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## Introduction

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## INTRODUCTION

Each year, the *Center for Gender & Sexuality Law* devotes a day-long symposium to the significant contributions of a senior scholar to the literature of gender and/or sexuality law and theory. For our inaugural symposium we were pleased to have selected Martha Nussbaum, the Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics at the University of Chicago with joint appointments in the Philosophy Department, Law School and Divinity School. Professor Nussbaum's work spans a daunting terrain. In her work as a classicist and theorist of liberal humanism, she has both explored an ethics of vulnerability and human flourishing, in *The Fragility of Goodness* (1996), and defended liberal education in *Cultivating Humanity* (1997). In *Hiding from Humanity* (2004) she used tools from moral psychology to better understand the role that shame and disgust play in legal argument, focusing in particular on the subordination of women, Jews and homosexuals. Her *Sex and Social Justice* (1999) defended a universal notion of gendered and sexuality-based justice that demonstrates the ineluctable link between sex and social justice. Finally, in *Women and Human Development* (2000) and *Frontier of Justice* (2006) she made a compelling case for defining development goals in terms of human capabilities that insist on the priority of gender and sex-based justice.

Some scholars of great prominence make their mark by boring deep into a difficult problem, using complex theoretical tools to reveal a problem's troubled premises, illuminate its hidden biases and in so doing enhance our appreciation of the problem and the role of law in its eradication. Other distinguished scholars aim more for breadth than depth, reaching across disciplines to aid our understanding of a domain in life or in law with the tools and methodologies of an allied field, be it philosophy, political theory or economics. Still others have built remarkable bodies of work taking as their starting point not the realm of theory but the demands of real life and those who suffer unnecessarily. Their work starts with the world and works out from there to the more abstract domain of ideas. These scholars insist that our scholarly projects be motivated by and responsive to the most urgent of real world problems.

What is most remarkable about Martha Nussbaum is that she has developed a body of field-transforming scholarship not in any one of these domains, but in all of them. She is at once a scholar in the field of classics and political philosophy, of ethics and the rights of disabled people, of cognitive psychology and development policy, of Stoicism and the rights of gay people and women, and of disgust and animal rights. Her work shows

us how a thick commitment to justice can extend not only to the dignity claims made by poor women in India, same-sex couples seeking to marry in California, and disabled people living anywhere, but to animals in circuses and factory farms as well. To do so she pairs Cicero with Mill, Rawls with Plato, Blackstone with Maguigan.

She challenges us to think hard about complex problems, and complexly about hard problems. Even when we disagree, which is inevitable in work of such ambition, she makes us better for the way her work rigorously challenges us to carefully articulate and defend where and why we part ways.

The Symposium, held in February of 2009, was organized around three general themes in Professor Nussbaum's work: Feminism and Liberalism; History, Identity and Sexuality; and Gender and Development. We invited distinguished scholars from law, history, sociology, development and political science to discuss the ways in which Professor Nussbaum's work has influenced the fields in which they write as well as their own thinking. To this stellar group, we posed the questions: Where, from your vantage point, has her work had the most significant theoretical and policy-based influences? Where have you picked up her ideas and taken them somewhere else—perhaps somewhere Nussbaum herself would not have gone?

The papers that follow in this volume represent our panelists' efforts to engage these and other means by which to assess the enormous contributions of Professor Martha Nussbaum's work to the scholarship and practice of gender and sexuality law. Her work in any one of several areas—classical philosophy of ethics and emotions, contemporary moral philosophy or international development policy—standing alone would amply justify her honor as a giant in the field of gender and sexuality law. Her capacity to undertake such intellectually rigorous and politically daring work across a broad spectrum of disciplines renders her without question among the most influential scholars of sex and gender justice of our generation. Professor Nussbaum is a scholar of rare and distinguished talents that cover a broad range of scholarly disciplines, methodologies and social contexts, and we take great pleasure in honoring that work in this special issue of the *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*.

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