
Preface

In many respects our world is out of balance. The gaps are widening between technological advancements and social progress, between economic success and environmental degradation, and between research-based insights and political decision-making. They are complemented by a rapid loss of biodiversity, a growing trend towards privatization and commercialization of common goods, and last but not least by growing inequality, uncertainty, and complexity involved in meeting the challenges ahead of us.

When we look at the current state of affairs, the mounting crises, the Russian–Ukrainian war, and the atrocities that go with it, we surely have many reasons to give in to feelings of pessimism and despair. The downward spiral of adverse developments appears to dominate our perception. And yet, as scholars as well as concerned citizens we can no longer ignore the fact that it is the responsibility of our generation to come up with new ideas and viable concepts that can pave the way for an urgently needed transformation of our lifestyles, modes of production, and societies at large.

By courageously, critically, and creatively reflecting on various imbalances and their root causes as well as by trying to open up pathways to viable solutions for at least some of the huge problems we are confronted with, scholars and practitioners from various walks of life can help to change course in the direction of a more just, ecologically sound, and economically sustainable future. This holds particularly true when they jointly embark upon a journey focused on thoroughly rethinking and reconfiguring current practices.

It is against this background that the first cohort of fellows at THE NEW INSTITUTE involved in the start-up phase of our programme '*Foundations of Value and Values*' set out to develop a conceptual and strategic framework for an intellectually ambitious attempt at positioning the humanities in the wider context of bringing about systemic change. Despite the professional diversity of the group, fellows succeeded in focusing on their commonalities alongside their differences. This discussion paper is itself proof of the integrative capacity of the humanities. Building on their epistemic foundations and specific expertise, as well as their boldness and persistence, the humanities will nevertheless have to enlarge the scope and scale of their activities beyond understanding past and present phenomena towards more future-oriented approaches.

All of this requires a change of perspectives not only within the humanities themselves but also in the respective ecosystems of knowledge production at large. Even nowadays, in many debates focusing on research and innovation agendas, the humanities are often seen as less useful when it comes to shaping the future. While science and engineering are widely accepted as the key drivers of economic and technological progress, the humanities seem to lack a clear orientation towards the major challenges ahead of us. This perception of a set of decoupled knowledge domains urgently needs to be changed, last but not least in view of the multiple, interwoven crises we are confronted with.

To ultimately realize their potential as strongholds of reflexivity, multi-perspectivity, and normativity, the humanities will have to proactively take on the task of adopting a conceptual and strategic framework that puts them centre stage when it comes to tackling such crucial questions for our common future as: What is a sustainable value system for the 21st century? How can we create a common way forward towards a New Enlightenment? When and why are people prepared to change their behaviour and to reconfigure their lifestyles in favour of a sustainable future for humankind and our planet? Last but not least, the provision of adequate answers to these questions will require serious commitment to interdisciplinary, trans-sectoral, and intergenerational collaboration.

In several respects this was the spirit in which our fellows – namely Markus Gabriel, Christoph Horn, Anna Katsman, Corine Pelluchon, and Ingo Venzke – cooperatively and creatively worked

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Wilhelm Krull

Founding Director of THE NEW INSTITUTE

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