often neglecting humanistic insights due to the institutional decoupling we describe above.

The inevitable socio-ecological transformation underway is, thus, in urgent need of a humanistic and social underpinning. In this regard, we call for a future- and goal-directed positioning of research to develop conceptual tools that can contribute to a new 'Vision of the Good' (Leiter 2013: 121).

Today this goes beyond a culture of individual practical wisdom. For what is at stake in complex crises is *social* and not merely *individual* freedom. Social freedom concerns the shape of meaningful activities which only make sense against a background of shared understanding. Where social freedom is concerned, community and the individual reciprocally determine one another. Individual self-determination has to be reconfigured in light of collective responsibility. For this reason, we ought to reconcile the moral demands on individual action with the collective architecture of the very problem space within which our individual choices make sense. Both have to be taken into account, which requires a new form of intellectual cooperation across the humanities and social sciences as well as feedback loops to and from non-academic actors. Interdisciplinary exchange is not enough; we need trans-sectoral cooperation and integration in order to shift our mindsets and structure social change in light of our 'best account' (Rosa 2021: 151) of what it means to be human in the 21st century.[3]

2 The unique knowledge position of the humanities and social sciences

Human beings are 'self-interpreting animals' (Taylor 1985: 45–76). This implies: How we make sense of ourselves shapes who we are and who we become. There is no single substantial nature to the human in light of which we can identify stable sets of preferences or patterns of societal wellbeing. Human beings have the higher-order ability to select rules, maxims, guiding principles, and normative

self-images for their agency. They are also capable of making their value-laden experience explicit by formulating theories based on value representations. These value representations can be assessed as correct or incorrect. This is the basic idea of practical normativity, i. e. of norms inherent to our social practices.

One can think of the humanities as contributing to the heuristics of ethical insight. By describing human experience in a transcultural and multi-perspectival setting, they inform us about deep cultural and mental differences of individuals and collectives. We thus need humanistic knowledge in order to advance ethics and other normative disciplines that put the human being centre stage.

One way of characterizing the unique knowledge position of the humanities can be specified with recourse to an 'indispensability thesis' (Gabriel 2020b: 3),[4] that is, the thought that the gigantic array of subjective positions from which human beings experience reality is indispensable to knowledge of the human. There is no calculus that would allow us to replace discussions concerning right ends with technocratic solutions. For this reason, human becoming cannot adequately be represented by providing ever more technical or technocratic answers to our problems. Human existence is fundamentally value-laden so that a value-driven approach in the humanities and social sciences cannot be circumvented.

Humanistic knowledge differs from the instrumental use of reason in that it is deeply concerned with describing synchronically and diachronically varying self-conceptions of human beings. Humanistic insight which draws on cultural, symbolic artefacts (including, but not limited to artistic, religious, and other modes of value expression) can, thus, contribute to a heuristics for ethics.[5] If there is a difference between value representations and actual values, i. e. if there is any kind of minimal objectivity to normative debates, there is a need for a methodology of normative disciplines and we propose to think of the humanities as being in a position to contribute their already developed methods to the goal of specifying conditions for positive social change. Their results and insights can thereby contribute to empirical research in the social sciences which in turn will actively shape social change in tandem with humanistic inquiry.

Insofar as the symbolic order shapes our behaviour even under urgent conditions (such as a pandemic or the climate crises we are

facing), we cannot even understand, let alone change, how we are acting without enlisting the humanities to contribute their analyses to a description and reorientation of our action space. As the poet and cultural critic Bayo Akomolafe put it during his keynote speech at a recent workshop on 'objectivity in the humanities': 'The times are urgent; let us slow down' (Forum Humanum 2021, at 1:26:35).

Getting values into view requires that scholars from the wide range of the humanities and social sciences participate in the production, reproduction, and discovery of values. The humanities and social sciences implicitly and explicitly render value judgements. The value judgements cannot be reduced to the value representations which circulate in 'society' anyway. Rather, they are grounded in scholarly, systematic, and methodological knowledge-acquisition characteristics of the manifold disciplines rightly grouped together in virtue of their specific epistemic position.

Many of our most urgent, concrete, and practical questions are, upon closer look, questions addressed by the humanities and social sciences. Existential threats to humanity prompt questions about how humans should relate to nature. They have shaken bedrock beliefs about how the economy should be organized. They call for solidarity in a world of stark divisions. The humanities and social sciences have started to respond, and we can connect to those developments to further bridge the gap between them and society at large.

There are many proposals in play on how to respond, for instance, to climate change, ranging from geo-engineering solutions to interrogating the ethics of production and consumption practices. How are we to evaluate these proposals and which should we prioritize? Who is qualified to make these decisions and why? These are interpretive and not just political power questions that require public dialogue facilitated and supported by specialists in values and value representations working on these issues.

For instance, trained humanists working in the rapidly developing field of ecocriticism address questions like: are apocalyptic, hellscape stories of impending climate doom the right or good stories to be told? Why are we telling these stories to ourselves? Is the nature of climate change best represented, from an imaginative and affective point of view, in quantitative terms such as '1.5 degrees'? Is shaping the problem through thick notions of guilt and sacrifice

compatible with the motivational sets through which human beings actually change their fundamental behaviours? Just as technology and the natural sciences help us build infrastructure such as roads and computers, the humanities provide the infrastructure for asking and addressing questions like the above.

As self-conscious, social beings *we cannot but make sense of how we make sense*. Despite the continuing rise of a consumerist or entrepreneurial notion of the self, people continue to seek and make meaning and self-understanding. Debates about truth and objectivity in a world of fake news and 'alternative facts', the relationship between individuality and community, our responsibilities to one another, non-human life forms, the earth, and more, cannot but continue; whether this will be done in a rigorous, sensitive, nuanced way, and lead to results, depends on how central the study of humanities remains in our culture. As Martha Nussbaum puts it:

> Responsible citizenship requires … a lot more [than learning the basic techniques of economics]: the ability to assess historical evidence, to use and think critically about economic principles, to assess accounts of social justice, to speak a foreign language, to appreciate the complexities of the major world religions. The factual part alone could be purveyed without the skills and techniques we have come to associate with the humanities. But a catalogue of facts, without the ability to assess them, or to understand how a narrative is assembled from evidence is almost as bad as ignorance, since the pupil will not be able to distinguish ignorant stereotypes purveyed by politicians and cultural leaders from the truth, or bogus claims from valid ones. World history and economic understanding, then, must be humanistic and critical if they are to be at all useful in forming intelligent citizens, and they must be taught alongside the study of religion and of philosophical theories of justice. Only then will they supply a useful foundation for the public debates that we must have if we are to cooperate in solving major human problems. (Nussbaum 2016: 93–94)