

POVERTY AND THE HUMANITIES—A CONTINUING EDUCATION COURSE OFFERED AS PART OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO'S POVERTY, PROMISE, AND POSSIBILITY INITIATIVE

COURSE SUMMARY BY BART SCHULTZ

I.

GENERAL CONCERN: TOO MANY PUBLIC POLICY AND POLITICAL DISCUSSIONS OF POVERTY FAIL TO RECOGNIZE THE IMPORTANT ROLE THE HUMANITIES CAN AND SHOULD PLAY IN BOTH DEFINING POVERTY AND DEVISING ANTIPOVERTY POLICIES.

GENERAL AIM: TO BUILD A BETTER NARRATIVE ABOUT THE ROLE OF THE HUMANITIES IN ANTIPOVERTY RESEARCH AND POLICY

SPECIFIC AIM: TO ASSESS CRITICALLY SUCH HUMANITIES-BASED ANTIPOVERTY PROGRAMS AS THE CLEMENTE COURSE IN THE HUMANITIES AND ITS POSSIBLE EXTENSIONS TO NEW AUDIENCES AND AGE GROUPS.

II.

BULLET POINTS ON POVERTY:

- **IT IS WORSE THAN YOU THINK (BOTH DOMESTICALLY AND GLOBALLY)**
- **IT IS COMPLEX AND CHANGING (TAKING DIFFERENT FORMS HISTORICALLY, CULTURALLY, AND GEOGRAPHICALLY, WITH IMPORTANT GENDER DIMENSIONS)**
- **IT IS GENERALLY VERY BADLY MEASURED AND CONCEPTUALIZED (THE MOST WIDELY-USED MEASURES ARE TOO SIMPLISTIC)**

FROM STEPHEN PIMPARE, A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF POVERTY (NEW PRESS, 2008):

“According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, a family of three was poor in 2005 if its annual income was below \$16,090; it was not poor if it had income above that. For a single person, the number was \$9,570; for a family of five, \$22,610. So, by official Census Bureau measures, which use that standard, 37 million Americans were poor in that year, almost 13 percent of the population—the equivalent of the combined populations of California, Alaska, and Wyoming. The official rates were substantially higher for African Americans (one in four), Hispanics (one in five), and children under eighteen, 13 million of whom (almost 18 percent) were poor by government measures....The method of calculating this ‘poverty line’ has remained largely unchanged since it was devised in the 1960s by the Social Security Administration’s Molly Orshansky ... Even then she warned that her calculation was a ‘research tool’ that would inevitably understate poverty,

and that it was 'not designed to be applied directly to an individual family with a specific problem.' That's nonetheless how we use it now. She took the Department of Agriculture's estimate for the cost of a survival-level food budget (which was designed for short-term use in an emergency), adjusted it for family size, and multiplied it by three, since it was then estimated that food represented one-third of a family's total expenses. That's the poverty line. Critics of the left and right find legitimate fault with this measure. The former argue that it understates the problem of poverty: its design presumed that this would be a minimal budget only practicable for short-term emergencies; food now typically represents less of a family's budget, while housing costs are often 40 percent or more, and in some locales transportation alone is 20 percent of household expenditures. It doesn't take into account unavoidable out-of-pocket expenditures (especially for medical care) that can substantially reduce a family's income, and that make it impossible for them to provide for basic needs even if their income is above the threshold. And the index doesn't vary by region, so the poverty line is the same dollar amount in New York and San Francisco as it is for rural Mississippi, despite large differences in the relative cost of living in those places."

FROM LARRY SNYDER, THINK AND ACT ANEW: HOW POVERTY IN AMERICA AFFECTS US ALL AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT (ORBIS BOOKS, 2010):

"The great American tradition has been that if you work hard you can provide a better life for yourself and your family. This is the bedrock of the 'American Dream.' Unfortunately, too many Americans today are working very hard but still cannot make ends meet.

More than half of Americans will experience poverty for at least one year.

What is perhaps most frightening is that poverty is expanding into nearly all segments of society. Mark R. Rank, a professor in the School of Social Work at Washington University and a noted research on poverty, has estimated some of the risks of experiencing poverty. He writes:

'[B]eginning at age 20, 31 percent of Americans will have experienced at least one year of poverty by the time they reach age 35, 45 percent will have done so by age 55, and 59 percent will encounter a year or more of poverty by age 75. In addition, 68 percent of Americans will experience a year below 125 percent of the poverty line between the ages of 20 and 75, and 76 percent of Americans will face a year below 150 percent of the poverty line.'

He concludes from these staggering numbers that 'What these percentages strikingly reveal is that rather than being an event that affects a small minority of the U.S. population, poverty is a mainstream experience that touches a clear majority of Americans at some point during their adult lifetimes.'....

A study by the AARP Policy Institute indicates that close to one in ten older adults (those sixty-five and over) live in poverty, and half again as many live just above the poverty threshold, based on the 2008 federal poverty threshold of \$10,326 for single elderly persons.

The men and women who serve our country are not immune. One social worker noted on our online forum that some of the homeless are Vietnam veterans. Many did not receive adequate care for the mental, physical, or spiritual damage they suffered from when they returned from the war, and were 'left with no limbs and nothing to live for.'

Millions of others do not fall below the official federal poverty levels, but they are asset-poor and are at risk of falling into poverty in the event of a single emergency such as the situation for the residents of New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, or those whose livelihoods have been impacted for an unforeseeable time by the expansive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico....

One Catholic Charities director has asked: How can we define poverty in America so that people might determine if they are indeed poor? Can we make this somehow measurable? He suggests that someone is poor if:

- 1. They cannot afford housing that is clean, safe, and in good repair.**
- 2. They cannot afford nutritious food for themselves and their family on a regular basis.**
- 3. They cannot consistently pay their utility bills even though it is a priority.**
- 4. Their children are not adequately clothed for school with clean clothes that fit and are in good repair, and they do not have proper clothing for work.**
- 5. They cannot afford to go to the doctor for any kind of illness for fear that the visit will be beyond their means to pay for it.**

All of the above factors take into account that a person is trying to do the very best he or she can do and still cannot succeed. The face of the poor is not the same today as it was in generations past. Recognizing who the poor are today is the first step to understanding the problem and finding a solution."

EXTREME GLOBAL POVERTY IS IN MANY RESPECTS WORSE THAN POVERTY IN THE U.S.

FROM PETER SINGER, THE LIFE YOU CAN SAVE (RANDOM HOUSE, 2009):

"A few years ago, the World Bank asked researchers to listen to what the poor are saying. They were able to document the experiences of over 60,000 women and

men in seventy-three countries. Over and over, in different languages and on different continents, poor people said that poverty meant these things:

- You are short of food for all or part of the year, often eating only one meal per day, sometimes having to choose between stilling your child's hunger or your own, and sometimes being able to do neither.
- You can't save money. If a family member falls ill and you need money to see a doctor, or if the crop fails and you have nothing to eat, you have to borrow from a local moneylender and he will charge you so much interest as the debt continues to mount and you may never be free of it.
- You can't afford to send your children to school, or if they do start school, you have to take them out again if the harvest is poor.
- You live in an unstable house, made with mud or thatch that you need to rebuild every two or three years, or after severe weather.
- You have no nearby source of safe drinking water. You have to carry your water a long way, and even then, it can make you ill unless you boil it.

But extreme poverty is not only a condition of unsatisfied material needs. It is often accompanied by a degrading state of powerlessness. Even in countries that are democracies and are relatively well governed, respondents to the World Bank survey described a range of situations in which they had to accept humiliation without protest. If someone takes what little you have, and you complain to the police, they may not listen to you. Nor will the law necessarily protect you from rape or sexual harassment. You have a pervading sense of shame and failure because you cannot provide for your children. Your poverty traps you, and you lose hope of ever escaping from a life of hard work for which, at the end, you will have nothing to show beyond bare survival.

The World Bank defines extreme poverty as not having enough income to meet the most basic human needs for adequate food, water, shelter, clothing, sanitation, health care, and education. Many people are familiar with the statistic that 1 billion people are living on less than one dollar per day. That was the World Bank's poverty line until 2008, when better data on international price comparisons enable it to make a more accurate calculation of the amount people need to meet their basic needs. On the basis of this calculation, the World Bank set the poverty line at \$1.25 per day. The number of people whose income puts them under this line is not 1 billion but 1.4 billion.... In response to the '\$1.25 a day' figure, the thought may cross your mind that in many developing countries, it is possible to live much more cheaply than in the industrialized nations....If such thoughts occur to you, you should banish them now, because the World Bank has already made the adjustment in purchasing power: its figures refer to the

number of people existing on a daily total consumption of goods and services—whether earned or home-grown—comparable to the amount of goods and services that can be bought in the United States for \$1.25....This kind of poverty kills. Life expectancy in rich nations averages seventy-eight years; in the poorest nations, those officially classified as ‘least developed,’ it is below fifty. In rich countries, fewer than one in a hundred children die before the age of five; in the poorest countries, one in five does. And to the UNICEF figure of nearly 10 million young children dying every year from avoidable, poverty-related causes, we must add at least another 8 million older children and adults.”

THE UNITED NATIONS ‘WE CAN END POVERTY-2015 MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS’ WILL NOT BE ACHIEVED:

“It is clear that improvements in the lives of the poor have been unacceptably slow, and some hard-won gains are being eroded by the climate, food and economic crises,” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says in the foreword to the [Millennium Development Goals Report 2010](#), issued on 23 June. But the report also cites big gains in cutting the rate of extreme poverty, getting children into primary schools, addressing AIDS, malaria and child health, and a good chance to reach the target for access to clean drinking water. (FROM <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>).

IN FACT, THE MAIN GAINS IN COMBATting EXTREME POVERTY HAVE BEEN IN EAST ASIA, BUT MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD, SUCH AS SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA, ARE MAKING LITTLE OR NO PROGRESS.

THE U.S. HAS CONTRIBUTED VERY LITTLE TO THE FIGHT AGAINST EXTREME GLOBAL POVERTY, GIVING ONLY \$0.18 OF EVERY \$100 EARNED, WHEN OTHER ‘ADVANCED’ COUNTRIES GAVE AN AVERAGE OF \$.48 OF EVERY \$100 EARNED. PRIVATE CHARITABLE GIVING AT BEST RAISES THE U.S. FIGURE TO ONLY \$0.25 OF EVERY \$100 EARNED.

HELPFUL LINKS:

1. The Life You Can Save, at <http://www.thelifeyoucansave.com/>
2. Poverty and Gender Equity Measurement, at <http://www.yale.edu/macmillan/globaljustice/FemPov.html>
3. Poverty and Human Rights, at http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/poverty/expert/docs/Thomas_Pogge_Summary.pdf
4. Human Development Reports, using the Human Development Index, at <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>

5. The Earth Institute, Jeffrey Sachs, at <http://www.earth.columbia.edu/articles/view/1804>

AS THE ABOVE PASSAGES SUGGEST, IT IS NOT SUFFICIENT OR ADEQUATE TO MEASURE POVERTY EXCLUSIVELY IN TERMS OF INCOME AND WEALTH. SUCH MEASURES, ESPECIALLY MEASURES OF INCOME/WEALTH INEQUALITY, ARE NECESSARY AND IMPORTANT, BUT INCOME/WEALTH POVERTY IS OFTEN CRUELY MEASURED AND DOES NOT CAPTURE ALL THE DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN POVERTY, FOR WHICH BROADER QUALITY OF LIFE METRICS ARE NEEDED.

HISTORICALLY, THE MAJOR RELIGIOUS AND PHILOSOPHICAL TRADITIONS HAVE ALWAYS VIEWED POVERTY IN MORE MULTIDIMENSIONAL WAYS.

- **“Within both the Hebrew Bible (Christian Old Testament) and the New Testament, the absence of material goods is the foundational meaning of poverty. Numerous Hebrew terms such as anawim, dal, ebyon, ras, and misken emphasize aspects of poverty such as humility, neediness, lowliness, thinness, and dependency. In the New Testament, the Greek term ptochos is used for ‘poor’ and assumes the connotations of these old Testament terms.**

To be poor in its most abstract sense is to be less than the whole, integral human self that God created and restored in Christ. The gospel of Luke in particular show this wide angle when it ties the term ‘poor’ to others such as ‘lepers, blind, lame, hungry, oppressed, deaf ‘ (see Luke 4:18, 6:20, 7:22, 14:13, 14:21. 16:20–23). Poverty for Luke implies any characteristic that isolates a person from his or her community.” (From Kent A. Van Til, “Poverty and Morality in Christianity,” in Poverty and Morality, eds. W. Galston and P. Hoffenberg [Cambridge, 2010]).

- **“...being well fed, warmly clothed, and appropriately lodged are fundamental, but ultimately it is instruction in human relations that is Confucianism’s highest goal, for this is what distinguished humans from animals. Providing for the human capacity to grow in the direction of goodness is the state’s highest responsibility, as this is what will enable one to recapture one’s original and innate goodness.” (From Peter Nosco, “Confucian Perspectives on Poverty and Morality,” in Poverty and Morality)**
- **“Charity is also central to the teachings of Hinduism and Buddhism as well, and ... it is also one of the Five Pillars of Islam. In the end, charity is an obligation of all our religions.**

The highest form of charity is not a handout, but a loan. Extending a loan treats the recipient as a peer who participates in this transaction by the promise of repayment. The individual's dignity is respected, with no danger of subservience or dependency.

If we are to think and act anew, we must renew our belief in the foundational principle of the inherent dignity of all human life. This will require us to put back the ethical and moral elements into all aspects of human engagement. But on a more basic level, it will require us to recognize all those that we meet as our sister and brother. It will mean looking into the eyes of the poor and marginalized and seeing the image and likeness of our God and listening with reverence to their stories. It will mean acknowledging that how I choose to live my life directly impacts the lives of many who are less fortunate. It will require our churches and social structures to commit to work toward a more equitable society. It will demand that we not separate the virtue of charity from the virtue of justice. And it will mean that we never settle or compromise for any less." (From Larry, Snyder, To Think and Act Anew).

PUBLIC POLICY DEFINITIONS OF POVERTY TODAY NEED TO BE SIMILARLY MULTIDIMENSIONAL, ADDRESSING A RANGE OF QUALITY OF LIFE FACTORS.

SOME PLAUSIBLE POSSIBILITIES:

- 1. POVERTY CONSTRUED IN TERMS OF UNETHICAL/UNJUST/INSUFFICIENT WELFARE/HAPPINESS (SINGER)**
- 2. POVERTY CONSTRUED IN TERMS OF THE UNJUST FAILURE TO GUARANTEE CERTAIN BASIC CAPABILITIES (NUSSBAUM)**
- 3. POVERTY CONSTRUED AS THE UNJUST VIOLATION OF CERTAIN BASIC RIGHTS (POGGE, GEWIRTH)**
- 4. POVERTY CONSTRUED IN TERMS OF 'THE SURROUND,' OR LIFE OF FORCE AND THE POOR AS CHEATED OUT OF A LIFE OF DIGNITY (SHORRIS)**
- 5. POVERTY CONSTRUED AS UNETHICAL/UNJUST ASSAULT ON GOD-GIVEN HUMAN DIGNITY (SNYDER)**

METHODOLOGIES FOR RESEARCHING POVERTY NEED TO BE ADEQUATE TO THESE MORE MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACHES, BRINGING IN PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH, RESEARCH ON THE 'EXCLUSIONS' POVERTY ENTAILS, AND RESEARCH ON HUMAN CAPABILITIES AND DEVELOPMENT (SEE FOR EXAMPLE SAKIKO FUKUDA-PARR, 'GLOBAL POVERTY AND UNEQUAL DEVELOPMENT: CONTEMPORARY TRENDS AND ISSUES,' IN POVERTY AND MORALITY, EDS. W. GALSTON AND P. HOFFENBERG).

III.

HOW THE HUMANITIES CAN HELP.

ETHICAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHERS HAVE BEEN KEY PLAYERS IN DEVELOPING THE BETTER, MORE MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACHES TO DEFINING AND COMBATTING POVERTY—WITNESS SINGER, POGGE, NUSSBAUM, GALSTON, SHORRIS ET AL. THUS, PHILOSOPHERS, ESPECIALLY THOSE CONCERNED WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE, ARE ALREADY INVOLVED AND PLAYING A CRUCIAL ROLE.

MORE GENERALLY, THE HUMANITIES REPRESENT CRUCIAL COMPONENTS OF THE HAPPINESS, CAPABILITIES, RIGHTS, AND DIGNITY THAT GENUINE ANTIPOVERTY MEASURES MUST INCLUDE AND/OR RECOGNIZE, PARTICULARLY AS PART OF ADEQUATE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES.

HISTORICAL ORIGIN OF THE HUMANITIES:

FROM ROBERT PROCTOR, DEFINING THE HUMANITIES (INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS, 1998):

“In the first half of the fifteenth century Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444), a humanist scholar and statesman who became chancellor of the Republic of Florence, wrote two letters in which he describes, with characteristic clarity, a new educational program that was just beginning to be known as the studia humanitatis. These letters provide the earliest complete description we have of the humanities as they came into being in the early Renaissance. In a letter urging Niccolo Strozzi, scion of a wealthy and powerful Florentine family, to devote himself fully to the new humanities, Bruni says:

‘Let your study be twofold, first in the skill of letters (litterarum peritia), not the vulgar and common kind, but one which is more diligent and penetrating, and in this I very much want you to excel; and second in the knowledge of those things which pertain to life and moral character (mores). These two are therefore called the humanities (studia humanitatis), because they perfect and adorn a human being (homo). (Bruni 1947, p. 7).

Bruni goes on to exhort Niccolo to be well read and widely learned, and to know how to illuminate and embellish this knowledge with eloquent words. He advises him to learn not only from philosophers, but also from poets, orators, and historians. Aristotle in particular, he says, will give Niccolo a knowledge of ‘things’; Cicero will teach him how to excel in ‘letters.’ Then, in comparing the humanities to law, Bruni asserts that while the study of civil law may be more marketable (vendibilis), in usefulness and in dignity it is surpassed by the humanities, for ‘the humanities as a whole aim at creating a good man (vir bonus), that which nothing more useful (utilius) can be imagined; but civil law has nothing to do with the creation of a good man’ (ibid., p. 8)....

Boccaccio's image of an unused path overgrown with bushes and brambles is typical of the way the first men of the Renaissance pictured what they saw as the neglect and decay of literary culture in the centuries immediately preceding their own. According to Boccaccio, it was Petrarch who opened this path back to classical poetry. Some thirty years later Leonardo Bruni used the same image to describe how Petrarch brought back the ancient humanities. It was Petrarch who 'restored the studia humanitatis, which were already extinct, and who penned for us the way whereby we could acquire learning' (Bruni 1952, p. 94)... Petrarch was driven to study classical antiquity because he was driven to study himself. He used the writers of ancient Rome, Cicero in particular, and the early Fathers of the Church, especially St. Augustine, to mold and shape his own soul.

The fullest expression of a new cultural movement, of a new way in which men and women begin to experience their humanity, often occurs at the beginning, before the movement has triumphed and the experience has lost its disturbing novelty. This is certainly true of the humanities. It is in Petrarch's life and writings that they achieved their fullest expression. For this reason, Petrarch should be the nucleus even today of any discussion concerning the future of the humanities: from him we can learn why the humanities came into being; how, at their very best, they can help us live our lives; and where they fall short—for Petrarch's life exemplifies the weaknesses as well as the strengths of the humanistic educational ideal....

We can now define the original humanities as a program of education having three distinguishing characteristics: a) the concept of a unique, autonomous, personal self, to be shaped through b) the study of the language and literature of ancient Greece and Rome, c) according to the perspectives of a group of primarily literary academic disciplines.

Of these three interrelated attributes, only the last has remained virtually intact up to the present time. The humanities are now most commonly defined by distinguishing them from other groupings of disciplines, especially the sciences. Definition by academic discipline, in fact, has become the primary, and often the only, way the humanities are now defined. The National Endowment for the Humanities, for example, defines the humanities as 'language, both modern and classic, linguistics, literature, history, jurisprudence, philosophy, archaeology, the history, criticism and practice of the arts, and those aspects of the social sciences which have humanistic content and employ humanistic methods' (Public Law, 89th Congress, S. 1483, September 29, 1965, Sec. 32). But it does not define 'humanistic content' and 'humanistic methods.'

Of the other two attributes of the original humanities, the concept of a personal self and the study of classical antiquity, the first continues to characterize our understanding of the human, but the ideal of molding or shaping a self is for the

most part absent from contemporary discussions of the humanities. The second attribute has now completely disappeared. In fact, most people today are surprised and baffled to learn that the humanities were once synonymous with classical education.”

THE ADAPTATION OF THE PETRARCHAN VISION IN THE CLEMENTE COURSE IN THE HUMANITIES, A ONE YEAR COURSE COVERING PHILOSOPHY, LITERATURE, ART, HISTORY AND LOGIC FOR DISADVANTAGED ADULTS.

FROM EARL SHORRIS, RICHES FOR THE POOR: THE CLEMENTE COURSE IN THE HUMANITIES (NORTON, 2000):

“THE SURPRISE COMES IN THE SIMILARITY OF THE METHOD, WHICH HAS CONTINUED OVER CENTURIES AND ACROSS CULTURES: HUMAN BEINGS BECOME POLITICAL BY CULTIVATING THEIR INBORN HUMANITY. THEY FOLLOW THE PATTERN ESTABLISHED AT THE BEGINNING. THEY EMBRACE THE HUMANITIES IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER; MOST OFTEN RELIGION LEADS TO REFLECTION, BUT THE LAW OR ORGANIZATION THEORY OR POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY CAN HAVE THE SAME EFFECT. THEY MUST DO SO, HOWEVER, WITH LITTLE HELP FROM THOSE WHO CLAIM TO CARE EITHER FOR THE POOR OR FOR THE HUMANITIES.

TO CALL FOR THE STUDY OF THE HUMANITIES NOW AS AN ANSWER TO THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES CONTRAVENES THE VIEWS OF BOTH THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT. THE LEFT HAS ABANDONED THE STUDY OF THE HUMANITIES AS THE CULTURAL IMPERIALISM OF DEAD WHITE EUROPEAN MALES, GIVING IT OVER TO THE CONSERVATIVES, WHO HAVE CLAIMED IT AS THEIR OWN. IN FACT, THE HUMANITIES SHOULD BELONG TO THE LEFT, FOR THE STUDY OF THE HUMANITIES BY LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THE POOR, IS IN ITSELF A REDISTRIBUTION OF THE WEALTH. THE RIGHT, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAS HAD NO USE FOR THE LIVING HUMANITIES SINCE PLATO BANNED POETS FROM THE REPUBLIC.

OBJECTION BY THE LEFT TO THE STUDY OF THE HUMANITIES CAN BE DEALT WITH QUICKLY: THE DIVISION SHOULD COME BETWEEN MARKET-DRIVEN CULTURE AND THE HUMANITIES, NOT BETWEEN THE BEAUTY OF AN ASIAN POEM AND A EUROPEAN POEM. WHEN PETRARCH CALLED FOR A RETURN TO THE CLASSICS, MEANING THE WORK OF GREECE AND ROME, HE KNEW NO OTHER. HIS NOTION OF CIVIC HUMANISM WOULD NOT INCLUDE THE STUDY OF BRICKLAYING OR POPULAR CULTURE NOW AS IT DID NOT THEN. NOR WOULD THE HUMANITIES COMPRISE THE MANUFACTURE, PROGRAMMING, OR REPAIR OF COMPUTERS. BUT I THINK PETRARCH WOULD MAKE WORLD LITERATURE HIS TEXT AND FIND ART INFLUENCED BY AFRICA, ASIA, AND THE AMERICAS AS INTERESTING AS THE SCULPTURES OF GREECE OR THE ARCHITECTURE OF ROME. HISTORY, OF COURSE, HAS NO LIMITS AND LOGIC NO SUBSTITUTE. THE ANSWERS ARRIVED AT BY PHILOSOPHERS DIFFER FROM TIME TO TIME AND PLACE TO PLACE, BUT THE

QUESTIONS, AS KANT SET THEM OUT, HAVE ALWAYS BEEN THE SAME: WHAT CAN I KNOW? HOW SHALL I LIVE? WHAT MAY I HOPE? AND WHAT IS MAN?....

THE AIM, HOWEVER, HAS NEVER BEEN SIMPLY TO PREPARE STUDENTS FOR COLLEGE ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS, ALTHOUGH IT HAS OFTEN DONE SO. NOR ARE THE SUGGESTIONS HERE APPROPRIATE TO A STANDARD FOUR-YEAR UNIVERSITY LIBERAL ARTS CURRICULUM. THERE IS NO LANGUAGE COMPONENT IN THE CLEMENTE COURSE, NOR DOES IT OFFER STUDIES IN THE SOCIAL, PHYSICAL, OR BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES. IT IS A HUMANITIES COURSE, TAUGHT WITH THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE STUDY OF THE HUMANITIES WILL LEAD TO A CITIZEN'S LIFE. THE MOST COMMON ERROR WE MAKE IN PRESENTING THE COURSE TO STUDENTS, FUNDERS, AND SO ON, IS TO DESCRIBE ITS SUCCESS OR FAILURE IN TERMS OF THE PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WHO ENTER COLLEGES. THE SECOND MOST COMMON ERROR IS TO PROMISE A POLITICAL LIFE TO THE STUDENTS, A CHANGE FROM REACTION TO REFLECTION, FROM PRIVATE TO PUBLIC LIFE. IF AND WHEN THAT CHANGE OCCURS, IT WILL BE A BYPRODUCT OF TAKING POSSESSION OF SOME SIGNIFICANT PART OF THE RICHES OF THE HUMANITIES. THE END OF THE COURSE, IN THE KANTIAN SENSE, IS DIGNITY, WHICH, AS KANT SAID, 'HAS NO PRICE.' IN THIS CASE, NOT EVEN A PRICE OR A PRIZE CALLED COLLEGE."

THE PARALLEL DEFENSE OF THE HUMANITIES FOUND IN MARTHA NUSSBAUM, NOT FOR PROFIT: WHY DEMOCRACY NEEDS THE HUMANITIES (PRINCETON, 2009):

Democracies have great rational and imaginative powers. They also are prone to some serious flaws in reasoning, to parochialism, haste, sloppiness, selfishness, narrowness of the spirit. Education based mainly on profitability in the global market magnifies these deficiencies, producing a greedy obtuseness and a technically trained docility that threaten the very life of democracy itself, and that certainly impede the creation of a decent world culture.

If the real clash of civilizations is, as I believe, a clash within the individual soul, as greed and narcissism contend against respect and love, all modern societies are rapidly losing the battle, as they feed the forces that lead to violence and dehumanization and fail to feed the forces that lead to cultures of equality and respect. If we do not insist on the crucial importance of the humanities and the arts, they will drop away, because they do not make money. They only do what is much more precious than that, make a world that is worth living in, people who are able to see other human beings as full people, with thoughts and feelings of their own that deserve respect and empathy, and nations that are able to overcome fear and suspicion in favor of sympathetic and reasoned debate.

NUSSBAUM'S DEFENSE OF THE HUMANITIES IS PARTLY REFLECTIVE OF THE CAPABILITIES APPROACH THAT SHE DEVELOPED IN COLLABORATION WITH AMARTYA SEN. FOR NUSSBAUM, EVERY INDIVIDUAL IS ENTITLED, AS A MATTER

OF JUSTICE, TO THE DEVELOPMENT, UP TO A BASIC THRESHOLD LEVEL, OF ALL THE FOLLOWING HUMAN CAPABILITIES:

The Central Human Capabilities

- 1. Life.** Being able to live to the end of a human life of normal length; not dying prematurely, or before one's life is so reduced as to be not worth living.
- 2. Bodily Health.** Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.
- 3. Bodily Integrity.** Being able to move freely from place to place; to be secure against violent assault, including sexual assault and domestic violence; having opportunities for sexual satisfaction and for choice in matters of reproduction.
- 4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought.** Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason -- and to do these things in a "truly human" way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid non-beneficial pain.
- 5. Emotions.** Being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves; to love those who love and care for us, to grieve at their absence; in general, to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger. Not having one's emotional development blighted by fear and anxiety. (Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development.)
- 6. Practical Reason.** Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life. (This entails protection for the liberty of conscience and religious observance.)
- 7. Affiliation.**
 - A.** Being able to live with and toward others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction; to be able to imagine the situation of another. (Protecting this capability means protecting institutions that constitute and nourish such forms of affiliation, and also protecting the freedom of assembly and political speech.)
 - B.** Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others. This entails

provisions of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin.

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

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

10. Control over one's Environment.

A. Political. Being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association.

B. Material. Being able to hold property (both land and movable goods), and having property rights on an equal basis with others; having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; having the freedom from unwarranted search and seizure. In work, being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers.

EARL SHORRIS REGARDS HIS DEFENSE OF THE HUMANITIES AS AN ANTIPOVERTY PROGRAM AS CLOSELY ALLIED TO NUSSBAUM'S DEFENSE OF THE HUMANITIES AS A CRUCIAL COMPONENT OF GENUINE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. BOTH INSIST THAT THE SOCRATIC METHOD IS PEDAGOGICALLY CRUCIAL:

Nussbaum: "Socrates proclaimed that 'the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being.' In a democracy fond of impassioned rhetoric and skeptical of argument, he lost his life for his allegiance to this ideal of critical questioning. Today his example is central to the theory and practice of liberal education in the Western tradition, and related ideas have been central to ideas of liberal education in India and other non-Western cultures. One of the reasons people have insisted on giving all undergraduates a set of course in philosophy and other subjects in the humanities is that they believe such courses, through both content and pedagogy, will stimulate students to think and argue for themselves, rather than defer to tradition and authority—and they believe that the ability to argue in the Socratic way is, as Socrates proclaimed, valuable for democracy."

Shorris: "The first year of the Clemente Course produced many errors, but also set the pattern for teaching the humanities to the poor. Although the course continues to be refined, there has been no basic change. The end remains to bring the students into the public world, to take them from the isolation of poverty to the political life of citizens. The means is still to use the Socratic method to teach the humanities at the university level in a form that integrates the disciplines...."

Socrates won no prizes, started no academies, wrote not a word; he was a philosopher, the one who connected philosophy with the public world. If it can be said that Socrates bears the true responsibility for the Clemente Course, we shall not be able to measure its effect upon our students until after they are dead, to borrow an old Greek view of evaluation. As winning the Nobel is not the only mark of academic accomplishment, going on to college is not the only route to the examined life, the pursuit of virtue, a habit of good actions, acting according to a maxim which could become a general law, understanding the happiness of others as the greatest good. Although it is seldom mentioned in Cambridge, Massachusetts, Abraham Lincoln did not attend Harvard College.

The goal of the Clemente Course requires a curriculum that may prepare students to go on to college, but aims mainly to repeat the pattern of reflection, autonomy, the public world, that we see in ancient Athens. Petrarch's vision suits that goal; the vision of the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, New Jersey, does not."

NOTE: THE SHORRIS/NUSSBAUM APPROACH TO THE HUMANITIES IS MORE FLEXIBLE, AND LESS FOCUSED ON A FIXED CANON OR CURRICULUM, THAN THE APPROACH OF PROCTOR AND OTHERS WHO DEFINE THE HUMANITIES STRICTLY IN TERMS OF GREEK/LATIN LITERATURE. THE 'GREAT BOOKS' APPROACH OF ROBERT MAYNARD HUTCHINS AND MORTIMER ADLER WAS SOMEWHERE IN-BETWEEN THESE ALTERNATIVES, INSISTING ON A FIXED CANON BUT A MORE WIDE-RANGING ONE ACCESSIBLE TO A WIDER AUDIENCE.

SOME HELPFUL LINKS:

The Clemente Course, at <http://clementecourse.org/>

The Illinois Humanities Council, at <http://www.prairie.org/>

The University of Chicago Humanities Division, at <http://humanities.uchicago.edu/>

The University of Chicago Civic Knowledge Project, at <http://civicknowledge.uchicago.edu>

IV.

THE TASK AHEAD: TO PUT TOGETHER THE 'DIFFICULT NARRATIVE' AND BE ABLE TO ADVANCE THE HUMANITIES AS A CRUCIAL PART OF THE CRITICAL THINKING CALLED FOR IN DEFINING POVERTY AND EFFECTIVE ANTIPOVERTY PROGRAMS. AS SHORRIS WOULD PUT IT: ARE 'THE POOR' CHEATED BY ANTIPOVERTY PROGRAMS THAT FAIL TO ADDRESS THE ROLE OF THE HUMANITIES AND THE VALUE OF A LIFE WITH DIGNITY?

A FEW OUTSTANDING PROBLEMS:

- 1. TO CONTINUE TO BUILD CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE SHORRIS/NUSSBAUM APPROACH AND OTHER VIABLE NORMATIVE APPROACHES, SUCH AS POGGE'S HUMAN RIGHTS APPROACH, SINDYER'S NATURAL GOOD APPROACH, AND SINGER'S WELFARIST APPROACH.**
- 2. TO ADVOCATE AS ANTIPOVERTY POLICY THE SHORRIS/NUSSBAUM EXPANSION OF THE PETRARCHAN CONCEPTION OF THE HUMANITIES AND THE ROLE OF THE SOCRATIC METHOD. POPULAR ANTIPOVERTY PROGRAM MODELS—SUCH AS GEOFFREY CANADA'S HARLEM CHILDREN'S PROMISE ZONE—UTTERLY FAIL TO ADDRESS THE ROLE OF THE HUMANITIES. VARIOUS EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN CHICAGO, NOTABLY THE CIVIC KNOWLEDGE PROJECT'S WINNING WORDS AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM AND THE PROPOSED EXTENSION OF THE CLEMENTE COURSE TO DISADVANTAGED HIGH SCHOOLS, PROVIDE CONCRETE PROGRAMMING OPTIONS THAT COULD MAKE THE WOODLAWN CHILDREN'S PROMISE ZONE A MORE HOLISTIC AND HUMANITIES-ORIENTED MODEL.**
- 3. TO CONTINUE TO ADDRESS THE REAL WORLD IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEMS WITH SUCH PROGRAMS, PARTICULARLY THE NECESSARY COMPROMISES THAT INVOLVE ROLLING MORE MATERIAL FORMS OF SUPPORT INTO THEM. ACHIEVING THE BETTER BALANCE, WITH MORE MATERIAL MEASURES CARRYING MORE HUMANITIES CONTENT, AND HUMANITIES MEASURES CARRYING NECESSARY MATERIAL CONTENT, IS VITAL.**
- 4. TO ADDRESS THE 'SINGER PROBLEM' OF PRIORITIZING LIFE SAVING IN CONDITIONS OF EXTREME POVERTY IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT OVER LOCAL EFFORTS TO COMBAT POVERTY.**

