
Summary

Humanity is faced with fundamental challenges and, taking research-based scenarios seriously, it will continue to be confronted with a host of global, interwoven, and increasingly complex crises. As a result of this seemingly ever-increasing dynamic, uncertainty and urgency seem to dominate our future. Considering the possibility to secure the uncertain and to postpone the pressing is no longer an option. Instead, we suggest making a case for future-oriented humanities, which may provide a foundation for a New Enlightenment carried by an interdisciplinary, trans-sectoral collectivity. In this respect, we propose the following:

1. The overarching goal must be to recouple the humanities with disciplines and sectors that have traditionally defined the direction and scope of tools used to cope with diverse challenges.
2. The humanities should strive for providing the much-needed compass called ‘becoming human in the 21st century’, which may structure, shift, and align all current and future steps towards individual, collective, and institutional change.
3. Facing the need to build bridges between disciplines and sectors, cultures and continents, as well as past, present, and future, the humanities must make use of their integrative capacity.
4. To contribute to the range of options for a constructive, innovative, and positive future, the humanities can and should use methods which go beyond criticism and critique, including the development of programmes that moderate and successfully recombine competencies from different disciplines and sectors.
5. A fundamentally revised idea of institution-building that facilitates creative collaboration is required to realize the humanities’ full potential.

6. A New Enlightenment as a project which essentially aims to overcome various schemes of domination may be carried by a diverse, yet – and perhaps even thereby – united range of actors.
7. Joint endeavours may include: The creation of a new approach to coping with complexity, the exploration of new perspectives for a dynamic process of universalizing that we can all share as human beings, the inquiry into new practices that systematically place environmental matters at the core, and the investigation of new ways of thinking about what is in the public interest and how to strengthen resilience in this regard.

All in all, this Discussion Paper is a plea for a fundamental reorientation of the humanities as well as a reorientation of the public discourse calling the humanities and social sciences to action.⁷⁴ But more importantly, it is an invitation to embark upon a journey with us towards creating the conceptual foundations of a New Enlightenment.