The Nature of the Humanities

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Abstract

In this paper I aim to state the nature of the humanities, contrasting them with the natural sciences. I argue that, compared with the natural sciences, the humanities have their own objects, their own aims, and their own methods.

1. Introduction

We hear much these days about a 'crisis of the humanities'.[1] The number of humanities students drops, so does the number of humanities professors, and accordingly we see shrunken departments. The number of students drops, it is said, because of the bad job prospects for students with a Ph.D. in (one of) the humanities. It is also suggested that it drops due to certain 'post structural' and 'post modern' ideologies endemic in humanities departments, as well as to certain ways in which the humanities have been 'placed in the educational market'. There is said to be an obvious political side to this, as it is always easier to defend spending money on faculties and institutions that have 'practical' aims (such as medical schools, law school, economics and business departments) than on the 'impractical' humanities. Also: the humanities are said to keep a spirit of independent and critical thinking alive, which isn't always to the liking of those in power.[2]

What I am going to say about the humanities almost entirely by-passes all of these themes even though it is relevant to all of them. Statements about 'crisis' all assume certain views as to what the humanities *are*. But those views are often kept or left implicit. The aim of this paper is to visit this lacuna, and explicate and state the *nature* of the humanities and to do so by contrasting the

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[1] See for example Martha Nussbaum, *Not for Profit. Why Democracy Needs the Humanities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), chapter one.

[2] All of these points are covered by Steven Conn, 'How the Crisis of the Humanities is Like the Greek Economy', in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (2015).

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humanities with the natural sciences.[3] Such a statement is relevant to discussions concerning the value, practical relevance, and yes 'crisis of', the humanities, as such discussions can be more adequate and relevant when they are not burdened by misunderstandings about the nature of the humanities.

Stating the aim of this paper this way may to raise eyebrows. Some will doubt that the humanities even *have* a nature, and may see the very question as the expression of a hopelessly out-dated form of essentialism – essentialism being the following claim: an essence E of something X is a property of X such that X cannot be without E.[4] What some doubt is that the humanities have an essence. In this paper I am going to argue that the humanities *do* have an essence: there are certain properties that all of the humanities have and that they cannot be without. I argue for three essential properties: of being directed to a specific kind of objects, of having a specific kind of aims, and of employing specific kinds of methods – objects, aims and methods that contrast with the objects, aims and methods of the natural sciences.

Before going to business, I deal with some preliminaries. Whereas the substance of this paper deals with the *intension* of 'the humanities' (where the intension of a term T is the set of properties a thing must have if T is to be applicable to it), it is fitting to provide at least an initial idea as to the *extension* of 'the humanities' (where the extension of a term T is the set of thing to which T in fact applies). I take it that all of the following fields of learning or areas of inquiry fall in its extension: history, including parts of archaeology; literary studies,

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[3] I signal the fact that I abstain from contrasting the humanities with the social sciences, as that would require dealing with a lot of additional complexities. But I record my conviction that the humanities don't subsume under the social sciences. This is not to deny, of course, that fruitful cooperation is possible, as in social-economic history, linguistics and reception aesthetics, to mention just three examples.

[4] Essentialism has been out of favour for quite a while. Among philosophers, however, the view has found able defenders. One early example is Alvin Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), chapter V. Plantinga distinguishes between 'the essence' of a thing, and 'essential properties' of a thing, and couches both in terms of possible worlds. E is an *essential property* of X, provided X has E in every world in which X exists. But E is an essence of X, provided E is an essential property of X *and* nothing other than X has E. Diverging from Plantinga, I use 'essence' in the way he uses 'essential property'. I have no interest in arguing that the essence of the humanities consists of a set of properties such that no non-humanities field of study has even *one* of the properties of that set.

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i.e. the study of drama, poetry, novels and other kinds of literary texts; linguistics, or at least large parts of it, such as semantics, grammar, pragmatics, and phonetics; logic; rhetoric; art history; musicology; philosophy, at least large chunks of it, such as epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, philosophy of mind; theology, or at least large parts of it, such as church history, biblical exegesis, and systematic theology. I also take it that ethics, at least its foundational parts (as contrasted with 'applied ethics'), is also part of the humanities – as ethics surely is neither a natural nor a social science; the foundational parts of ethics deal with the right and the good.[5]

As indicated, I shall frame my discussion of the nature of the humanities by drawing a contrast with the natural sciences. All of the following fall in the extension of 'the natural sciences': physics, chemistry, biology, geology, astrophysics, brain sciences, parts of biopsychology.

The overall suggestion of this paper is that the humanities are of great and unique value – that they (can) give us things that the natural sciences cannot. I hasten to add, though, that this is by no means a blank endorsement of all scholarly activity that go by the name of 'the humanities'. Although the humanities have great value, this doesn't entail that each and every humanistic[6] study has

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[5]   See Russ Shafer Landau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 2012) for a helpful presentation of ethics as a normative discipline. Bod's impressive history of the humanities doesn't cover ethics, philosophy and theology. The motivation is that he only aims to deal with the 'empirical', 'observation-based' humanities. (See Rens Bod, *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2) Given this motivation one may be surprised that Bod extensively deals with logic. But one shouldn't. Logic is traditionally conceived of as a *normative* discipline. John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic,* 8th ed. (London: Longman, 1970 [1843]), 6–7 said 'Logic … is the science of the operations of the understanding which are subservient to the estimation of evidence: both the process itself of advancing from known truths to unknown, and all other operations in so far as auxiliary to this.' The 'science of the operations of the understanding' has often been based in observations about how people actually reason and estimate evidence.

[6]   I use 'humanistic' as the adjective that is derived from the substantive 'humanities' – in the same way that the adjective 'scientific' is derived from the substantive 'science'. There is no implication of my use of 'humanistic' to '(secular) humanism' as a worldview; there *is* a relation of my use with the 14th–16th century scholarly movement of which Erasmus was one of the most shining exemplars.

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great value. The same is true of the natural sciences: they have great value, but not every scientific study or research paper has great value.

2. The Objects of the Humanities

To a first approximation, the objects of the humanities, in contrast with the objects of the natural sciences, are objects that 'have meaning'. This needs unpacking.

   One large class of objects of the humanities are texts, i.e. items composed of sentences, which in turn are items composed of words, which in turn are composed of letters. Words, sentences and entire texts have meaning. They are the objects of humanistic study, not objects of scientific study. Another large class of objects of humanistic study are material artefacts such as paintings, statues, musical compositions (both scores and performances). Artefacts are objects with meaning in one of the multiple senses of 'meaning' that I shall present below. Yet another large class of objects is sequences of events that have taken place in time and space such as wars, elections, and the building of nation states. Of course, it isn't that just *any* sequence of events is the object of humanistic study, it is only allegedly *meaningful* sequences of events – again in one of the senses of 'meaning' to be explicated below. Generalizing we may say that the objects of the humanities are objects that have, or carry, or embody, meaning. What I am saying, then, as a first approximation, is *that the humanities study meaning*. Meanings are the objects of the humanities. And this in sharp contrast to sciences.

   This is only a first approximation. For many objects of the non-humanities, such as physics, biology and the medical sciences, can *also* be said to 'have meaning' – but, I aver, not in the sense in which the objects of the humanities have meaning. Let me explain. The trail of hooves imprints means that, say, recently horses have passed by; the trail means something. When the mercury column in the thermometer has gone up, this means that it has become warmer; the rising of the column hence is a meaningful event. Certain kinds of speckles on a person's skin mean measles – the speckles hence have meaning. Must we conclude from these examples that *being directed to objects with meaning* does not mark a contrast between the humanities and the sciences? No, for we should not equivocate. When we say that the items just mentioned (the trail, the mercury column, the speckles) 'have meaning', what we say is that they are *signs* or *indicators* to us of something else. But when we say that '"to procrastinate" means "to put things off"', which is the sort of thing that a linguist could say,

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we don't mean to say that 'to procrastinate' is a sign of, or indicates, 'to put things off'. Likewise, when we say that *vanitas* paintings mean to convey the idea that many earthly pursuits are idle, we aren't saying that those paintings are *signs* of idleness. Generally speaking, the objects-with-meaning that the humanities study aren't *signs* in the sense that they aren't like the rising of the mercury column (that indicate warmer weather), nor like the speckles on one's skin (that indicate measles). But how exactly shall we make this distinction if we wish to avoid equivocation?

Here is my proposal. The kind of meaning that the objects of the humanities have is the (or a) *meaning that derives from human conventions, from human intentions, and/or from human purposive behaviour*. This phrase is sharp enough to exclude the meaning of the trail, the meaning of the height of the mercury column, and the meaning of the specks on one's skin, as none of these meanings is due to conventions, or human intentions; none of these things have intentions, nor does their meaning derive from human purposive behaviour. At the same time this phrase is broad enough to cover a plurality of things that can all be called 'meanings' which are the objects of the humanities. In order to make this point clear, I first have to deal with the notions of 'intention' and 'purposive behaviour' and next with the said plurality.

I claimed that the objects that are being studied in the humanities have a meaning that is, or is derived from, human conventions, intentions and/or purposive behaviour. People have intentions, and they act intentionally. Having intentions and acting intentionally are related, but nonetheless different things.[7] People have intentions, for example the intention to become a better piano player, or the intention to attend a particular meeting. But *to have* intentions is not the same as *to act* intentionally. People act intentionally, for example, when they buy a piano, and when they attend that particular meeting. These actions are intentional in the sense that people who do these things don't do them inadvertently, or by accident, or by mistake. They are, in one sense of the word, 'meaningful' actions. Now the intentions that people have, and the intentional actions they perform, are among the paradigmatic objects of humanistic study. For it is widely felt that to know what intentions people have, and which of their actions are intentional is very often quite

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[7]   The complex relations between these is a major topic of Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), as well as of J.L. Austin, 'Three Ways of Spilling Ink', *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 272–87.

important and valuable. (It isn't that engaging in humanistic study is the *only* way to come to know the intentions that people have, or the *only* way to come to know which of their actions are intentional. In many ordinary cases and quotidian contexts nothing that qualifies as 'humanistic study' is required for that. But sometimes it is.) And the point is that the natural sciences give us no handle on intentions, nor on intentional actions: they cannot help us to find out the intentions of people have, nor whether their actions are intentional.

As J.L. Austin has argued, acting intentionally is not the same as acting on purpose. What is done intentionally need not be done 'on purpose', i.e. not done for a purpose, but *without* a purpose. One of his examples is children that pull off the wings of a fly. There is no purpose to these actions, yet they are done intentionally. They are wanton acts. Austin suggested that what is done on purpose is always done intentionally. Purposeful action is always intentional action. Examples of actions done for a purpose are: standing up and walking to the book shelve in order to take out a particular volume; waving your hand so as to greet your neighbour; saying 'I do' in a very special setting with the aim of getting married. Actions done for a purpose are the objects of humanistic study, not of scientific inquiry. The natural sciences are blind to purposeful behaviours – they lack the categories to even articulate them.

Actions done for a purpose may lead to objects, states of affairs, or events that continue to exist long after the actions from which they resulted were completed. Purposive actions are themselves items with meaning. But many results or outcomes of purposive actions have meaning as well, for example uttered sentences, books, statues, paintings, buildings, legal regulations, wars, and many other things. The meaning that is the object of humanistic study, is meaning that is derived from human intentions and from human purposive behaviour.

A potential misunderstanding must be avoided. I have been talking about the 'objects of the humanities' and the 'objects of the sciences', and I claimed that these objects are different. This is potentially misleading in that the self-same thing X might be studied *both* scientifically and humanistically. Paintings and statues, for example, can be studied scientifically: it can be studied what sort of paint or material has been used, what its chemical and physical properties are, how sensitive to light the materials are, etc. At the same time they can be studied humanistically: it can be studied what they mean, what their makers intended with their production, what cultural relevance they have, etc. In such cases the humanities and the sciences study 'the same thing', viz. X. But this doesn't undermine my general claim

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that the humanities and the sciences study *different objects*, for they study *different properties* of things.

As I said earlier, the phrase '*meaning that derives from human conventions, human intentions, and/or human purposive behaviour*', is broad enough to cover a plurality of things that can all be called 'meanings'. To this plurality I now turn. I list seven different notions of 'meaning', each of which refers to a property in virtue of which their bearers are actual or potential objects of humanistic study.

[a] *Sentence meaning*. Sentences have meaning.[8] The English sentence 'The earth revolves around its axis' means something, it means the same as the Dutch sentence 'De aarde draait om haar as'. Sometimes it is difficult to tell what the meaning of a sentence is, for instance when it concerns a topic you are not familiar with, or when you don't know some of the technical terminology that is used. If we want to understand such sentence, we try to find a sentence that expresses the same meaning, but, for us, *clearer*.

Sentence meaning is one kind of meaning falling under the umbrella '*meaning that derives from human conventions, human intentions and/or from human purposive behaviour*', as the meaning of a sentence derives from human conventions about word meaning, grammar, and pragmatics.

It goes without saying that not each and every object with sentence meaning is an object of humanistic inquiry. Many sentences that are uttered and written down will never be the object of anything that merits the description 'humanistic inquiry'. Still, sentences are among such objects. Sometimes they are such objects because they seem important while at the same time obscure, and hence in need of clarification. Such inquiry focuses on the meaning of the sentence and is *exegetical* in nature. Other times it is not the *meaning* of a sentence that is the object of humanistic study, but its *structure*; such inquiry is *grammatical* in nature.

The natural sciences don't and can't study these objects, as they are blind to sentence meaning. There is no natural science we can turn to when we want to know the meaning of a sentence.

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[8] It is one thing to say that sentences have meaning. It is quite another thing to give an *account* of sentence meaning, i.e. an explanation of what it is that a sentence has when it has meaning. One impressive but not widely discussed account is P. Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), part II.

[b] *Word meaning*. Words have meaning.[9] 'To procrastinate', for instance, means 'to put things off'. When we don't know the meaning of a word, we look it up in a dictionary where we find more or less helpful synonyms for it.

Word meanings also fall under the broad umbrella of '*meaning that derives from human conventions, human intentions and/or from human purposive behaviour*', as the meaning of a word derives from human conventions.

It goes without saying that not each and every object with word meaning is an object of humanistic inquiry. In the ordinary run of things we normally know what words mean. Still, words are among the objects of the humanities. Word meanings are studied by lexicologists. However, it is not only the *meaning* of words that is the object of humanistic study. Word forms are also studied; morphologists and historical grammarians do this.

The natural sciences, again, have no handle on word meaning and word form, and hence cannot contribute to their study.

[c] *Speaker's meaning*. Word meaning and sentence meaning must be distinguished from what Paul Grice has called *speaker's meaning*.[10] The difference between sentence meaning and speaker's meaning is the difference between what a speaker *says* (in the sense of the words he utters) and what he *implicates* (implies, suggested). Consider the sentence 'It is cold in here'. This sentence has a meaning that everyone who reads these words understands. When John utters that sentence, however, he might mean to implicate that the window should be closed. It is one thing to know what a sentence means, it is another thing to know what the utterer of that sentence implicated, i.e. what he aimed to suggest by uttering it.

Speaker's meaning, as I will be using the term, encompasses more than Gricean 'conversational implicatures'. It also encompasses illocutionary act intentions and perlocutionary act intentions. Here I am drawing on the theory of speech acts that was given its initial form by J.L. Austin.[11] By way of explanation, when the prime minister said

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[9] J.L. Austin has pointed out in his characteristic way numerous pitfalls that surround the notion 'the meaning of a word'; see J.L. Austin, 'The Meaning of a Word', *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970), 55–75.

[10] Paul Grice, Studies in the Way of Words (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), 117–137.

[11] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). A full-blown exposition of this theory is William P. Alston, *Illocutionary Acts and Sentence Meaning*, part I.

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'Jack won't be released', she said that, let us suppose, in order to calm down the opposition. She intended her words to have that calming effect. The intended effect of her words are her 'perlocutionary intentions'. For understanding what someone said it is often quite relevant to know such intentions. Speakers also have 'illocutionary intentions'. Suppose Agnes spoke the words 'Alzheimer's disease is the next medical tsunami', then how must her words be taken? Is she quoting someone, is she making an announcement, or is she making a prediction? She may have had any of these intentions. But to her hearers it will be quite important to know *which* of these 'illocutionary intentions' she in fact had. To understand what a speaker said, it will generally be quite important to know what the speaker's illocutionary intentions were.

Speaker's meaning can be attached to sentences, but also to larger linguistic wholes, such as speeches, articles, books.

In many cases, in many contexts, we don't need specialized scholarship in order to (get to) know a speaker's meaning. But sometimes we do. Such speaker's meanings are potential objects of the humanities.

Speaker's meaning also falls under the broad umbrella of '*meaning that derives from human conventions, human intentions and/or from human purposive behaviour*'. For speaker's meaning just *is* the intention a person has when he produces a sentence.

Speaker's meanings are not the object of the natural sciences. The sciences cannot address questions about conversational implicatures, perlocutionary intentions, and illocutionary intentions.

[d] *Maker's meaning*. Although linguistic objects form an important and expansive contingent of objects of the humanities, they by no means exhaust the field. Humans not only speak, they also make paintings, drawings, and statues, buildings, they make movies, and music, and they dance. Instances of these have analogues of speaker's meaning. They have what I shall call maker's meaning. The makers of these items have intentions in making these items, they realize intentions in making these artefacts. Paintings and drawings are made from a huge variety of intentions: to make a statement about war; to remind others of things that are important; to shed new light on a depicted event; they express anger or happiness; and many other things. Statues are made with the intention of enabling the commemoration of an important statesman, or to keep alive the memory of those who gave their lives for freedom's sake. Movies are made for an enormous varieties reasons: to accuse, to give hope, to commemorate, to edify, to warn, to amuse… *Mutatis mutandis* the same is true of music, dances and the dramatic performances: their makers had intentions

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(analogues of illocutionary and perlocutionary intentions) that they aimed to realize through these works. These intentions are the maker's meaning.

Maker's meaning, of which speaker's meaning is one variety, fits the broad umbrella of '*meaning that derives from human conventions, human intentions and/or from human purposive behaviour*'. For maker's meaning is the intention that the maker meant to realize through making the work; works of art, and artefacts in general, are the products of purposive human behaviour.

Many maker's meanings will never be the object of anything that qualifies as humanistic research. Still, if a thing has maker's meaning it is a potential object of such inquiry.

[e] *Functional meaning*. Humans make pottery, cutlery, ovens, tables, beds, clothes, and numerous other sorts of artefacts, such as laws and regulations, organizations and societal structures. These things are made *with* a purpose and made *for* a purpose. Pottery is made for the purpose of storing and cooking food in; cutlery is made for the purpose of civilized eating; laws and regulations are made for the purpose of structuring society, etc. These artefacts have meanings – the meanings being *the functions they were intended to perform*. I call this their *functional meaning*.

The functional meanings of human made artefacts fit under the umbrella of '*meaning that derives from human conventions, human intentions and/or from human purposive behaviour*'. This kind of meaning derives from human intentions and from human purposive behaviour; without these, these things wouldn't even exist.

Here too there are many things with functional meanings that never have been, or will become, the object of humanistic study. Still, such meanings are possible objects of such studies. Archaeological study of shards of pottery is an instance of such study – at least when the aim is to find out the functional meaning of the shards.

[f] *Expressive/indicative meaning.* Sometimes intentional human behaviours, or states of affairs resulting from those behaviours, express or indicate or reveal something that the agent who performs the behaviours, is or was unaware of. A possible example is what Freud has called 'Fehlleistungen', or what the English translators of his work render as 'parapraxes', i.e. mistakes that betray something of the deep attitude of the person in question, such as mis-hearing someone, mis-seeing something, slips of the tongue, and forgetting. Freud's example of the latter is the case of a young man who lost the expensive fountain pen that he got from his father; according to Freud the loss indicates that the young man has a troubled

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relationship with his father.[12] If Freud's theory is right, parapraxes fit the broad umbrella of '*meaning that derives from human conventions, human intentions and/or from human purposive behaviour*'. For although persons are unaware of what their parapraxes express or indicate, their meaning does derive from their (unconscious) intentions and their (unconscious) purposes.

The rubric of expressive/indicative meaning should be understood so as to also encompass the quite elusive phenomenon that texts may express thoughts and ideas that go beyond what the author may explicitly have wanted to express. In such cases it wasn't the author's explicit illocutionary intention to convey those particular thoughts and ideas. The author may even be unaware of the very thoughts and ideas themselves – and this *not* because of some false consciousness in the author. This sets the sort of cases I have in mind apart from the Freudian cases mentioned in the previous paragraph, as in those cases there *is* some sort of false consciousness. To substantiate the suggestion that there is this sort of expressive/indicative meaning, think of, for example, *King Lear*. Certain thoughts and ideas in that drama may only become evident as the play is performed, thought about, criticized, etc. These thoughts and ideas may be latent in Shakespeare's text and they may never have been explicitly contemplated by Shakespeare himself. Still, the drama, or the performances thereof, may be said to 'express' those thoughts and ideas. René Girard was a literary scholar who was rather keen on this kind of expressive/indicative meaning. He argued that a number of novelists expressed important thoughts and ideas about desires and desiring that they in all likelihood had never explicitly contemplated.[13] The thought their works expresses, he argued, is that desires and desiring have a mimetic structure, by which he means that when person X desires something Z, X desires Z not because of Z's own qualities, but because some other person Y desires Z, and X, unbeknownst to Xself, mimics or imitates Y. Whether or not Girard was right is up for debate. But his approach of novels fits a general pattern, viz. that texts may express thoughts and ideas that their authors were unaware of (and aren't due to false consciousness).

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[12]   Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, 1.* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1915 [1973]), 50–110.
[13]   Girard discusses works by Proust, Standhal, Flaubert, Cervantes, and Dostoyevski. See René Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1965).

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We here approach one way in which Wilhelm Dilthey sought to delineate the objects of the humanities.[14] Human beings, he said, experience things. Moreover, they *express* their experiences in poems, in books, in gestures, in works of art, etc. These expressions are 'objectifications' of private experiences, they take on an objective existence in the world of culture, and thus become in principle accessible to others. The objects of the humanities are objectified expressions of human experiences. The objects of the sciences lack this character. Neither the rising of a mercury column, nor the speckles on a person's skin express experiences.

Objectifications of human experiences have expressive/indicative meaning too – they are indications and expressions of experiences. These meanings too fit the broad umbrella of '*meaning that derives from human conventions, human intentions and/or from human purposive behaviour*', as the objectifications are the products of human intentions and of purposive behaviour.

Of course, not all objectifications will need humanistic scholarly treatment in order for their meaning to be captured. And not all will have this kind of meaning. Still, objects with such meaning exist, and they are the potential objects of a humanistic scholarly approach.

Expressive/indicative meaning hence covers both unconscious (Freudian-type cases) and conscious (Diltheyan-type cases) expressions and indications.

[g] *Value meaning.* Many things have value properties. Things mean something to us, *because* they have value properties. Certain poems mean much to us, because they are beautiful; they have *aesthetic* properties. Some acts mean much to us because they are acts of kindness, others because they are courageous. Some actions, moreover, are morally permitted, other morally required, yet others morally forbidden. So acts, as well the products thereof, have value properties, namely *moral* properties.

Aesthetic and moral properties, along with other value properties, too fit the broad umbrella of '*meaning that derives from human conventions, human intentions and/or from human purposive behaviour*.' They do so, first, because objects with value such as beautiful works of art, have that value due to human intentions and human purposive behaviour. Second, actions have value properties because human intentions and purposive behaviours are almost invariably driven by values, or rather the recognition thereof. Humans aim to realize

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[14]   Wilhelm Dilthey, *Einleitung in die Geisteswissenschaften* (Leipzig: Duncker & Humbolt, 1833), 79–88.

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values by making works of art, as well as other artefacts, and also by acting in particular ways.

Many things with value meaning will never be the object of humanistic investigation. Often the value meaning of things will be obvious to us. But not of all, perhaps not even of many. In such cases they may become the object of humanistic inquiry. Values and value properties of things and actions are among the objects of the humanities.

The sciences *don't* and even *can't* study the value properties of things.[15] However, in the technical sciences physical properties of materials are studied in the interest of deciding whether or not they can be used to build fire-resistant doors, or to make air-allowing water-proof overcoats from. Since fire-resistance and air-allowing water-proof ness incorporate values for humans, it could be thought that the study of values is not the prerogative of the humanities. However! The science-part of the technological disciplines has no handle on the fact that fire-resistance and air-allowing water-proof ness incorporate values for humans – viz. the values of safety and comfort. In order for people working on these projects to be able to grasp these values, something other than science must be reverted to, as values are among the objects that the sciences have no handle on. Values are among the objects of the humanities. Similar things can be said about pharmaceutic research.

What I have been arguing, then, is that the objects of the humanities are items that have a special sort of meaning – viz. '*meaning that derives from human conventions, human intentions and/or from human purposive behaviour*'. It is not unimportant to add to this that I am not at all suggesting that we have a crystal clear and uncontroversial grasp on the metaphysical nature of intentions, or purposive behaviour, or values. Much ink has been spilled over whether intentions, purposes and values can be reduced to other things or whether they have an independent ontological status, and on the question whether or not they fit in a scientific view of the world.[16] I don't aim to address these very large and complex issues here. What I have said must be understood as follows: the objects of the humanities are items that have a '*meaning*

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[15] I am assuming that value properties are non-natural properties. A strong case for the thesis that value properties are non-natural is made by Terence Cuneo & Russ Shafer-Landau, 'The moral fixed points: new directions for moral nonnaturalism', *Philosophical Studies* **171** (2014), 399–443.
[16] See Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention*, 1957; Scott Sehon, *Teleological Realism: Mind, Agency, and Explanation* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2005).

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that derives from human conventions, human intentions and/or from human purposive behaviour', whatever we may philosophically think about the metaphysical nature of intentions, human purposive behaviour, and values. In order to work in the humanities one needn't have a worked-out philosophical account of intentions and purposes – nor of meaning for that matter! Just as a medical researcher can professionally and effectively conduct his research on patients, even if he has no worked-out metaphysical view as to what persons are.

3. The Aims of the Humanities

So far I have indicated in broad strokes what the objects of the humanities are and suggested that the natural sciences are unable to study them. The basic idea is that the objects of humanistic study are characterized by the fact that they have meaning, are woven into the fabric of intentions, and embody values. I should now like to move on and indicate what the *aims* of the humanities are, i.e. what they try to accomplish, and again contrast these with the aims of the sciences. Of course, strictly speaking neither the humanities nor the sciences are the sort of things that can have aims. It is only *human beings* that can have aims. In a non-strict way, however, we can say that the humanities and the sciences do have aims. We can do that when we think of engagement in the sciences and humanities as a social practice, that, following Alasdair MacIntyre, may be thought of as a coherent but complex form of socially established human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve standards of excellence that are appropriate to and partly definitive of that form of activity.[17] 'Goods internal to' a practice, are the 'aims' of that practice. The goods internal to the humanities, as I will argue in this section, are different from the goods internal of the sciences.

Before doing that, however, I note that practice-internal aims must be distinguished from whatever it is that *motivates* people to engage in the practice in the first place. People can be motivated towards engaging in the humanities or in the sciences by intellectual curiosity, or by the wish to show to others that they can take on an intellectual challenge, or by the wish to do something respectable, or by the wish to boost their ego, or by the wish to be part of a social group, or by the wish to make money. None of these or other motivations have (or

[17] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* 2nd ed. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 187.

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perhaps I should say: *should* have) a bearing on the practice-internal aims of the humanities or the sciences.

What, then, are the aims internal to the humanities? As will become immediately clear, a truly bewildering array of aims can be distinguished. As will also become clear, sometimes those aims can be attained inside and other times outside of a scholarly context. In some cases these aims are attained routinely, in other cases their attainment requires protracted scholarly effort. It is mostly only when the aims are attained within a scholarly context that we speak of the humanities. Something similar is true of the aims of the sciences: sometimes these aims can be attained outside of academic and laboratory contexts, but other times they can't. In some cases the aims of the natural sciences can be attained routinely, in other cases their attainment requires extensive research and hi-tech laboratories. It is mostly only when the aims are attained within an academic setting that we speak of science. Susan Haack once said that science is 'the long arm of common sense';[18] I say that the humanities are another long arm of common sense. Many of the ordinary quotidian aims we have, and many of the ways of finding things out, are continued and sharpened in both the humanities and the sciences.

Orienting myself to the various kinds of objects that were delineated in the previous section, I will now list a number of the aims of, the internal goods of, the humanities. Since the humanities are a huge and living thing that is moreover in constant flux of development, the list cannot possibly lay claim to completeness.

With respect to [a], *sentence meaning*, the aims include: (i) understanding the meaning of sentences in a language, especially sentences that seem puzzling or even obscure to us; (ii) explicating the syntactic rules that underlie well-formed meaningful sentences in a language; (iii) tracing syntactic changes and developments over time; (iv) explaining how syntax is learned by children and second-language users.

Concerning [b], *word meaning*, the aims include: (i) explicating the meanings of words in a language; (ii) tracing shifts in word meaning in a language over time; (iii) explaining why certain words became popular, while others receded into obscurity.

As to [c], *speaker's meaning*, some aims are: (i) understanding or reconstructing what it was that a speaker or an author intended to convey through her words (=understanding the illocutionary intentions of a speaker or author); (ii) explicating what a speaker or an

[18]   Susan Haack, *Defending Science – Within Reason: Between Scientism and Cynicism* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2007), 93–122.

author aimed to bring about through his words, what effects he tried to secure through them (=explication the speaker's or author's perlocutionary intentions); (iii) understanding what it was that motivated the speaker to say what he wanted to say, what it was that motivated the author to say what she wanted to say.

Aims concerning [d], *maker's meaning*, mimic the aims concerning speaker's meaning: (i) understanding or reconstructing what, if anything, it is that the maker of a particular non-linguistic artefact such as a painting, a statue, a musical composition, etc. intends to convey through her work; (ii) explicating what, if anything, the maker of a non-linguistic artefact aimed to bring about through her work, the effects he tried to secure through it; (iii) to understand what motivated the maker to make what she made; (iv) to explain why an audience responded to the maker's work in the way it did.

Regarding [e], *functional meaning*, the aims include: (i) understanding the actual or intended function of a particular object or man-made institution; (ii) explaining which properties of a particular object or institution are responsible for its ability to perform its actual and/or intended function; (iii) gaining historical insight into how certain things and institutions, rules and laws have come to be; (iv) understanding the emergence of things and states of affairs that are unintentional side-effects of intentional actions.

A propos [f], *expressive/indicative meaning*, some aims are: (i) to explicate what is, perhaps unintentionally, expressed by a speaker's speech, or a maker's work in terms of a particular theory such as Marxism, Psychoanalysis, Mimesis theory, etc.; (ii) to articulate the respects in which a speaker or maker is a child of his times; (iii) 'getting into the mind' of someone who expressed himself in particular ways – trying to see what someone else saw, feel what someone else felt, etc., i.e. getting a sense of what-it-is-like to have an experience one hasn't had for oneself.

Finally, concerning [g], *value meaning*, we may say that one of the aims of the humanities is *to value things* (i.e. to *evaluate* things) – more specifically, to value them *properly*. One values a thing properly when one endorses its value when it has value, or denies it has value when it has no value. Poems and novels can be valued – and what the humanities strive for is to value them properly, i.e. to endorse their, say, aesthetic and artistic value when they have such value, or to deny them value when they don't have value. Actions such as slapping someone in the face, helping one's grandmother in need, and having an abortion – these actions have moral properties. To value these actions adequately is to see them as morally required or permitted when they *are* morally required or permitted, and to see them as morally wrong

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when they *are* morally wrong. Analogous things could be said about other values. In a way that needs qualification it can be said that the aim of the natural sciences is *not* to gauge the values that things may have. The natural sciences don't value the aesthetic properties of poems, or whether or not a certain action is morally permitted. The aims of the humanities hence include: (i) gauging the literary, aesthetic, moral and others values of speeches, poems, novels and other books, and of works of art, and of states of affairs and events; (ii) understanding in virtue of what certain objects, or states of affairs are good or bad; (iii) finding out what we ought to do, and ought not to do; they also include (iv) handing over insights into what is valuable and honourable to new generations.

I take it that we can see that these aims cannot be attained by doing physics, or chemistry, or biology, or astrophysics, or brain science. Why that is? The answer has to do with the practice-internal aims of the sciences. These are varied (but perhaps not as varied as the aims of the humanities): (i) finding out the regularities and correlations that hold in the natural world; (ii) explaining phenomena by figuring out their natural causes (Virgil's adage *Felix, qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas* has resounded throughout the ages); (iii) predicting future events; (v) providing knowledge that might satisfy technological and practical interests, i.e. enable humans to produce artefacts that they think are useful.

The differences in aim between the humanities and the sciences are stark. The natural sciences don't tell us about and don't study meanings, intentions, or values. Of course, natural scientists inevitably will have ideas about what is meaningful (for instance about what is meaningful to investigate, or about the meaning of certain experiments, and also, surely, about what words and sentences mean), they surely have intentions (for instance the intention to conduct rigid experiments on super conduction), and they no doubt have ideas about values (even if only so-called 'theoretical values', i.e. values that should be heeded if an inquiry is to yield valid results). But meaning, intention, and value are not among the *objects* that they study.

The differences are stark, even when both the sciences and the humanities sometimes seek to 'explain' things. However, 'explanation' is a bit of a weasel word, and we cannot suppose that in the context of the humanities the word refers to the same things as it does in the context of the sciences. According to one important theory of scientific explanation, Hempel and Oppenheim's account of deductive-nomological explanation, phenomenon X is explained provided X can be deduced from the laws of nature and the local initial

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conditions.[19] Although this theory has its problems[20], it is widely agreed that a wide and important class of explanations in the sciences do involve essential reference to physical laws, i.e. laws that describe relations of nomic necessitation.[21] Explanations in the humanities, however, don't refer to laws of necessitation. As Rens Bod has forcefully argued, the humanities do embody a search for principles and patterns, such as grammatical patterns, phonetic principles, etc.[22] But such principles and patterns are not physical laws of necessitation. Moreover, these principles and patterns are mostly not presented as *explanations* but rather as organizers of otherwise seemingly jumbles of facts. The principles and patterns make the facts intelligible. This is not to deny that in the humanities explanations are offered. But such explanations as are given don't refer to laws that necessitate. Rather, such explanations refer to the intentions of actors, to the reasons they had for acting as they did, as, for example, when an explanation is offered why Churchill bombed part of the French fleet in 1940 (known as the Battle of Mers-el-Kebir), or an explanation of why Hendrik IV (1056–1106) went to Canossa, or an explanation why my neighbour sold his house. My point, then, is that even if both the sciences and the humanities aim to 'explain' things, the *nature* of the explanations offered is very different.

The aims of the humanities, then, have to do with understanding and explaining meanings, intentions, and values, whereas the aims of sciences don't. This may give rise to the question whether there is a *fundamental* difference in aim underlying all other differences

[19] The classic exposition of the DN-model is Carl G Hempel, *Philosophy of the Natural Sciences* (Englewood-Cliffs: Prentice Hall.Hempel, 1966), chapter five.

[20] It has been argued that the conditions mentioned by Hempel and Oppenheim are *not sufficient*, as their account faces counterexamples involving irrelevant factors, symmetry, and prediction. See James Ladyman, *Understanding Philosophy of Science* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002), 202–6.

[21] Here I accord with Swinburne who argued that, given some of the problems mentioned in the previous footnote, Hempel's account of explanation must be modified so as to involve a notion of 'law of nature' according to which a law of nature states that events of a certain kind *physically necessitate* (or make probable) events of a certain other kind. On Swinburne's modified Hempelian account an explanation retains the concept of causation – it doesn't analyze it away in radically other terms. See Richard Swinburne, *The Existence of God* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 29–31.

[22] Bod, *A New history of the Humanities* (2013).

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in aim? Karl-Otto Apel's interesting proposal is that the humanities and the sciences embody different so-called 'cognitive interests'.[23] Whereas the aims of the natural sciences are impregnated by the *interest to explain* natural phenomena, the aims of the humanities, by contrast, are impregnated by the *interest of communicative under- standing*.[24] This proposal accords to some extent with what I have been arguing in this section. However, it doesn't explicitly refer to the value-oriented aims of the humanities, nor to the humanities' focus on intentions, intentional actions, and the products thereof. For this reason I prefer my own suggestions about the peculiar objects of the humanities, as well as about the specific aims of the hu- manities, since they make these references explicitly, and thus give a richer picture.

So far I have highlighted differences. However, there is one com- munality of aim between the sciences and the humanities that is of staggering importance. They both serve the two prime epistemic goals, which have been described by William James as follows: 'We must know the truth; and we must avoid error, – these are our first and great commandments as would-be knowers; but they are not two ways of stating an identical commandment, they are two separable laws.'[25] Seeking truth and avoiding error are the two lode stars of both the humanities and the sciences[26]. Both seek knowledge and aim to undermine what is only presumed knowledge. They seek knowledge of different objects, as I have been at pains to show – but knowledge nonetheless. And to seek to know, is to seek the truth, and to avoid falsehood. For knowledge entails truth, and false knowledge is

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[23] See Karl-Otto Apel, *Understanding and Explanation* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1984), 19, 32, 182, 184.

[24] Moreover, the technological sciences, Apel says, embody the interest of manipulative interaction.

[25] William James, 'The Will to Believe', in William James, *The Will to Believe and other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1897 [1956]), 17.

[26] That science aims at truth is by no means uncontroversial. Bas C. van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980) has famously argued that science's goal is empirical adequacy. It must be noted, though, that what Van Fraassen denies is that *when it comes to what is unob- servable* truth is science's goal. When it comes to what is observable he does seem to adopt truth as the goal of science. An argument for truth as goal is René van Woudenberg, 'Truths that Science Cannot Touch', *Philosophia Reformata* **76** (2011), 169–186. A clear-headed criticism of the idea that truth is not the goal of science is Alvin Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1999), chapter eight.

impossible. What I say is that both the sciences and the humanities have as (part of) their practice-internal aim *epistemic* aims, i.e. the aims of seeking truth and avoiding falsehood. This means that both aim at propositional knowledge.

Saying that the humanities aim at propositional truth[27] is a claim of some moment, as many working in the humanities eschew talk of truth and put a lot of emphasis on 'subjectivity', 'situatedness', and 'relativity'.[28] However, in actual practice truth-relevant considerations do play an important role in the humanities. This is the way it should be. For the humanities must be veritistic, if they are to be at all.

4. The Methods of the Humanities

In what ways do the humanities aim to attain their aims? What do scholars in the humanities *do* in order to attain those aims? What are their *methods*? Do they have any methods at all? Well, what *is* a method? Before taking on these questions, I quote a very sensible remark of John Stuart Mill about methods and theories about methods:

> The Principles of Evidence and Theories of Method are not to be constructed *a priori*. The laws of our rational faculty, like those of every other natural agency, are only learnt by seeing the agent at

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[27]   Saying that the humanities aim at propositional truth is not saying that this is their *only* aim. Other aims that the humanities can and do have include: the development of certain sensibilities, the nourishing of the intellect, learning to cope with certain kinds of complexities. See for this Robert Audi, 'The Place of the Humanities in Public Education', *The Nebraska Humanist* **5** (1982), 37–43.

[28]   Especially when it comes to interpreting works of literature and works of art, it has been claimed that it is wrong, futile, mis-conceived to seek for the true meaning of a work, or 'the true interpretation' of it. An older but still good critical discussion of such claims is Eli D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967). Advocates of these claims often confuse 'the truth of a statement' with 'the reasons we may have for thinking that a statement is true'. For a discussion of why this is a confusion, see René Van Woudenberg, 'True Qualifiers for Qualified Truths', *The Review of Metaphysics* **68** (2014), 3–36. Many of these claims are directly due to the pervasive influence of 'postmodern' ideas about truth in the humanities. A trenchant but fair critique of these ideas is Alvin Goldman, *Knowledge in a Social World*, chapter one ('Epistemology and Postmodern Resistance').

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work. The earlier achievements of science were made without the conscious observance of any Scientific Method; and we should never have known by what process truth is to be ascertained if we had not previously ascertained many truths.[29]

The last sentence bears rephrasing: we should never have known by what methods truth is to be ascertained if we had not ascertained many truths independently of any explicitly formulated scientific (or, I add, humanistic) method.

Very generally speaking, a method is a set of rules that must be systematically applied in the interest of securing a certain result. The results aimed at can be broadly practical: one set of rules may be applied so as to build a house, another so as to fight a nasty germ, yet another so as to select the best candidate. The results aimed at can also be broadly theoretical: one set of rules may be applied so as to find out the height of a mountain, another set so as to establish the probability that some event will take place, yet another set so as to find out what it was that an author wanted to say by means of his text, still another set so as to detect the value of something, etc.

Philosophy of science text books usually discuss deductivism, inductivism and falsificationism as scientific methods.[30] Deductive methods include such rules as: 'formulate axioms or first principles of a certain field of study and make sure these axioms are perfectly evident (and a proposition is evident when only a little attention is needed to recognize it is true); next, prove propositions that are even slightly obscure, by deducing them from the axioms and propositions that have already been proved; third, treat things as much as possible in their natural order, beginning with the most simple and most general, and explain everything belonging to the nature of the genus before proceeding to particular species.'[31] Deductivism has worked fine for mathematics, but as a method for doing empirical research it was seriously flawed. Inductivist methods, by contrast, don't include rules having to do with stating axioms, or first principles. Rather, they include such rules as: 'first, collect data in an unprejudiced way; next, organize the data in a perspicuous way, free from presuppositions and constraints; then, through induction, derive correct generalizations and explanatory principles from the organized

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[29]   Mill, *A System of Logic*, 545.
[30]   For example John Losee, *A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Science,* 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), chapter ten.
[31]   A much more elaborated version of this model is offered by Willem R. de Jong & Arianna Betti, 'The Classical Model of Science: a millennia-old model of scientific rationality', *Synthese* **174** (2010), 185–203.

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data.'[32] Inductivism doesn't work well for the empirical sciences: we need selection principles for finding data (as not all data are relevant for the purposes at hand); moreover, we need principles to organize the data (data don't organize themselves); and most of all: there is no logical procedure to get from the organized data to the generalizations and explanatory principles – we need imagination, as theories are underdetermined by the data. Falsificationist methods include such rules as 'first, get clear about the empirical consequences of the theory you entertain; if you can't derive empirical predictions from it, then recast the theory in a way that will enable you derive predictions from it; if you can't recast the theory, then discard it; next, check whether the predicted consequences do obtain, if they don't, then reject or adjust the theory, but if they do, then stay on the outlook for falsifications.' Falsificationism worked well in some respects, but not in others. It worked well, insofar as it urged scientists to formulate theories that could in principle be refuted by counter examples and counter evidence. But it didn't work, insofar as it offers no rules for what to do in order to confirm a theory.

Although discussions about these methods are interesting in their own right, they are also rather abstract and at quite some remove from actual scientific and humanistic practices. In order to discuss the notion of method in a way that connects more nearly with actual practices, we need further distinctions. First, as already hinted at, methods are geared towards specific aims. The method of applying a thermometer aims at finding out temperatures, it doesn't aim at finding out velocities. The method of applying penicillin aims at fighting bacterial infections, it doesn't aim at fighting mental depressions. Second, methods specify rules that must be applied if the aim is to be attained. The method of applying a thermometer specifies how the thermometer is to be applied. For instance, if it is a thermometer for gauging out door temperatures, the thermometer should be in contact with the out door air; but if it is a thermometer for gauging temperatures of human bodies, it should be in contact with certain bodily parts, and not with others. The method of applying penicillin specifies how, when and where the drug is to be administered. Third, methods can be differentially successful in attaining their aims – if two methods are geared towards the same aim, the one may be more reliable than the other. One type of thermometer may be more reliable than another; one kind of penicillin more effective than an other.

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[32]   This is *very* roughly based on Losee, *A Historical Introduction to the Philosophy of Science*, 54–63.

It should be noted that a method may but need not consist of a great number of rules, may but need not involve rules that are very difficult to apply, may but need not involve rules that must be mastered through some training schema. The method for measuring the speed of light consists of many rules, many of which will be difficult to follow, and many of which will have to be mastered through some training schema. The method for figuring out whether one stone is bigger than another may, by contrast, consist of one simple rule: looking. This rule isn't hard to follow, and it requires no specialized training. Of course, if two stones are differently shaped and of roughly equal size, this method won't secure a result. In that case another method should be applied, for example the respective immersion of the stones in a fixed volume of water in a container; the stone that raises the water level most, is the bigger of the two. (One may worry that looking is not a 'method'. However, on my definition, it *is* a method. For it is geared towards an aim, viz. figuring out the shapes and colours and positions of middle-sized objects. It consists of rules, such as: having one's eyes opened, and looking in the direction of the object or objects.)

What are the methods of the humanities? Given the multiplicity of aims mentioned in the previous section, we must expect a multiplicity of methods. Which is exactly what we find. It will be impossible to describe, for each of the aims that are connected with the objects of the humanities, which methods are used. I therefore restrict myself for each of the objects to one or two methods geared toward one or two aims. Before turning to this, I need to touch a general matter that is of great importance to all of the methods that are wielded in the humanities. What is so reassuring about science is that its methods can repeatedly be employed by different persons, at different times and at different places. Because of this, the outcomes of the employment of a method transcend the level of personal divination or subjective feeling, as the outcomes can be tested, or verified, or corroborated by other persons using the same method. Do the methods applied in the humanities have this reassuring quality? This is a very big question that I cannot possibly deal with here. What I can say, and what I think must be said, is that insofar as the humanities apply rules, and since it belongs to the nature of rules that they can be re-applied (by different persons, at different times, to both the same and other materials), this invites us to make a presumption in favour of the methods used in the humanities. Whether these methods are all equally reliable, and whether they are as reliable as the methods of the natural sciences, is a very large matter that I won't go into. My present point is only that

the methods of the humanities must initially be presumed to be reliable – the onus of proof is on the person who claims the methods to be unreliable.

I now turn to a number of methods, of which I can only provide the barest of sketches.

[a] *Sentence meaning*. Suppose we hit upon a sentence whose meaning escapes us. What can we do to find its meaning? Is there a method, a set of rules, that we can apply to secure this aim? There are numerous rules we can and do apply, even if many of them have never been explicitly formulated in the (imaginary) Handbook for Finding out Sentence Meaning. Such as: ask the speaker; if the speaker is unavailable, ask others who you think are competent users of the language what they make of the sentence; in case you can't or won't do that, and the meaning escapes you because of an unfamiliar word, then consult a dictionary; if the meaning escapes you but not because of unfamiliar words, then consult a grammar book of that language; if the construction of the sentence cannot be found in the grammar book, then try to see whether the construction mimics constructions that can be found in other languages; if it does, you may have a clue, but if not, and if you cannot think of any other rules you can apply, you may provisionally conclude that the speaker produced a faulty sentence, that she made a mistake and that her sentence has no meaning (and a sentence can have no meaning, even if all the words it contains have meaning, as in 'Apples great as blue can hope umbrageous'.) Of course, these rules require that a number of non-trivial resources are available: dictionaries and grammar books. These resources themselves are the products of inquiry – products that have been methodically secured. The methods for finding and describing the grammar of a language have been developed en refined over time,[33] and have been described in great detail by professional linguists.[34] They include: finding out what the smallest meaningful units of a language are – and there are methods for doing this, 'methods of isolation' as they may be called. Also: finding out which grammatical roles which words can have in a language: which words can and which can't play the subject-role, which can and which can't play the predicate role, which words are substantives, which are adjectives and adverbs,

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[33] See Bod, *A New History of the Humanities* (2013).
[34] A state of the art work on this is Thomas Payne, *Describing Morphosyntax. A Guide for Field Linguists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

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which are count words, etc. There are myriad rules to follow if one wants to find out a language's grammar.

There appears to be no sharp borderline between the each and every day ways of finding out sentence meanings, and the sophisticated proceedings of professional linguists. Linguists wield the long arm of common sense procedures for figuring out sentence meaning, and they refine them with great skill and sensitivity in response to linguistic material at hand, and given the aims pursued. It should be clear that these methods are very different from the methods used in the sciences, such as the C-14 method for estimating the age of an object, or methods used for sequencing DNA, etc..

[b] *Word meaning.* Suppose we hit upon a word that we don't know – even though we are familiar with the language to which we presume the word belongs. Can we apply a method, rules we can apply, to find out the meaning of that word? Of course. We can ask others, we can consult a dictionary. If that doesn't help we can collect sentences in which the same word is used, and so get a sense of the context in which the word is used (the context of ship building, or computer programming, or abstract metaphysics, or cricket). Something like that is what lexicologists do when they make a dictionary for foreign and so far undescribed languages. In order to figure out the meaning of an unknown word in the absence of a dictionary, it is also relevant to find out *to what* the speaker commits himself when he uses that word in a variety of sentences in that language. Again these methods are very different from methods used in the natural sciences.

[c] *Speaker's meaning.* Looking about for methods that enable us to find out speaker's meaning lead us away from the methods that average language users, grammarians, lexicologists and other linguists enable them to find out about sentence and word meaning. In the preponderance of cases knowing the meaning of a sentence will be a necessary but insufficient requirement for knowing the speaker's meaning. So the first thing to do, if one wants to know a speaker's meaning, is to get to know the meaning of the sentence(s) that he uses. It is telling that Grice, who brought so much intelligence to the topic of speaker's meaning, never indicated how to go on from there – he never specified a method for doing that. He assumed that we more or less know how to do that, even if we cannot explicate the rules we follow. But here, as before, in most ordinary life contexts we do know the speaker's meaning, i.e. we know what he implicated, we grasp his illocutionary intentions, and often we also have a decent sense of his perlocutionary intentions.

Often we are confident about these things because we know the speaker or author, and know about his ways with words (is he a straight talker, or is he prone to making implicit suggestions, etc.); and perhaps we know something about his general outlook on things so that we can be somewhat confident about his intentions; or because we heard the entire speech, or read the whole book, or perhaps even more than that; or because of specific contextual clues we are aware of (we know who the audience was, and the occasion on which the speech was given; or the circumstances under which the text was written, etc.); as well as the culturally dependent modes of expression that we know of.

If we are not confident, we can ask the speaker or the author what he implicated, or what his intentions were. If they are unavailable, we will have to go by the clues that I mentioned in the previous paragraph, as well as by many others. Highly relevant among the clues is the genre to which the text from which the sentences are taken, belongs, or must be presumed to belong: is it a historical report, a literary essay, a novel, a poem, a propagandistic text, or yet something else? Every genre requires it own approach and its own rules of exegesis. It is the traditional task of hermeneutics to formulate those rules.[35] Often ego-documents of authors will provide clues as well. So there is a welter of things to attend to if one aims to grasp the speaker's meaning. Again, these ways of going about are very different from the ways of going about in the sciences.

We should not suppose that even if insistent scholarly attention is given to the clues mentioned above, and to the hermeneutical rules that have been proposed, we will have full certainty of the speaker's meaning. Pronouncements about speaker's intentions are fallible. Here as in the natural sciences, we will mostly have to be satisfied with probabilities – probabilities that often can not be given a precise numerical value. There are two main reasons for the lack of full certainty: (a) clues that once existed, may have gone missing; (b) speakers and authors may themselves not have very clear speaker's meanings, they may even have conflicting speaker's meanings.

[d] *Maker's meaning*. Finding out the maker's meaning of an artefact such as a painting, or a law, or a practical tool, is in many respects

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[35]   See Anthony C. Thisselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); Stanley E. Porter & Jason C. Robinson, *Hermeneutics. An Introduction to Interpretative Theory* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); Jens Zimmerman, *Hermeneutics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); these books cover interpretational methods in literary studies, biblical exegesis, and law.

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analogous to finding out speaker's meaning. Maker's meaning, recall, is what the maker aimed at by means of the work, what effects he may have hoped to realize through it.

Of relevance here are such things as: knowledge about the maker, what her station in life is, her general outlook on life; other things she made; what she said or wrote about what she made; what sorts of things her contemporaries working in the same area made; what her social and cultural environment was; what cultural conventions were in place; etc. All of these, and many more, might be or contain clues as to the maker's meaning. Examples of statements of speaker's meaning are: 'she intended that this law should improve the entrepreneurial interaction with the Russians', 'she intended to show that post-Raphael painting was dead', 'she aimed to stir up the public against the government's colonial politics'.

Finding out maker's meaning may very often not be a work of great travail. In many ordinary and run of the mill situations, we more or less unreflectively get a decent sense of maker's meaning. Not all situations are ordinary, however, and often we are clueless about the maker's meaning. In such situations, we may self-consciously pay explicit attention to the clues mentioned, and study them in an in-depth way, i.e. engage in humanistic scholarship.

Again we must not suppose that we will always reach a clear resolution about maker's meaning. Vital clues may get lost. Makers may have not one, but multiple meanings, and these might be in conflict with each other. Or they may explicitly say that they 'mean nothing at all'. Still, as a rule we may suppose that there is maker's meaning; there is no apriori reason for thinking things are otherwise. Also, we must deem ourselves able to capture maker's meaning; there is no apriori reason either for thinking we never can. In fact, there are strong reasons for thinking both that maker's meanings exist, and that we often are able to capture it. For example, we know from our own case that often when we make things, such as email messages, shopping lists, philosophical papers, poems, songs, paintings, laws, we have specific intentions in making these things (we affirm or deny something; we accuse or condone; we demonstrate something or cast it into doubt, etc.) and we aim to secure certain effects (we want certain things to be taken note of; certain things to be changed; certain seeds to be sowed, etc.); also: we often know the meanings of other makers (we know, we think, what Rembrandt wanted to say by means of *The Nightwatch*; we know what Rietveld intended when he made his famous chair.)

There are, then, multiple clues for finding out maker's meaning, multiple methods, i.e. multiple rules, to apply. Art historians,

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cultural scientists, historians may not have their methods cut out as clearly as linguists. But they surely have their methods – there is in fact intense discussions about them.[36] And the point to see is that these methods for finding out maker's meaning are very different from the methods used in the natural sciences. And that is only natural, given the diversity of aims.

With respect to [e] *functional meaning*, we should note that, as Heidegger rightly remarked, in ordinary contexts the functional meaning of many objects is unreflectively understood: we know the function of cups and cutlery, books and newspapers, cars and bikes, shoes and clothing, axes and rakes. We know what they are *for*. But there will always be objects whose functional meaning escapes us, in which case some bit of inquiry will be required – humanistic inquiry. The functional meaning of many states of affairs (for instance the state of affairs consisting in the borders between countries) and regulations (such as EU regulations for procurement) will often be less clear. In such cases we will have to do much more in-depth investigation, often of a historical nature. For a description of the prehistory of the opaque states of affairs and seemingly strange regulations may make them intelligible. Historical inquiry can shed light on the factors and motivations of key players that are responsible for the emergence of the states of affairs and regulations. Historians have many methods at their command to do this.

Historical accounts of functional meaning may sometimes have the effect that now that we see the history behind the objects, states of affairs and regulations, we become convinced that they are outdated, or wrong-headed, or unjust. At this junction the humanities may take on the further task of what has been called 'ideology

[36] In the area of art history and art theory, see Anne D' Alleva, *Methods and Theories of Art History* (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2003); Michael Hatt & Charlotte Klonk, *Art History: A Critical Introduction to Its Methods* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006); Margaret Iversen & Stephen W. Melville, *Writing Art History. Disciplinary Departures* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). For cultural humanistic studies, see Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierungen in der Kulturwissenschaften* (Berlin: De Gruyter: Bachmann-Medick, 2011); and Mieke Bal, *Traveling Concepts in the Humanities* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press., 2002). For history, see W.B. Gallie, *Philosophy & the Historical Understanding,* Second Edition (New York: Schocken.Gallie, 1968); and Chris Lorenz, *Constructing the Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). Gallie's crucial claim is that much historical understanding must take the form of a narrative, a *story* – and he does a lot of work to explicate what a historical story is.

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critique', the task of passing critical normative judgments on what has emerged. However, on the basis of historical accounts of the functional meaning of objects, states of affairs and regulations, we can also become convinced that they are still important, still valuable, or even in need of further development. These too are important tasks of the humanities, and below, when discussing value meaning, I will return to it.

The obvious point this leads up to, of course, is that these methods are very different from the methods of the natural sciences, that are impotent when it comes to understanding the functional meaning of human-made artefacts.

Let us now turn to [f] *expressive/indicative meaning*. What humans do and what they make, is often the expression of something – something they might be unaware of. At least, that is what Marx and Freud, and the entire Christian tradition have maintained. Certain states of affairs, such as land ownership, Marx claimed, are expressions of capitalism. Certain cases of forgetting, Freud claimed, are expressions of certain unconscious attitudes. Certain attitudes, such as pride and greed, Christianity has said, are expressions of not being properly attuned to God. Whether these claims are true or false, depends on whether Marx' theory of capitalism is correct, on whether Freud's psychoanalytic theory is true, and on whether what Christianity says about sin, is true.

There are ways of critically testing such claims, and these ways are not the ways of natural scientific inquiry.

Finally we turn to [g] *value meaning*. We must endorse that a thing has value only when it in fact *has* value, and deny that a thing has value only when it *lacks* value. It is an unwanted, an unjust, and an unholy state of affairs when what is worthless gets high acclaim, and when what has great value, is declared worthless. Valuing, or evaluating, is something we do virtually all the time, in virtually all contexts, and often implicitly. We value, evaluate, meals by how they taste. We evaluate clothes by how they look on us, by how expensive they are, and by the likelihood that they bear slavery footprints. We evaluate speeches by how effective they are, by how well they are composed, by how authentic they seem. We evaluate actions from historical figures by the soundness of their aims, by the moral virtues those actions display, and by the good or bad effects that they sorted.

Evaluating is ubiquitous and mostly goes entirely spontaneous. However, sometimes we are puzzled, and don't know how to evaluate some deed, some object, some state of affairs. In such cases we must explicitly reflect on what to think, some form of study, investigation or scholarship is called for. In some of these the humanities have a

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task to perform. For as I said in the previous section, one task of the humanities is to *value* things. It should be clear that many things are not the object of humanistic evaluation. For instance, that your meal today was cooked well, is an evaluation, but not a humanistic evaluation. That the boss's farewell speech was a tad over the top is an evaluation, but not a humanistic one. However, some evaluations *can* be a task of the humanities. I mention four kinds of evaluation: logical, philosophical, aesthetic and moral.

We evaluate both deductive and inductive arguments in terms of soundness, validity, etc. To say of an inductive argument that it is incorrect is to pass a logically evaluative verdict on it. We evaluate works of art, among other things, in term of beauty and thus pass aesthetical verdicts on them. We evaluate persons, actions, and the products their actions in terms of being virtuous, being right and being just and thus pass moral verdicts on them.

Is there a *method* that is applied when the humanities pass such evaluative verdicts? They are certainly not chance verdicts, that might as well have taken an entirely different content. There is a method in it. First, all the relevant non moral facts must be ascertained, so: the physical qualities and properties of the painting or the statue, the compositional properties of the music, the circumstances of the action, etc. Sometimes non-humanistic modes of learning will have to be used to get things straight here. Next the relevant normative standards will have to be applied. How do we know about these standards? Is there a further method by which we can secure them? Many philosophers have held that there are 'first principles' that can be intuitively known by well-formed and well-educated persons that are free from prejudice. Aesthetics, logic and ethics all have been claimed to have their own first principles that supposedly can be known immediately, i.e. independent of argument or ratiocination.[37] What may be required, though, is reflection, but reflection is not argumentation.[38] Others have proposed methods for argumentatively deriving moral truths from a single principle – as did Henry Sidgwick in his voluminous *The Methods of Ethics*.[39]

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[37] See for instance Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Power,* Ed. Derek Brookes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002 [1785]), essays VI, VII, and VIII.

[38] Robert Audi, 'Ethical Reflectionism', *The Monist* **76** (1993), 295–315.

[39] Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981 [1907]).

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There is no space to go into this in any detail. Fortunately, there is no need either, as the main point is, again, that passing evaluative verdicts on matters aesthetical, logical and moral, cannot possibly be the business of the natural sciences. If scholarly attention needs to be given to such verdicts, then the humanities are in charge.

All of what I have said about method is still of a high level of abstraction and generality, even if it goes some bit further than the statements of Deductivism and Inductivism. But it is, I aver, or rather hope, of the right level to make the argument that the methods of the humanities are very different from those of the natural sciences at least plausible.

5. Conclusion

What I have been arguing, then, is that the humanities have objects, aims, and methods that differ from those of the sciences, and that the humanities can deliver cognitive goods that the sciences are incapable of delivering.[40] The crucial point of the argument is that the objects of the humanities, in contrast with the objects of the sciences, *have meaning* – a special kind of meaning that is to be contrasted with the meaning that certain specks on the skin have, viz. '*meaning that derives from human conventions, human intentions and/or from human purposive behaviour*'. This umbrella notion covers a number of more specific notions of meaning, such as: [a] sentence meaning, [b] word meaning, [c] speaker's meaning, [d] maker's meaning, [e] functional meaning, [f] expressive/indicative meaning, and [g] value meaning. I have laid no claim to completeness, nor did I exclude the possibility that some of these notions can be further analyzed. But I have claimed that when it comes to understanding these meanings, the natural sciences leave us destitute.

With respect to this special sort of meaning, I suggested furthermore, we have a great variety of different cognitive aims – there are many different things we want to find out about them. Very often

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[40] This paper, hence, is one long argument against scientism, the view that only the natural sciences can give us knowledge. Advocates of some form of scientism include logical positivists, Alex Rosenberg, Daniel Dennett, Richard Dawkins, and Maarten Boudry. For a critical evaluation of scientism see René Van Woudenberg, 'An Epistemological Critique of Scientism', in Jeroen de Ridder, Rik Peels & René van Woudenberg (eds), *Scientism: Prospects and Perils* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

we are capable of realizing these aims independently of humanistic scholarly efforts. But sometimes scholarly efforts *are* required.

When scholarly efforts are required, workers in the humanities use a wide variety of methods, some of which have been formulated more rigorously than others. These methods differ from those in the sciences, even if the science and the humanities serve alike the epistemic goal of finding truth and avoiding falsehood. The use of methods makes the outcomes of humanistic inquiry testable and renders them open for two kinds of criticism, viz, that either the method has not been appropriately applied, or that the method itself is inappropriate. In this formal respect there is a parallel with the sciences.

Whether the Humanities have objects, aims and methods that differ from those of the social sciences is a matter that I have not discussed. (I leave that for another occasion, if not to others.)[41]

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