

Gunnar Skirbekk
19.12.05

A Crisis in the Humanitiesⁱ? **The challenges of culture in modern societies**

Questions are nowadays raised at regular intervals by those doing research in the humanistic disciplines about just what they are engaged in: whether we face a crisis in the humanities. Seminars are duly organized and committees appointed. As for the conclusions drawn, they are by and large expressive of a certain feeling of relief: it isn't, after all, the humanities that are in poor shape—quite the reverse, research and publication go ahead as never before—but money that is in short supply and academic posts that are few and far between. That's where the real crisis is to be found: at the universities, in the school system and in the social situation in general. The apparent crisis in the Humanities turns out to be a letdown on the economic front, a budgeting fiasco. Which in turn is all of a piece with a deplorable buckling of prestige patterns in favor of more practical kinds of expertise, whether technological, scientific or related to the social sciences.

The seminar participants and committee members can accordingly wander away, reassured, in their several directions after delivering themselves of the requisite screeds concerning the paramount importance of humane studies both for the individual and for society at large.

These pleas in defense of humanistic research vary somewhat in the paths they elect to follow. We offer a brief resume of some of the better represented viewpoints. Scholarly activity, like all other activities, has to be able to establish its credentials; it's partly a matter of being allowed to carry on with what one is doing, partly of actually getting financial support towards doing it. The key problem nowadays for humanistic research is that of establishing its credentials where financial backing is at stake.

There are, broadly speaking, three kinds of argument that are pressed into use to establish the credentials of scholarly activity: a general one, applicable to any such activity, and two that bear differently upon different kinds of disciplines.

The generally applicable one urges the value of truth in its own right and of the pursuit of truth in *its* own right. There is a permanent place for this argument, but it will not be pursued here. Then we have two types of argument whose relevance varies with the special field of research: that research is *useful* and that it is *culturally formative (bildend)*. It is arguments of this sort that claim our attention here, since it is in this respect that humanistic research is found to have its own special character.

When we here speak of research being useful, we have in mind the argument that research puts us in a better position to get done the things that want doing. Research can be usefully applied in the sense that the outcome of the inquiry can be put to use in a purposively rational connection; used, that is, as a means of bringing about something we (society) consider desirable. Thus the physical sciences, carried over into applied technological research, enable us to construct better bridges and aircraft, better houses and factories. This argument in terms of purposively rational usefulness, then, draws its strength from the fact that such research is quite simply sound business—something it pays to put money into.

True enough, this argument too takes on a more dubious aspect as we switch from applied to fundamental research, and is seen increasingly to cut both ways as we come to appreciate how many of the end-products of research for which there is a positive use can just as well be turned to destructive purposes; and this of course goes for the entire gamut of

research results from nuclear physics to molecular biology.

But what really matters for us in this connection is the fact that humanistic research *cannot* be put to use in this purposively rational sense, so that only the educational argument remains when it is humanistic research that has to be justified. Let us look a little more closely at the reason for this.

A branch of natural science such as classical physics is, methodologically considered, built up around laws that can be applied in carrying out purposively rational operations; a humanistic discipline, on the other hand—literary history, say—furnishes no such laws. The dividing line, we might say, falls between those disciplines which can be accommodated under Hempel's explanatory model and those which can't.ⁱⁱ

We may sum up Hempel's celebrated thesis by saying that scientific explanation takes the form of a logical inference from given initial conditions together with general laws. His classic case in point is the car radiator that froze up. An explanation of this occurrence is made up of (1) that we make sure that certain initial conditions were met: the car was left out on the night in question, the temperature dropped below zero, the radiator was filled with water, the radiator is able to stand only a certain pressure, (2) that we are aware of a general law to the effect that water expands during freezing with a certain force, and (3) that we accordingly conclude (from 1 and 2) that the radiator was bound to burst that night. What here serves to explain something that's already taken place, can just as well be used to predict what is going to happen: *if* you leave your car outside on a frosty night with a certain amount of water in a radiator that won't stand up to pressure, and *if* we know that water expands at high pressure during freezing, *then* we can predict that your car radiator's going to burst. But that's only another way of making the point that you can *use* your acquaintance with this law to get your radiator to burst if that's what you want. So the law about water expanding during freezing can be *useful* in a rationally purposive connection. There is, in short, an internal relation between explanations, predictions, and technical maxims of this kind. Which is only another way of saying that those disciplines which come under this model of scientific explanation *can* be supplied with credentials via the usefulness argument.

A discipline such as literary history operates with no such laws, and disciplines of this kind *cannot* therefore rely on the usefulness argument for their credentials, but only on the cultural one (along with the argument, shared by all disciplines, about the intrinsic value of truth and the pursuit of truth).ⁱⁱⁱ

It is not suggested that disciplines like physics can have no cultural value. There are ample grounds for claiming that all scholarly endeavors are culturally rewarding (*bildend*). We merely point out that such disciplines as literary history cannot be put to purposively rational use, and can consequently invoke only the cultural-benefit argument.

Much more might of course be said on methodological issues. But for now, enough is enough. We take it, moreover, that what we have said about scientific laws and forms of accreditation is relatively non-controversial.

We shall take this a step further, and assert that the humanistic disciplines admit of being negatively characterized as those not catered for by Hempel's model. This commits us to nothing about what positive characterization, if any, might be given to humanistic disciplines. This we will come back to. Nor do we propose to enter into a discussion of the extent to which Hempel's model is to be counted adequate vis-à-vis both the natural and the social sciences. Suffice it to say that to whatever extent explanatory ingredients of Hempelian type enter into what is traditionally regarded as humanistic research (e, g., historical research); these ingredients will have to be classed as non-humanistic.

On this basis, we are inclined to contend that humanistic research can establish its credentials only by means of the cultural-benefit argument and not by means of the usefulness argument. But it should be remembered that we here use the concept of usefulness in a

distinctive way, associated with goal-directed rational operations. For it is evident that that kind of cultivation (*Bildung*) which the humanistic disciplines can bestow is likewise “useful”, for so much as a community has among its prerequisites the need for some sort of cultural base; a community demands, for instance, that those who live in it shall have a certain minimal acquaintance with, and identification with, the local language and local tradition. This is of great significance. The distinction between “useful” and “culture conferring” disciplines is not one between those that are requisite or desirable for meeting the community’s functional demands and those that merely contribute to the delectation and edification of the individual, so enabling him to achieve self-fulfillment in ways that don’t concern the community. It marks a sad decline in the Humanists’ self-comprehension that the humanities should be defended from such, a recreational standpoint. To base one’s thinking on the distinction between work and play, and to locate the humanities on the recreational side (seeing them as individual consumption of cultural commodities) is to completely overlook the social indispensability of educatedness and culture. It is to be blind to the vast potential of the humanities for being socially “useful”.

There is naturally more to be said about the concept of usefulness; about, for example, what is useful to *whom*—and we do not only have in mind the various political alignments and their divergent objectives, but more especially the question of who makes a plea for genuine, who for spurious needs, and who genuinely seeks to preserve the internal relationship between person and tradition. It is, moreover, as many will be aware, highly problematic to apply the concept of usefulness to that which useful things are useful *for*. Life is neither useful nor useless—any more than the time is seven or seven-thirty on the sun. Looked at in this way, the cultural refinement of those persons and that culture for which all the initiatives of goal-directed rationality are useful is itself neither useful nor useless. The point we were making above, however, was that lack of culture can be socially counterproductive—quite apart from the fact that an unnecessarily low level of cultural refinement is in itself to be deprecated.

It is appropriate at this point to say a little more about what we include in the concept of culture. Let us first note in passing that the sciences’ cultural potential can be analyzed both in terms of scientific enquiry as an activity and in terms of science as an end-product. As already remarked, all scientific activity contributes to culture and cultivation by virtue of its requiring a questioning confrontation of phenomena and a mutual acceptance of fellow researchers as being both rational and fallible. We shall not now go into further detail about this,^{iv} but confine ourselves to emphasizing that the enterprise of research calls for a special assignment of social roles to the researchers. This, in fact, is one of the reasons why the systematic pursuit of truth may be said to be a good thing. But over and above the cultural benefits which accrue to the participants in the research process, we can also have cultural profit from enjoying the fruits of scientific enquiry. We are here thinking of culture (*Bildung*) partly as the result of acquiring knowledge, partly as the result of shaping one’s own identity by assimilating the social pattern into which one fits as member of a given community. Thus both enlightenment and the assumption of a social role are involved. The deeper significance of the concept of culture and cultural refinement can be said to be connected with the aspect just mentioned, that of self-development.^v

Yet when the matter is thought through, it soon becomes evident that there is a connection between enlightenment and the assumption of a social role. To assimilate scientific results in such a way that one really understands them is not at all the same as to learn to recapitulate isolated, disconnected truths, it requires us to in some measure appreciate the way in which the scientific result was attained (recognizing the operative methodological presuppositions and conceptual perspective), so as to see the result in its proper context, to acquire, that is to say, a full and complete grasp of what is and is not being said. But this

precisely adds up to a demand for reflection reinforced assimilation—an exercise with its own culture-transmitting value. And in this respect we are entitled to say that an excessively sharp dividing line between science as an activity and science as an end-product is a mere fabrication, since the latter presupposes the former, not least for the “users” themselves. But this amounts to saying that we have arrived in all probability at a certain parting of the ways between the humanistic disciplines and the rest: in the former, the end-product is in an even more fundamental sense accessible only to those who “play along”. There is only one way to become a “user” of the end-product of research into literary history, and that is to immerse oneself in it. Whereas one can perfectly well make use of the end-product of technological research while having at most a sketchy insight into it—much as one can press a switch and turn on the light without knowing the first thing about electricity.

In general, then, we may say that all science can serve to transmit cultural values, partly by teaching us to distinguish between what we do and do not know, between sound and unsound supporting instances, and between arguments and the grounds on which they rest at various levels; partly by teaching us something about cultural, social and physical phenomena. Humanistic studies perform their special cultural function by treating man as a cultural agent. To bring out just what we are getting at here, let us call to mind the way in which, broadly speaking, the various disciplines tie in with the historical emergence of distinct institutions.^{vi} The emergence of the economy as an institution (in the developmental sociologist’s sense) coincides with the operational progress of goal-directed rationality, and this, as industrialization sets in, goes hand in hand with technological advances that continually draw on the natural sciences for their support. In parallel with this goes the development of politics as a distinct institution: whereas the operations of goal directed rationality in the economy are regulated by money, its operations in the political arena are shaped by the legally sanctioned exercise of power via a judicially controlled administration. Economics, law, and in due course social science, get involved with these institutions. The entire field of operations concerning primary socialization and handing down of tradition was for a long time in all essentials virgin territory compared with the institutionalized domains of economy and politics—virtually untouched by the plans and actions of goal-directed rationality. Yet all along it was a social necessity that these cultural functions be performed, if only so that the economy and the political system should be supplied with articulate spokesmen whose cultural identity and loyalties could be counted upon. The emergence of the domains of art and culture as distinct institutions is of relatively recent date, just as is the attainment of distinctive status by the humanities.^{vii} This cultural sphere, which was originally catered for by linguistic-normative “handing down” (mainly in the family and in the immediate environment) has been subject to increasing political intervention, typically by jurisdiction concerned with schooling and family life,^{viii} as well as to economic forces, as when cultural phenomena are commercialized or given a twist convenient to the media.^{ix} Indeed, there are a number of reservations that must be made in using such concepts from developmental sociology as “differentiation” of “institutions” peculiar to politics, economy and culture. But what needs to be stressed in the present context is how the various branches of research are linked with professions which in their turn link up with developments in various fields; seen in this perspective, the humanities contribute neither to the furthering of industrial production nor to management and administration, but to the consolidation of culture as an institution in its own right.

We can illustrate what is distinctive of humanistic research and its subject-matter by distinguishing between “intersubjectivity” (*Lebenswelt*) and “system”.^x The distinction we here want to make is one between actions primarily governed by internalized norms and mutual understanding and actions primarily governed by a model of goal-directed rationality (system). This is used as the basis for distinguishing between traditional and modern

communities. Actions and transactions were originally constituted via norms and concepts which the agents simply took over—caught on to and accepted—and which each individual was aware that the others latched on to and accepted. This meant, in effect, that there was a conviction-carrying background consensus. Economically based division of labor, on the other hand, meant that the diverse functional roles and the associated norms and concepts came to depend on the way division of labor was structured. Everyone now sought to buy and sell commodities, working capacity included, each participant in the various activities attempting to maximize his own advantages through acts of goal-directed rationality motivated by needs and interests that were looked on as naturally “given”. In the framework of “intersubjectivity”, actions owe their identity to the concepts and norms in terms of which the agents understand each other. Within the “system” however the interplay of actions and transactions can for one thing be analyzed via a game-theoretic approach.

The point now being made is that humanistic studies relate to man as creative agent in the world of intersubjectivity—a world constitutively dependent on a background consensus of norms and concepts, not to man as a system-directed agent. We shall shortly pursue this point in greater depth, but it may not be inappropriate first to remark on possible levels within the world of intersubjectivity such as “culture”, “community” and “identity”.^{xi} These three levels may, be said to be simultaneously present in intersubjectivity, not least because of their reciprocal dependence, but for analytic purposes each can be taken in its turn. “Culture”, then, stands for the conviction-transmitting, “community” for what is structured by mutual norms, and “identity” for the shaping of the individual ego. Different theoreticians can be said to have concentrated on one or other of them—Heidegger on culture, Durkheim on community and Fromm on identity, to mention just three. The corresponding crisis phenomena are loss of meaning (life is felt to be hollow and pointless), weakening of solidarity (normlessness, anomie, supervenes), and finally crises of identity (“otherdirectedness” and weakening of the ego).^{xii}

Gathering up the threads, then, the real point of these distinctions taken from developmental sociology is to emphasize the place occupied by the humanities in our historical and social framework. We are including under “humanities” both humanistic research and its subject-matter. Up to now, our comments on the methodological basis for such research have been confined to saying that humanistic studies are not grounded in the Hempelian model with its invocation of laws. Using the concept of intersubjectivity (*Lebenswelt*), we can now give some positive indication of what humanistic studies essentially are. Once it is granted that intersubjectivity’s world takes shape via actions and attitudes based on mutual recognition and acceptance of concepts and norms by the agents involved, the way is open for research aimed at tracking down and giving an account of these norms and concepts. And this of course is the very foundation of “understanding” research.^{xiii}

As members of the community we have, *ipso facto*, a certain access to the horizon of signification that comprises the world of intersubjectivity, and this is something we researchers can explore much more fully by a thorough scrutiny of our sources, supplemented by analysis and reflection, in an unending discursive spiral of inquiry.^{xiv}

Within this range lie historical studies (so far as these do not incorporate explanatory devices from sociology and political economy), linguistics, comparative literary studies, aesthetic disciplines and philosophy, not to mention phenomenologically oriented social anthropology and psychology. Now, each of these branches of scholarship can evolve its own specialized and theory-laden concepts, concepts which go far beyond what is immediately comprehensible given the thought horizons of the current intersubjective context. The theories of linguists and philosophers spring to mind in this connection. Our present claim goes no further therefore than saying that the *point of entry* to humanistic studies must be accessible to people who inhabit the relevant intersubjective world (assuming them to be of normal

competence, articulateness and willingness to communicate). But we do make a stronger claim than the commonplace thesis that all forms of learning must in principle be accessible to others than those directly engaged in them (at least for those who will take the trouble to “do their homework”). In the first place, the absolutely basic credentials of humanistic research, which takes its stand on the bestowal of culture, will be drastically weakened if such learning cannot be acquired by those not engaged in it: whereas the utility-disciplines can establish their credentials by turning out packaged end-products along with an appropriate set of operating instructions for the uncomprehending masses, humanistic scholarship must constantly endeavor to put out its results in such a way that a reasonably large section of the public can keep abreast of what is going on. Secondly, it remains true that the effective substrate for concept formation in humanistic studies is more intimately related to the concepts present in intersubjectivity than are the concept-forming bases of other disciplines. Not that we would deny that the natural sciences, for instance, lean quite heavily upon mutual comprehension on the intersubjective level (as when researchers make arrangements with each other), nor are we forgetting that scientific concepts can carry over into daily life, so that it isn't only the sciences that are beholden to the concepts of intersubjectivity, but also the intersubjective world that is beholden to the sciences. What we do insist on is that humanistic research must always orient itself in relation to the horizon of intersubjectivity, whatever further processing and theoretical refinement the relevant concepts may undergo. This contextual frame is constitutive for humanistic research: the scrutinizing of deeds, attitudes and dealings on the intersubjective scene—starting out from those concepts which explicitly or implicitly play a central part in the agents' own understanding of themselves and their situation—is just the sort of thing for humanistic research to tackle.

This entails that humanistic studies are in a large measure descriptive. As, for instance, with the narrative presentation of doings and happenings in historical disciplines. The task here is to track down some problem, then put them in the form of a comprehensible narrative—comprehensible in the sense that it enables one's readers to relive the events in their own persons. Where the mental horizon of the historians differs from that of the parties involved, the task is one of reflective transposition from the one horizon to the other. While should the reader in turn relate to a third horizon, it will be up to him or her to perform comparable transpositions relating his own horizon to each of the other two. This again illustrates how the humanistic disciplines demand of the reader that he “go along”, and how they involve, at the same time, a “cultural enhancement” (*Bildung*) of the reader, since this “transposition” is a process of personal involvement which imports a person's own identity and cultural background into the cognitive process.

Now, it is well known that there are numerous problems of principle involved in the writing of history, that, for example, of discovering the implicit intention behind what the persons involved said and did—of “understanding those involved better than they understood themselves”—either by seeing events in a wider perspective than the protagonists were able to, or by invoking ulterior motives and incentives, even using concepts beyond the ken of those involved, in order to win internal consistency for one's account of events. But even if such a strategic entertaining of suspicions is often quite legitimate and indeed unavoidable, it in any case invokes a mental horizon of conceivable mutual understanding between protagonist and researcher—and the ultimate aim is to enhance such understanding.

Structural analyses in linguistics, as indeed in philosophy and literary studies, may as already remarked go far beyond the conceptual horizons to which the “agents” (language-users) themselves relate on the intersubjective scene. But the point here is to get at implicit presuppositions behind what is done, said and thought, whether in a particular culture (or context), or more generally. Thus understood, we stick to what we have said, counting these disciplines too among the humanities.

The humanistic disciplines will in many cases have a restricted body of facts under scrutiny—the works of Ibsen, perhaps, or the sculptures of Rodin. And even though there can here be no question of turning up fresh facts, the humanistic disciplines can still do serious research on such topics by reinterpreting the given material against ever new backgrounds and interconnections, including new patterns of insight arising in the researcher's special time and place.^{xv} So that we have an unfinished, open-ended epic of interpretation, taken up as every new page turns, rolling forever on as a give-and-take dialogue between the original work and the ever evolving traditions of interpretation.^{xvi}

It is after all evident enough that literary studies, art history and other special disciplines accounted “aesthetic” can also engage in the qualitative assessment of works under consideration without abandoning their anchorage in intersubjectivity and argumentation. This is basically due to the interplay between the circumstantially assigned values and norms attached to the mental horizon framing the original work and those values and norms which have been evolved by the interpretative tradition. What has to be understood here is that concepts, norms and values alike are constitutive elements in intersubjectivity, so that particular phenomena and particular actions within a specific intersubjective world-context owe their very identity to these elements—elements which are at one and the same time conceptual, evaluative and normative, much as “goal” and “corner” are in football.^{xvii}

We have now taken a look at the positive relation between humanistic studies and the “intersubjective world”. Before turning to the more negative relationship between these disciplines and the “system”, we next briefly call to mind some of the more distinctive institutions in which the several humanistic disciplines have a role to play.

The concept “humanities” is an equivocal one. It includes on the one hand the special kind of research we call humanistic and on the other hand much more. Literary studies, for instance, might be dubbed the top of the iceberg, the rest of which colossus is made up of the entire institution of letters: the writers who write the works to publishers who publish them, the booksellers who put them on sale, the libraries that lend them, the readers—whether purchasers or borrowers—who read them, and finally the critics who review them either in the press or through other debating channels. The bulk (and many will say, the real core) of all this lies submerged. Literature could exist without literary studies, literary studies without the writings (and all the rest) certainly couldn't.

This raises once again the question of what literary research really has to offer. Can we get by without it? The problem of establishing credentials is not to be brushed aside: we have those who produce literature, those who distribute it, those who read and review it and those who, in the schools and the media, initiate the rising generation into the literary tradition. What more does anyone need?

There's no straightforward answer. But we can get some way toward an answer by focusing on the fact that intersubjectivity is not some massive “working of nature” but a frail artifact, prone to stagnation and decline. There is the need for a perpetual traditionwise transfer of the communal horizon to new generations, and its due acquisition calls for a personal effort on the part of the individual that starts with his or her initial socialization and continues through life as a whole. There here takes place a vulnerable transference between intersubjective tradition—the mother tongue, for instance—and the separate individuals, who first acquire the stamp of culture through socialization. This transference can be rigidified and perverted, but it can also be refined and improved: there is, we may say, a simultaneous need for conservation on the one hand and for renewal and critical challenge on the other. We confront the tension, inherent in all culture, between the conservative and radical components, and this is where humanistic research joins the dance—in the tension between conscious acceptance and critical reservation. In addition to having its own special value as part of the search for truth, the study of literature has just such a “regenerative” function: in the interplay

between new and old, between good and not so good, the processes of humanistic research take on a dialectic role in the institution of , letters, posing problems in the most illuminating contexts, distinguishing between felicitous and infelicitous interpretations, between appropriate and inappropriate instances—all in order to temper and ameliorate the perspective-generating insights which literature has to offer.

It is a responsibility which does not lie exclusively with those professionally engaged in research, and others may well have no small contribution to make, but in light of the present considerations authorized research has a special responsibility, and one which confers upon it its credentials.

We shall not here weary our readers by detailing how the other humanistic disciplines get involved with diverse specific institutions having greater or less resemblance to the institution of literature, and how their spheres of interest intersect, via, e.g., the school, the mass media, the theater and the museum.

We may sum up all we have so far said concerning methodology and institutional specialization with respect to the humanistic disciplines in the contention that humanistic research comprises the endeavor to investigate, interpret, describe, assess and reflect upon creative works and performances in the intersubjective realm, starting out from those concepts which they explicitly or implicitly incorporate. Their accreditation rests upon the level of culture these disciplines help to confer on the inhabitants of our own intersubjective world, always relative to the mental horizon there being established and perpetuated.

Having taken a look at the internal relation between the humanities and intersubjectivity, we turn to that between the humanities and the “system”. Briefly, the contention here is that with the constant expansion of politics and economics as institutions, at the expense of the intersubjectively constituted cultural sphere, people are to an increasing extent made what they are by objective structures, in relative independence of any mutually accepted norms. And there is a corresponding diminution in the culturally formative potential of the humanities and of humanistic disciplines. Here we have the crisis in the humanities.

We are faced with fewer and fewer things we can “see” by relying simply on concepts from our intersubjective frame. Economics, politics, and technology operate in terms of concepts—frequently wielded via particular social or natural sciences—which just aren’t accessible from the perspective of those engaged at the intersubjective level, or from any perspective towards which humanistic research can be of assistance.^{xviii}

What all this means is that there is a marked falling-off in the educational potentialities traditionally claimed by the humanities and humanistic scholarship. For Aristotle it could seem feasible to understand himself and what went on in the city-state by further developing his intersubjectively based concepts via ethical reflection and a sort of taxonomic political science. We today are dependent on a complex chain of insight-transmission linking us with a multitude of disciplines (taking in both the “system” and the “intersubjective world”), if we are ever to attain anything like an adequate grasp of ourselves and the world we live in. It is an enterprise of daunting complexity, and certainly one that takes us far beyond what the humanities alone can provide.^{xix} A crisis, indeed, for the humanities—and also for the world, and for the culture, of which we are a part.

It is thus the primary responsibility of the humanities to acknowledge their historically conditioned boundaries. Perspectives from the sociology of culture and of knowledge are here essential, enabling us to understand culture not merely as a private asset and a leisure occupation, but as a functionally indispensable, perspective mediating intersubjective structure, interacting incessantly with other institutions. It is against this background that those energies which the humanities have at their rightful command can be brought into play, with a full awareness both of what their impact is worth and of the need for other kinds of endeavor to supplement them.

It isn't easy to see what all this means for the individual researcher in the humanistic disciplines, or to say anything at all relevant at the most general level. It must be left to each individual to work out what the implications are for his own particular area. If we generalize at all, it can only be to stress how vital it is to intensify efforts within these fields of scholarship, and that this be done with a clear awareness of the structural problems in our society.

What we can perhaps do is to outline a few misconceived ways of going about things. (1) There are some who simply haven't concerned themselves with the sort of problem we have been talking about—who, untouched by inner disquiet on such issues, carry blithely and serenely on as if nothing had happened. This is the naively nonchalant response. (2) There are others who sense the problem, and feel the need to intensify humanistic research, but who show no awareness of the structural contractions taking place. This is typical of the earnest humanist who lacks perspective. (3) Others, again, have read about the structural problems and bring the matter up on ceremonial and political occasions, but do not let it affect the way they do their job. We could call them the week-end ideologists. (4) Lastly, there are those who have made an honest endeavor to get up to date with all these novel notions, and who strive zealously to import them into humanistic research, yet without really getting a proper grasp of developmental sociology. They proclaim with missionary zeal that books are commodities and language a social phenomenon. In short, the amateur sociologists.

But it isn't only for humanistic researchers that the world has become a more difficult place. All of us, implicated as we are, socially and politically, in our intersubjective world, face the same situation: it gets harder and harder to see the point of what other people are doing because it belongs to a pattern of activity to which we are strangers, while at the same time our own affairs intermesh with other goings-on in ways we could not have foreseen, alienating us both from ourselves and from each other. This can cause both solidarity and fellowship to disintegrate, leaving us bereft of both the integrity and the synoptic perspective necessary for a rational give-and-take, whether it be in relation to those nearest us in the intersubjective world or in relation to the economic and political structural problems. For, administration problems and the crisis of culture are two sides of the one coin—but that is something we shall pursue no further here. A later article must take over.^{xx}

References

- Anscombe, Elizabeth (1958) "On Brute Facts", in *Analysis*, vol. 18, no. 3.
- Apel, Karl-Otto (1979) *Die Erklären: Verstehen-Kontroverse in transzendental-pragmatischer Sicht*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- Feigl, Herbert and Wilfrid Sellars (eds.) (1949) *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*. New York, Appleton-Sentury-Crafts.
- Habermas, Jürgen (1981) *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp.
- McCarthy, Thomas (1991) *Ideals and Illusions*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Skirbekk, Gunnar (1993) *Rationality and Modernity*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Skirbekk, Gunnar (ed.) (1983) *Praxeology*. Oslo: Norwegian University Press.

□ An early version of this paper was presented at the international conference in Montréal in 1983. Translation by Kenneth Young.

ⁱⁱ Cf Carl G. Hempel “The Function of General Law in History” in Feigl and Sellars (eds.) 1949, p. 459-471.

ⁱⁱⁱ There are, however, further complications. Humanistic disciplines such as literary criticism and literary history may contribute to the opening up of new perspectives (cd “world disclosure”, e.g. in Habermas and Rorty), and these in turn may modify our concept of the goals which our goal-directed rationality is to aim at. Our conception of a useful goal is thus dependent on cultural premises.

^{iv} Cf Apel and Habermas, who both underline the ethical presuppositions of scholarly and scientific activity, and especially for conducting a debate.

^v Cf Humboldt and the German *Bildung* tradition.

^{vi} Cf e.g. T. Parsons *The Evolution of Societies*, N. J. 1977.

^{vii} The following disciplines were recognized at the University of Paris towards the close of the Middle Ages: (1) grammar, logic, dialectic - collectively: the *trivium*, (2) arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music - collectively: the *quadrivium*. These were the *artes liberales*. There were, in addition, vocational studies in medicine, law and theology.

^{viii} Cf Habermas 1981, vol. II, p. 522-547 (esp. p. 534, 540).

^{ix} Habermas 1981, p. 512-522.

^x The terms of *lifeworld* and of *system* are far from unproblematic: to which extent are they to be conceived of as clear-cut *ontological realities*, or are they rather to be conceived of as dominant aspects, perceived by special *perspectives*? Cf McCarthy 1991.

^{xi} Cf Habermas 1981, vol. II, p. 209 ff.

^{xii} ‘Anomie’, in the sense of normlessness, is a term taken from Durkheim. ‘Otherdirectedness’ comes from David Riesman.

^{xiii} Cf e.g. the account (with historical synopsis) in Apel 1979.

^{xiv} Some will call this “hermeneutic”, others “hypothetico-deductive in relation to message-laden data”. Cf Gadamer: *Wahrheit und Methode*, and D. Føllesdal and L. Walløe: *Argumentasjonsteori og vitenskapsfilosofi*, Oslo 1977, p. 80 ff., especially p. 107.

^{xv} Cf Jon Elster, who makes it a requirement for methodologically sound research that new facts can be found, e.g. in *Forklaring og dialektikk*, Oslo 1979, p. 108-109.

^{xvi} Cf *Wirkungsgeschichte* in Gadamer.

^{xvii} Cf Elizabeth Anscombe on brute facts, in Anscombe 1958.

^{xviii} Cf “Science and Ethics” in Skirbekk (ed.) 1983. Meløe’s praxeological analyses, with their simple lifeworld examples, illustrate what a purely humanistic standpoint does *not* enable us to see, cf his articles in Skirbekk, (ed.) 1983, and my critical comments in Skirbekk 1993.

^{xix} A one-sided orientation based on communicative interaction (intersubjectivity) leads to what Habermas has called “comprehension-centered sociology’s hermeneutic idealism”. A corresponding one-sidedness based on the system/environment model results in various short-cut versions of social theory ranging from grosser variants like those stemming from sociobiology to more sophisticated ones in the style of Niklas Luhmann.

^{xx} Cf e.g. “Modernization of the Lifeworld” in Skirbekk 1993.