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## **Introduction: what is the history of the humanities?**

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## Introduction: What Is the History of the Humanities?

Herman Paul

In 2016, the opening issue of the journal *History of Humanities* proudly announced that a new field of research was in the process of emerging. Although humanities scholars had always engaged with the histories of their own disciplines, what was new and exciting, according to the journal editors, was that they had begun to broaden their horizons. If humanities scholars had been used to studying the history of French linguistics or Chinese historiography in relative isolation from other fields, they now began to raise comparative questions. How had Ferdinand de Saussure's structuralism resonated in disciplines other than linguistics? To what extent had source critical methods been adopted across the humanities? And how is it to be explained that some humanities fields have been more receptive to postcolonial critique than others? The history of the humanities as envisioned by the journal editors thus appears as something more than an umbrella term for the history of linguistics, the history of historiography, and the history of art history. Typical for the field is its "ambition to write comparative historiographies of the humanities." Historians of the humanities are scholars traversing across fields, through all of the humanities (and beyond), with the aim of understanding what the humanities have been, what they are today, and why they are important.<sup>1</sup>

Arguably, the new field's claim to novelty was a little exaggerated: there had been earlier attempts at writing histories of the humanities. Judging by books like James Jarrett's *The Humanities and Humanistic Education* (1973), authors pondering the state of the humanities had sometimes found it necessary to delve deeply into the past.<sup>2</sup> More rigorous historical studies had been written, too. Robert Proctor's 1988 book *The Great Amnesia*, for example, had traced in some detail how the *studia humanitatis* as practiced by Renaissance

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<sup>1</sup> Rens Bod et al., "A New Field: History of Humanities," *History of Humanities* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1–8, at 5.

<sup>2</sup> James L. Jarrett, *The Humanities and Humanistic Education* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1973), esp. 1–45.

humanists like Petrarch had given way to the modern humanities.<sup>3</sup> In Germany, there had even been a journal dedicated to the philosophy and history of the *Geisteswissenschaften*.<sup>4</sup> None of these publications, however, had found more than a niche audience. The German journal had ceased publication in 2000, while Proctor's exercise, in the author's own words, had been a solitary one: "The history of classical scholarship, the history of education, the history of classical political ideas, and the historical evolution of Renaissance individualism are all established areas of research. But no one, to my knowledge, has asked how all these fragments might fit together to form the history of the humanities."<sup>5</sup>

Although it is too early to tell whether *History of Humanities* will have a more enduring impact, the signs are not bad. The Society for the History of the Humanities has about 900 members from across the globe, institutional members not included.<sup>6</sup> Conferences on "The Making of the Humanities," organized on an annual (formerly biennial) basis since 2008, attract hundreds of participants who seem honestly excited about the new lines of research that are opened up by a comparative history of the humanities. Since 2016, the journal *History of Humanities* has published an impressive array of articles that unearth connections, similarities, as well as notable differences between traditions of humanities research and teaching in various parts of the world. So, one may wonder: What does this history of the humanities entail? Why does it attract so much attention? And what does this tell us about the humanities in the early 21st century?

### The world of the humanities

Before turning to these questions, we have to address the term "humanities" itself. What are the humanities that historians of the humanities claim to be studying? This question is easier

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<sup>3</sup> Robert E. Proctor, *Education's Great Amnesia: Reconsidering the Humanities from Petrarch to Freud: With a Curriculum for Today's Students* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988). See also Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities: Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> On the short-lived history of this *Dilthey-Jahrbuch für Philosophie und Geschichte der Geisteswissenschaften* (1983–2000), see Helmut Johach, "Das Dilthey-Jahrbuch als Ort der Hermeneutik-Forschung," in *Vom Wissen um den Menschen: Philosophie, Geschichte, Materialität*, ed. Julia Gruevska and Kevin Liggieri (Freiburg: Karl Alber, 2018), 330–51.

<sup>5</sup> Proctor, *Education's Great Amnesia*, 87.

<sup>6</sup> Personal communication by Rens Bod (19 April 2021).

to ask than to answer, given that the term “humanities” denotes “a whole set of commitments, ideals, and sensibilities.”<sup>7</sup> While it refers, on the one hand, to such concrete activities as students gathering in a lecture room for a class in English, history, or philosophy, the term also evokes images of methods, aims, or values that set the humanities apart from the sciences in particular. In other words, whereas the humanities are, practically speaking, an umbrella term for university departments, journals, and conferences devoted to the study of history, language, and culture, they also, more abstractly, denote what Simon During calls “a loosely-linked conglomeration of practices, interests, comportments, personae, offices, moods, purposes and values.”<sup>8</sup> Both the one and the other, moreover, look differently in the United States than they do in Germany, Russia, or China. Although *Geisteswissenschaften* (Germany), *sciences humaines* (France), *scienze umanistiche* (Italy), *humanvidenskaber* (Scandinavia), *gumanitarnye nauki* (Russia) and *renwen shehui kexue* (China) are nowadays routinely translated as *humanities*, these terms all carry their own connotations. This explains why Geoffrey Galt Harpham, looking back on a lecture tour in Turkey about the humanities as practiced in the United States, can report about puzzled gazes and raised eyebrows. To his Turkish audiences, says Harpham, the American-style humanities seemed “a mere provincial prejudice,” rooted in “a specifically American or at least Western, modern, and secular version of human being and human flourishing.”<sup>9</sup>

What then exactly do people disagree about in talking about the humanities? Without aiming to be comprehensive, we might identify three layers of disagreement. First, there is the issue of what *fields* the humanities encompass. When nineteenth-century Germans coined the term *Geisteswissenschaften*, they understood these “human sciences” to include the emerging disciplines of psychology, sociology, and political science, all of which would later be

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis: The Humanities in a Disenchanted Age* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 5.

<sup>8</sup> Simon During, “The Idea of the Humanities” (2017), online at [www.academia.edu/34926361](http://www.academia.edu/34926361) (assessed 9 March 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Galt Harpham, *The Humanities and the Dream of America* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 8. Harpham’s observations should not be misunderstood as implying that the Turkish and American humanities had developed independently of each other. See Ali Erken, “The Rockefeller Foundation, John Marshall and the Development of the Humanities in Modern Turkey: 1950–1965,” *Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 20, no. 38 (2015): 113–45.

rubricated under the social sciences.<sup>10</sup> Taking an even broader view, the journal *Die Geisteswissenschaften*, founded in 1913, aimed to cover “the entire domain of philosophy, psychology, mathematics, science of religion, science of history, ethnology, [and] pedagogy.”<sup>11</sup> If this list of disciplines corresponds badly with what humanities and *Geisteswissenschaften* are nowadays understood to mean, this is because, as Fabian Kraemer argues in this volume, classifications of disciplines change over time, while at the same time mirroring historically grown conventions of organizing learned societies into classes and universities into faculties or departments.<sup>12</sup>

As a result of this, American-style humanities and European *Geisteswissenschaften* differ, for instance in how they relate to the arts. While the *Geisteswissenschaften* are not usually understood to include creative writing or music performance – poetry and opera only appear as subjects of research in fields like literary studies and musicology – first-order engagement with literature, music, film, or dance has a more accepted place in the American humanities (with English departments offering degrees in creative writing, for example).<sup>13</sup> Such differences in turn have implications for what are regarded as “core disciplines.” Since the days of Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert, the field of history has often been considered the most representative discipline of the *Geisteswissenschaften*.<sup>14</sup> In the United States, by contrast, it is not uncommon to hear that history is “only partially linked to the modern humanities.”<sup>15</sup> If the humanities have a core discipline, it is rather English or literary

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<sup>10</sup> On the difficulties of accurately translating *Geisteswissenschaften* into English, see Roger Smith, *Being Human: Historical Knowledge and the Creation of Human Nature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 122–6.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted from the subtitle of this short-lived German periodical.

<sup>12</sup> See also Fabian Krämer, “Shifting Demarcations: An Introduction,” *History of Humanities* 3, no. 1 (2018): 5–14 and Julian Hamann, “Boundary Work between Two Cultures: Demarcating the Modern *Geisteswissenschaften*,” *ibid.*, 27–38.

<sup>13</sup> In this regard, the journal *History of Humanities* firmly positions itself in the tradition of the *Geisteswissenschaften*: “We do not intend to include historical studies of literature, music, theater, or the visual arts; rather, we aim at the history of the studies carried out on literature, music, theater, and the visual arts.” Bod et al., “New Field,” 4–5.

<sup>14</sup> Wilhelm Windelband, “Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft,” in *Das Stiftungsfest der Kaiser-Wilhelms-Universität Strassburg am 1. Mai 1894* (Strasbourg: J. H. Ed. Heitz, 1894), 15–41; Heinrich Rickert, *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft: Ein Vortrag* (Freiburg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1899).

<sup>15</sup> Eric Adler, *The Battle of the Classics: How a Nineteenth-Century Debate Can Save the Humanities Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 206 n. 2.

studies (fields in which, perhaps not coincidentally, engagement with the arts can take both first- and second-order forms).<sup>16</sup>

If classifications of disciplines are a first point of contestation, a second one are the *methods, values, or attitudes* associated with the humanities. Back in the nineteenth century, Windelband spoke about an “idiographic” method that set the *Geisteswissenschaften* apart from the “nomothetic” *Naturwissenschaften*.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Rickert argued that the “historical cultural sciences” (his preferred term) differed from the natural sciences, not only by studying parts of reality that humans have endowed with value, but also by approaching this value-laden reality with an interest in “the particular and the individual” instead of the recurrent or the general.<sup>18</sup> Although these arguments are more than a century old, versions of them continue to be offered in defense of medical humanities and environmental humanities (two of the so-called “new humanities” that the late twentieth century saw emerge).<sup>19</sup> Characteristic of the humanities, we are told, is a sensitivity to human factors, such as patients’ experiences, that is often absent from evidence-based reasoning.<sup>20</sup> Alternatively, it is said that the humanities engage in modes of inquiry that are “less straightforward” than scientific methodologies, if only because they shuttle “back and forth between the whole and its parts, between the past, the present, and the future, and in the case of the environmental humanities, between the environment and culture.”<sup>21</sup>

While these arguments may appeal to some humanities scholars, the history of the humanities shows that the dream of methodological monism – one scientific method for everyone – has at times been no less appealing than the methodological pluralism of the neo-

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<sup>16</sup> Jarrett, *Humanities and Humanistic Education*, vii.

<sup>17</sup> Windelband, “Geschichte und Naturwissenschaft,” 26.

<sup>18</sup> Rickert, *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft*, 15, 20, 45.

<sup>19</sup> Richard E. Miller and Kurt Spellmeyer, *The New Humanities Reader* (Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning, 2015). The slogan “new humanities” has, of course, a history of its own. For some older applications, see Patrick Fuery and Nick Mansfield, *Cultural Studies and the New Humanities: Concepts and Controversies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) and Kurt Spellmeyer, *Arts of Living: Reinventing the Humanities for the Twenty-First Century* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), esp. 7–8.

<sup>20</sup> Janine Naß, Thomas Efferth, and Anita Wohlmann, “Interviews and Personal Stories: A Humanities Approach in Pharmaceutical Education,” *Pharmacy Education* 19, no. 1 (2019): 155–61.

<sup>21</sup> Hannes Bergthaller et al., “Mapping Common Ground: Ecocriticism, Environmental History, and the Environmental Humanities,” *Environmental Humanities* 5 (2015): 261–76, at 265 (discussed in more detail by Kristine Steenbergh in Chapter 15 of this volume).

Kantians and their heirs. In our days too there are scholars who believe that the future of the humanities lies with the neurosciences. How can the humanities pretend to understand the human mind, asks philosopher Bernhard Lauth, as long as they keep a distance from neurocognitive methods for tracing “physical and chemical processes in the brain”? From Lauth’s point of view, the sciences-humanities divide is a nineteenth-century mistake whose correction is long overdue.<sup>22</sup> More practically, there are plenty of humanities scholars whose work in language acquisition, econometric history, text mining, or theoretical philosophy does not fit with the claim that the humanities are methodologically distinct from the sciences. By setting up experiments, analyzing large data sets, and engaging in abstract mathematical modeling, they challenge the stereotypical image of a humanist who draws on empathy and erudition in developing a new take on an old poem. In short, both on the level of aspirations and on that of actual research, the methods and stances cultivated in the humanities are too diverse to be reducible to a single formula.

Thirdly, as literary critic Ronald Crane observed long ago, while certain interpretative practices, such as close reading and historical contextualization, are widely shared across the humanities, people have different ideas about the *aims* these practice serve.<sup>23</sup> Do the humanities aim to make their practitioners “more human” by encouraging reflection on such timeless questions as “Who am I? Where have I come from? Where am I going? Why?”<sup>24</sup> Or is transformative self-understanding an archaic goal in societies that expect academics to deliver empirical knowledge? As early as 1963, the German philosopher Joachim Ritter argued that the task of the *Geisteswissenschaften* in post-traditional societies is to keep the past accessible. Not Humboldtian *Bildung*, but the preservation of knowledge about languages and cultures that industrial societies tend to disremember is what defines the *Geisteswissenschaften*.<sup>25</sup> If this argument suggests that the humanities are primarily *curative*,

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<sup>22</sup> Bernhard Lauth, “Das Dilemma der Geisteswissenschaften,” in “*Ethical Turn*”? *Geisteswissenschaften in neuer Verantwortung*, ed. Oda Wischmeyer and Christine Lubkoll (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 19–33, at 27, 32.

<sup>23</sup> R. S. Crane, “The Idea of the Humanities” (1953), in Crane, *The Idea of the Humanities and Other Essays Critical and Historical*, vol. 1 (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 3–15.

<sup>24</sup> Charles R. Keller, “Can the Humanities Catch Up?” *The Bulletin of the National Association of Secondary School Principals* 48, no. 291 (1964): 60–8, at 60.

<sup>25</sup> Joachim Ritter, “Die Aufgaben der Geisteswissenschaften in der modernen Gesellschaft” (1963), in Ritter, *Subjektivität: Sechs Aufsätze* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 105–40.

in the sense of taking care of vulnerable cultural resources (historical knowledge, foreign language skills, material objects), others prefer to see the humanities as *critical*: their aim is to challenge stereotypical ideas and dubious heritages. Drawing on various strands of critical theory, “critical humanities” as envisioned by the Indian English scholar D. Venkat Rao make people aware of the continuing impact of colonial legacies, while trying to open up spaces for rethinking the world from non-European, non-hegemonic perspectives.<sup>26</sup> In all these cases, moreover, the question is whether the humanities matter mainly because of their research (the books and articles that scholars write) or because of their teaching (the courses through which they educate new generations). Clearly, there is a plurality of aims that are attributed to the humanities, in addition to a variety of knowledge classification systems and an irreducible diversity of methods.

Two conclusions can be drawn from this. The first is that the term “humanities” is an essentially contested concept, on which scholars can project a broad range of expectations.<sup>27</sup> Although essentialist definitions of the humanities continue to be proposed,<sup>28</sup> the sober reality is that agreement on what the humanities signify is unlikely to be reached. This is, secondly, because the things called “humanities” are not a singular entity, but what Simon During calls a “world”: a whole conglomerate of continents and countries, sometimes separated by oceans or mountains, sometimes connected through peninsulas, bridges, tunnels, and airways. Its inhabitants speak different languages, despite a global English that allows for international communication, and participate in economic, political, and legal systems that are products of path-dependent historical trajectories.<sup>29</sup> The implications of this metaphor are clear: if the humanities are a world, any attempt to reduce them to a single language, political view, or national character trait is doomed to fail.

### **Genealogies of the humanities**

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<sup>26</sup> D. Venkat Rao, “Introduction: Crossing (the) Legacies,” in *Critical Humanities from India: Contexts, Issues, Futures*, ed. D. Venkat Rao (London: Routledge, 2018), 1–25, at 11–2.

<sup>27</sup> W. B. Gallie, “Essentially Contested Concepts,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (1955–6): 167–98.

<sup>28</sup> E.g., Willem B. Drees, *What Are the Humanities For?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 12.

<sup>29</sup> During, “Idea of the Humanities.”



It is here that historians of the humanities come in. For if essentialist definitions are unconvincing, what alternatives do we have? One possible strategy is to define the humanities not *descriptively* (as they currently exist), but *prescriptively* (as they might or should be developed). Especially in the blossoming genre of reflections on “the humanities in the twenty-first century,” such proposals for future humanities are frequently made. A recent volume on urban humanities, for instance, claims that “the humanities are not just a retrospective analysis of the remains of the cultural record (the archive, the wisdom of the past, the archaeological artifacts of the past), but can be – and we argue, *should be* – attuned to futurity, the possibility of justice, reparation, and perhaps even redemption.”<sup>30</sup> Inspiring as such visionary language may be, it does not help much to understand the humanities as we currently know them.

A more promising strategy, therefore, is to approach the humanities historically. How has this complex conglomerate of things called “humanities” come into being? Can a historical approach help elucidate how fields as different as theoretical linguistics and world art studies have ended up in the same cluster of disciplines? Questions like these are central to several recent monographs on the history of the humanities. Christopher Celenza, for instance, presents his book on the *studia humanitatis* in Renaissance Italy as an exercise in understanding “how the humanities have worked in the past and how their history can illuminate the present.”<sup>31</sup> Notably, like James Turner’s book, *Philology: The Origins of the Modern Humanities*,<sup>32</sup> the title of Celenza’s study speaks about “the origins of the modern humanities,” thereby suggesting that knowledge of Petrarch and Lorenzo Valla may contribute to understanding what the humanities have since become. Likewise, Eric Adler argues that a survey of “the path of the humanities from Roman antiquity to the present” may add much to understanding “what the humanities have been and are today.”<sup>33</sup> Even Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon, whose sensitivity to the variety of projects pursued under the rubric of the humanities makes them wary of grand generalizations, write a history aimed at unravelling

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<sup>30</sup> Dana Cuff et al., *Urban Humanities: New Practices for Reimagining the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), 4–5.

<sup>31</sup> Christopher S. Celenza, *The Italian Renaissance and the Origins of the Modern Humanities: An Intellectual History, 1400–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), x.

<sup>32</sup> James Turner, *Philology: The Forgotten Origins of the Modern Humanities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>33</sup> Adler, *Battle of the Classics*, 9.

the “inherited contradictions, oppositions, and presumptions” of the modern humanities.<sup>34</sup> The history of the humanities is therefore to no small degree a *genealogical enterprise*: it seeks to uncover the historical roots of the humanities so as to shed light on what the humanities currently are.

What lends a certain urgency to this genealogical project is what Rob Moore calls “a weakening of disciplinary identities” in contemporary higher education, paired to the rise of “humanities” as a new, overarching meta-discipline.<sup>35</sup> Increasingly, humanities scholars do not identify as Romanists, Egyptologists, or musicologists, but as practitioners of the “humanities.” What this reveals, says Simon During, is that the humanities “are decreasingly being thought about as a set of individual disciplines each with its own history and more as a ‘meta-discipline’ all of its own. Students and teachers are increasingly just ‘in the humanities.’”<sup>36</sup> In some countries, such as the Netherlands, institutional policies strongly contribute to this process. Despite the term “humanities” (*geesteswetenschappen*) not having not much of a history in the Netherlands, Dutch funding agencies and university administrators recently embraced it as a new organizational label.<sup>37</sup> While the universities of Amsterdam, Tilburg, Leiden, and Utrecht merged their formerly independent faculties of philosophy, theology, and arts into new faculties of humanities,<sup>38</sup> a whole infrastructure of graduate schools, core curriculums, honors programs, and research priorities areas in the “humanities” was built. To the extent that these new institutions forced faculty members to cooperate with colleagues and students outside of their own fields, they prompted renewed reflection on academic identities.

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<sup>34</sup> Reitter and Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis*, 254.

<sup>35</sup> Rob Moore, “Policy-Driven Curriculum Restructuring: Academic Identities in Transition?” in *Realizing Qualitative Research in Higher Education*, ed. Craigh Prichard and Paul Trowler (Aldershot: Ashgate 2003), 121–42.

<sup>36</sup> Simon During, “Are the Humanities Modern?” in *Latour and the Humanities*, ed. Rita Felski and Stephen Muecke (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2020), 225–48, at 226.

<sup>37</sup> J. Goudsblom, “The Humanities and the Social Sciences,” in *The Humanities in the Nineties: A View from the Netherlands*, ed. E. Zürcher and T. Langendorff (Amsterdam: Swets & Zeitlinger, 1990), 23–41, at 24–5: “In some European languages, such as German and Dutch, the word humanities has never become accepted, whether in its Latin or vernacular words.”

<sup>38</sup> Job Cohen et al., *Sustainable Humanities: Report from the Committee on the National Plan for the Future of the Humanities* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), 52 n. 4.

Philosophers, literary scholars, and area specialists alike began to ask: “What are those humanities to which we have been allocated?”<sup>39</sup>

Clearly, a world in which universities and research agencies alike encourage scholars to see themselves as belonging to the humanities is more hospitable to a history of the humanities than an environment in which mono-disciplinary identities are the norm. Indeed, insofar as scholars wonder what these much-discussed but often ill-defined humanities are, it makes sense for them to turn to a field that aims for “a comparative, interdisciplinary history of the related humanistic disciplines.”<sup>40</sup> The more people ask what the humanities are, the greater are the chances for a field that promises answers in the form of genealogies.

### **Defending the humanities**

If this demand for historical explanations is one factor contributing to the rise of the field called the history of the humanities, another one is the perception of the humanities as being in deep trouble. This “crisis of the humanities” is, of course, not a recent phenomenon. Already in 1964, in a volume with the telling title *Crisis in the Humanities*, the English historian John Plumb asserted that “the humanities are at the cross-roads, at a crisis in their existence.”<sup>41</sup> As Claire Rydell Arcenas shows in this volume, very similar things had been said about the American humanities in the early 1940s.<sup>42</sup> One might even argue that perceptions of crisis are as old as the humanities themselves, not because the humanities have always been vulnerable, but because they have a long tradition of presenting themselves as a remedy against crises caused by positivism, materialism, or managerialism (as the case may be). As Reitter and Wellmon argue: “[F]or politically progressive and conservative scholars alike, crisis

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<sup>39</sup> Similarly, funding bodies in Europe structured their grant competitions in such a way that historians found themselves competing with archaeologists, just as anthropologists of religion ended up in a panel with analytical philosophers. See, e.g., Thomas König, “Peer Review in the Social Sciences and Humanities at the European Level: The Experiences of the European Research Council,” in *Research Assessments in the Humanities: Towards Criteria and Procedures*, ed. Michael Ochsner, Sven E. Hug, and Hans-Dieter Daniel (Cham: Springer, 2016), 151–63.

<sup>40</sup> Rens Bod, “Introduction: Historiography of the Humanities,” in *The Making of the Humanities*, vol. 1, ed. Rens Bod, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 7–14, at 10.

<sup>41</sup> J. H. Plumb, “Introduction,” in *Crisis in the Humanities*, ed. J. H. Plumb (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), 7–10, at 8.

<sup>42</sup> See Chapter 13 in this volume.

has played a crucial role in grounding the idea that the humanities have a special mission.”<sup>43</sup> Dramatic stories of real or anticipated decline thus served, and continue to serve, as “mobilizing narratives,” told with the aim of raising support for threatened humanities disciplines.<sup>44</sup>

Such a historicizing of perceptions of crisis – done in much more detail by Hampus Östh Gustafsson in Chapter 3 of this volume – does, of course, not detract from the reality that pressure on the humanities has reached levels of concern in countries across the globe.<sup>45</sup> At a time when the percentage of humanities graduates in dozens of OECD countries is dropping and faculty members throughout the world see their departments being threatened with closure because of “budgetary reallocations,” one can understand why many wonder aloud how much of the humanities will survive in its current academic form.<sup>46</sup> Even if perceptions of crisis are old and the trope of “crisis” can be said to obscure as much as it reveals, the sheer number of books and articles that annually appears on the “crisis” and “future” of the humanities indicates that many scholars are worried.

Historians of the humanities contribute to this “humanist metadiscourse” by offering not only genealogies, but also *diagnoses* and *remedies*.<sup>47</sup> This is most apparent in books that explain historically what has gone wrong with the humanities and what can be done about it. Rens Bod, for instance, argues that the humanities have historically produced their own Keplers, Newtons, and Darwins: great scholars whose discoveries changed the world. If humanities scholars want to regain a position of prominence, says Bod, they should give up their neo-Kantian preoccupation with the particular and become “pattern seekers” like Pāṇini, the ancient Sanskrit scholar whose grammatical rules provided the basis for computer programming, or Valla, whose source critical methods are still indispensable for challenging

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<sup>43</sup> Reitter and Wellmon, *Permanent Crisis*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Hampus Östh Gustafsson, “Mobilising the Outsider: Crises and Histories of the Humanities in the 1970s Scandinavian Welfare States,” in *Histories of Knowledge in Postwar Scandinavia: Actors, Arenas, and Aspirations*, ed. Johan Östling, Niklas Olsen, and David Larsson Heidenblad (London: Routledge, 2020), 208–24, at 218–9.

<sup>45</sup> See *The Changing Face of Higher Education: Is There an International Crisis in the Humanities?* ed. Dennis A. Ahlburg (London: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>46</sup> Rosário Cauto Costa, “The Place of the Humanities in Today’s Knowledge Society,” *Palgrave Communications* 5, no. 38 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0245-6>.

<sup>47</sup> “Humanist metadiscourse” is a phrase borrowed from Eric Hayot, *Humanist Reason: A History, an Argument, a Plan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021).

fake news and alternative facts.<sup>48</sup> With a different word of advice but a largely similar strategy of drawing lessons from the past, Christopher Celenza argues that “we may not have institutionally based humanities for much longer” unless we do what Renaissance humanists so successfully did: combining textual research with moral reflection on the self.<sup>49</sup> Even more programmatic is the subtitle of Eric Adler’s book: *How a Nineteenth-Century Debate Can Save the Humanities Today*. Over against skill-based defenses of the humanities, Adler argues that until well into the nineteenth century, it was the content of literary, philosophical, and religious texts that was supposed to enrich students’ lives. According to Adler, such a “substance-based apologetic” makes “a more historically informed case for the humanities” than the worn-out argument that reading Plato or Goethe enhances students’ critical thinking skills (a case that Adler believes to be all the more persuasive if it manages to emancipate itself from a Eurocentric canon).<sup>50</sup>

Clearly, then, it is not only the question what the humanities *are*, but also the question what will *become* of them in a time of budget cuts, plummeting enrolments, and dwindling public support that contributes to the emergence of the history of the humanities. In Robert Proctor’s words: “It is only with the so-called ‘crisis of the humanities’ that the question of defining and understanding the humanities historically becomes a relevant and useful one.”<sup>51</sup>

## Two additional factors

If a burgeoning interest in the identity, purpose, and future of the humanities does much to explain why the history of the humanities finds receptive audiences throughout the world, there are two additional factors that help explain why this new field emerged only recently (and not, say, in the 1960s). Briefly put, the kind of comparative history to historians of the humanities are committed would have been hard to imagine without supportive trends in the history of science and even impossible to practice without the technological innovations of a digital age.

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<sup>48</sup> Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present*, trans. Lynn Richards (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). See also Rens Bod, “The Case for a History of the Humanities,” *Chronicle of Higher Education* 63, no. 25 (2017): B10–B11.

<sup>49</sup> Celenza, *Italian Renaissance*, 272.

<sup>50</sup> Adler, *Battle of the Classics*, 11, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Proctor, *Education’s Great Amnesia*, 87.

First, there was the so-called cultural turn in the history of science (as well as in other humanities fields).<sup>52</sup> While scientific theories, hypotheses, and explanations had long been important research topics for historians of science, the cultural turn in the 1980s and 1990s put a different sort of themes on the agenda. Historians began to examine what kind of self was implied in the pursuit of scientific research, how students were being educated in physics or mathematics, how an “ethos of exactitude” and its accompanying means for error prevention were instilled in budding scientists, and what role college sports (cricket, rugby, football) played in cultivating perseverance and collegiality.<sup>53</sup> Also, inspired by the blossoming field of memory studies, historians of science began to inquire how Newton had been turned into a scientific genius or, more generally, how scientists used historical narratives and commemorative events to articulate where they saw themselves coming from and heading to.<sup>54</sup> Although this cultural turn in some respects “lowered the tone” in a field that used to be strongly committed to reason, truth, and progress,<sup>55</sup> more important for our purposes is that it also broadened the conversation: it drew attention to cultural aspects of *Wissenschaft* on which natural scientists could not claim a monopoly. Humanities scholars therefore joined the conversation with studies on the working habits of nineteenth-century historians and their self-fashioning as “men of virtue.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> On which see Peter Dear, “Cultural History of Science: An Overview with Reflections,” *Science, Technology, and Human Values* 20 (1995): 150–70; Suman Seth, “The History of Physics after the Cultural Turn,” *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 41 (2011), 112–22, and John F. M. Clark, “Intellectual History and the History of Science,” in *A Companion to Intellectual History*, ed. Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), 155–69.

<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Kathryn M. Olesko, *Physics as a Calling: Discipline and Practice in the Königsberg Seminar for Physics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Andrew Warwick, *Masters of Theory: Cambridge and the Rise of Mathematical Physics* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>54</sup> Patricia Fara, *Newton: The Making of a Genius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002); *Commemorative Practices in Science: Historical Perspectives on the Politics of Collective Memory*, ed. Pnina G. Abir-Am and Clark A. Elliot (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>55</sup> Steven Shapin, “Lowering the Tone in the History of Science: A Noble Calling,” in Shapin, *Never Pure: Historical Studies of Science as if It Was Produced by People with Bodies, Situated in Time, Space, Culture, and Society, and Struggling for Credibility and Authority* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 1–14.

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., Jo Tollebeek, *Frederique & Zonen: een antropologie van de moderne geschiedwetenschap* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2008); Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, “Inventing

Around the same time, some historians of science also developed a greater interest in how academics outside of the sciences conducted their work. Lorraine Daston, for instance, not only co-authored a monograph on the scientific virtue of objectivity, but also examined how nineteenth-century humanities scholars appropriated this discourse of objectivity.<sup>57</sup> Burgeoning scholarship on the history of early modern learning also contributed to this rapprochement between the sciences and the humanities, partly by demonstrating that modern labels like “science” failed to do justice to how Newton, Boyle, and their contemporaries studied the world,<sup>58</sup> partly also by raising questions that could be fruitfully applied to the modern humanities, too.<sup>59</sup> In the wake of these developments, moreover, a new field called the history of knowledge emerged, which also contributed its share to challenging conventional demarcations between science and society as well as between producers and consumers of knowledge.<sup>60</sup> Seen in this context, the history of the humanities is not an isolated phenomenon, but part of a broader reconceptualization of what “science”

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the Archive: Testimony and Virtue in Modern Historiography,” *History of the Human Sciences* 26, no. 4 (2013): 8–26; *Epistemic Virtues in the Sciences and the Humanities*, ed. Jeroen van Dongen and Herman Paul (Cham: Springer, 2017); Herman Paul, *Historians’ Virtues: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022).

<sup>57</sup> Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007); Lorraine Daston, “Objectivity and Impartiality: Epistemic Virtues in the Humanities,” in *The Making of the Humanities*, vol. 3, ed. Rens Bod, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 27–41.

<sup>58</sup> As Daston recalls in a recent interview, it was the work of Anthony Grafton, Ann Blair, and Gianna Pomata that made her see “the history of scholarship as part of our bailiwick.” Alexander Bevilacqua and Frederic Clark, *Thinking in the Past Tense: Eight Conversations* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 51.

<sup>59</sup> Research on the “persona” of the early modern philosopher, for example, has found resonance among historians of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century humanities. See *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe: The Nature of a Contested Identity*, ed. Conal Condren, Stephen Gaukroger, and Ian Hunter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *Scholarly Personae in the History of Orientalism, 1870–1930*, ed. Christiaan Engberts and Herman Paul (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Paul, *How to Be a Historian*; and *Gender, Embodiment, and the History of the Scholarly Persona: Incarnations and Contestations*, ed. Kirsti Niskanen and Michael J. Barany (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

<sup>60</sup> On the history of knowledge, see Lorraine Daston, “The History of Science and the History of Knowledge,” *KNOW* 1, no. 1 (2017): 131–54 and the forum section, “What is the History of Knowledge?” *Journal of the History of Knowledge* 1, no. 1 (2020).

and “knowledge” entail. While supplementing and drawing on the history of science,<sup>61</sup> the history of the humanities also fills a “conspicuous lacuna” in the history of knowledge.<sup>62</sup>

On a more practical note, the comparative ambitions of the history of the humanities would be hard to realize without digital means for tracing and examining sources from different disciplines. Transgressing disciplinary boundaries is not just a matter of asking certain types of questions; it is also a matter of having means for tracing words like “facts” and “post-colonialism” through large corpora of texts.<sup>63</sup> A *History of Humanities* article like “German Thoroughness in Baltimore” (2018) would not have been possible without the search engines and digital repositories of Google Books, archive.org, and hathitrust.org. This is not only because the article draws on periodicals and brochures that only few libraries worldwide possess. More importantly, if these nineteenth-century sources had not been digitized, it would have been impossible to identify them as relevant to a study of “German thoroughness” – a trope that the first generation of Johns Hopkins professors eagerly employed in emphasizing the scientific ambitions of their university.<sup>64</sup>

In a recent interview, Lorraine Daston observes (“I’ll try to describe it neutrally”) how these digital possibilities lead especially younger scholars to approach historical texts very

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<sup>61</sup> Rens Bod and Julia Kursell, “Introduction: The Humanities and the Sciences,” *Isis* 106, no. 2 (2015): 337–40; Rens Bod, “A Comparative Framework for Studying the Histories of the Humanities and Science,” *ibid.*, 367–77.

<sup>62</sup> Bod et al., “New Field,” 5. Given that, historically speaking, fields like history and philosophy have often been more directly entangled with sociology, psychology, and political science than with chemistry or astronomy, one wonders why historians of the humanities orient themselves more on the history of science than on the history of the human sciences. Wolf Feuerhahn and Olivier Orain, “Pour une histoire inclusive des sciences humaines et sociales,” *Revue d’histoire des sciences humaines* 34 (2019): 7–10 are right to argue that a *histoire croisée* of the humanities and the human sciences makes just as much sense as an integrated history of the humanities and the natural sciences. On the history of the human sciences as an emerging field of study (like the history of the humanities), see Roger Smith, “What Is the History of the Human Sciences?” in *The Palgrave Handbook of the History of the Human Sciences*, ed. David McCallum (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

<sup>63</sup> Sjang L. ten Hagen, “How ‘Facts’ Shaped Modern Disciplines: The Fluid Concept of Facts and the Common Origins of German Physics and Historiography,” *Historical Studies in the Natural Sciences* 49, no. 3 (2019): 300–37; Andrew Sartori, “From Political Reference to Self-Narration: ‘Postcolonial’ as Periodizer,” in *Post-Everything: An Intellectual History of Post-Concepts*, ed. Herman Paul and Adriaan van Veldhuizen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 155–71.

<sup>64</sup> Herman Paul, “German Thoroughness in Baltimore: Epistemic Virtues and National Stereotypes,” *History of Humanities* 3, no. 2 (2018): 327–50.



differently from how her own generation was taught to read sources. “Reading practices, in part because of the web and hyperlinks, are now far more granular,” in the sense that scholars don’t read books from cover to cover anymore, but follow concepts or images through corpora of texts that no one before the age of Google Books could ever hope to master. This does not necessarily convert these scholars to “distant reading” as promoted by Franco Moretti and others (although *History of Humanities* has featured a digital humanities article relying on a data set of more than 2,400 texts).<sup>65</sup> Even when they use databases like JSTOR and EBSCOhost, most historians of the humanities still engage in analog reading of source texts. The point is rather that comparisons across periods, cultures, or disciplines force historians to give up their traditional habit of contextualizing texts in *oeuvres* and authors’ biographies. In Daston’s words: “This is a very different form of reading than the close reading techniques taught to the previous generation, and I think it’s led to a kind of pulverization of texts, which has its uses.”<sup>66</sup>

Although it is too early to tell how such modes of reading will affect the presentation of research findings in an age when the monograph is beginning to lose the privileged status that it long had,<sup>67</sup> one thing is clear: a comparative history of humanities disciplines would have been difficult to envision under pre-digital circumstances. The digital revolution is among the factors that make it feasible for historians of the humanities to engage in transdisciplinary comparisons.

### **A heterogeneous field**

If the factors contributing to the emergence of a history of the humanities include such diverse things as a sense of crisis, a weakening of disciplinary identities, new trends in the history of science, and a digital revolution, then it is no surprise to find scholars approaching the field from different directions and, consequently, to see them disagreeing over approaches and methods. What is an appropriate time scale or a relevant geographical unit? Are the

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<sup>65</sup> Franco Moretti, *Distant Reading* (London: Verso, 2013); Giovanni Colavizza, “Understanding the History of the Humanities from a Bibliometric Perspective: Expansion, Conjectures, and Traditions in the Last Decades of Venetian Historiography (1950–2013),” *History of Humanities* 3, no. 2 (2018): 377–406.

<sup>66</sup> Bevilacqua and Clark, *Thinking in the Past Tense*, 56.

<sup>67</sup> Ann Rigney, “When the Monograph is No Longer the Medium: Historical Narrative in an Online Age,” *History and Theory* 49, no. 4 (2010): 100–17.

humanities a modern phenomenon, dating back no further than the nineteenth century, or does it make sense to treat Sima Qian, in Han-dynasty China, and Ibn-Khaldun, in fourteenth-century North Africa, as humanities scholars *avant la lettre*? Should the humanities be studied globally, if only to challenge long-lasting legacies of Eurocentric thinking? But if so, how does that square with a professional commitment to reading sources in their original languages, or with historians' preference for basing their work, if possible, on archival material? Also, how acceptable, or desirable, is an apologetic tone of voice, given both the challenges that the humanities are facing and a long-standing distrust, among historians at least, of "presentist" modes of history writing?

One only needs to compare Jo Tollebeek's *Men of Character: The Emergence of the Modern Humanities* (2011) to Siraj Ahmed's *Archaeology of Babel: The Colonial Foundations of the Humanities* (2018) to see that scholars answer these questions very differently.<sup>68</sup> Based on archival sources, Tollebeek's short book offers a richly textured double portrait of two Dutch literary scholars around 1900. Inspired by ethnographic studies of science, the author examines their everyday practices of teaching and writing, while attending carefully to the importance of student-teacher relations, informal scholarly gatherings, and near-endless exchanges of letters.<sup>69</sup> In marked contrast to this lovingly written microhistory, Ahmed's study offers a sharply critical analysis of comparative philology and its complicity in the colonial project. Drawing on case studies from across the centuries, Ahmed argues that philology enabled colonial rule by offering a supposedly universally applicable method for ordering and classifying languages, literatures, and law. In practice, however, this method not only reduced complex discursive practices to standardized texts; it also ignored and marginalized all forms of culture that were opposed to textual authority. Insofar as "text-based academics today" continue this privileging of written texts, writes Ahmed, they are "inheritors of a colonial legacy." So unlike Tollebeek, whose aim is to understand in some detail how philologists around 1900 lived their professional lives, Ahmed sees it as "a politically urgent task" to "disentangle the postcolonial humanities from their still-unconsidered and hence unresolved

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<sup>68</sup> Michael O'Brien, "Where Have You Gone, Joseph Scaliger?" *Modern Intellectual History* 13, no. 1 (2016): 261–71 offers another glimpse of historians of the humanities disagreeing about questions that are worth raising and attitudes that scholars should display.

<sup>69</sup> Jo Tollebeek, *Men of Character: The Emergence of the Modern Humanities* (Wassenaar: Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities and Social Sciences, 2011).

colonial legacy.” Unlike *Men of Character*, *Archaeology of Babel* is a political project, motivated by what Ahmed calls “the humanities’ own radically democratic . . . ideals.”<sup>70</sup>

What these examples illustrate is that the history of the humanities mirrors some of the diversity that is typical of the humanities themselves. To the extent that the field offers scholars from across the humanities a space for reflection on who they are, where they come from, and where they are heading, it opens its doors to methods, approaches, and attitudes that are just as varied as the people who enter the conversation. Accordingly, as long as linguists, media scholars, and philosophers alike present their work on conferences organized by the Society for the History of the Humanities, the field is unlikely to develop anything like a shared understanding of how to write the history of the humanities. Although professional historians may have strong opinions in these matters, the history of the humanities would cease to serve as an interdisciplinary realm of reflection if historians were allowed to impose their professional standards on the field as a whole. Ideally, therefore, the history of the humanities should allow for different kinds of “past-present relations.”<sup>71</sup> It should be able to accommodate both contextually sensitive readings and exercises in ideology critique, both work that elucidates where current arrangements come from and interventions that challenge existing traditions.

Admittedly, however, such a heterogeneity of voices within the history of humanities can be puzzling, especially for researchers who newly enter the field. They might wonder: What are the questions that historians of the humanities pursue? What are their main themes and key approaches? Is there a map available of this new field?

### **Questions, themes, approaches**

“Mapping” the history of the humanities is exactly what this volume seeks to do. In line with the goal of the series in which it appears, it surveys how historians of the humanities do their work – what questions they raise, what themes they address, and what approaches they adopt. *Writing the History of the Humanities* is, in other words, a multi-voiced exploration of

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<sup>70</sup> Siraj Ahmed, *Archaeology of Babel: The Colonial Foundation of the Humanities* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018), 10, 7. On the study of language in colonial contexts, see also Joseph Errington, *Linguistics in a Colonial World: A Story of Language, Meaning, and Power* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008).

<sup>71</sup> Herman Paul, “Relations to the Past: A Research Agenda for Historical Theorists,” *Rethinking History* 19, no. 3 (2015): 450–8.

how this writing of the history of the humanities currently takes place, both within and outside of the Society for the History of the Humanities. To that end, a variety of scholars active in the field, including both established figures and early-career researchers, have been invited to explain their preferred way of working as concretely as possible – not with abstract arguments about the historiographical advantages of their favorite approaches, but with examples or case studies that show in some detail how they practice the history of the humanities. Contributors, moreover, have been encouraged to write accessibly, for a target audience of graduate students not yet familiar with the field, to introduce them to current approaches and to win their enthusiasm for this area of scholarship. The “map” provided in this volume is therefore not only a means for orientation, but also an invitation to join the exploration.<sup>72</sup>

Given these aims, the volume should not be mistaken for a history of the humanities *as such*. Readers expecting an overview of how the humanities have developed in different parts of the world are referred to other studies, such as Bod’s *A New History of the Humanities* (2013) and James Turner’s aforementioned *Philology* (2014). Likewise, readers hoping that this volume will pay long-overdue attention to their favorite discipline (analytical philosophy, Chinese studies, critical media studies, ethnomusicology) will likely be disappointed. Although the essays collected in this volume feature a dazzling variety of scholarly enterprises – from linguistic fieldwork in the Philippines and the editing of medieval music in German-occupied Alsace to anti-colonial activism in Africa and liberal arts teaching in Cold War America – the diversity that this volume seeks to map is not one of fields or subfields, but one of questions, themes, and approaches that are currently shaping the field.<sup>73</sup>

Some of the *questions* singled out in this volume include the following:

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<sup>72</sup> In the spirit of Peter L. Berger, *Invitation to Sociology: A Humanistic Perspective* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1963).

<sup>73</sup> In terms of periods covered, the volume reflects the current state of the field in focusing on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There are some signs, however, that students of early modern scholarship also begin to conceive of their work as contributing to the history of the humanities. See, for instance, *Confessionalisation and Erudition in Early Modern Europe: An Episode in the History of the Humanities*, ed. Nicholas Hardy and Dmitri Levitin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019). In Chapter 16 the present volume, Rens Bod also advocates a broad temporal scope, unrestrained by actors’ use of “humanities” and related terms.

1. *How did the humanities, or the Geisteswissenschaften, come into being?* Fabian Kraemer traces the origins of the terms, while James Turner describes how philology gave birth to modern humanities disciplines such as classics, history, and literary studies.
2. *What did these humanities have in common?* Devin Griffiths examines the uses of comparative methods through a variety of humanities fields. Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen highlights how influential the ideal of a “unity of teaching and research” has been, to which Falko Schnicke adds that such ideals underlying the humanities were often markedly masculine, both in their formulation and implementation.
3. *What kind of normative commitments did research and teaching practices in the humanities display?* Claire Rydell Arcenas examines how closely liberal arts teaching in the 1950s United States was entangled with the country’s Cold War politics, whereas Larissa Schulte Nordholt, writing about historians in Africa at a time of decolonization, shows that the thin line between scholarship and activism was subject to constant negotiation.
4. *What were characteristic attitudes of humanities scholars?* If Schnicke’s chapter shows how masculine the academic “self” was envisioned to be, my own chapter on the ethos of late nineteenth-century humanities scholars draws attention to standards of virtue shared by linguists, historians, and Orientalists alike. Also, Eskildsen’s chapter on teaching practices makes clear that socialization into academia always implied a cultivation of certain skills and attitudes.

In pursuing these questions, the essays collected in this volume also showcase some of the *themes* on which historians of the humanities find themselves working. The influence of what is sometimes called a “practice turn” is visible in chapters on research practices like collecting linguistic data (Floris Solleveld) and compiling historical dictionaries (Christian Bradley Flow). Research methods are discussed by Turner and Griffith, while Julianne Nyhan and Andrew Flinn draw attention to research technologies such as punched cards systems. Concepts like “crisis” (Hampus Östh Gustafsson, Arcenas), *jitsugaku* (Michael Facius), and “postcritique” (Herman Paul) travelled across and beyond the humanities, as did scholarly personae like the “interdisciplinary” researcher (Kristine Steenbergh). Boundary work is a recurring theme in this volume, both with regard to other disciplines (Kraemer) and in relation to colonial history

writing (Schulte Nordholt). Also, while historical legacies turn up throughout the volume, they receive special treatment in chapters on masculine values (Schnicke), the “colonial library” (Schulte Nordholt), and Eurocentric modes of history writing (Rens Bod).

In addition, the volume illustrates some methodological *approaches* current among historians of the humanities. Although most contributors write as intellectual historians – prosopographical analyses are absent from this volume, as are statistics about student enrollment or institutionalization of new fields<sup>74</sup> – the scales on which the essays operate vary substantially. While some chapters offer broad overviews, across countries and centuries, others analyze specific case studies in considerable detail. Also, while some contributions focus on individual scholars, other examine institutions, discourses, or scholarly paradigms. These different exercises not only come with different conceptions of agency; they also draw on different types of source material. While most chapters make ample use of published sources (books, journals), Flow’s chapter shows the significance of archival study in understanding the day-to-day realities of philological research. Also, Nyhan and Flinn’s contribution on the emergence of digital humanities illustrates the potential of oral history in examining the recent past. Finally, in terms of temporal and geographical scope, the volume illustrates that the *Geisteswissenschaften* in nineteenth-century Europe continue to fascinate. Increasingly, however, historians of the humanities are recognizing the need for more “global” accounts, if only to compensate for the lack of attention that the humanities outside of the Euro-American world have received. In this volume, chapters on Sino-Japanese learning (Facijs) and African historiography (Schulte-Nordholt) testify to the importance of this “global turn.”<sup>75</sup>

Given that these questions, themes, and approaches run through all of the chapters that follow, they do not offer a neat threefold structure for the book. The sixteen chapters have therefore been clustered differently, in five parts. *Part I*, on definitions and backgrounds, deals with the age-old demarcation problem (what makes the humanities different?) as well

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<sup>74</sup> Examples of this type of research are provided by Roger L. Geiger, “Demography and Curriculum: The Humanities in American Higher Education from the 1950s through the 1980s,” in *The Humanities and the Dynamics of Inclusion since World War II*, ed. David A. Hollinger (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 50–72.

<sup>75</sup> See also the theme issue, “Decentralizing the History of the Humanities,” *History of Humanities* 6, no. 2 (2021) and, more broadly, *Global Intellectual History*, ed. Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

as with the institutionalization of disciplines and the classic threat of “crisis.” *Part II* examines research practices varying from linguistic fieldwork and historical lexicography to digital humanities in an age of punched cards. The four chapters that make up *Part III* draw attention to what has been called “the flow of cognitive goods,” or the circulation of ideals, principles, or methods across disciplinary boundaries.<sup>76</sup> They do so by studying values and virtues, either discursively (as “traveling concepts”) or as markers of an ethos embodied by humanities scholars at particular times and places.<sup>77</sup> *Part IV* offers a much-needed corrective to historians’ habit of treating humanities scholars primarily as researchers. Not only does it show that teaching formats were imitated and adopted across geographical and disciplinary boundaries; it also suggests that the “societal impact” of the humanities is even more evident in their teaching than in their research. *Part V*, finally, is called “Visions of the Future,” because it examines the temporalities implied in calls for methodological innovation and interdisciplinary cooperation, but also because it contains a chapter on where the history of the humanities as a field might be heading.<sup>78</sup>

That final chapter, by Rens Bod, brings the volume to a full circle. Although the book aims to provide a state-of-the-art overview that reflects both the strengths and the weaknesses of the history of the humanities as it is currently being practiced, this introduction began by observing how energetically the new field has developed in the past two decades, how much enthusiasm its comparative ambitions elicit, and how eager its contributors try to expand the scope of historical inquiry. If Bod in the final pages of this volume calls for broader perspectives and greater inclusivity, he is not delivering a new message: he is appealing to an urge to transcend geographical and disciplinary boundaries that was, and is, foundational for the history of the humanities as such.<sup>79</sup> This, then, is a volume about scholars crossing borders

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<sup>76</sup> Rens Bod et al., “The Flow of Cognitive Goods: A Historiographical Framework for the Study of Epistemic Transfer,” *Isis* 110, no. 3 (2019): 483–96.

<sup>77</sup> The notion of “traveling concepts,” now widely used, originated with Mieke Bal, *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

<sup>78</sup> Chapter 16 is followed by a glossary that briefly explains some of the more technical (historiographical, methodological) terms used in this volume.

<sup>79</sup> If I may add one desideratum to the challenges discussed in Chapter 16, I would mention the need to move beyond the nineteenth-century *Geisteswissenschaften* that feature so prominently both in the pages of *History of Humanities* and in the present volume. In the light of all the scholarship done on Friedrich Schleiermacher, Karl Lachmann, Theodor Mommsen, and their contemporaries, one can only hope that historians of the humanities will devote equal amounts of attention to the second half of the twentieth century – a

of time, space, languages, and disciplines in the hope of deepening our understanding of what the humanities were, what they are, and what they might become.<sup>80</sup>

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period that witnessed an unprecedented proliferation and expansion of the humanities across the globe. Additionally, a focus on the more recent past would force historians to look beyond “classic” humanities fields like history, philosophy, and literary studies. It would allow them to trace the emergence of dozens of new fields, from cultural studies, media studies, and African American studies to legal humanities, urban humanities, and medical humanities – even if, for reasons still to be explored, the history of the humanities does not yet resonate much within these fields. Does the term “history” carry connotations that square badly with a critical assessment of past failures and wrongs? Or is “humanities” the problem, given that their complicity in the colonial system has been such that “inhumanities” sometimes seems a more appropriate name? (See Will Bridges, “A Brief History of the Inhumanities,” *History of Humanities* 4, no. 1 [2019]: 1–26.) Whatever the causes, more sustained attention to the recent past would contribute substantially to the genealogical project that is the history of the humanities.

<sup>80</sup> I would like to thank Rens Bod, Ian Hunter, Angus Nicholls, Roger Smith, and James Turner for their most helpful feedback on a draft of this text. Funding was generously provided by the Dutch Research Council (NWO).