
The Return of Humanities Flourishing in Australia

Cognition Histories. Essay 3 of 3-Part Series

Saving Higher Education through the Humanities Thinking

SERIES INTRODUCTION

Chris Lorenz (2024) recently produced a review essay of Jonas Ahlskog's *The Primacy of Method in Historical Research: philosophy of history and the perspective of meaning*. What Lorenz has to say about Ahlskog's thinking is a good introduction to an emerging field of "Cognition Histories" (and Cognition Sociology). The sociological thinking is rolled into person's historical thinking because, the other new emerging fields, Public History, and Public Sociology, speak *the same language*. As a few lines in Lorenz's abstract, global scholars speak to the older fields of social philosophy-social psychology, the philosophy of history, and the philosophy of social science, which are being revised inside the new fields, **and I am sorry to say, that my Australian history and sociology colleagues (old and new) appear completely stump at the cognition:**

Jonas Ahlskog presents a critical and lucid engagement with contemporary philosophies of history and makes a sustained case for a return to the ideas of history and social science as developed by R. G. Collingwood and Peter Winch. What philosophy needs again is, first, a recognition of the "primacy of method"—that is, the insight that *what* one knows about reality depends on *how* one knows it. Second, philosophers need to take "the duality of method" seriously again and to recognize that the modes of explanation in the human sciences and the natural sciences are categorically different from each other—especially now that this difference has been blurred in recent debates about the Anthropocene. Ahlskog's book is thus also a contribution to the classical debate about causal explanation versus meaningful understanding. On closer analysis, however, Ahlskog's "untimely meditations" on "historical method" suffer from an insufficient engagement with counterarguments. A first line of critique challenges the idea that human action cannot be explained causally. A second line of critique challenges the idea that all aspects of human action can be "understood," because the unintended aspects and consequences of individual actions cannot. These require causal explanation. A third line of critique concerns Ahlskog's denial of the fundamental plurality of ideas of history and the social sciences. Squeezing this plurality into one philosophical mold comes at a price. Unintentionally, Ahlskog's "untimely meditations" also show that much. (Lorenz 2024:1)

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In my cognition history and sociology studies I agree with the challenges that Lorenz has stated. In this series I explain, from various overlapping fields (multidisciplinary-interdisciplinary education), the difficulty for persons to understand even their own cognition; to understand:

1. Key and Relevant Concepts
2. Picture-Image and Language
3. The Politics of Thinking
4. Neuroscience and Perception
5. The Humanities Discipline as Primary

The three-part series has a postscript whereby there is a demonstration of the practice for understanding persons having to live through a brutal period of a confused economy.

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Lorenz, Chris (2024). If you could read my mind: on the history of mind and other matters, A review essay of *The primacy of method in historical research: philosophy of history and the perspective of meaning*, by Jonas Ahlskog. New York: Routledge, 2021. pp. 220, *History and Theory* 0, no. 0 (May 2024), 1–12

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The literature demonstrates several intellectual problems, as higher education practice, which have existed, for the last half century, and the solutions to re-flourish the humanities in Australia. Merely to consider the abstracts of the last two decades for the following points:

“Once again, there are signs of deep trouble for the humanities in higher education — in the Western world, if not the world as a whole. News of closures trickles in relentlessly. At New Zealand’s Victoria University, ancient Greek, Latin, and Italian were all given the ax. Michigan’s Cornerstone University, in Grand Rapids, reduced and merged its humanities programs. Leaders at the Duksung Women’s University, in Seoul, South Korea, have proposed closing the institution’s German-literature and French-literature departments. In such circumstances, opinion pieces lamenting the fate of humanistic education have understandably proliferated.”

“These trends offer an important opportunity to ponder the place and purpose of the humanities. One promising effort to do so is spearheaded by the Society for the History of the Humanities, an organization established in the last decade. Its journal, *History of Humanities*, began publishing in the spring of 2016. The journal’s inaugural editorial announces in its bold title ‘[A New Field: History of Humanities](#).’”¹

1. Politicians are in wilful ignorance keeping the fool population in ignorance.

Harding (2006:20) tells us that “Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud provided powerful accounts of systematic interested ignorance:

Fifty years ago, Anglo-American philosophies of science stigmatized Marx's and Freud's analyses as models of irrationality. They remain disvalued today, at a time when virtually all other humanities and social science disciplines have returned to extract

¹ From Eric Adler, “The Promises and Pitfall of a ‘Global Humanities: Multiculturalism alone won’t save us.” [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#), August 5, 2024.

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valuable insights from them. ...there are reasons distinctive to philosophy why such theories were especially disvalued then and why they remain so today. However, there are even better reasons today for philosophy to break from this history and find more fruitful ways to engage with systematic interested ignorance. (20)

2. The Humanities Discipline has been an existential crisis in Australia for some time.

The Humanities in Australia is a reflection of the global ‘humanities in crisis’ thesis’:

The humanities are in crisis. and this is part of their self- identity. To say that the Humanities are constitutively in crisis is to imply, via the reading that has come to us from Reinhart Koselleck, that their fundamental task is historical, in the sense that they entail the transmission of forms and values across time, and in the sense that time is a source of value for that which is transmitted. That relative value underwrites the authority of the statements made within their domain. It also assumes that humanistic knowledge—the forms of knowledge that are generally counterposed to scientific knowledge— is narrative (Lyotard [1979] 1984, 7). The question implicitly posed ... is whether the crisis afflicting the Humanities in the new millennium is fundamentally different from those that characterized the previous century or, indeed, the period we may designate as Enlightenment modernity: the era of the university modeled on Humboldt’s proposal for the University of Berlin. This question is not merely academic, although it pertains to the institution of the university: its status, its function, its role in the shifting organization of social and political authority, and its contributions to culture. As Lyotard stated in 1979, “it is impossible to know what the state of knowledge is ... without knowing something of the society within which it is situated” (13). (Morris 2017:583)

3. At the heart of the “humanities in crisis” thesis for American and Australian society is the anti-intellectualism thesis, beginning with Richard Hofstadter (1963):

In his classic *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (1963), the historian Richard Hofstadter argued that popular suspicions of and hostility toward intellectuals grew out

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of the laudable egalitarian commitments of Protestantism and the American Revolution. Favoring a religion of the heart and the common sense of the people, Americans tended to distrust what they saw as the inaccessible musings of philosophers and university professors. A pragmatic people, they treated ideas as tools to achieve their goals, not as ends in themselves. Further, Hofstadter argued, because intellectuals viewed the exchange of ideas as intrinsically worthwhile, without regard for economic interests, business leaders, too, were often hostile to the life of the mind. To them, knowledge mattered not for its own sake, but for its cash value.

More surprising, perhaps, was Hofstadter's antagonism toward university-based schools of education. During the first half of the 20th century, he argued, education scholars had come to view the teaching of academic subject matter as secondary to the goal of providing young people with basic instruction in life skills. He worried that as "the mental world of the professional educationist became separated from that of the academic scholar," the purposes of schooling would become more utilitarian and less intellectual (Hofstadter 1963, p. 338).

It is a strange and sobering experience to read Hofstadter in our own anti-intellectual era. His mid-century observations, written in the wake of McCarthyism, seem prescient and help make sense of the anti-intellectualism of today's education rhetoric and policy making. Now as then, many business leaders, education professors, and ordinary Americans take a purely instrumental view of the K-12 curriculum, treating the study of academic subject matter as just a means to an end.

Yet, while Anti-intellectualism in American Life has often been read as a defense of beleaguered intellectuals, Hofstadter argued that intellectuals themselves were partly to blame for their sorry state. In the early 1960s, he could see that many academics, writers, and artists were becoming increasingly disdainful of the wider public. At a time when our government was expanding rapidly and citizens were becoming distant from the officials and experts who shaped their lives, intellectuals were retreating still further from their fellow Americans. (Neem 2020:10).

In recent times Carlin Romano's *America the Philosophical* (2013) is an attempt to challenge the entrenched stereotype that the United States is an anti-intellectual, un-philosophical nation. However, this is a rather deeper argument, not about anti-intellectualism or intellectualism as such, but whether the American culture actually has a philosophy or the argument that the American culture is anti-philosophy philosophy. I see Romano overstating his case, as American

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republican philosophy is philosophy, but *Trumpism*, it is true, is antiphilosophy philosophy. Nevertheless, it is worth stating Romano's case:

He [Romano] accuses purveyors of this view (e.g., Richard Hofstadter in *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* and Susan Jacoby in *The Age of American Unreason*) of cherry-picking, and elaborates a long list of highly philosophical American cultural items. This culminates in his claim that "America in the early twenty-first century towers as the most philosophical culture in the history of the world, an unprecedented marketplace of truth and argument that far surpasses ancient Greece, Cartesian France, nineteenth-century Germany or any other place one can name over the past three millennia" (Romano 8). In an unrelated article published a year earlier ("Essaying America: A Declaration of Independence"), John Lysaker scrutinizes the very term "American philosophy." He does not ask whether America is a particularly philosophical place (let alone the most philosophical ever), or if its culture is truly characterized by anti-intellectualism (these are taken as givens); he considers, rather, if "American philosophy" is a conjunct that makes any sense whatsoever. He argues that the meaning of "America" is starkly incompatible with the meaning of "philosophy." This claim requires commitments about the meanings of the two terms involved. "America," for Lysaker, refers to "empire," to "a globally operative, often dominant force, which often operates through violence or its threat" (Lysaker 542). He gives a rough definition of philosophy as "the formation of belief, value, and policy through dialogue and inquiry" (543). Given the dissonant character of these two terms, he concludes that "American philosophy" is an oxymoron akin to "antiphilosophy philosophy" (543). (Busk 2016:49)

4. A significant part of the 'anti-intellectualism for both United States and Australia is a popular outright rejection of the sociology discipline, but the problem is made worse by the discipline's own confusion on its own future.

Mišina (2015) identifies two sets of claims:

William Carroll's vision for a transdisciplinary future of the social science and humanities (i.e. the transdisciplinarity argument) (Carroll 2013); and Antony J. Puddephatt & Neil McLaughlin's counter-vision for a sociology bound by its traditional disciplinary

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boundaries (i.e. the traditionalism argument) (Puddephatt and McLaughlin 2015). ... an analysis of the debate in question [is provided] and argues that Carroll's and Puddephatt & Neil McLaughlin's reflexive diagnostics regarding the future of sociology offer two distinct, and competing, understandings of the discipline's nature, purpose and relevance, as well as two different sensibilities regarding an audience the discipline of sociology is, or ought to be, speaking to. In addition, an argument put forth is that Carroll's public-political and Puddephatt & McLaughlin's professional-organizational models of sociology have important implications both for mapping out the future trajectories of the discipline, and for gauging sociology's role and position within, and relationship to, the 'universe' of society. (Mišina 2015:527)

At the heart of the problem is an acceptance or dismissal of 'Agent-based modeling'. This has been discussed in Klein, Marx, Fischbach (2018):

... we first classify different aspects of the model-building process and identify a number of characteristics shared by most agent-based models in the humanities and social sciences; then we map relevant differences between the various modeling approaches. We classify these into different dimensions including the type of target systems addressed, the intended modeling goals, and the models' degree of abstraction. Along the way, we provide reference to related debates in contemporary philosophy of science. (Klein, Marx, Fischbach 2018:7)

Significantly for urban sociologists modelling research:

...takes place within three major disciplinary clusters: 1) the social sciences, and arts and humanities, 2) medicine, and 3) natural/technical sciences (environmental, earth and planetary, agricultural, and biological sciences). Medicine shows an early prevalence, and recently the social sciences have been strongly represented in these studies. (Hočevár and Bartol 2021:123)

In the midst of this modelling research, "Traditional humanistic disciplines feel irrelevant and marginalized in Europe and Anglophone countries. Instead of demonstrating the insights into

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humans, their communities, and values that only philosophy, literature, and the arts can provide, many humanists repudiate their base in favor of scientific models:"

This turn to philosophic naturalism - the belief that only knowledge derived from natural sciences has credibility - underlies much current work in the humanities and social sciences. Similarly, the digital humanities, purportedly rooted in 'computational thinking', were born with a bias toward science. This paper addresses the loss of confidence in the explanatory value of critical and aesthetic methods of literary inquiry through the work of Richard Rorty. He holds that science and philosophy employ different kinds of thinking and do different work: science asks 'how' questions, philosophy asks 'why'. Confusing two incompatible epistemes will not improve the status of the humanities. It is this same epistemic confusion that the digital humanities must also negotiate. (Nichols 2013:1)

5. Solutions call for a revaluation of Digital Humanities projects.

The hope in digital humanities projects has been "... that digital humanities scholarship can contribute to the humanities as a whole, by expanding comparative literature studies with data-based empiricism:"

However, as a new approach to comparative literature, digital humanities is still in its fledgling stage and faces a slew of challenges: inadequate involvement from humanities scholars, undefined boundaries within humanities disciplines, lack of global recognition, and immature theoretical models to propel future research. (Peng 2020:595)

And furthermore, social scientists often have a too narrow understanding of humanities paradigms:

A traditional, and reasonable, way of thinking about the digital and modelling within the context of the humanities is to begin with humanistic inquiry and then explore the world of information processing and management through digital technologies, such as virtual

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reality, computers, smartphones, and tablets. This chain of thought revolves around the idea that information is part of the world of computing with its technological methods and marvels. However, through traditional humanities topics such as language and sensory arts, we claim that the idea of information and information processing is part and parcel of the humanistic tradition. Seeing the world as information is a matter of interpretation, and not of technologically-motivated implementation, even though such implementation provides us with efficient tools for managing information. Written and pictorial languages are a basis for formalizing information and models, independent of technology. (Fishwick 2018:154)

There can be useful combinations in overlapping social science models and humanities paradigms, for example:

... developing bibliometric models of the sources used in different types of humanities scholarship. [And] identifies five types of scholarship: description of primary sources, editing of primary sources, historical studies, criticism, and theory. It illustrates the approach through an analysis of sources used in fifty-four monographs in literary studies and art scholarship. ...(Wiberley 2003:121)

What this calls for is “the discourse about modelling in the humanities [and] would have to be unearthed and considered first or at least as well, particularly where it already crossed paths with disciplines adjacent to computing.” (Gengnagel 2018:226) There important differences to be understood:

As the sciences rely on explicit top-down theories connected to bottom-up maps and models, and whereas the humanities build on bottom-up differences within malleable top-down “theories” (approaches, themes, theses, programs, methods, etc.), the changes in the sciences during this period contrasted sharply with the changes in the humanities. ...(Narmour 2011:1)

The focus of this article is the employment of the grounded theory approach to derive models of the information-seeking patterns of academic researchers. The background to

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the development of interest in qualitative approaches to information studies in the United Kingdom is described, and the results of four studies, carried out at the University of Sheffield, into the information-seeking patterns of researchers in the social sciences, sciences, and humanities are outlined. The methodological issues involved in the employment of the grounded theory approach in the studies are discussed - with particular attention being given to the conceptual questions of analysis, comparison, and validity and to the practical issues of data recording, coding, and selection. Reference is also made to other studies carried out at the University of Sheffield that have employed the grounded theory approach. (Ellis 1993:469)

Grounded Theory is what Dr Buch ('I') is doing in his scholarship. In the literature the work has been done in taking a practical and compatible approach between the sciences and humanities. As a select summary:

(i) adoption of “a bi-dimensional vision: considering the model as both a process of abstraction, an interpretation from a certain point of view, and a formal language to implement this abstraction in order to create something processable by a machine. The role of conceptual models – to be converted into ontologies – as a semantic deepening of controlled vocabularies, is the translation of this vision. Ontologies are the models used in domain communities in order to share classes and predicates for conceptual interoperability. Thinking of data models as a knowledge organization system is the core of this reflection on Digital Humanities domain.” (Tomasí 2018:170)

(ii) “the framework of Charles S. Peirce’s theory of signs that sheds light on the practice of modeling in the digital humanities. As a first step, it is argued that models are icons, i.e. signs that represent their specific objects by being regarded as similar to them; and that there are, in all, three basic types of model, namely “images,” “diagrams,” and “metaphors.” A second step explicates relevant implications of this model-theoretic approach, especially as they relate to the digital humanities. In particular, it is shown that models are not identical to the things they represent and that they only represent them partially; that the representation operates on the basis of a mapping relation between select properties of the model and its object; that each model and each instance of modeling has a theoretical framework; and that models are the true basis for genuine creativity and progress in research.” (Lattmann 2018:124)

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(iii) “provides a very brief overview on modelling as intended as a research strategy applied to scientific fields in the 20th-21st centuries. This overview is followed by a short introduction to modelling in digital humanities, focusing on how modelling has developed into a practical strategy and how it has been theorised. ... (Ciula, Marras, Sahle 2018b:343)

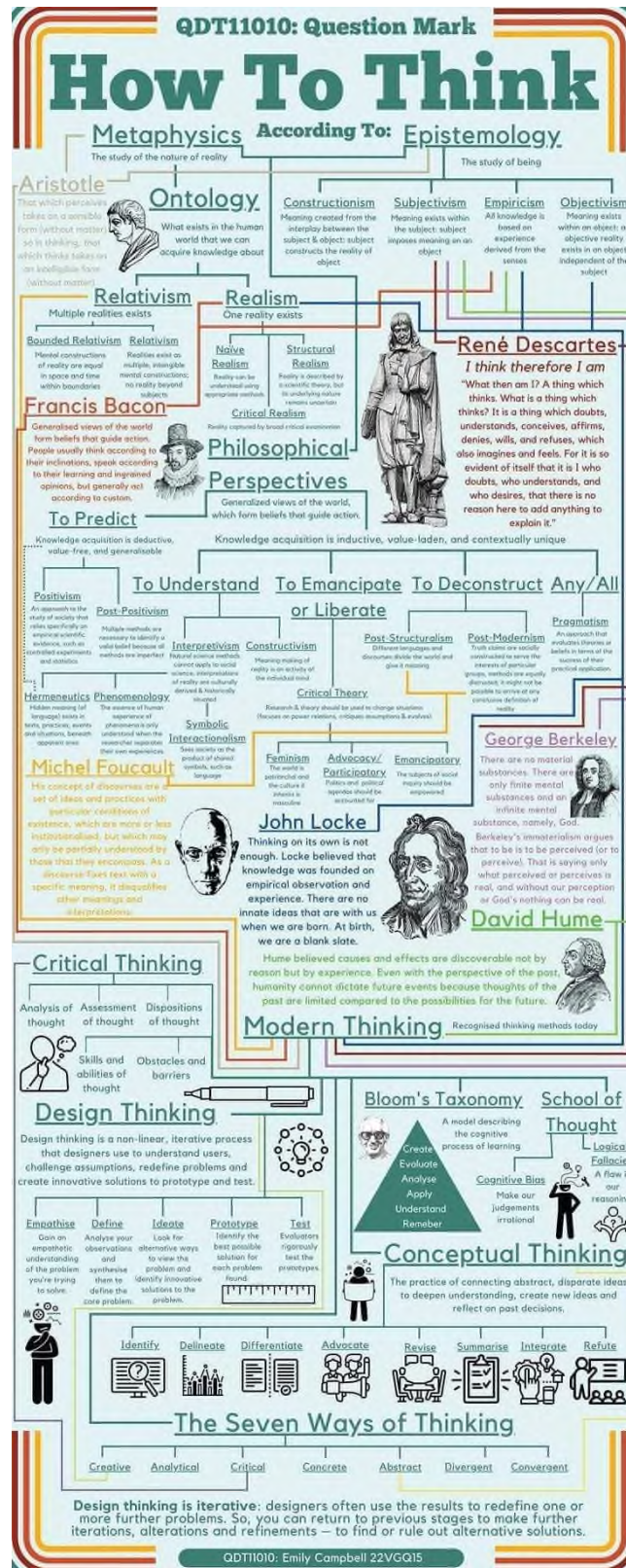
(iv) [refraining from] “providing a normative definition of ‘model’ and ‘modelling’ and rather attempt at encircling the current state of the art. ...to present a multitude of modelling practices from various disciplines together with different theoretical frameworks. ...” (Ciula, Marras, Sahle 2018a:7)



*Understanding history is
philosophy in practice*

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Concluding Remarks



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Campbell (n.d. Facebook; image above) produced this teaching aid graph on 'How to Think'. It is a statement of Global Cognition History.

In this series on Cognition Histories, I have made several concluding and critical observations:

Essay 1.

1. Cognition is the "mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses".

2. Although there are disciplinary differences, there are no cognition differences as comprehensive understanding.

3. A significant slice on the global history of sociology, philosophy, and historiography has been around discussions of Micro and Macro scopings, and Thin and Thick concepts, with the best scholars examining what Randall Collins calls, "interaction ritual" (IR).

4. Randall Collins's book, *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (1998), teaches on the problems of schooling, along with the paradigmatic criticism of Ivan Illich (via Michael Macklin).

5. A number of other psychological theories may also shed light on behaviour in the political context of avoiding understanding human factors, such as cost-benefit analysis, and free-choice paradigm.

6. We continue to make ethical judgements, despite the dismissive nonsense about not making judgement. We can identify a person's motivation as malice, intellectual laziness, or just plain ignorance. These are what Bernard Williams called thick concepts – the way we, at the same time, combine our valuation and facts of the matter in language.

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7. In current discussions today on democracy, the biggest threat is the thin concept of “We the People”, and the solution is the thick concept of “We the Persons”.

8. All of the terms and concepts of thinking has a fit to, not one, but to several overlapping schemas.

9. True learning is three metaethical concepts, which align together, and with all other terms and concepts mentioned in the series: Open Access, Open Participation, and Open and Level Playing Field.

Essay 2.

10. (1) The Oscar Wilde novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, reminds us of the consequences of substituting an aesthetic for an ethical conscience.

11. (2) Often persons of the fool population do not understand what they think they see in the Image.

12. (3) Media and the academy often provide false messaging where we are believe that “this” person is “smart”, that the economy is “smart”, and that “A.I.” is smart, all based in false assumptions.

13. (4) The benefits of the Transmedial Pedagogical Form, as technology, does not address the traditional-historical problem of propaganda.

14. (5) A fool population of technicians are in the wilful ignorant of the intellectual content to question, of why, why not, and who?

15. (6) You-I-we are projecting into the image what you-I-we think you-I-we perceive, but the measure of what is correct in that perception, is to the extent you-I-we know the history,

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and know it because you-I-we have opened your-mine-our mind to open learning and prepared to put aside your-mine-our presumptions (the prejudices of assumptions).

16. (7) The key concept here is perception.

17. (8) Neuro-philosophy, in basic terms of ontology, demonstrates that reduction, in the science, cannot explain the integration of thought and emotion, and the explanation can really only come down to the language of science; indicativism is to *denote*, meaning here that all we have is the language of the experience, and not an affirmative ontology.

18. (9) The remaining question is why persons in the fool population cannot perceive such influence upon (each) their lives? Is it wilful ignorance or is it cultural anti-intellectualism?

Essay 3.

19. (1) Politicians are in wilful ignorance keeping the fool population in ignorance.

20. (2) The Humanities Discipline has been an existential crisis in Australia for some time.

21. (3) At the heart of the “humanities in crisis” thesis for American and Australian society is the anti-intellectualism thesis, beginning with Richard Hofstadter (1963).

22. (4) A significant part of the ‘anti-intellectualism for both United States and Australia is a popular outright rejection of the sociology discipline, but the problem is made worse by the discipline’s own confusion on its own future.

23. (5) Solutions call for a reevaluation of Digital Humanities projects.

24. (6) In the literature the work has been done in taking a practical and compatible approach between the sciences and humanities:

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(i) adoption of “a bi-dimensional vision: considering the model as both a process of abstraction, an interpretation from a certain point of view, and a formal language to implement this abstraction in order to create something processable by a machine;

(ii) the framework of Charles S. Peirce’s theory of signs;

(iii) how modelling has developed into a practical strategy and how it has been theorised;

(iv) refraining from providing a normative definition of ‘model’ and ‘modelling’ and rather attempt at encircling the current state of the art.

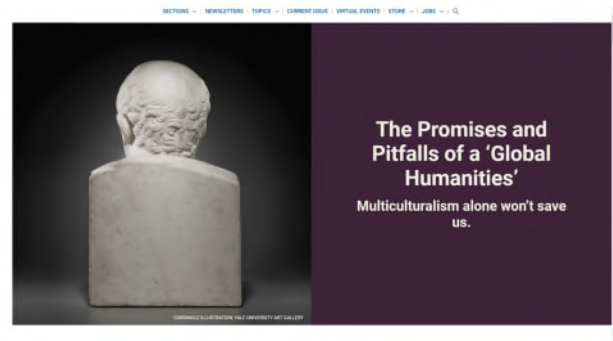
This essay concludes the series, but there is a separate postscript to come.



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Featured Images: Two Websites of the Humanities: *History of Humanities* and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*



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