

cisions in court. But, for one thing, no interpretation or court judgment is entirely determined by the law and, for another, any court decision is again open to interpretation in a way that finds no end.

Under these conditions, legal critique can take many different forms.⁵⁵ Some interpretations of the law are still better than others *in terms of the law*. The open process of legal discourse cultivates a non-reducible layer of legal normativity. At the same time, presumptions of law's legitimacy can and should of course be critiqued and rebutted, in light of practical morality, in the spirit of a hermeneutics of suspicion, as ideology, or otherwise. The fact that the law is so closely tied to the workings of power just as well as to aspirations towards justice contributes to its central role in society. As such, the law shows traces of the best and the worst, taking stock of patterns of domination and struggles for emancipation at national, subnational and international levels of governance. Any critique raises questions about the standpoint of the critic, their situatedness and aspiration to objectivity. But neither the critic of law nor of art is alone in this, and the fact that every starting point of critique is partial does not mean that critique needs to end up there.⁵⁶

4 The humanities and social sciences will only succeed if they pursue an integrative approach

Internal disciplinary dynamics and the organization of research have created obstacles for integrated approaches. Developments in research have paralleled the functional differentiation of society, leading to greater specialization and remarkable expertise. But they have come with the downsides of silos: deep but narrow views of the social world. Disciplinary identities and professional belonging have been constructed in negative opposition to respective others. The development of mainstream, allegedly value-free economics is only the most egregious example with its feeble attempt to rid itself of normative foundations.

The same may be said of parts of the humanities that have theorized in remarkable distance to facts. A practical philosophy without practice has a questionable standing, just like a legal theory that is ill-attuned to the operation of the law. Examples for both are too many. Factors supporting disciplinary self-isolation include career trajectories as well as the importance of journals that lead in rigorous rankings and are driven by methodological sophistication which might stifle creativity. Path-breaking interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary studies have of course been possible, but they are still too rare.

The humanities will only succeed in their endeavours if they can build bridges across cultures and continents based on the conviction that it is necessary to be aware of others, of the past, and of the path-dependencies of our present-day lives, if we want to responsibly shape the future. Past, present, and future ought to be connected in the historical temporalities in which we are embedded as situated subjects.⁵⁷

Philological, historical, or philosophical approaches are often driven by close interactions between subject and object, the ones who try to understand and interpret, and the things to be interpreted. In a classic book, Theodor Litt emphasizes the importance of the will to be involved in shaping the future when it comes to analysing the present and its historical preconditions.⁵⁸ According to Litt, it is essential that the humanistic scholar approaches the objects of study in an unbiased, impartial, perhaps even objective manner, an approach 'full of self-denial' (Litt 1926: 413). The ability and the willingness to know more about the object of study needs to be closely associated with a firm basis in contemporary life. Otherwise, we will end up with a lot of mindless and meaningless notes.

In view of the opportunities as well as the limits and limitations of humanistic studies, it is essential to deploy the *interpretive*, *explanatory*, and *provocative* functions of humanistic research. Most of the questions we are confronted with in our globalized world cannot be solved without making use of interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approaches. These, of course, are difficult to plan and resource, and they often cause a lot of headaches for university leaders as well as heads of funding institutions. Nevertheless, it is a necessity for all of us to try to provide preconditions for these ambitious endeavours to successfully cope with the complex realities of an

increasingly multipolar and interconnected world in the 2020s and beyond.

Experience tells us that the integrative capacity of the humanities and social sciences can best be realized if the whole effort is conducted on a medium scale and driven by the complex problem itself. Only if the very problem to be tackled urges the researchers to combine their relevant expertise are they ultimately able to fully develop their integrative capacity and come up with surprising insights resulting in radically new perspectives and outstanding publications.⁵⁹

To a large extent our academic institutions are still organized on a discipline by discipline basis. However, this institutional setting is itself the object of a value-laden critical analysis in that we ought to overcome some of the conceptual boundaries between disciplines in order to get their own value-foundations into view. This reflexive manoeuvre is essential for the task of coping with social complexity that includes the institutional repositioning of humanistic knowledge.⁶⁰

One can distinguish between five different levels or attempts at integration when it comes to tackling at least some of the challenges we are confronted with:

1. The mere accumulation of methods and techniques is the most common form of combining different perspectives when looking at one and the same object. It is mainly multidisciplinary approaches that follow this path, and it usually allows all the researchers involved to address their preferred disciplinary communities. Often it is even required with respect to future careers of the junior researchers involved that they adhere to this self-sufficient disciplinary mode of a somewhat moderately integrated operation.
2. The integration of competencies from other disciplines is one of the most important ways of pursuing research questions of a global nature. For large parts of the humanities and social sciences (e.g. studies on modern China or India), it is even a prerequisite if one wants to produce sound insights concerning the respective region or topic, in particular when it comes to cross-cultural and comparative studies.

3. To develop different methods and disciplinary know-how in one and the same person is perhaps the most ambitious (and sometimes cumbersome) way of gaining the necessary degree of intimate knowledge about the object under study. If pursued with great competence and stamina, this approach can lead to outstanding results and globally acknowledged findings, represented in *opera magna* types of books that are translated into many other languages.
4. The interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary aggregation of competencies in a medium-scale research group is a complex endeavour, but if thematically as well as methodologically and organizationally integrated, it turns out to be the best way to proceed in most cases. The approach taken by the Danish National Research Foundation is perhaps the most successful one to date.
5. Problem-driven aggregations of skills are the most common approaches taken in large-scale projects and programmes. They are often confronted with enormous tensions: (1) between the heterogeneity of the phenomena to be studied and the aspiration towards methodological coherence throughout the project, (2) the tension between the often microscopic obsession with detail on the one hand, and striving for a comprehensive explanation on the other, sometimes even at the global level, (3) and last but not least the tendency of all involved to be self-sufficient in their disciplines, and at the same time a disposition to epistemic immodesty concerning knowledge claims with respect to the overarching goals. Cluster approaches taken by the humanities and social sciences are telling examples for these huge discrepancies between the objectives proposed and the everyday reality of the work done.

At the same time, it is essential for the humanities to draw on fundamental curiosity-driven 'blue sky' research, and thus avoid falling into the trap of becoming a 'service industry' for problem-solving in science and engineering. Instead, there is a clear need for them to autonomously develop their own, genuine research questions

which can prominently contribute to achieving social, cultural, or economic solutions. In our digitized and globalized world, with its multiple opportunities for networking and interacting with one another, it is indispensable that the humanities bring to the fore how much it helps us to grow our personalities and cultivate our virtues through these encounters. Ultimately, it is the other who helps me understand myself and my environment better than before. Such a contextualization of humanistic studies not only links the present to the past, but it also puts great hopes on the future.

5 Reconfiguring institutions – Towards a culture of creativity

Human behaviour and values (including central values like freedom, dignity, and wellbeing) are fundamentally tied to the structure of our social institutions. This is because human action and self-knowledge are necessarily shaped by social interactions that are patterned through institutions. As Hegel argued, individualist approaches or solutions to social problems are insufficient, because the rational freedom and wellbeing of individual lives are essentially bound up with the structure of our institutions. Humanistic inquiry must involve the critical study of the values held, both tacitly and explicitly, in our social institutions, examining their rational potential and deficits, and creating new institutions in line with our latest rational self-portraits.

An adequate institutional framework must be put in place for the humanities and social sciences to realize their full potential. Their potential is undermined not only when financial and material conditions are precarious, but also when they are squeezed into an instrumental logic and tied to technocratic descriptions of what problems are to be solved. We identify *four demands* for the institutional framework that enables a culture of creativity in the humanities and social sciences.⁶¹