

FORUM: THE INHUMANITIES

A Brief History of the Inhumanities

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a brief history of the inhumanities in both the East and the West. The term *inhumanities* gestures in two directions. *Inhumanities* refers first to humanistic texts and thinkers who provide “logical justifications” for dehumanizing human beings. The term also considers the logical justifications such texts and thinkers provide for disqualifying certain humans—for the purpose of this essay, slaves—from access to humanistic study. The article supposes that this history of the inhumanities is the long-standing first crisis in the humanities. With this in mind, it considers the reverberations of the history of the inhumanities in our current crisis in the humanities, and it concludes with a call to rethink the humanities in this contemporary moment of crisis.

*This is an idea with a powerful hold on the liberal mind—that great literature and art inoculate against illiberalism, that high culture properly interpreted offers a natural rebuke to all that is cruel [and] hierarchical. . . . And meanwhile the whole deep human past is still there.*¹

In the fourth Republican presidential debate of 2015, Marco Rubio, the junior United States Senator from the state of Florida, could not fathom the value of the humanities. Why shouldn't, Senator Rubio proposed, higher education simply respond to some imagined need for “more welders and less philosophers?”² Not *fewer* philosophers, but *less*. But maybe Rubio's formulation is more than a Freudian slip of the tongue. Perhaps Senator Rubio wants us to be less philosophical, as in a lessening of

1. Ross Douthat, “White Pride and Prejudice,” *New York Times*, March 22, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/22/opinion/jane-austen-and-white-pride-and-prejudice.html>.

2. Michael Stratford, “In GOP Debate, Rubio Again Criticizes Philosophy,” *Inside Higher Ed*, November 11, 2015, <https://www.insidehighered.com/quicktakes/2015/11/11/gop-debate-rubio-again-criticizes-philosophy>.

some unquantifiable way of human thinking. And maybe this lessening is already on full display in the articulation of the good senator himself—his inability to fathom the value of the humanities might speak to the dampening of imaginative capacity concomitant to any turn away from the humanities. Or maybe the senator is suggesting that the humanities have value only for certain people, like the senator himself, and that the value of the humanities dissipates when it falls into the wrong hands or, rather, minds.

But it just may be that this entire line of questioning obfuscates the true legerdemain of the senator's logic: his assumption that it is unnecessary, or perhaps impossible, for a person to be both a philosopher and a welder. Senator Rubio is not alone in this assumption. When asked, "shall we teach them trades, or train them in liberal arts," W. E. B. Du Bois proposed that we "teach the workers to work and the thinkers to think; make carpenters of carpenters and philosophers of philosophers."³ But I can recall extemporaneously a couple carpenter-philosophers who rebuilt our visions of the world.⁴ And this is ultimately the destination to which any advocacy for the humanities should aspire: the welder-carpenter-philosopher. We should argue that all kinds of existences have a need for the epistemological vantage points offered by the humanities. Our advocacy should follow Paul Ricoeur, who defines humans as "that being which exists in the mode of understanding being. Understanding is thus no longer a mode of knowledge but a mode of being, the mode of that being [read: humans] which exists through understanding."⁵

If this—the plumber-poet-philosopher-human—is the desired destination, then the history of the humanities is an invaluable guide. Insofar as a history of the humanities is a kind of scholarly testament to the knowledge-building and problem-solving capacities of the humanities throughout human history, the field does indeed have the potential to "help save the humanities" from the misguided senatorial salvo noted above.⁶ The history of the humanities is a long-awaited, long-overdue reminder of the enduring necessity of the humanities for all humans. The field is a space where "we could study the history of the humanities for its own value while at the same time acknowledging the fundamental questions raised and problems solved by humanists in the past and present."⁷

But, when it comes to the salvation promised by the history of the humanities, preaching to the choir runs the risk of missing the devil in the details. In order for the history of the humanities to assist in the restoration of public recognition of the

3. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover, 1994), 54.

4. Namely, Jesus and Mozi.

5. Paul Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 7.

6. Rens Bod, "How a New Field Could Help Save the Humanities," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 19, 2017, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/How-a-New-Field-Could-Help/239209>.

7. Ibid.

value of the humanities, it should do two things. First, it should respond to the adversaries of the humanities on their terms. Second, it should acknowledge not just the problems solved by humanists but the problems created by humanists (more on this momentarily). The history of the humanities runs the risk of ripping thinkers such as Rubio and Du Bois from a philosophical field adjacent to the one from which their salvos originated. Whereas the history of the humanities advances a primarily epistemological proposition for the humanities, its opponents advance a counterproposition that is primarily existential. That is to say, the history of the humanities is interested primarily in a chronicling and analysis of a particular mode of knowledge production, a way of knowing the world. The *History of Humanities* journal, for example, is “meant to stand for the fact that scholarly practices of a type today labeled ‘humanities’ have been an essential part of the process of knowledge making.”⁸ Contemporary arguments against the value of the humanities, however, are not epistemological, but existential. These arguments suggest that a particular kind of being—the poor, the outcaste, women, those with low scores on standardized tests when taken at age eighteen, and so on and so on—have no need for the humanities. Rubio and (more so) Du Bois know the value of humanistic thinking. Du Bois’s and (more so) Rubio’s qualm is with the practicality of making it a public(ally funded) good accessible to anyone in the agora.

This schism between the epistemological and the existential is not new. It too has a history. Derrida once referred to this split as “the first question of philosophy.”⁹ Here is the question: is being and love about the *who*—some irreducible singularity deserving of being and love (and humanistic education) simply because she exists, or a *what*—something that can be known to us and judged worthy of being and love by virtue of this knowledge? If to be and love humanity is to side with the *who*, the side of this schism that harbors the *what* is inhumanity. There is a history of the inhumanities, a long history of epistemologically informed arguments against the existential humanities.

By the “inhumanities,” I am not thinking of David Dennis’s recent articulation of this term. For Dennis, the onus falls on the hermeneutic. Dennis suggests that the infallible humanities are stalked by the insidious inhumanities. From here, the humanities are transformed into the inhumanities by way of some interpretative malfeasance that is “not necessarily . . . a direct result of creators’ intentions, but often . . . manifested in the responses of audiences.”¹⁰ The order of operations between the humanities and the in-

8. Rens Bod, Julia Kursell, Jaap Maat, and Thijs Weststeijn, “A New Field: *History of Humanities*,” *History of Humanities* 1, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 1.

9. *Derrida*, directed by Kirby Dick and Amy Kofman (New York: Zeitgeist Films, 2002), DVD.

10. David Dennis, *Inhumanities: Nazi Interpretations of Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.

humanities I propose here is less romantic, and it goes back to Derrida's first question of philosophy. The inhumanities are not something that happens hermeneutically to the humanities after the fact but simply what becomes of the humanities when they pocket postulations of difference in the existential values of human beings. If this is indeed the difference between the two fields of inquiry, it can be argued that we have yet to produce the humanities and their history at all—all we have are histories of the inhumanities by another name.

Addressing the inhumanities requires a response to what Giorgio Agamben once called the fracture “that lies at the foundation of Western politics.”¹¹ That is to say, the goal of a critique of the inhumanities would be a fundamental rethinking of the relationship between the human, humanity, the humanities, and human history. “I think therefore I am” is a beautiful solution to a thought experiment, but it is a slippery stepping stone on the way to a de-ontological humanities (read: a plumber-philosopher humanities, the humanities as the obligation of all human beings). It is slippery insofar as it runs the risk of predicating human being on thinking. Addressing Agamben's fracture—a historical stress fracture, compounded by centuries of rearticulation, and one that runs deep into the bones of intellectual history—requires a reversal of Descartes: I am therefore I think.

The “inhumanities” as proposed here might strike the skeptic as too dependent upon wordplay. “Sure,” the justified skeptic might retort, “you have your ‘inhumanities’ today, but only because of a bit of historical linguistic happenstance bleeding from the fields of Hastings in 1066. What's next—the *ungeisteswissenschaften*?” Such a skeptic would indeed be correct in positing that the term *inhumanities*—as is the French *humanités/inhumanités* or the Spanish *humanidades/inhumanidades*—is dependent upon its inheritance from the Latin *humanitas* and its negation, *inhumanitas*. The same would be true of neologisms such as the Chinese *feirenwen* and the Japanese *hininbun*, both of which are themselves rooted in the negation of neologisms *renwen* and *jinbun*, nineteenth-century East Asian translations of “humanities.”

But these terms and their negation, it seems to me, are simply making visible a principle that runs deeper than linguistic difference. The study of *humanitas* or *ren* or *geist* or what have you calls for a limit, a differentiation between the *geist* and the *poltergeist*, a segregation of that which falls within the realm of humanistic studies and that which falls without. Although there is no *ungeisteswissenschaften*, there is nevertheless Hegel's inhumanistic claim that “in defining the African spirit, we must entirely discard the category of universality—*i.e.* although the child or the Negro has ideas, he still does not

11. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 11.

have *the idea*.¹² When the line demarcating the difference between *humanitas* and *inhumanitas* is drawn on the human body, the haunting spirit of the inhumanities is present whether the lexical embodiment is there or not. To adapt Rens Bod's articulation, the need to define the limits of the humanities seems to be a "thread in the history of the humanities" that "can be found in all disciplines, periods, and regions."¹³

The work of delegitimizing humanity and legitimizing inhumanity has, historically speaking, often been dependent on a denial of humanistic thought for certain kinds of people—for what need does the inhuman have for the humanities? For the purposes of this history of the inhumanities, the slave or, in the case of Japan, the *hinin*—literally, the "in-human"—will serve as a proxy for the subject of the inhumanities. As Hannah Arendt suggests, the logical and ethical dilemma of the ancient Athenian slave as a talking commodity was one that had to be quite literally conquered in order for the liberal arts to be born. The relationship between the *instrumentum vocalis* and the pursuit of *artes liberales* was one of dependency and necessity. "To labor," Arendt writes in *The Human Condition*, "meant to be enslaved by necessity, and this enslavement was inherent in the conditions of human life. Because men were dominated by the necessities of life, they could win their freedom only through the domination of those whom they subjected to necessity by force."¹⁴ "It was precisely on these grounds that the institution of slavery was defended and justified."¹⁵

It is right next to these grounds that the inhumanities are defended and justified. Orlando Patterson, following Henri Wallon, notes that the ancient Greeks saw the slave as "an animated instrument," a living thing with human-like movement but "without its own reason, an existence entirely absorbed in another."¹⁶ This conceptualization of the slave posits a causal link between a lack of reason (for our purposes, disqualification from humanistic study, or the inhumanities) and a missing *raison d'être* (disqualification from humanity, or inhumanity as such). I do not think therefore I am not. The dilemma of the talking commodity—an invaluable good (economic, not ethical) required for the free to pursue the paths of human existence—is solved with a ventriloquistic master-slave dialectic, in which the master speaks and reasons for the slave.

12. As cited in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1976), 183.

13. Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

14. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 83–84.

15. *Ibid.*, 83.

16. As cited in Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 4.

Rens Bod opens a new way of seeing the humanities with his central insight: “there is . . . a centuries-old humanistic tradition that seeks principles and patterns while at the same time giving us an understanding of what makes us human.”¹⁷ So too does even the briefest of histories of the inhumanities elucidate a set of principles, patterns, and metapatterns while at the same time providing a perverse justification of what makes one inhuman. By “principles,” I mean simply to note the global and diachronic continuities of learned dehumanization. The aim of this forum is to excavate some of the principles and patterns of the inhumanities, particularly those established by the humanities and humanists, with an eye turned ultimately toward how these patterns inform our current crises in the humanities. That is to say, I am interested in a historical exploration of the principles and patterns by which humanists have provided arguments to underpin the twin claims of justified dehumanization and the superfluity of the humanities for the slave, or, in the Japanese case, the inhuman. My premise is that the processes of dehumanization are irrevocably intertwined with the processes of delegitimizing the humanities. And, if humanists themselves have a history of devaluing the humanities and humans, we should not be surprised when others catch on.

Given the limited space and expertise I have here, this excavation cannot help but be anecdotal and brief. But I hope that I can establish two things over the course of this essay: the resonances of the inhumanities across epochs and national traditions, and a forum in the broadest sense of the term.

This essay provides a brief history of how humanists have thought about what is arguably the most vital figure of their studies: human beings. I trace this history of the inhumanities—however briefly and anecdotally—in both the East and the West. In the West, I trace from Aristotle to Nietzsche. In the East, I trace from Confucius to the restoration of Meiji Japan. In taking this East-West approach and tracing the travel of inhumanistic thought across time and space, I am borrowing from the techniques of the history of the humanities in order to suggest that a history of the humanities, in and of itself, is not enough to save the humanities. This is because a history of the humanities is also always a history of the inhumanities.

These days, neo-Nazis come with advanced degrees in the humanities, just as they did in days past. From the very onset of the humanities, one inhumanistic metapattern at work is *the ever-present possibility of cannibalizing humanistic discoveries for inhumanistic pursuits*.¹⁸ This metapattern gestures toward the crux of my argument: that a history of the humanities-style focus on the epistemological importance of the humanities is not enough to disabuse the most ardent advocates of the inhuman-

17. Bod, *A New History*, 10.

18. Following the precedent set by Bod, I italicize patterns and principles for emphasis.

ities. For these advocates, even if persuaded of the epistemological importance of the humanities, can use the very epistemological techniques of a true humanities to argue for the inhumanities.

History of Humanities is a venue that “welcomes arguments” both “in favor of (or, obviously, against) the value of the humanities.”¹⁹ This forum is a tentative acceptance of that parenthetical invitation to argue against the humanities. It is only by first comprehending the existential argument against the humanities that we can find ways to persuasively articulate the value of their contemporary and ongoing existence—the topic with which I conclude this essay.

THE DAWN OF THE INHUMANITIES

The dawn of the humanities is also the birth of the inhumanities. One remnant of this double birth remains in our word for teacher: pedagogue. This is derived from the Greek *paidagogos*, which derives in turn from *paid* (child) and *agogos* (leader). This *paidagogos* was “a household slave of low standing . . . who was the attendant of a school-aged child.”²⁰ Although the pedagogic slave facilitated the education of his affluent charge, the education of the slave himself was not of central importance. It was only occasionally and by happenstance that pedagogues gained a bit of an education for themselves as they accompanied their charges to lectures.²¹ I can think of no better metaphor for the dissociative relationship between the humanities and the inhumanities than the etymology of pedagogy, with the wealthy child on the inside of the schoolhouse, the poor servant on the outside, and the word *pedagogue* dictating the border between the two.

It was Aristotle (384–322 BCE) who put the slave in her pedagogical place. Mavis Campbell argues that Aristotle is second only to the Bible in his importance for philosophers and educators seeking a logical justification for slavery.²² “The Directors of Education,” Aristotle writes in his *Politics*, “should have an eye to the . . . bringing up [of the youth,] and in particular should take care that they are left as little as possible with

19. Bod et al., “A New Field,” 6.

20. Manfred Landfester, ed., *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 2006–11), 344. Free people too were hired to serve as child leaders. My thanks to Emily Jusino for bringing representations of pedagogues in classical primary sources to my attention.

21. See Norman Young, “Paidagogos: The Social Setting of a Pauline Metaphor,” *Novum Testamentum* 29, fasc. 2 (April 1987): 150–76. There was an Athenian practice of appointing slaves who knew their letters to the position of *paidagogos*. This had the added benefit of making a “walking tutor” accompany the child.

22. Mavis Campbell, “Aristotle and Black Slavery: A Study in Race Prejudice,” *Race: A Journal of Race and Group Relations* 15 (1974): 283–98.

slaves.”²³ Aristotle’s segregation of the student and the slave is for pedagogical purposes. “There can be no doubt that children should be taught those useful things which are really necessary, but not all useful things; for occupations are divided into liberal and illiberal; and to young children should be imparted only such kinds of knowledge as will be useful to them.”²⁴ By “liberal” teaching here, Aristotle means the kind of education required for full, free citizenship. The “illiberal arts,” to the contrary, “include cookery and similar menial arts.”²⁵ There is, Aristotle contends, “a science for the master and a science for the slave.”²⁶ The slave has no need for philosophy, a science for the masters. The illiberal arts, however, are the natural province of the slave. “For he who can be, and therefore is, another’s, and he who participates in reason enough to apprehend, but not to have [reason], is a slave by nature.”²⁷

Although Aristotle ends up with natural slavery, his *Politics* begins as a search for the best kind of political community for those who are able to achieve the good life. The qualification here is of paramount importance, because, as Aristotle continues, “a state exists for the sake of a good life, and not for the sake of life only: if life only were the object, slaves and brute animals might form a state, but they cannot, for they have no share in happiness or in a life based on choice.”²⁸ Realizing the Aristotelian good life requires education and philosophical self-reflection and, more importantly, the leisure and latitude for such education. The question becomes, then, how are we to differentiate those who qualify for the good life from those who must attend to the basic needs of life? Even Aristotle wonders if “there is any one thus intended by nature to be a slave, and for whom such a condition is expedient and right, or rather is not all slavery a violation of nature?”²⁹

Aristotle answers this wonder with analogic: just as the human intellect is the proper master of the body, which sustains the intellect, a body of intellectuals should be the master of the slaves, who will provide sustenance for the intellectuals. “*From the hour of their birth*”—this is Aristotle’s conclusion, but the emphasis is mine—“some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.”³⁰ It is also in this hour that the division of labor between the liberal and the illiberal arts is born, “hence those who are in a po-

23. Aristotle, *The Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 183.

24. *Ibid.*, 186.

25. *Ibid.*, 9.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*, 7. For an exegesis of Aristotle’s logic here, see Marguerite Deslauriers, “Political Rule over Women in *Politics I*,” in *Aristotle’s Politics: A Critical Guide*, ed. Thornton Lockwood and Thanassis Samaras (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 46–63.

28. Aristotle, *Politics*, 63.

29. *Ibid.*, 6.

30. *Ibid.*

sition which places them above toil have stewards who attend to their households while they occupy themselves with philosophy or with politics.”³¹ This argument might be called the Aristotelean foundation of the inhumanities in Western thought: that the free should receive a liberal education and the slave should make do with the illiberal arts.

There is nothing particularly anti-Aristotelian in Aristotle’s argument here. Aristotle simply takes several of the logical maneuvers that make him a pillar of any history of the humanities—critical observation, analogical thinking, deductive reasoning, and so on—and makes them do hard labor. For example, Aristotle puts “the eyewitness account principle” to work; life in ancient Athens would have inevitably bombarded Aristotle with images of slavery.³² He also believes that his “own way of life is the best.”³³ Aristotle deems the good life of Athens as better than the lives of foreign barbarians, because it is almost, Aristotle notes, “as if . . . the barbarian and the slave were by nature one.”³⁴ Moreover, in employing these principles and patterns, Aristotle establishes a few inhumanistic principles (the principle of a natural basis for rulership and the oppression of the unreasonable by the reasonable) and metapatterns (the ever-present possibility of cannibalizing humanistic discoveries for inhumanistic pursuits) of his own.

There is, of course, no Aristotle, and thus no Aristotelean foundation for the inhumanities, in China. If anything, classical Chinese thought presents a more egalitarian view of education, be it of slaves or otherwise, than Aristotle’s. And yet, even with its classical Chinese roots, the history of Japanese education gives birth to an iteration of the inhumanities with a great deal of affinity to its Aristotelian counterpart. How did, then, Japan devolve from Chinese-style “humanities”³⁵ to the inhumanities?

In comparison to Athens, early China comes a bit closer to the humanities in the fullest sense of the term by virtue of its interest in cultivating *ren* (humanity) in all its citizens regardless of their class. In the Confucian tradition, *ren* is the kind of moral connection necessary and possible only when two (or more) humans come together—the Chinese character for *ren*, 仁, combines “two” and “human.” From the moment we are born, humans are, quite literally, connected to another human being. For Confucius (551–479 BCE), the proper cultivation and ritualized expression of this human connection, *ren*, is what makes us human.

The entire social life of a human being might be consider as a series of semirituals: the ritual of greeting a spouse in the morning, the ritual of selecting and putting on

31. *Ibid.*, 9.

32. Bod, *A New History*, 22.

33. *Ibid.*, 23.

34. Aristotle, *Politics*, 2.

35. Following Bod’s insight, I work here under the assumption that there are moments when anachronism can be intellectually productive. Perhaps the same can be said of inexact comparatism.

the proper attire for work, the ritual of greeting coworkers and superiors, and so on. Confucius's moral innovation is a radical redefinition of ritual. Rather than reflecting the sacred order, social ritual itself becomes a kind of sacred order. By redefining ritual to encompass, in the words of David Hinton, "all the caring acts by which we fulfill our responsibilities to others in the community," Confucius creates an irrevocable bond between *li* (ritual propriety) and *ren* (humanity).³⁶ Translated as "benevolence," "goodness," "love," "humaneness," "humanity," "human-heartedness," "compassion," and "sympathy," *ren* serves as a multifaceted linchpin of Confucian thought. Or, according to the *Analects*, "The Master said: . . . those who love Humanity know of nothing more essential. And those who despise Inhumanity act with such Humanity that Inhumanity never touches them."³⁷

Whereas Aristotle is a bit ambiguous on the relationship between education and morality ("for men are by no means agreed about . . . whether education is more concerned with intellectual or with moral excellence"),³⁸ Confucius is decidedly unambiguous. In Confucian thought, the objective of study of the "six arts"—ritual propriety, music, archery, horseback riding, literature and calligraphy, and mathematics—was to achieve moral excellence, to become a better human being by cultivating the "goodness" or "humanity" of *ren*. In this sense, Confucian education is moral education; the aim of the "Confucian humanities" is humanization. Moreover, the teaching and cultivation of *ren* was not—in theory—restricted to a particular class. Think here, for example, of the passage in the *Analects* where it is reported that "The Master said: 'I never refuse to teach anyone, not even those so lowly they come offering nothing but a few strips of dried meat.'³⁹ Confucius's acceptance of strips of dried meat from lowly students speaks to an openness to teaching students (read: cultivating *ren*, and thereby social harmony, benevolence, and humanity) from any social stratum. This keeps with the teaching of the *Great Learning*, one of the four canonical books of Confucian thought, which argues that self-cultivation is of paramount importance for the king, the common people, and everyone in between. The egalitarian ideal of the transformative power of education as a force that transcended social strata would apply, in theory, to the slave as well. Michael Nylan notes, for example, a second-century CE anecdote on slaves appealing to the benevolence of an angry slave owner by citing the *Book of Songs*, which

36. David Hinton, *The Four Chinese Classics: Tao Te Ching, Chuang Tzu, Analects, Mencius* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2013), 224.

37. Hinton, *Four Chinese Classics*, 253.

38. Aristotle, *Politics*, 185.

39. Hinton, *Four Chinese Classics*, 272.

was supposedly compiled by Confucius, as a gauge of the ubiquity of an educational culture of cultivating *ren* across social strata.⁴⁰

It is not my intention to romanticize the egalitarian underpinnings of Confucian education. In the *Discourses on Salt and Iron*, which record a debate between legalists and Confucians on government policy held at the imperial court in 81 BCE, for example, the Confucians argued that criminals, and, by proxy, slaves, were “inhuman” (*feiren*) because they were socially dead persons with no officially recognized familial relationships.⁴¹ For the purposes of the argument I want to make here (namely, that a review of the Japanese history of the humanities suggests a drift from its roots in the egalitarian Confucian ideal of the humanities toward the inhumanities), I simply want to establish the existence of an egalitarian ideal. The question becomes, then, how and why does classical Japanese educational philosophy stray from the egalitarian, Confucian ideal?

One key phenomenon here is the *ritsuryō-sei*, a system of criminal and state administration laws imported from China to Japan beginning in the mid-sixth century CE. The Japanese *ritsuryō* system, which was highly informed by the Legalist and Confucianist administrative practices of the Tang dynasty, served as the architectural backbone for Japan’s creation of a rational, centralized, bureaucratic government rooted in the principle of universal imperial rule.

The Japanese adoption of Tang administration codes came with a key adaptation: a tension between the Confucian ideal of universal education and the Japanese precedent of aristocratic nepotism. The *ritsuryō* code of 718, known as the Yōrō code, is a case in point. This code codified Japanese educational policy by reorganizing the *Daigaku-ryō*, the “Bureau of Great Learning,” an academy to train students for the Japanese equivalent of the civil service examination. The Academy in the capital taught students the Confucian classics, arithmetic, law, calligraphy, literature, and Chinese pronunciation. The 718 code stipulated a student body of 400 students. But matriculation was restricted to the offspring of the aristocracy, namely prospective pupils whose father or grandfather held the fifth rank or above. Of course, being from the fifth rank or higher did not guarantee that a pupil would have the aptitude to succeed at the Academy. This puts the Japanese imperial court in a politically sticky situation: what should be done if the child of a powerful lord was deemed intellectually unqualified for study at the Academy? Following the letter of the Tang dynasty would mean students who couldn’t pass the civil service examination would not advance in the bureaucracy.

40. See Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 104.

41. See Robin Yates, “Slavery in Early China: A Sociocultural Approach,” *Journal of East Asian Archaeology* 3, nos. 1–2 (2001): 283–331, 299.

The Japanese *ritsuryō* code works around this with the creation of *on'i*, or so-called shadow ranks, in which children of aristocrats would receive a rank once they reached age twenty-one. Aristocratic children would receive these ranks automatically, whether they attended the Academy or not. This effectively made higher education an unnecessary formality for aristocratic children focused on climbing the social ladder. This is why, in *The Tale of Genji*, Genji's son "detested his father" for making him attend the Academy, "for were there not others who rose high and held distinguished office without ever having to suffer this way? . . . [But] he [Genji's son] buckled down and decided somehow to get through these classics as quickly as possible and on with a successful career."⁴²

The children of the aristocracy, then, were able to receive an education and its benefits (broadly defined) unconditionally, and they were also able to receive the social capital of attending the Academy whether they attended the Academy or not. Now consider the slave in eighth-century Japan. The *ritsuryō* code also divided the Japanese population into *ryōmin* (good citizens) and *senmin* (lowly citizens). The good citizens were, in order of worth: government officials, citizens, professional courtiers, and miscellaneous tradesmen. Imperial guards and servants, public officials, servants of the aristocracy, slaves of the court, and personal slaves were lowly citizens. The *ritsuryō* code makes no mention of educating slaves. This is, most likely, because education in Japan during the Nara and Heian eras was dependent upon one's rank, and slaves were not thought of as humans who might qualify for education. The *Nihon kyōiku-shi* (A history of education in Japan) notes that it was not until the end of the Kamakura period that Japanese commoners would think of themselves as human beings equal to their aristocratic counterparts and therefore worthy of receiving an education.

One exceptional figure in this history of the inhumanities is the Buddhist monk Kūkai (774–835). In 828, Kūkai opened the *Shugei shuchi-in* (School of arts and sciences). In a document in which Kūkai articulates his vision for the academy, Kūkai quotes Confucius as he argues that the six arts hold the key to enlightenment for all human beings regardless of social status. A remarkably forward-thinking endeavor that preempted universal education in Japan by more than a millennium, Kūkai's academy was open to students of any status, implored teachers not to discriminate against students of "lower status," and provided free meals for impoverished pupils. Kūkai's progressive experiment in universal education was, unfortunately, short-lived; the academy closed some ten years after Kūkai's death. It seems, however, that Kūkai was, to adapt a cliché, the exception who challenged the rule. According to the *Cambridge History of Japan*, "Whereas China had the ideal of universal education, however imperfectly realized, in Japan not until the Edo period did Confucian education become available to members of diverse classes

42. Murasaki Shikibu, *The Tale of Genji* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 383.

of society.”⁴³ And even here, as we will discuss momentarily, diversity does not necessarily mean education for the inhuman.

STUDIA INHUMANITATIS

There are classical precedents, then, for the inhumanities in both the East and the West: the Aristotelean argument in Athens, and the aristocratic nepotism of Kyoto. The next moment in this brief history of the inhumanities are medieval and early modern reinventions of these precedents.

The twelfth-century Renaissance saw the rise of Europe’s first universities. These universities were powered by a cultural energy born from the synthesis of the Aristotelian world view and the Christian view. On the one hand, many of these “new” universities were actually the progeny of cathedral or monastic schools. On the other hand, the discovery, translation, and analysis of ancient Greek and Aristotelean texts was at the center of their curricula. It is under these conditions that what Bod calls the *biblical coherence principle* emerges. The biblical coherence principle makes the humanities another servant of the lord: according to this principle, a given humanistic interpretation is accurate insofar as it adheres to the teaching of the church. Bod argues that the biblical coherence principle represents a “transform[ation],” or maybe we should say a deformation, of the humanities into “an uncritical and anti-empirical attitude.”⁴⁴ If this is indeed the case, then the slavery and colonization done in the name of the Aristotelian humanities and biblical coherence throughout the age of exploration implies another pattern, or perhaps an amniotic condition, of the inhumanities: *when the humanities languish, the inhumanities flourish*.

The Valladolid debate (1550–51), in which the Spanish empire debated the proper political and moral relationship between Spanish colonizers and the colonized people of South America, is a case in point. The debate addressed a vaguery of a 1493 papal bull: did the jurisdiction granted by the bull justify a Spanish war against the Native Americans? The debate featured humanist philosopher Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1490–1573), who argued that a war against the Native Americans was just because the barbarity of the Native Americans made them natural slaves. The Native Americans are *natural* slaves here in the Aristotelian sense of the term—it is “natural” for those who do not have the intellectual capabilities to rule themselves to be ruled by others. Sepúlveda’s opponent in this debate was Bartolomé de las Casas (1484–1566), who argued that the Native

43. Donald Shively and William McCullough, eds., *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 2, *Heian Japan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988–1999), 369.

44. Bod, *A New History*, 141.

Americans were humans and therefore should be educated in the ways of Christ rather than subjugated by Christendom.

Even in synopsis, Sepúlveda is reminiscent of Aristotle. In addition to his work as a theologian, philosopher, and chronicler, Sepúlveda was also a translator of Aristotle, including Aristotle *Politics*. So it should come as no surprise that in his *Democrates Secundus*, a text that served as a precursor for the arguments Sepúlveda would make at Valladolid, Sepúlveda essentially translates Aristotelian logic for the New World. His translation is formal, linguistic, and logical. It is a formal translation insofar as the *Democrates Secundus* takes the form of a kind of Platonic dialogue between Democrates, a mouthpiece for Sepúlveda, and Leopoldo, a well-meaning Lutheran who wants to argue for the rights of the Native Americans but is ultimately persuaded by the superior argumentation of Democrates. It is a linguistic and logical translation of Aristotle in that Sepúlveda quotes Aristotle's *Poetics* and extrapolates the significance of Aristotelean natural slavery for the Spanish encomienda system.

I should note that Las Casas, Sepúlveda's putative opponent in the debate, actually agrees with Sepúlveda's logic in a key moment: Las Casas agrees that the humanity of the Native Americans is contingent upon their ability to be civilized. This means that Las Casas adheres to the terms of debate set by Sepúlveda (and Aristotle). Disagreement arises between the two only when they consider whether or not Native American meet the requirements for natural servitude. Sepúlveda contends that the Native Americans do meet the requirements; Las Casas argues that they do not. (Note: Sepúlveda theorizes on the Native Americans from his perch in Europe whereas Las Casas had extensive, lived experience with the Native Americans. This suggest another pattern of the inhumanities: *geographic and cultural distance serve as a catalyst for the inhumanities*).

The reason, however, that Las Casas contends that Native Americans do not meet the prerequisites for natural servitude is that he sees acculturation as the cause of their "barbarity," and he believes that they can learn how to be more human through the teachings of Christ. Given the alternative—forced civilization after subjugation in a just war—Las Casas's approach certainly sounds enlightened. But the underbelly of Las Casas's logic can't be avoided: if the humanity of the Native Americans is contingent upon acculturation and their ability to accept the teaching of Christ, they are inhuman if they refuse to see the light. Perhaps this is why the same Las Casas who is often seen, and not without merit, as one of the first Western advocates of universal human rights, has no problem justifying war with infidels like "the Turks and Saracens"—"the Church . . . rightly and always has the power to invade them."⁴⁵ Las Casas has conveniently forgotten the Chris-

45. As cited in Daniel Brunstetter, *Tensions of Modernity: Las Casas and His Legacy in the French Enlightenment* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 80.

tian mandate to turn the other cheek, and this amnesia speaks to the inhumanistic underpinnings of his logic of humanity as contingent upon learning. Rafael Alvira and Alfredo Cruz argue that Sepúlveda's position is premised on the belief that "Man, by virtue of his nature, is called to a specific fullness—civilization, *humanitas*—and in order to attain this, needs to draw on specific means (virtues, sciences, arts)."⁴⁶ On this point, the debate between Sepúlveda and Las Casas isn't much of a debate at all. Las Casas simply wants a *humanitas* attained by way of the biblical coherence principle, that is, he wants to include Native Americans in salvation history.

To revisit the inhumanities in Japan, we left our story with the Yōrō code of 718, which codified aristocratic nepotism at the expense of the egalitarian ideals of Confucian education. According to the *Nihon kyōiku-shi*, the rise of public education in Japan began in the end of the Kamakura period (1185–1333), as the common people came to realize that they too were fully fledged human beings just like their aristocratic counterparts. But, even in the face of the popularization of Japanese education, the inhumanities thrived.

The Edo period (1603–1868) would see the proliferation of several class-based options for education. We might imagine the educational system of Edo Japan as a kind of pyramid, which starts with an elitist pyramidion and runs down to a popular base. The *terakoya*, or temple schools,⁴⁷ were the popular base of the educational pyramid. The *terakoya* were open to commoners, both boys and girls, and focused primarily on the literary arts and arithmetic, especially the use of the abacus. It is in the temple schools that the diversification of Japanese education took place: in 1872, when Japan established its nationwide public school system with the Education System Ordinance, the previously established *terakoya* formed the backbone of the public school system. According to *Nihon no kyōiku: Kodai kara gendai made no rekishi to hensen* (Japanese education from antiquity to present), the *terakoya* was an invaluable resource not only because it provided commoners with the vocational skills required to enter the workforce of an increasingly mercantile Japan, but also because it was "a place where commoners could cultivate themselves and learn to acquire their humanity."⁴⁸

46. Rafael Alvira and Alfredo Cruz, "The Controversy between Las Casas and Sepúlveda at Valladolid," in *Hispanic Philosophy in the Age of Discovery* ed. Kevin White (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 101.

47. The term *terakoya* is a bit of a misnomer. Although some were indeed located in temples, "temple school" could also be held in the private residence of an instructor or in a designated communal space.

48. Tomitarō Karasawa, ed., *Nihon no kyōiku: Kodai kara gendai made no rekishi to hensen* [Japanese Education from Antiquity to Present] (Tokyo: Bunkyo seisaku kenkyūkai, 1985), 117.

Even with this enhanced access to education across social classes in early modern Japan, such educated humanity remained out of reach for the inhuman. By “inhuman,” I mean the *hinin*. Life in Edo Japan was organized in part by a class system known as the *mibunsei*. There were individuals, however, who fell beneath this class system. One such group was the *hinin*, literally the inhumans, who held a “non-status status” beneath the commoners.⁴⁹ *Hinin* status could be acquired for a variety of reasons: criminality, physical disability, illness (leprosy), vagrancy, and so on.⁵⁰ In addition to these entry points, in the Edo period, as the Tokugawa *shogunate* rationalized and codified its census policies, it became more common for individuals to fall into *hinin* status by way of heredity.

Even the most generous reading of the expanded educational access of Edo Japan suggests two things: first, that the notion of education as a necessity for commoners became debatable (rather than universally accepted) during this period, and, second, that schools were most likely segregated according to status—human education and “inhuman” education.⁵¹

To begin with the first suggestion, Ogyū Sorai’s (1666–1728) thoughts on educating commoners is a critical case in point. Sorai was one of the most influential, if not the most influential, Confucian philosophers of the Edo period. A bit eccentric and very contrarian, Sorai fundamentally opposed many of the teachings of neo-Confucianism, which was both a widespread and state-sanctioned political philosophy in the Edo years. The impetus of Sorai’s quarrel with neo-Confucian teachings was related to a perennial problem in the history of the humanities: how can we ensure that a given interpretation of a text is accurate? Reminiscent of the original source principle and anticipating Wittgenstein’s ordinary language philosophy,⁵² Sorai’s answer to this problem was to read the Confucian classics in the original Chinese and determine the meaning of Confucian terms by getting a sense of their contextual use. Sorai’s practices ran counter to neo-Confucian orthodoxy, which relied on Tang dynasty commentaries and glosses on the classics.

Sorai’s philological approach, which he referred to as *kobunjigaku* (the study of the ancient language), led to a radical rereading of Confucian terms. This rereading began

49. See David Howell, “Territoriality and Collective Identity in Tokugawa Japan,” *Daedalus* 127, no. 3 (Summer 1998): 105–32, 107.

50. For more on this, see Gerald Groemer, “The Creation of the Edo Outcaste Order,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 27, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 263–93.

51. My thanks to David Howell, and to Daniel Botsman, Maren Ehlers, and Tim Amos. A personal correspondence with Howell was invaluable in thinking through the relationship between temple schools and *hinin* status.

52. The insight about the affinity between Sorai and Wittgenstein belongs to John Tucker, *Ogyū Sorai’s Philosophical Masterworks: The Bendo and Benmei* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006).

with *jin*, the Japanese pronunciation of the previously mentioned Chinese character *ren* (humanity, benevolence). Sorai contended that, in the original classics, Confucius never spoke of *ren* as an innate, universal possession of humans. Rather, *ren* as we (read: Sorai's contemporaries) know it is a creation of the ancient kings and sages, that is, a product of human history. For Sorai, there is no heaven that endows all humans equally with the virtue of *ren*. Rather, there is only human history, which can be studied by way of *kobunjigaku*. (This is the origin of Sorai's renowned claim that "the ultimate form of scholarly knowledge is history.")⁵³ In lieu of searching for the heavenly mandates of a universally shared human nature and social order, the scholar is supposed to study the historical, manmade social norms that support humanity and benevolence.

It is important to note that this is the job of the humanist scholar. Rather than a shared, universal humanity, every individual has what we might call in contemporary parlance "God-given talents." "In doing their work," Sorai contends, "drills need to be sharp, while hammers need to be dull."⁵⁴ The job of the sharp scholar is to engage in the humanistic work of *kobunjigaku* in order to discover and set the social norms of humanity, and the commoner should occupy herself with duller pursuits. Or, as Sorai wrote in a letter to two of his students: "There is, however, the question of ability. It would be difficult for those without the requisite ability to accept Humanity as their responsibility."⁵⁵

If educating the commoners was cause for debate, educating *hinin*, the inhuman, alongside humans was highly unlikely. It is, of course, difficult to prove the claim I have made here; proving this claim calls for evidence of the absence of *hinin* in the otherwise egalitarian temple schools. But it seems safe to conjecture that this absence of evidence is the evidence of absence of the *hinin*. This conjecture is a safe one because the *hinin* were the limit by which the lowest level of humanity, commoners, was demarcated. In other words, commoners were allowed to study together at the temple schools precisely because they were human rather than inhuman.

Take, for example, Sasayama Baian's 1695 "A Set of Terakoya Precepts," an extant documenting of the guidelines of a temple school. The precepts are unequivocal in their assumption that there is a difference between the human and the inhuman. From the very first line of the precepts, students are taught that "to be born human and not be able to write is to be less than human."⁵⁶ Although, in this case, the reading of the Chi-

53. Haruo Shirane, ed., *Early Modern Japanese Literature: An Anthology, 1600–1900* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 367.

54. Tucker, *Sorai's Philosophical Masterworks*, 153.

55. Samuel Yamashita, *Master Sorai's Responsals: An Annotated Translation of Sorai Sensei Tomonsho* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1994), 79.

56. See Ronald Dore, *Education in Tokugawa Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 323. The translation of the precepts is Dore's.

nese characters for “less than human” is *hito ni arazu*, the characters themselves are the same characters used to signify *hinin* (inhumans). This creates a kind of logographic innuendo between the *hinin* and the rules of human behavior at the temple school. Several of the precepts warn children not to engage in behavior associated with the *hinin*: pupils should not lie (which, according to a Japanese proverb, is the first step toward criminality), gamble, watch street performers, or gossip and shout. These are “the marks of beggars and outcasts.”⁵⁷ Throughout the precepts, students are perpetually reminded that there are people who are born in human form but deform into inhumanity. These inhumans are “no more than a beast,” because “men deserve the name of men only when they behave like men.”⁵⁸ Men who do not behave like men—the inhumans—are disqualified from studying the “Way of Man” at the temple school.

THE INHUMANITIES AT THE *FIN DE SIÈCLE*

The history of the inhumanities continued in the modern era in both the East and the West. Take, for example, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), an undeniable paragon of the kind of creative, critical thinking deemed central to the humanities. Remember that Nietzsche was trained in classical Greek philology, and that his early works are essentially close readings of Greek philosophy and art. Perhaps this explains in part why his works pick up a common thread in the history of the inhumanities, one that can be followed back to Aristotle’s *Politics*. Namely, Nietzsche’s castigation of slave morality reinvigorates the boundary between the slave and education.

An antidemocratic, inhumanistic streak runs through Nietzsche’s philosophy of education. I am not thinking here of some haphazard linking of Nietzsche’s thought to its mobilization in Nazi thought. I am thinking instead of simple citation. In *The Greek State*, he writes: “Culture, which is first and foremost a real hunger for art, rests on one terrible premise”:

in order for there to be a broad, deep, fertile soil for the development of art, the overwhelming majority has to be slavishly subjected to life’s necessity in the service of the minority, beyond the measure that is necessary for the individual. At their expense, through their extra work, that privileged class is to be removed from the struggle for existence, in order to produce and satisfy a new world of necessities. Accordingly, we must learn to identify as a cruel-sounding truth the fact that slavery belongs to the essence of a culture. . . . The misery of men

57. Ibid., 326.

58. Ibid.

living a life of toil has to be increased to make the production of the world of art possible for a small number of Olympian men.⁵⁹

To recapitulate, in *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, Nietzsche argued that the “real secret of education” is that it is “monstrously overgrown”—“Countless people fight for it, and think they are fighting for themselves, but at bottom it is only to make education possible for a very few.”⁶⁰

Nietzsche saw himself as embroiled in a crisis in the humanities not unlike the crisis we find ourselves in today. In 1872, when Nietzsche composed the five public lectures that comprise *On the Future of Our Educational Institutions*, a constellation of cultural and academic trends seemed to conspire against the possibility of what Nietzsche deemed true education. “True education” here is *Humanitatzbildung*, the transformative, self-creation of one’s individual humanity that occurs upon authentic, humanistic engagement with the ideals of the ancient Greek classics. The trends that threatened to make “humanity building” education obsolete included: the rise of vocational and mass education, the conflation of educational ends with the economic needs of an expanding nation state, the substitution of instrumentalized information (which Nietzsche refers to as “journalism” or “news”) for wisdom, the hyperspecialization and pedantic fixation that accompanied the rise of the seminar and philology, the rise in prestige of the natural and physical sciences and concomitant science envy in the humanities, and so on.

Nietzsche divided these trends into two “equally ruinous” categories: “the drive for the greatest possible *expansion* and *dissemination* of education” and the “drive for the *narrowing* and *weakening* of education.”⁶¹ The desire to democratize education is an example of the drive to expand education. Determining the value of education solely in terms of economic or ivory-tower academic gain, rather than seeing education, especially humanistic education, as “something that would shape our innermost souls and satisfy those souls in the future,” is an example of the narrowing and weakening of education.⁶² For Nietzsche, both trends asphyxiate true education. With this historical context in mind, the logic of Nietzsche’s claim of the necessity of slavery becomes

59. Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Greek State,” trans. Carol Diethe, in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 166.

60. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Anti-education: On the Future of Our Education Institutions*, trans. Damion Searls and ed. Paul Reitter and Chad Wellmon (New York: New York Review of Books, 2016), 14.

61. *Ibid.*, 15.

62. *Ibid.*, 10.

clear: breathing life into an asphyxiated humanities means resuscitating the inhumanities. In Nietzsche's view, true humanistic education is the province of the privileged few. Rather than mass, universal education in the humanities, the objective should be segregation: true education on one side, false (?) education on the other.

Nietzsche finds his Japanese counterpart in Hosokawa Junjirō (1834–1923). The son of a Confucian scholar, in 1854, Hosokawa went to Nagasaki, where he studied Dutch, military science, and firearms. In the late 1850s, he would also master English and navigation at Japan's Naval Training Institute in Edo (present-day Tokyo). From here, he would return to his home domain, Tosa, and become a professor of Western learning. After the Meiji Restoration of 1868, he worked in the Ministry of Popular Affairs and the Ministry of Industry until 1871, when he went to San Francisco for further studies. Upon his return, he would go on to hold a variety of political seats: he joined the Senate in 1876, became its vice-minister in 1881, was appointed to the House of Peers in 1890, and was appointed to the Privy Council (an advisory board to the Emperor) in 1893. In addition to this, he was also an administrator and scholar. He served as director of the Women's Higher Normal School and the Peers School (an institution established to educate imperial children and the aristocracy), was named a Doctor of Letters, and served as the second directorial editor of the *Kojiruien*, Japan's state-sponsored and, at fifty-one volumes, largest encyclopedia of historical documents.

Many of Hosokawa's political and educational stances are defined by a combination of pragmatism and egalitarianism reminiscent of *The Analects*. Hosokawa, for example, penned "The Relationship between National Strength and Girls' Education" in 1895. There is, however, something opportunistic—or, perhaps more accurately, nationalistic—in Hosokawa's educational egalitarianism. On the heels of Japan's victory in the first Sino-Japanese War, Hosokawa argues for women's education not because women are equal human beings, but because they are Japanese, and therefore can make contributions to the growing Japanese nation state and empire. Hosokawa's nationalist streak makes a pattern of the modern inhumanities visible: *ethno-nationalism exacerbates the reservation of the humanities for the nation-state's preferred in-group*.

It is this opportunistic, inhumanistic nationalism that explains Hosokawa's modest proposal to the Japanese legislature in 1869. First, Hosokawa updated the schematization of *ryōmin* (good humans) and bad citizens. For the modern age, however, Hosokawa reconfigures Europeans as the *ryōmin* of the world. In order for the Japanese to join the ranks of such nobility, Hosokawa suggested that the Japanese government fully embrace a Pacific slave trade. The Chinese would function as house servants, and "Negro slaves" would perform hard physical labor. With the excess economic development produced by slavery, the Japanese would have the leisurely latitude to cultivate themselves into "good humans" (at the expense of inhumanized Chinese and

black slaves).⁶³ Hosokawa's proposal shares a certain affinity with Nietzsche's notion of necessary slavery. In turn, Nietzsche revitalizes Aristotle's distinction between *zoe* (bare life) and *bios* (qualified life), or life that qualifies for the political rights and privileges of humanity. As Giorgio Agamben suggests, this distinction between bare life and qualified life, between the inhumanities and the humanities, runs from Aristotle to Auschwitz.⁶⁴

THE INHUMANITIES AT THE DÉBUT DE SIÈCLE

This history of the inhumanities provides us with two reminders. The first reminder is of the literal, historical meaning of the liberal arts: an education befitting free citizens. There is nothing novel about contemporary attacks on the utility of the humanities and the liberal arts—these attacks are repackaged, contemporary updates of arguments on the relationship between education and labor that have been present since the very origins of the history of the inhumanities. As Wendy Brown notes in *Undoing the Demos*, these salvos against the humanities simply suggest to students that the modern *homo oeconomicus* does not have the (economic) freedom to pursue the humanities.

The second reminder is this: contemporary defenses of the humanities may be rooted in a faulty premise. We assume that the humanities are undervalued due to some ignorance on the part of its assailants, and that therefore the job of the defense is to provide historical knowledge of the value of the humanities. But a history of the inhumanities suggests something other than ignorance is at work. (We have yet to fully grapple with the implications of the fact that some of the greatest humanists the world has ever known, from Aristotle to Thomas Jefferson, waited until their deathbeds to free their slaves). The upshot of inhumanistic history is the exact inverse of that faulty premise: those who attack the humanities do so precisely because they understand its power. Aristotle, Sepúlveda, Sorai, Nietzsche, Hosokawa—these are not thinkers who are ignorant of the power of the humanities. Rather, it seems that the issue such adversaries have with the humanities is the same issue that has run right beneath the history of the humanities: the assumption that certain people don't need to think critically about the world, or to do any of those other things we say the humanities can teach them to do. "Those people" just need to go to work, and critical thinking might get in the way of productive labor.

63. For more on this, see Daniel Botsman, "Freedom without Slavery? 'Coolies,' Prostitutes, and Outcastes in Meiji Japan's 'Emancipation Moment,'" *American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (December 2011): 1323–47.

64. Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

There is a curious contradiction in some contemporary critiques of the humanities. On the one hand, critics say that the humanities are useless and have no real-world impact. On the other hand, some of these same critics say that “postmodern Neomarxist” humanities professors (whatever that might mean), the masters of an ostensibly useless art, have the power to corrupt the youth, silence their political adversaries, undermine the bedrock assumptions of Western civilization, and, I imagine, steal little children from their beds. How can the practitioners of a powerless art be so powerful? I think that there is an unacknowledged truth in this contradiction. The fear of these humanities naysayers is not that the humanities don’t work (or rather, that studying them won’t lead to any employable work⁶⁵) in the contemporary world, but that the humanities might work too well.

The master of Frederick Douglass provides a clear reminder of inhumanistic knowledge of the power of the humanities: “It was unlawful, as well as unsafe, to teach a slave to read. . . . Learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world. . . . If you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master.”⁶⁶ The issue here is not one of epistemology, but of existence. It is not that the humanities don’t know the power of the humanities’ knowledge-building capacity—the humanities are, after all, at the very root of the inhumanities. It is, rather, a question of being, namely, that certain human beings become, to borrow Douglass’s term, “unfit” for their lot in life due to the emancipatory power of the humanities.

If a history of the humanities is going to help save the humanities, then, it will do so only if coupled with a robust rethinking of the relationship between human being and the humanities. As a matter of pragmatics, what is needed is a program of tangible actions that evince the vital, irrevocable link between ongoing human existence and the humanities. We might call this program studies in the contemporary humanities, with the term *contemporary* here highlighting the virtues of living or existing with the humanities in the present moment. Recent moves toward the public humanities, as well as research that suggests the enduring importance of humanistic knowing for the nav-

65. I will admit that I am not persuaded by arguments to replace humanistic education with vocational training. These arguments are like taking a sick person to a buffet. Yes, everyone needs food (vocation), but you also need to be well (the humanities). With that said, I know that some people are persuaded by such arguments, so I provide access to the latest assessment here: Scott Carlson, “Over Time, Humanities Grads Close Pay Gap with Professional Peers,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 7, 2018, https://www.chronicle.com/article/Over-Time-Humanities-Grads/242461?cid=wcontentlist_hp_latest.

66. Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 31.

igation our present world, are certainly foundational steps toward the contemporary humanities. But making good on the promise of the contemporary humanities might require us to imagine bigger.

The syllabus for contemporary humanities studies would be life and thinking about how to live it. Here are a few ideas to begin our brainstorming as we think toward a new syllabus: imagine a faculty meeting where the enduring value of the humanities is an item on the agenda, or universities with office hours open to the public, or humanities scholars teaching at local high schools, prisons, corporations, and vocational schools, or more robust relationships between humanities departments and humanitarian endeavors, or a class on how literature provides a set of tools for thinking about life in the twenty-first century, or study abroad programs with community service components, or imagine a world in which constituents of all political stripes call their congressperson to advocate for the humanities. Or, as Wendy Brown concludes, the value of the contemporary humanities would “pertain to the kinds of knowing and feeling beings the humanities generate, as well as the kinds of knowledge the humanities circulates about and in cultural, political, and social life.”⁶⁷

The underlying assumption of what I am calling contemporary humanities studies is that, insofar as we are all born human, we all begin the work of the humanities from the moment we are born. We are all born into a moment in history, the baby’s cry is our first encounter with musicology, there is a poetry to our naming rituals, the mother’s caress is our introduction to physical anthropology, and on and on. We might call this the lived humanities. The academic humanities, as Bod has shown us, are a constellation of disciplines—each with its own tools, techniques, objects, histories, patterns, principles, and problem-solving capabilities—developed to make sense of the materials of human existence. The objective of the contemporary humanities would be to connect the academic humanities to the lived humanities. In this view, the contemporary humanities don’t make us more human—the lived humanities make us human enough. Rather, the contemporary humanities open us up to new, history-of-the-humanities, time-tested ways of thinking about humanity and navigating the human world. They make us—in the plural, all of us—more mobile humans, humans with a greater palette of opportunities for living the humanities. In short, the contemporary humanities would be a call to end the inhumanities, because the inhumanities end when we integrate an epistemological commitment to the humanities with an existential commitment to humanity.

At this juncture, Helen Small’s reminder that something might go wrong with another “recognizably American” call to add a new humanism and existentialism to the

67. Wendy Brown, “Neoliberalized Knowledge,” *History of the Present* 1, no. 1 (2011): 113–29, 125.

values associated with humanistic thinking is certainly apposite.⁶⁸ But, if we are serious about the history of the humanities as a new field that might help save the humanities, we should also remember Wendy Brown's warning: "markers internal to a particular discipline constitute no protection against metrics that devalue the discipline altogether."⁶⁹ For the humanities to remain alive and well, we will need more connective tissue between our internal markers (histories of the humanities) and the lived humanities out there in the world.

Bod provides an invaluable insight for anyone interested in rethinking the value of the humanities at what Mikhail Epstein has called the *début de siècle*.⁷⁰ Bod notes that, when seen from the view of a history of the humanities, the "pattern-rejecting" approach of poststructural humanists is actually a return to a pattern set by the anomalists of Pergamon.⁷¹ Bod, channeling Marx, quips that this return might be a bit of evidence that "everything in history occurs twice—the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce."⁷² It is also possible, however, that poststructuralist thought—which came to prominence in a century of world wars, concentration camps, state-sponsored apartheid, and other events that Norman Mailer once called "a mirror to the human condition that blinded anyone who looked into it"⁷³—is interested not in farce, but in restoration comedy. That is to say, one pattern rejected by poststructural humanities is the inhumanistic underpinning of the humanities. Historically, the strictures of the humanities have drawn a line between the human and the inhuman. Poststructuralist approaches ask if it is possible to respect and think of humanistic study as a series of infinite anomalies, without demarcating a boundary between the "natural human" and the natural slave. It might be the case that this approach is farcical in the respect it pays to each human anomaly, and that a focus on anomalies has been detrimental to the study of the shared patterns of human existence. If this is the case, we can chuckle a bit at poststructuralism's farcical attempt to polish Mailer's mirror. But it seems that the onus is still on contemporary humanists to determine how the history of the inhumanities might end and when a history of the humanities might begin.

68. Helen Small, *The Value of the Humanities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 53.

69. Brown, "Neoliberalized Knowledge," 126.

70. *Début de siècle*: "a stable pattern of innovative orientation toward the future, as opposed to 'fin de siècle'—a sensibility characterized by a sense of fatigue and exhaustion of creative impulses." See the glossary of Mikhail Epstein, *The Transformative Humanities: A Manifesto* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 296.

71. Bod, *A New History*, 351.

72. *Ibid.*, 351.

73. Norman Mailer, "The White Negro," in *The Time of Our Time* (New York: Random House, 1998), 211–30, 211.

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