behaviors that are accepted in a certain society. Cf. Rahel Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, trans. by Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018), 122.

occurrence, but it is a social construct.¹² Norms in general do not concern how a person *is* functioning but it is concern with how a person is *ought* to act. Norms determine what the reality must be and how an individual must act in accordance to these norms.¹³ Similarly in gender norms, the difference in the way male and female behave, fulfill roles, or have different preferences has nothing to do with their natural inherent qualities or on what they *can* or *cannot do*, but rather it is what they *ought to do* set by the society's standards and expectations imposed on people based on their physiological attributes (such as the reproductive system). For example, men are groomed to become rational and participate in the public institutions while women are groomed to fulfill roles in the private such as child-rearing and housework.¹⁴ Another example is how the sciences established the meaning of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity often refers to the trait wherein a person is strong, brave, dominant, and leaders while Femininity often refers to nurturing, emotional, submissive, and innocent.¹⁵ These roles, preferences, and behaviors are not inherent qualities because some women can also be *masculine* and at the same time some men can also be *feminine*. If in one way or another these behavior, roles, and preferences are present to the mentioned gender it does not necessarily mean it is true in a natural sense. Gender norms are socially constructed. Therefore, we can accustom the gender difference not by their natural qualities but by how child-rearing differs for male and female. Albeit gender norms were traditionally imposed and in the current settings the conditions of women have improved relatively,¹⁶ people especially

¹²Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience "Throwing Like a Girl" and Other Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 29.

¹³ See Jaeggi, *Critique of Forms of Life*, 125.

¹⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. by Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier (New York: Random House Inc., 2010), 440.

¹⁵ Martha Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 66.

¹⁶ Philippines ranks seventeenth place in world ranking (second in East Asia and Pacific region). See "Global Gender Gap Report 2021," in *World Economic Forum*, <<https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2021>>.

women are not yet emancipated from these gender norms. In the Philippine context, these gender norms were evident particularly on how women are expected to act with reference to the *Maria Clara* image and housework women ought to act or fulfill.¹⁷ If gender norms create a society with roles to fulfill, are gender norms now something that a society must practice in order to maintain peace? Are gender norms beneficial or problematic? Now I will answer these questions and provide arguments to support the latter claim, that gender norms are indeed problematic.

There are two points to emphasize for this claim. First, gender norms limit an individual's roles, ambitions, preference, and behavior to the physiological attributes that they have. If we are going to abide to gender norms, it will mean that an individual cannot properly exercise their rights *to choose* in such a way that they will not be able to do something that they want, they cannot be someone they wanted to be because everything is already pre-determined. Such pre-determination is not based on people's aspirations, not because of their skills and capabilities, but only because of the kind of reproductive system they possess. A woman cannot remain single because according to gender norms, she ought to get married and have a child; a woman who wanted to pursue career paths that are ought to be masculine will not be given the chance to fulfill these aspirations. Gender norms are not only problematic for women, but are also problematic for men. Men are expected to always be rational and the one who must lead. However, some men cannot meet these expectations and they cannot properly express their emotions because emotions are deemed to be feminine. Second, gender norms breed sexism and misogyny. On the one hand, sexism often consists of the assumption that gender difference based on beliefs, theories, norms, stereotypes, or even cultural narratives are justifiable because it is a *natural* difference between women

¹⁷ The Maria Clara image rooted from a character of Jose Rizal's novel: *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Fili Busterismo*, the character is often used to define how women must behave. These standards were introduced during the Spanish colonization when they redefine the standards of behavior for women. Cf. Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London and New York: Verso, 2016), 134.

and men, i.e., sexism breeds the notion that women being inferior of men is justified because of the natural difference between the sexes.¹⁸ On the other hand, misogyny is the practice that differentiate *good* women from *bad* women and tries to punish the latter.¹⁹ Both sexism and misogyny are related with one another; sexist ideology and misogyny are present in a society wherein sexual harassment, victim blaming, or rape culture is rampant and normalized. For instance, in a report of the World economic forum, the Philippines ranks seventeenth place in the world ranking of the countries that minimize the gender gap between male and female. This study shows gender gap difference under four categories: labor force participation, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment.²⁰ This report shows that the Philippines is one of the most gender equal countries in Asia. This may be true based on reports, but can we really claim that the Philippines is one of the most gender equal countries in Asia based only on the four categories mentioned above? It is somewhat true that under the four categories women are creating names and making a change for the future society it is still notable that the country continuously normalizes sexual harassment, victim blaming, and rape culture. While Filipino women have a lot of achievements in terms of labor force participation, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment, the country still cannot eliminate the misogynistic view against women as sexual objects. To provide some examples, an estimated of one in three women experienced physical or sexual harassment at least once in their lifetime, according to United Nation Women. What is alarming is that this is only the reported cases and half of women who admitted getting sexually harassed did not do anything about the incident.²¹ One of the many reasons why some women are too afraid to

¹⁸ Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 79.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ See “Global Gender Gap Report 2021.”

²¹ Tamil Kendall, “A Synthesis of Evidence on the Collection and Use of Administrative Data on Violence Against Women,” in *UN Women* (New York: UN Women, 2020), 9.

report sexual harassment that they experienced is because of the country's high tolerance to victim blaming. Victim blaming is putting fault on the victims instead of putting it on their oppressors. Because of victim blaming, sexual harassment was stigmatized in the country resulting to some women not reporting their experience. Sexual harassment is believed to have occurred because of women who wear *too revealing clothes* or when women do not conform to the Maria Clara image.²² Victim blaming has always existed alongside rape culture. Rape culture breeds the notion that male-incited sexual violence is inevitable because that is part of the nature of male, and that it is the woman's job to be vigilant, protect their body, and to avoid tempting the beast resting inside every man. People especially bystanders become indifferent and tolerant with internalized acceptance of rape resulting to women not being able to report what they have experienced, and worse, some even blame themselves for what happened. All these problems are rooted from the deep structure of gender norms because with gender norms, people have the acceptance that male and female must be socially constructed in a different manner. It must be socially accepted that men will always be sexually aggressive, and women will always have to be extra careful if they do not like to conform to these socially constructed male behavior. Gender norms are always promoted as something that is necessary to maintain order in a society. They rely on the pre-determined roles, behavior, and preference of a woman that results on other people not listening to their narratives anymore. A culture or society that relies too much on gender norms will lead to silencing a woman's voice and to justifying violence against women.

²² Cathy Carañes Yamsuan, "Culture of Blaming Victims Hinders Rape Cases," in *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (13 July 2020), <<https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1305894/culture-of-blaming-victims-hinders-rape-cases>>.

THE ROLE OF DEMOCRACY TO ALLEVIATE GENDER NORMS

The modern society is now in an abominable reality of utilizing education for profit. Nussbaum after identifying this problem aims to re-define and re-examine what should be the purpose of education to be beneficial not only to some individuals but to everyone including the minorities. Now that we have established that gender norms are problematic, the question now leads to how we can alleviate gender norms and how we can utilize education for democracy to help on this matter. Before we analyze the importance of education for democracy according to Nussbaum, it is important that we try to understand the definition of democracy *per se*. According to David Held, democracy is a form of government wherein people rule in contrast with aristocracies and monarchies.²³ Democracy as a form of government means that the power is in possession of the people.²⁴ There are a lot of arrays wherein democracy can be defined such as deliberative, participatory, representative, modern, direct, and so on. Martha Nussbaum argues that a society wherein democracy is practiced must be a society that consists of people who are able to think well about political issues especially those that affect the nation. Democracy in a society is not limited to voting during elections but means that a citizen has the capabilities to examine, criticize, reflect, and debate, not solely based on traditions or authority. Democracy is not only beneficial to how the future society will be constructed but will also be beneficial to its citizens. Similar sentiments were pointed out by Hannah Arendt, albeit some categorize Arendt's view with anti-democracy. Arendt only criticized existing democratic systems in order to pave way to the kind of democracy that is beneficial for people. According to Arendt, it is still essential for a community to have a government because there is a need for rules, but this

²³ David Held, *Models of Democracy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 1.

²⁴ Patchen Markell, "The Rule of the People Arendt, Arche, and Democracy" in *Politics in Dark Times Encounters with Hannah Arendt*, ed. by Seyla Benhabib, Roy T. Tsao and Peter Verovsek (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 59.

does not entail that government is an authoritative one and that the only role of people is to obey.²⁵ Arendt like Nussbaum aims to encourage dialogue and responsiveness of the people in the political dialogue.²⁶ Through democracy, citizens will have the ability to recognize the people they are with as people that have equal rights as their own, even if they may differ on sexuality, gender, religion, or ethnicity.²⁷ A society that exercises democracy will have citizens that treat one another with mutual respect regardless of their differences. Arendt emphasized the difference between the *polis* (or the masses) and the mob. For Arendt, *polis* is not a place but a group of people who belong in an organization arises from acting and speaking together.²⁸ While mob is defined as people who are in the same physical space just to obey rules, people belonging to a mob are not speaking and acting together. Mob is therefore not human persons but only represented numbers to make tyranny possible.²⁹ Another perspective on democracy was given by Socrates in the Book VIII of *The Republic*. Socrates criticizes democracy because he views democracy oscillating around how the governed votes and the governor rules. He claimed that democracy without educating its people can lead to tyranny because of the hostility of its ruler.³⁰ Socrates wanted a form of government that is not only based on giving votes, but people must also give importance to thinking; it is notable that a ruler for Socrates must be a philosopher-king.³¹ Albeit Socrates criticized democracy, this type of democracy that encouraged mass participation is also inspired by the spirit of Socratic pedagogy.³² Going back to the main point of Nussbaum, one of the highlights of education for

²⁵ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 110.

²⁶ See Markell, "The Rule of the People Arendt, Arche, and Democracy," 60.

²⁷ See Nussbaum, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, 76.

²⁸ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 132.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Plato, "Book VIII," in *The Republic of Plato*, ed. by Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991) 240.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² See Nussbaum, *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, 48.

democracy is by utilizing Socratic pedagogy. The aim of Socratic pedagogy is to emphasize the significance of examining, reflecting, and the ability to criticize one's life so that an individual will be able to be active and reflect on important issues. Socrates claimed that an unexamined life is not worth living;³³ this is the ingenuity of Socratic pedagogy. It is to encourage people or students to engage in the examination of life even up to the extent of criticizing oneself or another person. This can be done through the process of debate. Debate, however, is done differently from how modern society does it. In the modern settings, debate is done in order to win an argument against your competitor; i.e., the goal of debate is to prove that the opposing view is wrong and force upon them your perspective. This is refuted by Nussbaum: the aim of Socratic pedagogy is to come up with agreement between two opposing perspective.³⁴ There is an acknowledgement that one argument is not superior over the other, that instead of choosing which side is better over the other, the goal of debate is come to a tacit understanding on how two opposing views can come to an agreement. One important element of engaging in Socratic pedagogy is not only to criticize but to also listen to and try to understand their stance. Nussbaum and Arendt aim to promote a kind of democracy that must ensure that all voices from the people will be heard. No person can represent the way of thinking of another individual. All people must engage in a dialogue; democracy through dialogue can lead to mutual exchange or reciprocity for individuals to become equal with each other, because dialogue is not only for the purpose of speaking, but it also aims to listen to other people—by listening it means that we acknowledge each other as equal that can eventually lead, not in compromise but on agreement.³⁵

Education for democracy according to Nussbaum aims to promote active, reflective, and empathic thinking that will eventually lead to

³³ Thomas West, *Plato's Apology of Socrates: An Interpretation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979), 217.

³⁴ See Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, 74.

³⁵ See Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 157.

reciprocity as opposed to domination. Nussbaum also mentioned that in *The Religion of Man*, Tagore analyzed that the horrors left by the World War I have led younger people to prefer domination over reciprocity or mutual understanding.³⁶ Nussbaum emphasized that albeit it is challenging for people to practice mutual understanding and reciprocity, nonetheless this is possible through education for democracy and how it promotes multi-dimensional thinking. All these dimensions of thinking can be utilized in the process of eradicating gender norms. If we are actively thinking, one will be able to do away from the dictates of prejudice and stereotypical view on other people. Through active thinking, people will be able to see women as independent from gender norms and people will also have the desire to help women to alleviate these gender norms. One will not be succumbed to the prejudice gender norms pose but one will be interested in listening to the narratives of women as a complete citizen rather than as a means to gain profit. Empathic thinking will enable people to understand what people go through because of gender norms (such as the horrors women experience because of how rampant rape culture is) even without having to experience it themselves. Lastly, reflective thinking is the ability of an individual to criticize oneself. Criticizing oneself means that one will possess intellectual humility, that is also capable of criticizing others not in the manner of degrading someone's perspective or situation but rather criticizing in such a way that all members of the community will be capable of exchanging ideas, on the basis of mutual respect, reciprocity, and coming to a tacit agreement amongst each other even when they come from different backgrounds.³⁷ A society that consists of complete citizens that practice active, emphatic, and reflective thinking can navigate the current issues and will be able to help build a future society that has a more inclusive environment for minorities especially to women. This is also the aim of Socratic Pedagogy: for all members of the society be able to listen to the narratives of people particularly women, without prejudice,

³⁶ See Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, 84.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

stereotypes, and norms dictated by the society. Nussbaum highlighted that education for profit tolerates hierarchy and domination that we must move away from. Education for democracy does not entail that the goal is to reverse the hierarchy or to promote female domination in the context of sex, but rather the goal is for people to be able to recognize minorities as people who have rights equal to their own. Education plays a vital role in honing individuals and is an important tool to alleviate gender norms. Gender norms will be eradicated if we will carefully analyze all aspects such as economic, political, private, and social spheres through education for democracy. It aims to mold social formation of an individual, albeit it may be difficult to establish a good form of education that can combat challenges posed by gender norms. Through education for democracy, both men and women will be able to recognize the importance of empathy and reciprocity.³⁸ The goal is not to reverse the hierarchy but to be with (*Mitsein*³⁹) one another, to create a sense of belongingness, for women to co-exist with men equally and to establish a society without *other* or *the second sex*.

³⁸ See Nussbaum, *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, 29.

³⁹ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publisher Ltd. 1962), 150.

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