Once Again with Feeling:
Empathy in Deliberative Discourse

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If we think of emotions as essential elements of human intelligence, rather than just as supports or props for intelligence, this gives us especially strong reasons to promote the conditions of emotional well-being in a political culture: for this view entails that without emotional development, a part of our reasoning capacity as political creatures will be missing.

—Martha C. Nussbaum

In *Upheavals of Thought*, Martha C. Nussbaum asks, “What positive contribution do emotions, as such, make to ethical deliberation, both personal and public?” (298). Her answer to that question is “considerable,” an answer that aligns with and diverges from Matthew J. Newcomb’s efforts in “Totalized Compassion” to rescue compassion as a basis for social action. Newcomb and Nussbaum lay similar claim to the importance of emotion, particularly compassion, which Newcomb defines as sympathy for and a desire to mitigate another’s suffering (106). Compassion, Newcomb argues, can do important work by “lead[ing] to imagina­tive connections between people,” but only when it is “not a totalizing concept or sole basis for relationship” (107). Similarly, Nussbaum envisions compassion, “a painful emotion occasioned by the awareness of another person’s undeserved misfortune” (301), as a keystone to social justice; she claims that “compassion can be an invaluable way of extending our ethical awareness and of understanding the human meaning of events and policies” (14). Thus, in making his argument to secure a position for compassion in deliberative discourse, Newcomb reinforces Nussbaum’s own efforts to reclaim emotions, including compassion, as crucial to ethical decision-making.

However, Nussbaum and Newcomb also diverge; they differ significantly in their starting points concerning the nature of all emotions and especially the nature of compassion. On the one hand, Nussbaum argues that all emotions contain a cognitive element; emotions, including
compassion, perhaps even particularly compassion, are by definition a combination of rationality and affect. On the other hand, Newcomb, drawing on Hannah Arendt, begins from the premise that all emotions, particularly compassion, are all feeling and no thought. Compassion is an involuntary and blind force dissolving the space between self and other and silencing the dialogue so necessary for social action. As Newcomb argues, rescuing compassion requires highlighting the mixtures of feelings and motives in compassion so the individual can then bring rationality to bear on compassion; rationality is not intrinsic to compassion.

While applauding Newcomb’s recovery of compassion, I would like to explore the implications of Nussbaum’s starting point. Instead of beginning with the belief that emotions, including compassion, are spontaneous, uncontrollable responses sans rationality, I instead begin from the premise that all emotions, including compassion—or, empathy, my term of choice—always involve an element of rationality. Because of this mix of emotion and cognition, compassion doesn’t merely facilitate persuasion and dialogue. To exist, persuasion and dialogue require compassion, which unites communities in just action. Using Martin Hoffman’s work with empathy, I propose that empathy enables a person simultaneously to identify with and evaluate the suffering of another. I demonstrate the value of empathy in dialogue and persuasion in three venues: the international stage, through Ralph K. White’s realistic empathy; disciplinary spaces, through Min-Zhan Lu’s use of critical affirmation; and the classroom, through Todd DeStigter’s critical empathy. My agenda in this essay does not dismiss or erode the importance of Newcomb’s work; it complements that work by seeking to forward its goal—achieving an other-centered rather than self-centered social action—by taking an alternative pathway.

Intelligent Feelings

Nussbaum contends that a problem posed by emotions in law and political theory is that too many times questions concerning emotions are answered “without much prior analysis of emotions and without sorting out competing theories of their structure and development” (Upheavals 298).
In fact, she argues that "reasoning about emotions [is] only as convincing as the account of emotions it employ[s]" (298). Therefore, I begin with two different accounts of emotions, one derived from Newcomb's reading of Arendt and one from the work of Martin Hoffman, whose definition of empathy as a composite of rationality and emotion aligns with Nussbaum's definition of compassion. What remains uncritiqued in Newcomb's absorbing essay is his starting point: Arendt's belief that all emotions, because they are blind forces, disrupt the rationality necessary for reasoned debate, negotiation, and persuasion in the public sphere. My starting point is the contention that all emotions, including empathy, involve a rational, particularly an evaluative, element. No emotion is blind. The interplay of both is necessary for empathy, a starting point considerably different from that proposed by Newcomb and one that underscores the vital role of empathy in dialogue and persuasion.

Central to Newcomb's argument is Arendt's position concerning emotions in general and compassion in particular, both of which undercut the dialogue required for deliberative discourse. According to Newcomb, Arendt contends that compassion lacks a rational component; it is an involuntary response that bypasses thought and exists beyond the control of the individual. Therefore, it does not and cannot foster the negotiation and dialogue necessary for engaging in social action or determining questions of justice in the public sphere. Instead, because compassion operates through identification, which dissolves the space and boundaries between individuals necessary for the negotiation in the public sphere, it results in silence rather than persuasion and forecloses any thoughtful motivations to action (107–08). Newcomb takes seriously Arendt's disquiet with compassion. When compassion is complete, the individual is trapped in an emotion, and emotions, including compassion, allow no room for rational discrimination. In fact, all emotions, not just compassion, are suspect because, according to Newcomb's reading of Arendt, emotions do not incorporate an element of rationality; they are all involuntary bio-psychological responses.

This general perception of emotion that Newcomb ascribes to Arendt is his starting point, and he proceeds logically to demonstrate that no emotion, including compassion, is ever merely one emotion. Rather, it is a complex of swirling feelings, and it is within this swirl, this impurity of
emotion, that discrimination, dialogue, and judgment can take place. The conflicting array of feelings in compassion enables the individual to bring rationality to bear on the experience; however, that rationality is not intrinsic to the experience. Newcomb concludes his argument with examples drawn from his students’ work in a first-year composition class organized around the theme of “The Rhetoric of Suffering and Service” to illustrate the complex network of feelings and motivations intertwined with instances of compassion. Compassion is not, as he makes abundantly clear, the totalizing, self-centered emotion that Arendt fears, and, because it is not, it can foster other-centered social action.

Arendt’s assumptions concerning the nature of emotion in general and compassion in particular lead her to conclude that compassion is detrimental to negotiation and persuasion. In contrast, Nussbaum arrives at a different conclusion based on a different account of emotions and compassion. Drawing on both classical traditions, particularly a modified reading of the ancient Stoics, and modern psychology, Nussbaum in *Upheavals of Thought* persuasively argues that emotions “involve judgments about important things, judgments in which, appraising an external object as salient for our own well-being, we acknowledge our own neediness and incompleteness before parts of the world we do not fully control” (19). She refers to her theory as a cognitive-evaluative view to stress that emotions always integrate thinking about an object, embody a way of seeing that object within the fabric of one’s life, and involve a set of beliefs about that object (23, 27–28). Thus, to experience anger, one must believe that nontrivial damage has occurred to self or significant other and that the damage occurred through another’s willing actions (29–30). Anger is not just an intense physiological agitation, although it definitely is that. It is not some blind energy pushing a person around; instead, it, like all emotions, is tied up in a complex process of perceiving, valuing, and believing.

Nussbaum’s carefully laid-out theory of emotion points to an important role for emotions in ethical decisions and just actions, particularly compassion. Like all emotions, compassion, for Nussbaum, is an amalgamation of feeling, evaluating, and believing. More particularly, the experience of compassion is contingent on three judgments: assessments of the seriousness of the suffering, the fault of the suffering, and the
possibility of sharing a similar suffering. First, size matters. Nussbaum explains that implicit in compassion is the observer’s judgment about the “size” of the suffering (310–14). The example she offers is the difference between a master wind musician experiencing a mouth injury that jeopardizes a career and Nussbaum herself experiencing the same injury, which would inconvenience her only slightly. Second, compassion entails the notion of responsibility or blame and is predicated on a worldview in which people cannot always control their fate. Compassion is typically evoked in those instances where the sufferer is perceived as not responsible for his or her pain. Within this framework, then, Enron employees who lost their pensions through their supervisors’ malfeasance would evoke compassion whereas someone who empties a pension account to play the ponies would not. Finally, compassion is dependent on what Nussbaum calls eudaemonistic judgment: the recognition of one’s own vulnerabilities in the suffering of another. One sees in another’s woe a potential for similar distress in one’s own life. The terror of such vulnerability is essential to the experience of compassion.

The evaluative element in compassion is a product of rational thought, of cognition. Thus, for Nussbaum rationality is not something that we bring to or impose on compassion; rather, it is already intertwined with compassion. Such an amalgamation of cognition and feelings differs radically from the monochromatic view of compassion suggested by Newcomb’s summary of Arendt. Because of that difference, it suggests a radically different role for compassion in dialogue and social action. If we start from the premise that compassion, or empathy (my preferred term), is already a complex network of thinking and feeling, then empathy becomes the heart of social activism, a belief supported by Martin L. Hoffman’s work with empathy (a term that coincides with Nussbaum’s definition and application of compassion).

Hoffman’s lifelong work with empathy aligns with Nussbaum’s argument that emotions, including compassion, consist of an intricate network of affective and evaluative components. However, while Nussbaum provides a philosophical argument, bolstered by research in psychology, for the intricate interweaving of rationality in emotion, Hoffman makes an empirical argument for the interplay of cognition and affect in empathy, an interplay necessary for what Hoffman calls prosocial
activism: a community coming together to engage in just action. Throughout a series of projects, Hoffman has traced the developmental path of empathy from the phenomenon of the synchronized crying of newborns in hospital nurseries to the more sophisticated language-mediated empathy of adulthood. The first element of empathy is its constitution as a vicarious emotional response to another person’s situation. It is a match between the observer’s feelings and those of the model (“Interaction” 103). To feel empathy, people must overlay their own situation with that of the victim. That dynamic, however, is not restricted to moments when individuals physically see another’s distress and react to those physical cues. Empathy is also language-mediated. Unlike Arendt who, as Newcomb says, sees compassion as born in silence and giving birth to nothing but silence, Hoffman concludes that empathy and language coexist. According to his research, children, as young as three years, and adults all experience empathy evoked through words (for instance, through a story or a letter).

If empathy were only feeling, then it would serve neither deliberative discourse nor other-centered social action, which is Arendt’s fear and Newcomb’s exigency. However, according to Hoffman, while empathy relies on feelings, it also relies on cognition. Hoffman explains that from the age of about eighteen months, when children begin to develop a rudimentary sense of self as separated from the other, they begin integrating a strong socio-cognitive component into their empathic experiences. This critical aspect of empathy is clearly evident in the attribution of causes for the distressful situation and in application of principles, values, and ideologies, a conclusion resonating with Nussbaum’s definition of compassion (“Empathy and Prosocial” 79). For example, Hoffman concludes from his research that when individuals encounter someone in distress, they automatically begin to assign reasons for the distress, and those reasons affect how empathy is experienced. If people determine that victims have no control over their plight or if they determine that the victims have contributed in some way to that plight, very different empathic responses occur, each of which leads to different kinds of civic actions. A critical leap is also necessary for the shift between empathy for another’s specific situation or life condition and the realization that such suffering is endemic to an entire group or class of people (70). Here is
where the interplay between cognition and feelings in empathy enables collective as well as individual action.

Empathy as a composite of feelings and evaluations does not die in the egg, limited to the dyadic relationship of empathizer and victim, something that, according to Newcomb, Arendt fears with compassion. Instead, the interplay of evaluation and feelings in empathy is the source of social action and community-building. Hoffman has written repeatedly that empathy is the basis for prosocial activism, which he defines as “sustained action in the service of improving another person’s or group’s life condition either by working with them or by trying to change society on their behalf” (“Empathy and Prosocial” 65). As a result of matching experiences, especially when the emotion matched is empathic distress or anger, the empathizer is frequently motivated by the conscious desire to alleviate the victim’s distress by changing the situation causing the distress (71). This conscious intention to help is rarely, if ever, the desire to relieve the empathizer’s distress. It is not self-focused; it is community-focused (“Is” 132). In fact, empathy is the glue by which communities adhere through just action. “This human capacity for empathic distress may provide the affective and motivational base for moral development and just behavior and may thus be a major cohesive force or glue in society,” Hoffman argues (“Empathy and Justice” 151).

Empathy in Deliberative Discourse

As a complicated mixture of affect and rationality, empathy lends itself to deliberative discourse—to negotiation, debate, and persuasion—in the public sphere and serves as the foundation for social justice. Three incarnations of empathy, each functioning in different areas and each characterized by the recursiveness of rationality and feelings, illustrate the degree to which empathy constitutes a crucial element of persuasion: realistic empathy (White), critical affirmation (Lu), and critical empathy (DeStigter).

Perhaps the largest scope for empathy in negotiation and social action is through international conflict resolution. Ralph K. White’s concept of realistic empathy highlights the potential of empathy to open up rather
than close down dialogue among adversarial nations. White developed the concept of realistic empathy in the 1980s to highlight the problems in national cold war policies, particularly the nuclear arms buildup, applying it as well in the 1990s in the context of the US conflict with Saddam Hussein. The arms race in the 1980s was motivated, White argues, by two underlying assumptions about the nature of the Soviets that, if the Reagan administration had "empathized realistically with the Soviet rulers, [it] would [have] recognize[d] in all probability as false" (123). However, bogged down by "demon images" of the Soviet rulers, envisioning those rulers as inhuman and inhumane, the Reagan administration closed off discourse and engaged in the arms race as a viable international strategy. Necessary to jump start dialogue was realistic empathy, for realistic empathy enables disputants to see the other as human, even if adversarial. Unlike Newcomb's account of Arendt's compassion, White's realistic empathy serves not only as a "major antidote to war," but "need for it extends to every form of human conflict and conflict resolution, between groups on every level of society and also between individuals—e.g., married couples, and parents versus children" (131–32). It is key to dialogue rather than a blind force that silences dialogue.

The centrality of realistic empathy to international negotiation arises from the interplay of cognition and feeling. White distinguishes empathy from sympathy. Empathy consists of a "realistic understanding of the thoughts and feelings of others," while sympathy is "feeling with others. Empathy is cognitive; sympathy affective" (121–22). However, both occur together and are causally related, the distinction between the two blurring as White practices realistic empathy. The cognitive component in empathy is necessary to balance sympathy because of the difficulties and dangers of "feeling with" a hostile other. First, people are reluctant to "feel with" an adversary, personal or international, whose genuine hostility is dangerous and therefore frightening. Second, people endanger themselves if they "feel with" a hostile other and, as a result, fail "to be tough in ways we should be tough" (122), a factor that motivates Arendt's dismissal of compassion. What is necessary, White argues, is not sympathy alone, but empathy, a process that enables individuals to see an adversary's "essential humanity" without discounting the danger of hostility. Such recognition does not mean that negotiators roll over and
expose their bellies to an adversary. It does not mean that an accused is excused for crimes committed because a jury perceives the defendant as a victim. Rather, realistic empathy means that people are “reasonable and cooperative in the ways we must be in order to survive” (122) because they think with and feel with. Realistic empathy is, in fact, a necessary component in personal and international negotiation because without it there would be no belief in the benefits of negotiation, no belief in one’s ability to negotiate with an other.

White’s realistic empathy highlights the degree to which empathy is central to negotiations on an international level within the public sphere. Realistic empathy moves an individual and a country beyond silence into deliberative discourse. However, it is also important on a more local level, for instance, in the discourse that arises from our own disciplinary scholarship in composition studies. Min-Zhan Lu offers a performance of and argument for empathy in the deliberative discourse of our professional sphere through the concept of critical affirmation.

Lu does not use the term empathy to describe her approach to civility and civic action through literacy. Instead, she uses critical affirmation, a phrase she borrows from Cornel West and one bound up in West’s love ethics. Critical affirmation consists of an intricate dance of personal and public choreographed by the interplay of feelings and critique. Lu’s starting point for her essay begins with her own failure to practice critical affirmation in her professional discourse. While Lu states that she strives to enact critical affirmation in her public writing and her public actions, she ultimately falls short because “in my private thoughts, feelings, and visceral reactions, I have not always practiced critical affirmation when responding to others in the field” (173). Such a failure results in what Lu calls teacher illiteracy: when teachers do not practice what they preach and believe about literacy. Her agenda in “Redefining the Literate Self” is to realign her public actions and private reactions, and, in so doing, underscore the importance of critical affirmation, with its swirl of feelings and rationality, in fostering dialogue.

Lu’s realignment begins with narratives of personal experiences. She explains that she requests her students to analyze the ways in which an experience of oppression becomes a legitimate site for empathy, a process that affirms students’ personal experiences of marginalization. At the
same time, she asks her students to analyze the ways in which they, even as victims, also victimize: that is, she instructs them to grapple with their contributions to the oppression of others, which means they critique that which they affirm through their personal narratives. Such a double move—identification with one’s own victimization and identification with the plight of those whom one victimizes—is necessary for critical affirmation and, through critical affirmation, social change. Lu says: “Chances of changing the particular system most immediately oppressive to each of us will remain limited until we learn to confront our own complicity with various systems of oppression” (176). The problem for Lu, though, is her realization that she does not enact the same critical affirmation that she requires from her students. Rather, she explains that she automatically condemns personal narratives told by individuals from privileged positions, as evidenced by her public excoriation of Richard E. Miller’s “The Nervous System.” She critiques without affirmation.

Lu then proceeds to revise her own literacy practices in ways that align with her vision of critical affirmation, and each step seeks an integration of feelings and critique as the grounds for fruitful dialogue. First, she investigates the limits of empathy, the limits of identification, by revisiting her tendency to identify emotionally with others who, like herself, have experienced marginalization. Specifically, Lu points to her tendency to conflate her sense of exclusion, as the result of being a Chinese woman in a racist culture, with the exclusion of all racial minorities. She illustrates the dangers of that conflation by analyzing her reactions to Jacqueline Jones Royster’s “When the First Voice You Hear is Not Your Own,” the 1995 CCC’s Chair’s address. Pinpointing three personal scenes that Royster uses to illustrate moments in her professional life when she was not heard, Lu lists possible empathic responses to those personal anecdotes. However, each response, Lu says, denies the challenge posed by Royster’s essay: the reminder that Lu’s experiences of racial exclusion cannot be substituted for Royster’s. Even classified as a woman “of color,” Lu explains that she must remember that she is a “stranger” to African-American experiences. Thus, reading Royster requires Lu to inhabit a paradoxical space in which she is part of and excluded from Royster’s experiences, in which she can and cannot identify. This insider-outsider stance demands a dance of feeling and
thinking: a careful listening and careful seeing that commit Lu to learning what she shares with these voices, these scenes, and what she does not. Lu notes that "vigilance towards the possibility of my 'touring'—'violating'—these texts is absolutely necessary for my own interest as well as that of the writers" (181).

Her second step in this balance of feelings and critique in critical affirmation is to return to her negative responses to Richard E. Miller's "The Nervous System." To enact literacy as opposed to illiteracy, Lu says, "I need to join his efforts to combat the conventions of attack/counter-strike" (182); she needs to identify with him, or else she shuts off dialogue and social action before either can start. She notes two rhetorical moves in Miller's essays that initially distressed her—a citation practice and a language practice—critically examining her negative reactions, reactions that failed to find any common ground between Miller's goals and her own. She concludes that a principled literacy requires her to get beyond the traps posed by these negative reactions and to identify a "yearning" that she and Miller share: the desire for agency and a more compassionate world (182–83). She needs to get beyond evaluation to a point where she "feels with" Miller's agenda. Then, on the basis of this identification, they can jointly confront the paradox of privilege and move from stasis to dialogue to action.

White at the international level with realistic empathy and Lu at the disciplinary level with critical affirmation demonstrate ways in which empathy's amalgamation of thinking and feeling can shape productive dialogue. Both would agree that empathy, however named, is necessary for negotiation and persuasion in the public sphere. Without it, people remain, in Matthew Arnold's words, ignorant armies clashing by night. If White's concern with international discourse implicates Lu's exploration of disciplinary discourse, then Lu's plea for critical affirmation in disciplinary discourse certainly implicates composition pedagogy, an issue that Todd DeStigter tackles directly in his insistence on the importance of critical empathy in the classroom.

Nussbaum in *Frontiers of Justice* claims that compassion, because it is an amalgamation of feelings and evaluation, can be taught. DeStigter's work with at-risk students suggests not only that empathy can be taught, but that it also should be taught because it weds emotional commitment
with ethical action, providing a basis for and a monitor of dialogue. Troubled by the need to foster community in the classroom (affective ties) and the need to move beyond community to civic participation (collective action aimed to change the material situations that prevent students from pursuing life’s dreams), DeStigter asks: “How might we imagine and set forth a framework that situates conceptions of community and the public not in opposition to each other, but as complementary, recursive, and mutually-dependent?” (“Public” 240). His response to this question is critical empathy. A term coined by Jay Robinson and shaped by Todd DeStigter, critical empathy refers to “the process of establishing informed and affective connections with other human beings,” connections that yield civil relationships with civic potential (“Public” 240).

Empathy is integral to DeStigter’s *Los Tesoros* project, a 10-week literacy venture developed by DeStigter in conjunction with Laura Vedder and Alicia Martinez, two teachers working at Addison High School. Concerned with the failure of many students to find a place for themselves in the public school system, the three devised a program in which at-risk Anglo students from Vedder’s American literature class met with their Latina/o counterparts in Martinez’s Spanish-speaking English as a Second Language class. The goals of the program were two-fold: to help students succeed academically by building on literacies they already possessed and to help students connect with others so that they would “feel as though they actually belonged in the classes they attended” (DeStigter, “Tesoros” 13).

To change these students’ sense of marginalization, DeStigter turns to two criteria of John Dewey’s democratizing pedagogy: shared interests and free interplay of difference. These criteria emphasize the common ground among groups (their unity) and the differences between them (their separation). DeStigter writes:

I believe that what emerged during the *Tesoros* Project was . . . a tentatively empathetic “togetherness” made possible by the Latino and poor white students’ shared marginalized status at Addison High, but also complicated (and enriched) by the Latino students’ assertion of a separate identity that caused a disruption in what Dewey calls our “habits” of thought and conduct. (17)
Derived from a reading of Dewey that highlights an often overlooked emotional component, this emphasis on affective relationships enabled members of the fledgling *Tesoros* community to “encounter difference as complementary and socially productive rather than as threatening” (17). By collaboratively composing oral, visual, and print stories, students found in their shared marginalized status a basis for solidarity (23) and gradually began to form ties of affection, reflecting what Dewey calls *intelligent sympathy*, an essential component of community building. Defined as “‘a cultivated imagination for what men have in common and a rebellion against what unnecessarily divides them’” (Dewey, qtd. in DeStigter 23–24), intelligent sympathy fuses emotional commitment with principled interaction, serving as the foundation of and guide for dialogue, the second crucial component of democratic community-building.

Empathy as intelligent sympathy did not silence students; rather, empathy fostered dialogue because of its coupled ties of affinity with acknowledgement of differences. Dewey’s intelligent sympathy, DeStigter points out, emphasizes the need for difference, and difference in the midst of affinity creates dissonance, which is a prelude to change. Through dissonance, community members—motivated by their desire to maintain affective connections—adjusted continually to new experiences presented by fellow members; they honed new habits of mind and action in response to these experiences. Thus, when the Latina/o students in the *Tesoros* project jointly identified themselves as “Mexicans” in contrast to their Anglo classmates, producing artwork and texts celebrating that difference, the group as a whole, to remain a group, discussed those differences and teased out the complementarity of each other’s unique function within the community.

Such is the complex empathy that guided the pedagogical practices of the *Tesoros* literacy project. However, necessary for social change beyond the classroom is critical empathy, for it unifies community and civic sphere. As DeStigter defines it, critical empathy is the process of establishing informed and affective connections with other human beings, of thinking and feeling with them at some emotionally, intellectually, and socially significant level, while always remem-
bering that such connections are complicated by sociohistorical forces that hinder the equitable, just relationships that we presumably seek. ("Public" 240)

Drawing on his experiences at his current research site, Latino Youth Alternative High School in Chicago, DeStigter offers an illustration of critical empathy in the work of a counselor at that high school, who establishes strong affective ties that extend beyond Latino Youth. Through her efforts, students learn to meld civil and civic moments, moving from community into public space: Lisa, a mother of two, plans to attend college; Pedro attends a Chicago Public School Board meeting to protest funding cuts to alternative schools; dozens of Latino Youth students attend a rally at Daley Plaza to protest police violence. The counselor’s success at crafting a community that moves into public space has “a lot to do with critical empathy,” DeStigter argues (242). Although we can never totally understand another’s position, he concedes, we can still connect in “partial and mutable ways,” and those connections of affection can lead us to commit ourselves to civic action (242).

Whether we call it empathy, compassion, realistic empathy, critical affirmation, or critical empathy, the experience of sharing another’s suffering is essential to deliberative discourse, to negotiation, and to persuasion in the public sphere. Newcomb ably demonstrates the potential of compassion for determining and engaging in other-centered social action, beginning from the premise that compassion, like all emotions, is a complex interplay of many feelings. Seen through a critical eye, the totality of compassion is disrupted, which prevents compassion from dissolving the separation between public and private and thus silencing deliberative discourse. In my response to his fine essay, I have presented an alternative road to a similar end, arguing for the importance of empathy in international, disciplinary, and pedagogical venues. As a rich amalgamation of feelings and rationality, empathy does not prevent dialogue; it enables it. It recognizes difference in the midst of identification, and it motivates other-centered social action.

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Notes

1. A word about words is necessary here. Sympathy, pity, compassion, empathy are slippery terms made even more slippery as usage shifts within and between disciplines. Because my argument draws on scholarship from different fields, I have out of necessity retained my sources' original vocabulary; however, I have chosen empathy, rather than compassion, as my overarching term because of my reliance on Martin L. Hoffman's work with empathy. Significant to my argument is the congruence between Nussbaum’s definition of compassion and Hoffman’s definition of empathy as the combination of feeling and evaluation.

2. The degree to and the point at which cognition enters into emotions has been a long-standing controversy in psychology and, as Nussbaum points out, in philosophy. See Lazarus; Zajonc; Zajonc and Markus. This controversy is further complicated by the role of culture in shaping emotions. See Harré.

3. Newcomb demonstrates this, for he summarizes two letters from international aid organizations that seek to elicit contributions to their causes by evoking the reader’s compassion via verbal descriptions of suffering. Newcomb’s concern is that these language-mediated pleas result in self-centered social action with no significant effort to redress inequities in the larger social context.

4. White’s association of rationality with empathy and emotion with sympathy differs considerably from Nussbaum, who defines empathy as imaginative reconstruction of experience sans evaluative content (Upheavals 302). For her, sympathy, like compassion, includes such content (302). See also Bakhtin. My point is that enacting White’s realistic empathy relies on both thinking with and feeling with.

Works Cited


