

On the Hermeneutical Presuppositions of the Formation of Humanistic Knowledge

DEAN KOMEL, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, University in Ljubljana, Slovenia

KOMEL, D.: On the Hermeneutical Presuppositions of the Formation of Humanistic Knowledge
FILOZOFIA, 81, 2026, No 5, pp. 525 – 539



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Public License.

The article is devoted to the question of the formation of humanistic knowledge, which cannot be replaced by an apology for the social role of the humanities, or by promoting the development of digital humanities. The key hermeneutic starting point in this regard is that humanistic knowledge, as Charles Taylor and Hans-Georg Gadamer state, is necessarily value-characterized, which from a hermeneutic perspective means that it forms an understanding of meaning in such a way that something gains or loses value for us. This value characteristic of humanistic knowledge becomes even more apparent when considering Aristotle's discussion of the dianoetic virtues in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, which also expresses a critique of Socrates' identification of virtue with *episteme* in Plato's dialogue *Protagoras*. On this basis, the possibility of constituting humanistic knowledge is outlined – one that preserves and at the same time redefines its critical theoretical and practical relevance.

Keywords: humanistic knowledge – humanities – hermeneutics – Aristotle – value – virtue

Discussing the hermeneutical presuppositions of humanistic knowledge today is certainly a challenging task in many respects. In any case, the development of digital humanities (Berry – Fajergold 2017; Andresen 2024) and the social

role of the humanities (Nussbaum 2010; Bate 2011; Small 2013; Belfiore – Upchurch 2013) are much more prominent in academic discussions nowadays. Ultimately, the latter boils down to the demand that the humanities, with philosophy at the forefront, provide an ethical platform for addressing urgent global and local issues that endanger humanity and life on the planet as a whole (Serres 2025). Though entirely justified, we do not believe that such a demand for an ethical reformation of human existence in the world could contribute significantly to the formation of humanistic knowledge. Instead, it is related to the *crisis of humanism* and its transition into *an apology of posthumanism*, which has become dominant in establishing humanistic discourse nowadays (Cotter et al. 2016). In more blunt terms, given the academic, cultural, research, informational and social dominance of the post-humanist understanding of the role of the humanities today,¹ the consideration of humanistic knowledge has been pushed to the sidelines.

In this regard, it should also be noted that the humanities have long been criticized for being *insufficiently scientifically grounded*, and for their research findings *lacking practical applicability*. In our opinion such criticism overlooks the specific nature of the formation of humanistic knowledge, which differs from the generally accepted criteria of scientific rigor in theoretical enquiry.²

¹ "Post-humanism, as I will define it here, is not an overcoming of the human but takes a similar form to the structure of nihilism. If belief in a transcendent redemption negated the force of this world for a higher world, then a reactive nihilism responded to the loss of transcendence with despair, the horror that there might be nothing more than this world. In this respect, the retreat to a world in which there is only man, not God, remains theological – for God has been subtracted but the world as God-less (abandoned to man) remains. The post-human, similarly, renounces human privilege or speciesism but then fetishes the post-human world as man-less; 'we' are no longer elevated, separated, enclosed, detached from a man-less world, for there is a direct interface and interconnection – a mesh or network, a living system – that allows for one world of computers, digital media, animals, things and systems. There is a continuation of the humanities, which had always refused that man had any end other than that which he gave to himself, in the post-human notion that man is nothing but a point of relative stability, connected to one living system that he can feel affectively and read" (Colebrook 2011, 104 – 105).

² "So it is clear that the humanities, due to their specific character, use a methodology or a set of methodologies that is different from that of the natural and social sciences, although there are admittedly some overlaps. While issues and theories in the sciences come and go, the basic questions of the humanities tend to remain. The fact that they can never be definitively answered means that people return to them again and again regardless of their language, culture, or given historical period" (Stewart 2020, 8).

Furthermore, it fails to recognize the central and indispensable practical contribution of the humanities at all levels of education and in cultural activities. That the general criterion of scientificity of theoretical cognition is unsuitable for the humanities is already evidenced by the circumstance that the humanities do not define themselves solely in relation to science, but much more broadly also in relation to language, history, nature, literature, art, religion, politics, society, culture, technology, everyday life, media experience, the economy, ecology, and, in turn, to the very *humanity of the human being*, to which, ultimately, the designation of *studia humanitatis* also refers (Kjørup 2001).³

It is precisely the understanding of the humanity of the human being that from the very beginning establishes also a special relationship between humanistic knowledge and philosophy (Høyrum 2000), which deals with the question of knowledge as such in regard to what defines being as being and in its entirety. *The knowledge of what is*, from a basic philosophical point of view, necessarily implies *self-knowledge*. Thus, philosophy has developed within itself disciplines devoted to the being that is ourselves, such as ethics, anthropology, psychology, the study of history, society, culture, art, etc. In this context, philosophy has also taken upon itself the constitution of the humanistic knowledge, where Wilhelm Dilthey's project of providing a hermeneutic foundation of *Geisteswissenschaften* is particularly noteworthy (Dilthey 1989; 2002; Makkreel 1992). With it, Dilthey had a noticeable influence on Heidegger's hermeneutic-phenomenological elaboration of existential analytics in *Being and Time* (Heidegger 2011), as well as (through Heidegger) on Gadamer's renewed attempt at a hermeneutic conceptualization of humanistic knowledge in *Truth and Method* (Gadamer 2004) and other texts (see Gadamer 1972; 1979; 1992; 1994; Kasten – Paul – Sneller 2013), which has certainly had a significant impact beyond the field of philosophy in recent decades.

In addition, the poststructuralist considerations of humanistic knowledge from the mid-1960s onwards must be taken into account, as represented primarily by Michel Foucault (Foucault 1970; 1972; Arac 1989) and Jacques Derrida (Derrida 1970; 2001; Cohen 2001). In their works, we encounter quite a different approach to humanistic knowledge than those presented in the hermeneutic foundation of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, not only in Dilthey but also in Gadamer and his successors. Instead of the constitution of spiritual experience in and through history, Foucault and Derrida introduce the archaeology and

³ A comprehensive overview of the historical development of the humanities is provided in the book series *Arts and Humanities Through the Eras* (Soergel et al. (eds.), 2004).

deconstruction of the spirit, the archive instead of history, and textual structure instead of the context of understanding (Macksey – Deodato 1970). The understanding of the “humanistic knowledge” is further marked in Foucault and Derrida by the encyclopaedic conception of *connaissance humaine* as introduced by Condillac in his essay from 1746 (Condillac 2014), drawing on Bacon’s notion of *human knowledge* (Bacon 1662).

Any consideration of the humanistic knowledge today must take into account both of these above perspectives; at the same time, as Derrida urges in his 1998 Stanford lecture “The future of the profession or the university without condition (thanks to the ‘Humanities,’ what could take place tomorrow)” (Derrida 2001, 24 – 57), it must necessarily take a step forward. The question, of course, is *from where* and *to where*?

At first, it is important to note that we cannot approach humanistic knowledge only from an *epistemological standpoint*, simply because humanistic knowledge encompasses *episteme* (“knowledge,” “science,” “understanding”) as its own subject matter.⁴ Our deliberation is based on a hermeneutic approach

⁴ In this regard, we should highlight Foucault’s consideration of *episteme* within the concept of the “epistemological rupture,” as introduced by Gaston Bachelard (1938): “I am not concerned, therefore, to describe the progress of knowledge towards an objectivity in which today’s science can finally be recognized; what I am attempting to bring to light is the epistemological field, the episteme in which knowledge, envisaged apart from all criteria having reference to its rational value or to its objective forms, grounds its positivity and thereby manifests a history which is not that of its growing perfection, but rather that of its conditions of possibility; in this account, what should appear are those configurations within the space of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science. Such an enterprise is not so much a history, in the traditional meaning of that word, as an ‘archaeology’” (Foucault 1970, preface XIII – XIV). Furthermore, it is worth noting Derrida’s delineation of “structure” through the legacy of *episteme*: “It would be easy enough to show that the concept of structure and even the word ‘structure’ itself are as old as the *episteme* – that is to say, as old as western science and western philosophy – and that their roots thrust deep into the soil of ordinary language, into whose deepest recesses the *episteme* plunges to gather them together once more, making them part of itself in a metaphorical displacement. Nevertheless, up until the event which I wish to mark out and define, structure – or rather the structurality of structure – although it has always been involved, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by a process of giving it a center or referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin” (Derrida 1970, 247). It is also important to note the linguistic connection of the Greek “*episteme*” to the English “understanding” and the German “*Verstehen*” (the same Proto-Indo-European root **sta-*), as it has influenced its translation and interpretation: “The ancient Greek word *episteme* is at the root of our contemporary word ‘epistemology,’ and among

that links the epistemological viewpoint, ranging from the conditions of articulating truth to the conditions of conceiving reality, to a *prior horizon of understanding of meaning* as a presupposition for forming any kind of knowledge.

The horizon of understanding of meaning also provides a hermeneutical guideline for approaching humanistic knowledge as knowledge that either has or lacks meaning (for me) and is therefore necessarily endowed with a certain value potential (for me). Humanistic knowledge is essentially value-characterized.

In this regard, we can refer to Charles Taylor, who concludes his 1971 essay "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man" (see also Yanow 2023) with the following observation:

Human science looks backward. It is inescapably historical. There are thus good grounds both in epistemological arguments and in their greater fruitfulness for opting for hermeneutical sciences of man. But we cannot hide from ourselves how greatly this opinion breaks with certain commonly held notions about our scientific tradition. We cannot measure such sciences against the requirements of a science of verification: we cannot judge them by their predictive capacity. We have to accept that they are founded on intuitions which all do not share, and what is worse that these intuitions are closely bound up with our fundamental options. These sciences cannot be *wertfrei*, they are moral sciences in a more radical sense than the eighteenth century understood. Finally, their successful prosecution requires a high degree of self-knowledge, a freedom from illusion, in the sense of error which is rooted and expressed in one's way of life; for our incapacity to understand is rooted in our own self-definitions, hence in what we are. To say this is not to say anything new: Aristotle makes a similar point in Book I of the *Ethics*. But it is still radically shocking and unassimilable to the mainstream of modern science (Taylor 1999, 57).

In this light, the question naturally arises: what exactly does Taylor's claim that the humanities cannot be *wertfrei* mean? The use of the German term *wertfrei* is itself significant here; the discussion on *Wertfreiheit* dates all the way back to Max Weber (Weber 1988) and later also marked the discussion

philosophers it has been common to translate episteme simply as 'knowledge.' For the last several decades, however, a case has been made that 'understanding' is a better translation of *episteme*" (Grimm 2025). Nevertheless, the hermeneutic conception of "Verstehen" in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer cannot be approached from an epistemic horizon or from an epistemological perspective, as Karl-Otto Apel attempted in his transcendental-oriented philosophical program (Apel 1984).

between Gadamer and Habermas.⁵ Since Taylor refers directly to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, it stands to reason that his formulation should be understood primarily in an ethical or moral context. However, Taylor's argument is not that the humanities always tend somehow to the moral explanations of our world situations but rather that *humanistic knowledge as such elementarily embodies value orientatives*. In the realm of humanistic research and education, there is always a *meaningful orientation* at work, through which knowledge *directly acquires value*. As a consequence, within the humanistic field, not only the question of what is true and false remains always *orientationally open*, but also that of good and evil, beautiful and ugly, time and space, ourselves and the world. For the humanistic knowledge, it is not only the scientific criterion of validity that is decisive, but also the meaningful-orientational measure of valuability.

When Taylor emphasizes that the humanistic disciplines are "inescapably historical," this does not mean that they are focused solely on the past, on the "recognition of the recognized," but rather he has in mind the *spatio-temporal interweaving of meaningful orientation*. In this context, we can draw on Gadamer's conception of *effective historicity* (*Wirkungsgeschichte*) and the related *fusion of horizons of understanding* (Gadamer 2004). The value orientatives of humanistic knowledge are not fixed in the manner of a closed value system or order. Instead, they *occur in a specific extraordinariness*, which does not, however, simply mean disorder. Understanding meaning leaves the horizon of interpretations open in the way that something could receive the value—that is *be something given to us*. The authority of what is "given to us" does not originate from the "order of things" or "the power of discourse" (what could be considered as epistemological prejudice), but from the *open field of our life experience*. That the normality and normativity of our life-world is predetermined by a set of inherited values, among which we can choose or simply adopt, can indeed be regarded as a limiting and restrictive antithesis to their open experience (cf. Heidegger's analysis of 'das Man' in *Being and Time*). However, the closure of values would not be "effective" without them being presented in the way of openness, which enables freedom of choice and decision, and thus defines the moment of thinking and the element of historicity.

⁵ See Apel – Kettner (1994). Gadamer explicitly stresses: "No humanist, no follower of the sciences that we call *Geisteswissenschaften*, can be described in his own doing and his own ideals under the point of view of value-free science. That is so self-evident that I find it necessary to reconsider the whole question of the humanistic tradition and its function in our modern culture" (Gadamer 1979, 75).

On this point it should also be noted that contemporary philosophy is largely characterized by a fundamental critique of “thinking in values” (Heidegger 1977, 228), as decisively formulated by Heidegger against Nietzsche’s demand for a “revaluation of all values,” which was intended to dispel nihilism in our attitude toward life. The matter becomes even more acute when we consider that Heidegger had no particular interest in the question of humanistic knowledge, and he also regarded Gadamer’s attempt in this direction as limited in light of the modern expansion of technoscience. His “Letter on Humanism” does not seem to offer us much help in this regard, although it begins with the observation, that we are “still far from pondering the essence of action decisively enough” (Heidegger 1977). Gadamer and Taylor, as well as Foucault and Derrida, were well acquainted with Heidegger’s critique of “thinking in values,” but the question arises as to what extent this is also taken into account within the framework of their engagement with the problem of humanistic knowledge. Derrida’s *deconstruction* and Foucault’s *biopolitics* certainly move in the direction of a critique of human values and humanism, which is based on these values, but it remained uncertain, how this critique also concerns the value aspect of the humanistic knowledge.

Humanistic knowledge does not result from “thinking in values,” but rather engages with the very realm that makes the interconnection between thinking and value possible in the first place, namely *action*. Only if we accept that thinking is within itself essentially also action, and as such involves a meaningful orientation, are we on the path to grasping the value characteristic of humanistic knowledge. In this regard, we find ourselves on the threshold of an even broader discussion that has not only defined the development of philosophy and the humanities, but also the Western spirit’s very self-understanding, and it is linked to Aristotle’s definition of *being human as ποιᾶσις*, which differs from the other two fundamental attitudes of *and ποιήσις*; as Aristotle states in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

...αὕτη γὰρ καὶ τῆς ποιητικῆς ἀρχεῖ: ἔνεκα γάρ του ποιεῖ πᾶς ὁ ποιῶν, καὶ οὐ τέλος ἀπλῶς (ἀλλὰ πρὸς τι καὶ τινός) τὸ ποιητόν, ἀλλὰ τὸ πρακτόν: ἡ γὰρ εὐπραξία τέλος, ἡ δ’ ὄρεξις τούτου. διὸ ἡ ὀρεκτικὸς νοῦς ἡ προαίρεσις ἡ ὄρεξις διανοητική, καὶ ἡ τοιαύτη ἀρχὴ ἀνθρώπου (Aristotle 1926, 330; 1139b).

...the act of making is not an end in itself, it is only a means, and belongs to something else. Whereas a thing done is an end in itself: since doing well (welfare) is the End, and it is at this that desire aims. Hence Choice may be

called either thought related to desire, or desire related to thought; and man, as an originator of action, is a union of desire and intellect (Aristotle 1926, 331; 1139b).

First, it should be emphasized that Aristotle, by differentiating between theoretical, practical, and productive sciences (ἐπιστήμαι) in *Metaphysics*, provided the basis for all subsequent systematizations of the sciences, within which the position of the humanities is also defined.

Aristotle not only distinguishes προᾶξις in regard of its self-oriented fulfilment from θεωρία and ποίησις, but also stresses that human action can achieve its own end only if it is accomplished *in accordance with virtue* – ἀρετή (Aristotle 1926, 32; 1098a), which is generally interpreted in moral terms as the attainment of flourishing (εὐδαιμονία) in human life. When reflecting on the value-characteristic of the humanistic knowledge, a comparison between ἀρετή, *virtus*, *Tugend*, virtue, and value naturally suggests itself; however, a thorough exploration of this comparison would go beyond the scope of this discussion. Within contemporary moral thought, it would certainly be worth referring to Alasdair MacIntyre's work *After Virtue*, first published in 1981.⁶

In Plato's dialogue *Protagoras*, which discusses whether virtues are teachable (see Gigon 1985), we find a definition of ἀρετή that seems central to our discussion. Socrates argues that if virtue is teachable, it must be conceived as ἐπιστήμη – *knowledge* (Denyer 2008, 59 – 60; 357c – 358d). This definition, that MacIntyre does not specifically reflect, concerns not only the Greek philosophical understanding of ἀρετή, but also signals its transition into a modern-era value. In *The Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche regards this equating of ἀρετή with ἐπιστήμη as the culmination of Socrates' philosophical depravity:

I am trying to grasp the idiosyncrasy that is the source of that Socratic equation: reason = virtue = happiness – the most bizarre equation that there

⁶ "When recurrently the tradition of the virtues is regenerated, it is always in everyday life, it is always through the engagement by plain persons in a variety of practices, including those of making and sustaining families and households, schools, clinics, and local forms of political community. And that regeneration enables such plain persons to put to the question the dominant modes of moral and social discourse and the institutions that find their expression in those modes. It was they who were the intended and, pleasingly often, the actual readers of *After Virtue*, able to recognize in its central theses articulations of thoughts that they themselves had already begun to formulate and expressions of feeling by which they themselves were already to some degree moved" (MacIntyre 2007, 12; Prologue to the 3rd edition). See also Krämer (1959); Kube (1969); Hobbs (2022).

is, and one which in particular has all the instincts of the older Hellenes against it (Nietzsche 1997, 14).

Nietzsche was not the first to critically intervene regarding Socrates' equating of ἀρετή with episteme; rather, Aristotle had already done so decisively in his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Assuming that the consistent application of the understanding of ἀρετή as ἐπιστήμη could lead to the destruction of the ethos of common life in the polis, Aristotle introduces in *Nicomachean Ethics* a differentiation between ethical and dianoetic virtues; the former are acquired through habit, the latter through learning. The consequences of Aristotle's correction of Socrates' identification of ἀρετή with ἐπιστήμη are particularly evident in Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where, within a specific discussion of dianoetic virtues, the foundations are laid for the division of sciences into theoretical, practical, and poietic, as Aristotle presented it in *Metaphysics*. The hermeneutical relevance of Aristotle's considerations is demonstrated by the fact that Gadamer specially translated and commented on Book VI of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle 1998), after having attended Heidegger's interpretation of it within his Marburg lectures on the Plato's dialog *Sophist* in 1924 (Heidegger 1997). When presenting the dianoetic virtues, Aristotle proceeds from the five fundamental ways in which the soul, through negation or affirmation, reveals the truth (...ἀληθεύει ἢ ψυχὴ τῷ καταφάναι ἢ ἀποφάναι πέντε τὸν ἀριθμὸν) (Aristotle 1926, 330; 1139b). In the theoretical realm, these are ἐπιστήμη, νοῦς, and σοφία; in the practical realm, φρόνησις and in the poietical realm, τέχνη. Aristotle divides these five dianoetic virtues – depending on whether they are linked to the cognition of unchangeable or changeable entities – into two areas: the ἐπιστημονικόν (ἐπιστήμη, νοῦς, σοφία) and the λογιστικόν (φρόνησις, τέχνη). By doing so, he foreshadows the later differentiation between scientific and humanistic knowledge, as well as the technological efficiency and the measure of human action.

The conceptualisation of ἐπιστήμη is decisive for the establishment of the institution of science in the form of a scientific system. Aristotle himself uses the term “ἐπιστήμη” in the narrower sense of demonstrative cognitive ability (ἐξίς ἀποδευκτική)⁷ and in the broader sense of “knowledge” or “science,” for

⁷ *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 1139b31–32; *Posterior Analytics*, 71b10–15. “The *Posterior Analytics*, like the *Theaetetus*, is an essay on ἐπιστήμη, or understanding. For Aristotle, ἐπιστήμη is, in broadest terms, the explanatory art; one who understands is someone able to explain what

example in the division of ἐπιστήμαι into theoretical, practical, and poietic. Plato, however, already introduces a decisive differentiation between ἐπιστήμη and δόξα, which Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* does not classify among the ways in which the soul attains truth, because it leads to error (Aristotle 1926, 330; 1139b). Furthermore, within the framework of the question of humanistic knowledge and its value-characteristics, it is important to highlight the field of λογιστικόν. Here, the focus lies on situational understanding of the meaning, which requires discourse about it, that is to say, a λόγον διδόναι that has not yet been epistemologically institutionalized into a systemic form of statement, proposition, logic, dialectics, and logistics, which proves to be inadequate in the field of the humanities (Erzetič 2025, 88). Gadamer correctly comments in this regard: “Aristotle is right here, contrary to Socrates. Arete is not logos, but κατὰ λόγον” (Gadamer 1979, 30).

This hermeneutical constellation seems to be most clearly articulated in Book I of *Politics*, where Aristotle links the definition of being human as πρᾶξις, which is fulfilled in accordance with ἀρετή, with the definitions of human being as ζῶον πολιτικόν and ζῶον λόγον ἔχον.

διότι δὲ πολιτικὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ζῶον πάσης μελίττης καὶ παντὸς ἀγελαίου ζῶου μᾶλλον, δῆλον. οὐθὲν γάρ, ὡς φαμέν, μάτην ἢ φύσις ποιεῖ: λόγον δὲ μόνον ἄνθρωπος ἔχει τῶν ζῶων: ἡ μὲν οὖν φωνὴ τοῦ λυπηροῦ καὶ ἡδέος ἐστὶ σημεῖον, διὸ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ὑπάρχει ζῳοῖς μέχρι γὰρ τούτου ἡ φύσις αὐτῶν ἐλήλυθε, τοῦ ἔχειν αἰσθῆσιν λυπηροῦ καὶ ἡδέος καὶ ταῦτα σημαίνειν ἀλλήλοις, ὁ δὲ λόγος ἐπὶ τῷ δηλοῦν ἐστὶ τὸ συμφέρον καὶ τὸ βλαβερόν, ὥστε καὶ τὸ δίκαιον καὶ τὸ ἀδίκον: τοῦτο γὰρ πρὸς τὰ ἄλλα ζῶα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἴδιον, τὸ μόνον ἀγαθοῦ καὶ κακοῦ καὶ δικαίου καὶ ἀδίκου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων αἰσθῆσιν ἔχειν: ἡ δὲ τούτων κοινωνία ποιεῖ οἰκίαν καὶ πόλιν. καὶ πρότερον δὲ τῇ φύσει πόλις ἢ οἰκία καὶ ἕκαστος ἡμῶν ἐστὶν (Aristotle 1932, 10; 1253a).

And why man is a political animal in a greater measure than any bee or any gregarious animal is clear. For nature, as we declare, does nothing without purpose; and man alone of the animals possesses speech. The mere voice, it is true, can indicate pain and pleasure, and therefore is possessed by the

he understands. In this sense, ἐπιστήμη is, as Aristotle repeatedly urges, a discursive disposition or habit of soul, a ἔξις, the locus of whose ἐνέργεια is in the activity of ἀπόδειξις, an activity that I shall with qualification call in English ‘explanation.’ The explanatory art presupposes another sort of understanding, νοῦς, which is itself a ἔξις, and whose nature and connection to ἐπιστήμη is complex and subtle” (Kosman 2014, 7).

other animals as well (for their nature has been developed so far as to have sensations of what is painful and pleasant and to signify those sensations to one another), but speech is designed to indicate the advantageous and the harmful, and therefore also the right and the wrong; for it is the special property of man in distinction from the other animals that he alone has perception of good and bad and right and wrong and the other moral qualities, and it is partnership in these things that makes a household and a city-state (Aristotle 1932, 11; 1253a).

Despite Gadamer's great appreciation, the question arises as to how Aristotle's differentiation between ethical and dianoetic virtues, and, within this framework, between the realms of ἐπιστημονικόν and λογιστικόν, can contribute to the constitution of humanistic knowledge today – in a time when πρᾶξις, is understood solely as productive labour, ζῶον πολιτικόν merely as a social being, and ζῶον λόγον ἔχον as nothing but an “anthropological machine” (Agamben 2004, 33 – 38)? When language and speech are no longer considered as the defining attributes of being human, but are instead seen as equally, if not more, closely associated with the *power of machines*?⁸

Both hermeneutics and poststructuralism, in their conception of humanistic knowledge, focus on the experience of language and speech, albeit from different starting points and with different goals. According to Aristotle's definition in *Politics*, human λόγος reveals not only the matters with which we engage in the world, but also our very humanity – that is, what is or is not worthy of *being considered human*. Λόγος, as speech that “lets something to be seen” (Heidegger 2011, 30 – 31), enables us not only to *know* the various matters of the world, but also, and above all, what matters about ourselves in the world. Given this, it forms the primary basis of all *knowledge*, particularly *humanistic knowledge* as a *value-laden understanding of meaning*. “Meaning” has not only

⁸ “In the examination of humanlike technologies today, language and intelligence are the most contested human attributes, the latter being often represented through language and reasoning. The twenty-first century is the first time in history when human languages have been used by machines on a humanlike level and in numbers that outpace humans. AI, still at the level of being constantly re-imagined and re-invented, is changing the landscape of language with its newly acquired nonhuman agency. Human language is not just ours anymore, and yet we tend to disregard the philosophical stakes of this colossal transformation. Machines co-creating human language and operating through it is not just a change of medium, but a change of language user and interlocutor. It is a language change of a philosophical nature, a conceptual shift that changes how we think about humans and technology, individually and together” (Beguš 2025, 7).

linguistic, cognitive and informative, but also value-related relevance. In this sense, we also speak of the meaning of life and of what constitutes a life worth living, as Aristotle considered in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*.

On the basis of incorporating of the *meaningful orientation* humanistic knowledge possesses within itself the *potential for its own constitution*. It does not need to rely on any specific methodological procedure; *all it constitutionally presupposes is language*, as Schleiermacher has already noted explicitly regarding hermeneutics as the art of understanding and interpretation.⁹

Bibliography

- AGAMBEN, G. (2004): *The Open: Man and Animal*. Trans. by K. Attell. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- ANDRESEN, M. (2024): *Computerlinguistische Methoden für die Digital Humanities. Eine Einführung für Geisteswissenschaftler:innen*. Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto.
- APEL, K.-O. (1984): *Understanding and Explanation: A Transcendental-Pragmatic Perspective*. Trans. by G. Warnke. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.
- APEL, K.-O. – KETTNER, M. (eds.) (1994): *Mythos Wertfreiheit? Neue Beiträge zur Objektivität in den Human- und Kulturwissenschaften*. Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus.
- ARAC, J. (ed.) (1989): *After Foucault: Humanistic Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.
- ARISTOTLE (1926): *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. by H. Rackham. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press and London: W. Heinemann (*Loeb Classical Library*, 73).
- ARISTOTLE (1932): *Politics*. Trans. by H. Rackham. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press and London: W. Heinemann (*Loeb Classical Library*, 264).
- ARISTOTLE (1949): *Prior and Posterior Analytics*. A Revised Text with Introduction and Commentary. Ed. by W. D. Ross. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- ARISTOTLE (1998): *Nikomachische Ethik*. Trans. and ed. by H.-G. Gadamer. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann.
- BACHELARD, G. (1938): *La Formation de l'esprit scientifique. Contribution à une psychanalyse de la connaissance objective*. Paris: Vrin.
- BACON, F. (1662): *De augmentis scientiarum: libri IX*. Amstelaedami: Sumptibus Joannis Ravesteinii. Available at: https://books.google.si/books/about/De_augmentis_scientiarum.html?id=I-VBAAAACAAJ&redir_esc=y
- BATE, J. (2011): *The Public Value of the Humanities*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- BEGUŠ, N. (2025): *Artificial Humanities: A Fictional Perspective on Language in AI*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.
- BELFIORE, E. – UPCHURCH, A. (eds.) (2013): *Humanities in the Twenty-First Century. Beyond Utility and Markets*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁹ Gadamer adopts Schleiermacher's formulation, "Everything presupposed in hermeneutics is but language," as the motto for the third section of *Truth and Method*, which addresses the ontology of language (Gadamer 2004, 360).

- BERRY, D. M. – FAGEJORD, A. (eds.) (2017): *Digital Humanities: Knowledge and Critique in a Digital Age*. Cambridge: Polity Books.
- COHEN, J. (ed.) (2001): *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- COLEBROOK, C. (2011): Post-Human Humanities. In: Herzogenrath, B. (ed.): *Time and History in Deleuze and Serres*. New York and London: Bloomsbury Publishing and Continuum, 103 – 126.
- CONDILLAC, É. B. de (2014): *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746, 1798). Édition critique, introduction et notes par J.-C. Pariente et M. Pécharman. Paris: Vrin.
- COTTER, J. et al. (2016): *Human, All Too (Post)Human: The Humanities after Humanism*. Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books.
- DENYER, N. (ed.) (2008): *Platos Protagoras*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- DERRIDA, J. (1970): Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences. In: Macksey, R. – Deodato, E. (eds.): *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 247 – 264.
- DERRIDA, J. (2001): The Future of the Profession or the University without Condition (Thanks to the "Humanities," What Could Take Place Tomorrow). In: Cohen, J. (ed.): *Jacques Derrida and the Humanities: A Critical Reader*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 24 – 57.
- DILTHEY, W. (1989): *Introduction to the Human Sciences. Selected Works*, vol. 1. Ed. by R. A. Makkreel – F. Rodi. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- DILTHEY, W. (2002): *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences. Selected Works*, vol. 3. Ed. by R. A. Makkreel – F. Rodi. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- EPSTEIN, M. (2012): *The Transformative Humanities: A Manifesto*. New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- ERZETIĆ, M. (2025): Testimony as a Co-Existential Extension of Deliberative Practices. *Phainomena*, 34 (132 – 133), 81 – 100.
- FOUCAULT, M. (1970): *The Order of Things*. Trans. by A. Sheridan. London: Routledge.
- FOUCAULT, M. (1972): *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. by A. Sheridan. New York: Harper and Row.
- GADAMER, H.-G. (1972): Das ontologische Problem des Wertes. In: Kuypers, K. (ed.): *Human Sciences and the Problem of Values – Les sciences humaines et le probleme des valeurs*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 17 – 31.
- GADAMER, H.-G. (1979): Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences. Trans. and ed. by J. Risser. *Research in Phenomenology*, 9 (1), 74 – 85.
- GADAMER, H.-G. (1992): *On Education, Poetry, and History: Applied Hermeneutics*. Trans. by L. Schmidt – M. Reuss. New York: State University of New York Press.
- GADAMER, H.-G. (1994): *Hermeneutics and Truth*. Ed. by B. R. Wachterhauser. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press.
- GADAMER, H.-G. (2004): *Truth and Method*. Trans. rev. by J. Weinsheimer – D. G. Marshall. New York and London: Continuum.

- GIGON, O. (1985): Die Wege zur ἀρετή bei Platon und Aristoteles. *Museum Helveticum*, 42 (2), 133 – 150.
- GRIMM, S. (2025): Understanding. In: Zalta, E. N. – Nodelman, U. (eds.): *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2025 Edition).
Available at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2025/entries/understanding>
- HEIDEGGER, M. (1977): Letter on Humanism. In: Heidegger, M: *Basic Writings*. Trans. by Frank A. Capuzzi – J. G. Gray, ed. by D. F. Krell. New York: Harper and Row, 190 – 242.
- HEIDEGGER, M. (1997): *Plato's Sophist*. Trans. by R. Rojcewicz – A. Schuwer. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- HEIDEGGER, M. (2011): *Being and Time*. Trans. by J. Stambach. New York: State University of New York Press.
- HOBBS, D. J. (2022): *Towards Phenomenology of Values: Investigations of Worth*. New York and London: Routledge.
- HØYRUP, J. (2000): *Human Sciences: Reappraising the Humanities Through History and Philosophy*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- KASTEN, M. – PAUL, H. – SNELLER, R. (eds.) (2013): *Hermeneutics and the Humanities. Dialogues with Hans-Georg Gadamer*. Amsterdam: Leiden University Press.
- KJØRUP, S. (2001): *Humanities. Geisteswissenschaften. Sciences humaines. Eine Einführung*. Stuttgart: Metzler.
- KOSMAN, L. A. (2014): *Virtues of Thought: Essays on Plato and Aristotle*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- KRÄMER, H. J. (1959): *Arete bei Platon und Aristoteles. Zum Wesen und zur Geschichte der platonischen Ontologie*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter.
- KUBE, J. (1969): *Τέχνη und Αρετή: Sophistisches und Platonisches Tugendwissen*. Berlin and New York: de Gruyter.
- KUYPERS, K. (ed.) (1972): *Human Sciences and the Problem of Values – Les sciences humaines et le probleme des valeurs*. Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.
- MACINTYRE, A. (2007): *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. 3rd ed. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.
- MACKSEY, R. – DONATO, E. (eds.) (1970): *The Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- MAKKREEL, R. A. (1992): *Dilthey: Philosopher of the Human Studies*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- NIETZSCHE, F. (1997): *Twilight of the Idols. Or, How to Philosophize with the Hammer*. Trans. by R. Polt. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing.
- NUSSBAUM, M. (2010): *Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- SERRES, M. (2025): *Humanistic Narratives*. Trans. by R. Burks. New York, London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- SMALL, H. (2013): *The Value of the Humanities*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- SOERGEL, Ph. M. et al. (eds.) (2004): *Arts and Humanities Through the Eras*, vols. 1 – 5, Farmington Hills, Michigan: Thomson and Gale (vol. 1, *Renaissance Europe 1300-1600*;

- vol. 2, *The Age of the Baroque and Enlightenment 1600-1800*; vol. 3, *Ancient Egypt 2675-332 BCE*; vol. 4, *Ancient Greece and Rome 1200 BCE-476 CE*; vol. 5, *Medieval Europe 814-1450*).
- STEWART, J. (2020): *The Emergence of Subjectivity in the Ancient and Medieval World: An Interpretation of Western Civilization*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- TAYLOR, C. (1999): Interpretation and the Sciences of Man. In: Taylor, C.: *Philosophy and Human Sciences. Philosophical Papers 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 15 – 57. (First published in the *Review of Metaphysics*, 25 (1), 1971, 3 – 51.)
- YANOW, D. (2023): Revisiting Charles Taylor's 1971 "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man." *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research*, 21 (2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8326478>
- WEBER, M. (1988): Der Sinn der „Wertfreiheit“ der soziologischen und ökonomischen Wissenschaften (1917). In: Weber, M.: *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Wissenschaftslehre*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 489 – 540.

The contribution was written within the framework of the research program P6-0341 and the research project J6-70215 (Institute Nova Revija for the Humanities, Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency).

Dean Komel
Department of Philosophy
Faculty of Arts
University in Ljubljana
Aškerčeva 2
1000 Ljubljana
Slovenia
e-mail: dean.komel@ff.uni-lj.si
ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2774-1429>