

Some Thoughts on the Role of the Human(ities) in Modern Society¹⁾

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As the first word of the title indicates, what can be offered in this article are only a few thoughts and suggestions concerning the role and the importance of the human and more specifically, in the academic world, of the humanities in modern society. I do not intend to discuss historic developments or global perspectives here but will rather try to show, against certain tendencies in modern society, why the humanities are as important as ever, or perhaps even more than ever, in a world dominated by the sciences, economic needs and bureaucratic structures.

I. Why the humanities?

To many people in today's society, driven by economic and rational exigencies, this may seem a rhetorical question. There is a tendency to neglect the human - and with it the humanities - in the context of economy, science and technology as well as within administrative structures and procedures, restricting it to the realm of the private and personal. To some it may even be a realm of the irrational surviving on the fringe of a society dominated by rationalization and digitalization.

But there are many indications that such attitudes are increasingly questioned and that the need to counterbalance such tendencies is felt more and more. The following section will discuss a few examples that may serve to illustrate this.

1. Many contemporary technologies contain ethical implications that

1) This article is a revised version of a talk given at the Institute for the Study of Christianity and Culture, International Christian University, on November 20, 2007.

need to be recognized and addressed. We are all aware of the discussion about life-prolonging measures in medicine, gene-manipulated crops or the cloning of animals and possibly humans. New interdisciplinary areas in the academic world, like Science, Technology and Society, try to respond to the need to discuss these new possibilities of the human mind not only from a purely technological or economic perspective but by also including perspectives that the humanities and social sciences can provide.

2. Science and technology require more than knowledge and technical skills; they also need intuition, fantasy, and creative imagination. I remember visiting a Japanese company known for its production of sophisticated machines. The chief of the personnel division told me that they mostly take graduates from natural sciences and engineering, of course, but always also some graduates from the humanities, the reason being that the scientists and engineers, according to him, tend to be rather uninspired and lacking in new ideas, whereas graduates from the humanities often are more creative and come up with interesting new proposals.

The need for a balance between abstract technical thought on the one hand and intuition or imagination fostered in the humanities on the other is emphasized by Hideki Yukawa who was awarded the Nobel Prize in physics in 1949:

I feel very uneasy about the fact that [the] one-sided trend to abstraction lacks something which is very important to creative thinking. [...] abstraction cannot work by itself, but has to be accompanied by intuition or imagination.²⁾

3. Since the time of Sigmund Freud and C. G. Jung we know of the immense world of the unconscious, not directly accessible to the conscious human mind, which expresses itself in various forms including dreams and fantasy, fears and desires. The arts, literature, and religion testify to the enormous influence the unconscious has on the thoughts and actions of

2) Hideki Yukawa, *Creativity and Intuition; a physicist looks at East and West*, trans. by J. Bester (Tokyo - New York, Kodansha: 1973), p. 107.

human beings. It represents a vast repository of human possibilities and creative insights but may also set free destructive forces.

4. Psychological factors play a role in practically all realms of human society. Even market analysts have to recognize that economic developments and the stock market are not solely determined by economic but, often decisively, by psychological factors or what we could call the human factor. The frequent use of words like fear, panic, hope or expectation are indicative of this. Analyses disregarding psychological and other human factors and based only on objective facts and rational considerations are bound to fail in many areas. To give a small concrete example: A favourite term of those concerned with efficiency in organizational structures is 'synergetic effect.' In a session at a well-known consulting firm, the advantages of having several institutions use the same building were discussed and the term 'synergetic effect' represented a major argument in this context. To those who used it, it did not even occur that there could also be adverse effects when putting different institutions into the same building. Knowing these institutions I was even sure that frictions and tensions could not be avoided to some extent and that their possible impact on the project should, therefore, also be discussed.

5. Moreover, it cannot be denied that human culture is an important determinant in almost all areas, even those that tend to think they are independent of it. The influence of culture on mathematics may be negligible but how about, for example, economics? A number of scholars claim that the economy is quite independent of culture. In a recent book,³⁾ Thomas Feldmann discusses this as well as the opposite claim with regard to Japanese companies. His conclusion is that there actually is an influence of culture on the economy and that cultural factors have to be included to some extent when trying to explain economic phenomena.⁴⁾

6. Most people in Europe think that administrative processes or legal cases are determined by the rational application of laws and regulations and

3) Thomas Feldmann, *Kultur als Determinante der Wirtschaft? Unternehmensphilosophien in Japan* (München: IUDICIUM, 2007)

4) Op. cit., p. 90.

that, in this way, “irrational” factors are effectively excluded. A closer look, however, would reveal that, in many cases, other factors are also involved and may even be decisive. Japanese are often better aware of these factors and more willing to admit their importance whereas Europeans prefer to see legal procedures and administrative processes as being based solely on reason and logic. One of those who radically challenged this position was Kafka, as will be discussed in the last section of this article.

I found an interesting confirmation of his position in a discussion on legal procedures in Japan. A Japanese lawyer explained to us that civil law cases in Japan are a complicated process that can take long time before a final verdict is reached, and he gave detailed information on the various risks and possibilities involved. Then he was asked: “Who will win in the end?” After some reflection he answered: “The side who becomes tired loses (*Kutabireta hō ga makeru.*).” This was an astonishing answer even to my Japanese colleagues. The physical or mental (as well as the financial) condition of a party should, of course, have no influence on the final judgment. Still, I felt I could understand what the lawyer meant, and it also seemed to me that Kafka could have said the same. When I was back home, I checked Kafka’s *Trial* in my computer for the word “tired” and realized, for the first time actually, that Kafka’s protagonist, from the beginning, is convinced that his case is lost once he becomes tired. And then he becomes more and more tired and, in the end, he is executed.

I was fascinated by this discovery and could not see it as a mere coincidence. Could it not be that Japanese are more aware than most Europeans of the “irrational” factors in human society which also exist in Europe and are not seen there only because they contradict basic elements of the European tradition of autonomous reason, particularly since the enlightenment, so that an artist like Kafka is required to make people aware of them in a European cultural context?

7. Finally, let me introduce an academic program that tries to achieve a balance between the sciences and humanities in medicine. It is the “Humanities in Medicine” medical education program at Dalhousie

University in Halifax.⁵⁾ In an article entitled “Why the Medical Humanities?” Thomas John Murray responds to this question with arguments that mostly also answer our more general question “Why humanities?” and, therefore, are quoted here at some length:

In the Gilman Lecture to Johns Hopkins Medical School in November 18, 1984, Canadian novelist Robertson Davies called his talk “Can a Doctor Be a Humanist?”, but said the title should be, “Can a Doctor Possibly Be a Humanist in a Society That Increasingly Tempts Him To Be a Scientist?” He spoke of the caduceus, that symbol with the two serpents entwined on the staff, one Knowledge and one Wisdom. The legend said that the warring serpents were writhing on the ground but were pacified by Hermes who passed a staff between them. Davies said Knowledge and Wisdom aren’t necessarily opponents, but they are opposites, and they must be reconciled and made supporters of each other. For the physician, Knowledge comes from without, and from education and study, enabling him to help patients. Wisdom, on the other hand, is an introverted element of the doctor’s psyche, coming from within...

and it is what makes him look not at the disease, but at the bearer of the disease. [...] It is Wisdom that tells the physician how to make the patient a partner in his own cure. Instead of calling them Knowledge and Wisdom, let us call them Science and Humanism. [Davies, R. Can a Doctor be a Humanist. The David Coit Gillman Lecture, Johns Hopkins Medical School, November 18, 1984. (Republished in *The Merry Heart*, by Robertson Davies, 1990, 110.)]

Medical Humanities at Dalhousie

We agree with Robertson Davies and believe that there has to be a balance between the sciences and humanities in medicine.

[...]

5) I am indebted to my colleague Dr. David Rackham who made me aware of this institution and provided valuable material.

The New Paradigm - Balance

The many exciting and important advances in science, technology and therapy over the last 150 years lead to an increasing biomedical view of illness, the continual specialization of medicine and a technological approach to diagnosis and treatment. It has fostered an emphasis on knowledge and technical skills in medical students and physicians with a neglect of the traditional humane and interpersonal aspects of the practice of medicine.

This revolution in science and technology was coupled with an expectation that this direction would continue to advance the goals of medicine and medical care, but the public and repeated reports on medical education suggest the neglect of the medical humanities is causing increasing concern over the imbalance in the two integral components of medicine, humanities and bioscience, and this imbalance is being reflected in the attitudes, approaches and effectiveness of our physicians. The call to pay attention to the medical humanities in medical education is not a call to de-emphasize science - it is to achieve a balance, and it is a necessary balance in order that our science will be informed by the concepts and lessons of the humanities.⁶⁾

The balance between the sciences and humanities advocated by the "Humanities in Medicine" program at Dalhousie University is also one of the fundamental principles of liberal arts education. This is why ICU has always seen the inclusion of natural sciences as crucial for a liberal arts program, why a course like History of Science was created in the Division of Humanities, and why, under the new curriculum from April 2008, major/minor combinations between an area in the sciences and one in the humanities are particularly meaningful. A number of interdisciplinary study areas under the new curriculum also attempt to realize a balance between the sciences and humanities.

6) <http://humanities.medicine.dal.ca/why.cfm> (Jan. 6, 2008); cf. "Why the Medical Humanities?" in: *Dalhousie Medical Journal*, 26 (1) (1998), pp. 46-50.

II. What is the *proprium* of the humanities?

In the preceding section, we have discussed the need to re-emphasize the importance of the humanities in a world that tends to neglect or de-emphasize the human against economic needs and rational exigencies. But what then is the *proprium* of the humanities? Since this is also the title of the present lecture-series I will briefly discuss this question by proposing a few possible answers revolving around four key concepts. These are only suggestions, of course, which can in no way cover the topic exhaustively.

1. Tradition

The role of tradition varies considerably in the different fields of the humanities. In religion, it may be the most fundamental element, based on sources that are thousands of years old and on traditions and symbols that might go back to pre-historic times. In other fields, tradition may not be so central but it is always present as the basis and the background of new developments. It represents the collective memory of humanity through which the experiences and insights, the dreams and anguishes, the creativity and the wisdom of past ages are transmitted. Tradition, in this sense, is not simply preservation of the past but a dynamic and creative process through which past cultures are transmitted and transformed into new environments, adapting them and expressing them in the context of different times and cultures. All works of art, music, or literature are created on the background of or within a tradition. They quote this tradition, make use of traditional motives and images, or rely on symbols that are rooted in tradition.

2. Wisdom

Robertson Davies, in the text quoted above, associates science with knowledge and the humanities with wisdom. Knowledge is an essential element in the world of science but it relates only to facts and thus is limited in its grasp of reality. Wisdom, on the other hand, could be called the deepest form of understanding. In German, the English verb “to know” can

be rendered by two verbs that clearly differ in meaning, *wissen* and *kennen*. The former refers to the knowledge of facts and is also used in the German word for science, *Wissenschaft*. (The noun is used in a wider sense, though.) *Kennen* normally refers to more complex phenomena and is, for instance, always used when referring to people. It implies a wider grasp and deeper understanding of an object. To apply this to the “Humanities in Medicine” discussion above, a physician must not only know (= *wissen*) many facts about the physical and mental condition of a patient, he must also know (= *kennen*) the patient as a person to be able to successfully cure his disease. This requires deeper insight, comprehension of the whole person, and a balanced view, all important elements in what we call wisdom, and all elements that are equally important in the humanities. Wisdom is also closely related to humour, one might even call humour the highest expression of wisdom. And could this not be the reason why humour is so conspicuously lacking in bureaucracies, legal documents, or market analyses?

3. Fantasy

When discussing the *proprium* of the humanities fantasy, no doubt, is another keyword to be considered. In a wider sense, it includes two terms that are also emphasized by Hideki Yukawa. As we saw, he regards intuition and imagination as necessary, even for a natural scientist, in order to counterbalance the “one-sided trend to abstraction” that he deplores.⁷⁾ Without fantasy, dreams, and imagination there would be no creativity, no arts, music, and literature but also no airplanes and all the other conveniences of modern technology. The study of the various forms of creative expression in the humanities not only keeps alive the rich heritage of the past but also fosters new creative insights and ideas. As I will try to demonstrate in the next section, artists are often far ahead of their times with regard to the recognition of future developments and possible dangers inherent in these. One may call this the prophetic function of art that can also be found in many religious traditions. Artists often are also able,

7) Cf. the quote before footnote 2.

through their creative insight, to transcend the narrow confines of the culture and society in which they live, pointing to universal features of the human mind and human society.⁸⁾

4. Criticism

A critical mind is usually associated with rationality and the ability of critical analysis in the sciences but criticism is, of course, equally important in the humanities. In the arts, literature, philosophy, and religion, it is often much more radical than in the sciences, challenging the very foundations of long-established worldviews and ideas. It can even mean a complete reversal or destruction of traditional values and concepts. In most cases, though, the critical attitude of the artist is expressed indirectly through a wide range of artistic expressions from alienation effect and subtle irony to caricature and sarcasm. This will be illustrated in the following section by a few examples from art and literature.

III. Some examples from art and literature

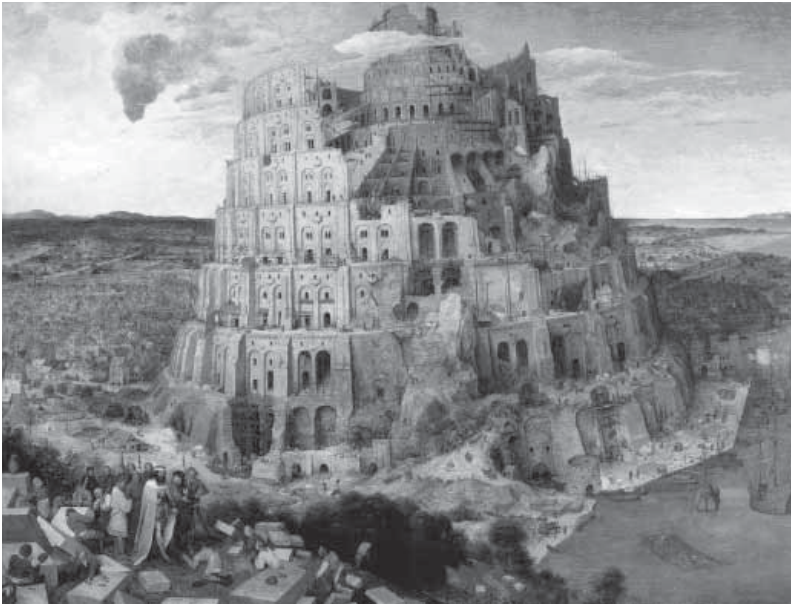
In this section I will try to illustrate some of the features of the humanities emphasized above through the discussion of a few concrete examples taken from the Renaissance artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525?1569) and from one of the most representative modern writers, Franz Kafka (1883-1924).

1. *The Tower of Babel* (Pieter Bruegel the Elder, 1563)

The story of the building of the Tower of Babel represents one of the oldest literary motives that we know. It was included in the *Book of Genesis* and has since then inspired many artists and writers. Best known among the paintings of the Tower of Babel is the one by Pieter Bruegel the Elder that is now in Vienna. It was a popular motive in Bruegel's time. He himself painted at least one more picture with the same subject, the "little" Tower of Babel (c. 1563), now in Rotterdam. But the latter as well as the Towers of

8) Cf. I.6 above.

Babel by his contemporaries⁹⁾ differ from the one discussed here in a number of ways. They show the tower as a solid, well designed and impressive construction, except for the top which remains unfinished. The transport of material to the top of the construction by a broad road circling the tower is well organized. On the “little” Tower we also notice numerous cranes symmetrically placed around the tower on each storey. The Vienna version shown here gives a considerably different impression.



The Tower of Babel, 1563 (Wien)

It is not an audacious, well designed construction that rises impressively into the clouds. Only the left side and the unfinished part at the top give an indication of this. But, at the top, one has the impression that work has stopped because the construction became too complicated and, on the left, even the foundation is either unfinished, which would be strange, or has

9) Particularly those by Hendrick van Cleve (c. 1525 - 89) and Lucas van Valckenborch (c. 1535 - 97)

already partly collapsed. Moreover, the whole building leans over to the left and seems to be held only by huge rocks that protrude at two places. The tower thus is not an independent, free construction but seems to be built on and around these rocks that almost reach the top. The rocks create a chaotic situation at the front part where nature and human technology are strangely mixed. There protruding parts are still not removed and block the road circling the tower. A few scattered cranes seem hardly sufficient to move up the mass of material needed at the top. King Nimrod and the workers in the front of the picture appear almost unrelated to the tower in the background.

As a whole, the tower looks more like a huge half-dilapidated old building than a construction site. People seem to have arranged themselves within this situation and, all around the building, have built not just workers' huts but solid houses. One has to look at the picture in its original size to discover the many almost idyllic scenes that show how the small world of human life gradually reconquers the unfinished gigantic construction of the tower. The access road to the tower is usually painted as a broad ramp with heavy traffic but Bruegel paints it as a small road over a narrow bridge and with houses squeezed in on both sides, an almost romantic scene that one would rather imagine along a lonely country road.

Much more could be said about Bruegel's painting. Every time one looks at it one discovers new and fascinating details. The artist shows the complexity of human life and many of its diverse aspects. The traditional motive of man's hubris and the limits set by God is reinterpreted in the context of his time. The fascinating possibilities of science and technology are indicated but also their limitations and dangers. There is the rigid despotism of the king who uses these possibilities for his own purposes without concern, it seems, for the needs of the people.¹⁰⁾ There are the forces of nature that can be used but not completely controlled and subdued. Even the human nostalgic longing for a return to a more natural life in the country is indicated, a tendency that became much stronger later in European history but has predecessors in Chinese Taoism or the bucolics of late antiquity.

10) It is generally assumed that this is also directed against Spanish rule over the Netherlands at that time.

Moreover, the gigantic construction of the tower is contrasted with the small world of normal people with their needs and aspirations. The complex relations between these and other elements are shown and make the viewer aware of the deeper dimensions of human life. They point to basic problems some of which are as relevant today as they were in the 16th century.

2. *The Fall of Icarus* (Pieter Bruegel the Elder, c. 1554-55)



Landscape with the Fall of Icarus, c. 1554-55

This picture challenges even more the optimism caused by human inventions and discoveries. The former are referred to by the theme of this painting, the latter by the ships sailing out into the world. Ironically, the three persons in the picture are not at all interested in the first flight by human beings nor in its dramatic ending. The viewer, too, will need some time to find the helplessly struggling legs of Icarus sinking into the sea in front of the largest ship. The flight is not shown at all, only the fatal end of it in a corner of the picture. The three persons in the picture also appear in Ovid's account of the story (*Metamorphoses* VIII, 183-235) but whereas Ovid

has them believe that Daedalus and Icarus flying in the sky must be gods, Bruegel's fisherman does not even notice Icarus' fall just in front of him, the shepherd turns his back to the scene looking up to the sky where his Christian God resides, and the farmer in the foreground is only occupied with carefully drawing his furrows. He dominates the picture, creating a contrast between his small and peaceful world and the world of seas, harbours, and faraway lands that extends in the background.

3. *The Burrow* (Franz Kafka, 1923)

Kafka even more radically challenges some of the basic assumptions and beliefs of modern thought. A few examples must suffice here. In *The Burrow*,¹¹⁾ Kafka demonstrates the impossibility of gaining certainty through rational reflection and logical conclusions. The protagonist, an animal living mostly underground, has built an extensive system of tunnels and hiding-places where he hopes to be safe. Priding himself on his sharp mind¹²⁾ he has very carefully calculated all possible risks and dangers and constructed his home or castle, as he calls it, accordingly. Being extremely concerned about his safety he constantly reflects on possible dangers and their countermeasures but can never come to a conclusion. Completely filling up the entrance hole, for instance, would make it impossible to discover his place but then he could no longer escape quickly if an enemy should attack him underground. In spite of all his rational reflections, he firmly holds to the irrational belief told in old legends that there are mysterious and extremely dangerous creatures living in the inner earth.¹³⁾ Or he stores his food all in one place but then it occurs to him that if he was attacked there and could not defend it, he would have nothing left. He then hastily distributes it to different places only to realize that, in this way, the danger of discovery would increase and the possibility of protecting the food decrease. So he moves it back to the central place. These and similar reflections continue endlessly and only for

11) Franz Kafka, *Nachgelassene Schriften und Fragmente*, ed. by Malcolm Pasley (Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 1992), vol. II, pp. 576-632.

12) Op. cit., p. 577.

13) Op. cit., p. 578.

short periods, when he forgets his safety concerns, can he feel comfortable and proud of the home he has created for himself.

4. *The Trial* (Franz Kafka, 1914/15)

Kafka's works are often seen as describing a world that is absurd, grotesquely distorted, and nightmarish - in one word "Kafkaesque" - compared to reality as most people see it. A careful analysis of Kafka's texts, however, reveals that his world is often much closer to reality than the common view of reality because the latter tends to be transformed by culturally determined biases and traditional world views. An example of this, in *The Trial*, was already discussed above.¹⁴⁾

One of the assumptions that are challenged in *The Trial* is explicitly mentioned by the protagonist himself:

K. was living in a country under the rule of law, after all, everywhere was at peace, all laws were upheld, who was it who dared accost him in his own home?¹⁵⁾

Throughout the story, the protagonist has to realize more and more that there are other, non-rational forces at work in society, even in the law courts or the administration, and that these decisively influence the course of events. The lawyer whom he consults describes the law court not as a rationally organized structure that follows strictly defined rules and laws but as almost a kind of huge monster, a living "enormous organism" which reacts like human beings and may even become malevolent if irritated by an individual.

Never attract attention to yourself! Stay calm, however much it goes against your character! Try to gain some insight into the size of the court organism and how, to some extent, it remains in a state of

14) See I.6.

15) Franz Kafka, *Der Proceß* (Frankfurt/M: Fischer), p. 13. All translations by David Wyllie, *The Project Gutenberg EText-No.7849*, Release Date 2005-04-01 ("under the rule of law" = my translation).

suspension, and that even if you alter something in one place you'll draw the ground out from under your feet and might fall, whereas if an enormous organism like the court is disrupted in any one place it finds it easy to provide a substitute for itself somewhere else. Everything is connected with everything else and will continue without any change or else, which is quite probable, even more closed, more attentive, more strict, more malevolent.¹⁶⁾

What shocks K. most is a discovery that he makes in the bank where he works, the only place where had he felt safe until then.¹⁷⁾ In the corridor which he passes through every day, he hears strange noises behind a door and when he opens it he witnesses the brutal whipping of two persons. He tries to stop it by bribing the whip-man but when he hears other people approach he is afraid of being found in an embarrassing situation, and so he leaves the two victims to their cruel destiny, and even manages to divert the attention of the other people. For Kafka's contemporaries it may have been difficult to imagine that such things could happen in reality, but twenty years later they did happen under the Nazis, who had secret torture chambers even in normal houses.

Often it is Kafka's extreme sensibility to the subtleties of language that makes him aware of relations and phenomena which otherwise remain unnoticed. Even a single expression may reveal a truth that might be essential for the understanding of human society and human relations. With an example that illustrates this I will conclude the present article.

5. *Before the Law* (Franz Kafka, 1914)

Before the law there is a doorkeeper. A man from the countryside comes up to the door and asks for entry. But the doorkeeper says he can't let him in to the law right now.¹⁸⁾

16) Op. cit., p. 160.

17) Op. cit., pp. 108-117.

18) Op. cit., p. 292.

This is the beginning of one of Kafka's best known texts. It was originally written as part of *The Trial* but then published separately, while the novel remained unfinished and was published only posthumously. The story has a title which Kafka added by using the first words of the text. As a title, these three words now take on a new meaning and have to be given special consideration.¹⁹⁾ In the original context, the attention of the reader is immediately drawn to the doorkeeper who stands before the law, the man from the country who wants to enter it, and to how the relationship between the two develops.

However, the title Kafka has added indicates now that it is not the relation between these two but the situation of being "before the law" that is central to the story. There is actually only one phrase in which this expression is normally used in German, namely the sentence: "Before the law all are equal." Kafka must have had this sentence in mind when he used the expression "before the law." Given the fact that he often understands words very literally, almost physically, he must have been aware of the fact that, in sharp contrast to the statement that all are equal, the phrase "before the law" implies the image of a hierarchical structure as in a feudal society where people stand before the throne of a king or before the judge sitting above them in the court.²⁰⁾ Thus, the title indicates that the real problem is not whether the doorkeeper or the man is deluded (as the priest in the novel argues) or what the man could have done to be able to enter the law. The problem, rather, is that both accept that they are standing before the law when they should be within it and protected by it, if the law were based on equality and justice.

19) Cf. my "Kafka's The Bridge," in: *Humanities* 33 (2002), pp. 78f.

20) The ODE defines this meaning of "before" as: "in front of and required to answer to (a court of law, tribunal, or other authority)"

Zusammenfassung

Einige Überlegungen zur Rolle des *Humanum*/der *Humanities* in der heutigen Gesellschaft

In einer von den Naturwissenschaften, wirtschaftlichen Zwängen und bürokratischen Strukturen bestimmten Gesellschaft scheinen das *Humanum* und damit auch die Kultur- und Geisteswissenschaften in den Hintergrund zu treten. Es gibt aber auch Gegenstimmen, die gerade in dieser Situation die Wichtigkeit der letzteren betonen. Die ethischen Implikationen moderner Technologien, die Notwendigkeit von Phantasie und Intuition auch in den Naturwissenschaften, der Einfluß des Unbewußten und vieler nicht-rationaler Faktoren, der Einfluß psychologischer Faktoren in allen Lebensbereichen, der Einfluß kultureller Faktoren etwa auch in der Wirtschaft oder zum Beispiel das "Humanities in Medicine" Programm der Dalhousie Universität in Halifax können hier als Gegenargumente angeführt werden.

Das *Proprium der Humanities* kann man vielleicht mit den folgenden Begriffen umschreiben: Tradition, Weisheit, Phantasie und kritische Distanz.

Einige Beispiele aus der Kunstgeschichte (Pieter Bruegel d. Ä.) und Literatur (Franz Kafka) sollen das Gesagte illustrieren. Bruegels „großer“ *Turmbau zu Babel* zeigt, am Beginn der Neuzeit, nicht nur die faszinierenden Möglichkeiten von Wissenschaft und Technik, sondern auch deren Grenzen und Gefahren, indem er sie in das komplexe Beziehungsgeflecht von Natur und Technik, menschlichem Machtstreben und den Bedürfnissen und Wünschen des Alltags stellt. In seiner *Landschaft mit Sturz des Ikarus* wird die friedliche Welt des Landlebens noch stärker in den Vordergrund gerückt.

In Kafkas *Bau* wird die Unmöglichkeit und geradezu Irrationalität des Versuchs demonstriert, durch rationale Überlegungen und entsprechende Maßnahmen absolute Sicherheit zu gewinnen. Auch der Protagonist im *Proceß* glaubt, in einer rational überschaubaren, gesicherten Welt zu leben, muß dann aber seine Abhängigkeit von einem unüberschaubaren, nicht rational reagierenden ungeheuren Organismus erkennen, der selbst in seine

unmittelbare Umwelt einbricht. Geradezu prophetisch macht Kafka hier auch Dinge sichtbar, die kurz darauf unter den Nazis Wirklichkeit wurden. Selbst in einzelnen Wörtern, wie in dem Ausdruck „vor dem Gesetz“, der den Titel eines der bekanntesten Kafka-Texte bildet, erkennt er grundlegende Machtstrukturen, die oft unbewußt unser Verhalten determinieren. In diesem Fall ist es die in dem Ausdruck implizierte feudalistische Struktur, die den demokratischen Gedanken des „Vor dem Gesetz sind alle gleich“ unterläuft.