

Editorial

Crossing Boundaries: Transdisciplinarity in the Humanities and the Essential Foundation and Development of Our Field in the Twenty-First Century

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In preparation for a MDPI-sponsored workshop on the topic of transdisciplinarity in the Humanities (23 May 2026), we put together a list of possible questions, issues, approaches, and contributions linking traditional Humanities with related disciplines in order to determine what we might conceive of as the widest-possible concept of human-related topics, especially in an age when AI and posthumanism have gained much in traction, whether to our advantage or disadvantage. Humanities scholars need partners and allies and are best served when they are considered the center of a wide network, as long, of course, as the Humanities can maintain their own fundamental character. After all, in the Humanities, we deal with the core issue of what constitutes human existence, a vast topic that can only be approached reasonably if we embrace many different disciplines as they pertain to human life.

The most relevant topics of discussion during our workshop on 23 May 2026 were as follows:

1. The meaning of transdisciplinarity;
2. The meaning of transculturality;
3. The relevance of literature today;
4. The relevance of the Humanities;
5. Past and present cultures together;
6. Environmental concerns in the Humanities;
7. Media, AI, and the Humanities;
8. Identity and the Humanities;
9. Space, design, colors, shapes, smells, senses, and the Humanities;
10. Music and the Humanities;
11. The individual and society;
12. Politics and the Humanities;
13. Language and literature;
14. Science/math and the Humanities;
15. Philosophy and the Humanities;
16. Physical and mental well-being;
17. The historical framework, past, present, and future;
18. Human independence, creativity, and identity;
19. Freedom, justice, and equality;
20. Humanism and Transhumanism;
21. Spirituality, education, happiness.

We were able to attract twelve scholars from the fields of literature, architecture, linguistics, poetry and philosophy, and medicine who were interested in and willing to engage in conversation on the question of what the current Humanities might be and how we can



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move forward in a dramatically changing world. One great concern was the deep impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and hence, the perceived danger that university administrators and politicians might prioritize making the university financially independent by transforming it into a money-producing institution mostly run by computers, robots, and other machines—the corporatization of education as a means to an external end. A major concern looms very large upon us all regarding the relevance of pedagogy, both in the STEM fields and in the Humanities/Fine Arts/Architecture, etc. Why would any society place so much value on advanced learning, if not for financial reasons? Or is there more? Are there intrinsic values in advanced academic learning that make or break a society? What is the role and responsibility of the individual within his/her society? How do we engage with the past to shape the future? How do we interact with each other in a globalizing world?

Currently, there are serious doubts about the ability of AI to promote our cognitive skills, since large language models tend to take us to a low intellectual average and undermine the high goals of originality and creativity. When AI replaces our own intellectual efforts, we become slaves of a technology that was supposed to serve us (Simanowski 2025; for a thorough and very positive review, see Sebastian Meißner, in *literaturkritik.de*; online at: https://literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=32052; last accessed on 9 June 2026). The future, however, will tell how much the computers will be able to learn and whether they might make the quantum leap to become independent, imaginative, and creative. Will humanity then still be around? (see the contributions to Atasoy et al. 2026). What will be the impact of AI, and thus of the algorithmic media, on education, and hence on the Kantian fourth question regarding the very nature of the human being (see now the contributions to Barberi et al. 2026)? Ana-Maria Dulea offers a skeptical perspective on the implied goal of creating a new “living” entity here on earth, the robotized transhuman:

The process of mechanization necessary for the humanization of the machine presupposes a certain reductionist epistemology. It implicitly asserts that the adequate and exhaustive path to human reality is that of the natural sciences and engineering, more precisely computational neuroscience and computer science. This excludes from the outset the validity of other modes of knowledge—phenomenology, introspection, subjective experience, personalist philosophy, and, essentially, theology—which argue that personal reality has a dimension that withdraws from objective analysis. (Dulea 2026, p. 87).

In the process of promoting and advocating for robotized technology, transhumanism will ultimately, as Dulea argues, drawing deeply from Martin Heidegger’s prophetic insights and now also from Jürgen Habermas’s tremendous perception of the emerging asymmetry between humans and machines, drop the human dimension in favor of Artificial Intelligence, the robot (p. 88). Ultimately, those advocating for this technology jettison thousands of years of cultural development, or, in Dulea’s words.

These fundamental concepts—human dignity, personhood, consciousness, freedom—are not spontaneous creations, but the result of a long and complex intellectual synthesis. They have their roots in Greek rationality (logos), Roman legal formalism (persona), the affirmation of the autonomy of the Enlightenment subject, and, decisively and constitutively, in the anthropological revolution brought about by Christian theology, with the doctrine of man as imago Dei. (p. 90).

The consequences of these various mechanized and technical processes would be, as she concludes, that “transhumanism proposes a redefinition of the human being that is reductionist, instrumentalist, and ultimately self-destructive” (p. 95).

Why would we still support the study of philosophy, political science, anthropology, psychology, or abstract math when AI could do it all much better than expensive faculty? We can see the writing on the wall; once professors or other instructors have created a completely asynchronous course that can run all by itself, then those same faculty members

can all be let go. But there are huge problems in the emerging strategy of having more and more university courses operate completely online, and those problems concern the very essence of all education. What constitutes learning in the classical sense of the word? Does it refer to the simple acquisition of knowledge (data), or does education truly mean the growth of the individual who acquires *Bildung*, as Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835), based on earlier thinkers, had poignantly formulated? Are independent thinking, creativity, logical and rational thought processes, deeply rooted culture and identity, or a sensitivity for culture and aesthetics luxuries or essentials for society at large? These questions have been raised for a long time, possibly since the Middle Ages when the institution of the university first emerged (Bologna, Padua, Pavia, Paris, etc.). We face here the perennial conflict between financial constraints and educational values and ideals. Put differently, should the university train students for their future jobs, like a community college or a technical school, or should we support the idea that true learning, which is first of all an abstract, esoteric, maybe even spiritual experience, is grounded in ideas, in values, and hence ethics, combined with aestheticism. What matters universally is, I venture to say, an intellectualization of the young generation so that it can grow into independently thinking individuals capable of addressing past, present, and then also future challenges. The simple know-how necessary for craftspeople, engineers, medical professionals, finance experts, or managers, administrators, or supervisors in whatever capacity certainly proves to be valid in down-to-earth tasks. In fact, modern society needs many more people who can serve in those practical jobs, whether as plumbers, masons, electricians, car mechanics, or nurses. But there is always a higher level of intellectual study, which empowers the individual to move beyond regurgitated knowledge to a level where innovation, creativity, and critical thinking come in quite naturally. Let us call those people “visionaries,” “inventors,” or “creators,” whether in electromechanics, computer software, medical procedures, literary history, art and music history, architectural design, or mechanics. Ironically, despite countless calls by postcapitalist society to dismantle the modern university and to replace it with cadre schools producing workers and operators, not thinkers and creators, in many universities across the world, the Humanities, Theoretical Mathematics and Physics, Music, and the Fine Arts continue to flower, though we do not know for how long (Nussbaum 1997; Collini 2012).

We might never solve the perennial question of what defines the Humanities. In recent years, or decades, the traditional College of Arts and Science has been replaced by the College of Science and the College of Humanities. Oddly, this separation has also splintered off the Social Sciences and the Fine Arts, although it would only make sense to view human issues through a variety of lenses, textual, visual, musical, and spatial. It seems almost absurd that departments of philosophy and history are so deeply separated from departments of languages and literatures. Of course, that is probably by design, following the motto, “divide and conquer.” Writers and artists have never created their works in an intellectual vacuum; instead, they have lived within their own time and gone through their education, however it was available (Montuori 2025).

1. Philosophy and Humanities

One extremely important example of the intersection between the studies of Philosophy and the Humanities is the deep impact, throughout the last one and a half millennia, of the teachings of Boethius in his *De consolazione philosophiae* (ca. 524) on all of Western literature. In this, he successfully outlined the logical path beyond the contingency of Fortune toward the goal of true happiness. Himself facing the death penalty for alleged state treason, certainly a trumped-up charge, Boethius engages with Philosophy and learns in the course of a complex exchange with her to understand the true nature of Fortune and

the ultimate meaning of goodness, which is tantamount to absolute happiness. His treatise was translated into various vernaculars by kings, poets, and philosophers throughout the pre-modern age, and it is rather doubtful that any of the great authors from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and then also the subsequent centuries, were not aware of Boethius or did not reflect his teachings regarding the true nature of Fortune and the ultimate quest for happiness open to the individual. After all, the *De consolazione philosophiae* was one of the essential textbooks in schools across pre-modern Europe and far beyond.

By the same token, we could easily identify many other major philosophical treatises that exerted a deep influence on their contemporaries and thus created the intellectual framework for an entire cultural period or triggered a paradigm shift. Best known today might be the influence of Voltaire, Locke, Kant, or Hume on the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, or that of Karl Marx and, after him, of Friedrich Nietzsche on the nineteenth century until today. It thus seems incomprehensible to research or teach a piece of literature, music, art, or architecture while not taking into consideration the deep impact of the philosophical discourse at a specific time. Of course, the philosophical discourse tends to represent unique epistemological challenges, so students in the traditional Humanities might naturally shy away from philosophical texts, even though they short-shrift themselves in that process, gaining only a fragmentary understanding of the intellectual world, past and present, as represented by literary work.

2. Literature and Humanities

2.1. Medieval and Early Modern Perspectives

Similarly, how could we fully understand a literary work without keeping in mind the great influence of contemporary artworks or architecture? Several interesting examples can illustrate this question well. In Boccaccio's *Decameron* (ca. 1350), the storytellers flee the plague-infested city of Florence and retire to their country estates for the duration of ten days. Those locations serve a unique purpose: to spend time in leisure and to reflect on human, often erotic relationships. The park-like environments strongly support the discourse because they mirror the storytellers' social background and explain the choice of themes made by most characters in the text. Of course, we cannot limit ourselves to material conditions in our analysis of the *Decameron*, as a legion of scholarship has long confirmed. We also have to consider the strong criticism of the Church (anticlericalism), the effort to introduce concepts of toleration and tolerance, warnings about the foolishness of ignorant and silly people, the huge impact of communication or its failure, reflections on the role of fortune and misfortune, and the focus on love, sex, and marriage, among other issues. It goes without saying that the experience of the Black Death mattered centrally for Boccaccio, although he does not engage with it anywhere else except in the prologue.

We observe very similar conditions in other famous collections of entertaining narratives, which thus would profit from a transdisciplinary approach, taking us all the way to the Eastern Mediterranean and from there to Persia and India many centuries earlier, with examples such as *Kalila and Dimna*. Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* (1558/1559) was a deliberate attempt to compete with Boccaccio's *Decameron*, introducing a particular female perspective insofar as the women characters are presented as feisty, intelligent, resolute, and self-assured. Significantly, Marguerite used a very different framework for her collection, discussing at first a spa situated in the Pyrenees where a massive and torrential rainstorm forces all guests to depart in a hurry. This leads to a catastrophic situation for a whole group of them when they run into several other dangers, such as thieves and murderers, dangerous animals, a flooded river, and the destruction of a bridge to the outside world. This natural disaster thus becomes the relevant framework for the storytelling, though the story does not engage with the flooding itself. Nevertheless, here we encounter an excellent

example of how to combine the study of a literary work with the study of natural disasters, as they of course occurred in the past as well. In fact, there are many literary works from antiquity to the modern world in which ecocritical perspectives matter critically, whether with the eruption of a volcano or a tsunami (cf. the fascinating literary account *Phi Phi Island* by Josef Haslinger 2007). Numerous Baroque poets, such as Simon Dach and Martin Opitz, like their classical Roman predecessors, were keenly aware of the dangers resulting from natural disasters, but unless literary scholars and environmentalists/climatologists collaborate, we cannot expect to gain deeper insights into the relevance of presented data, text, or images. To understand this huge and highly complex phenomenon of cross-fertilization within a global narrative network, which bridged many languages, religions, and cultures, would require extensive translation studies and/or intensive transdisciplinary collaboration. There have always been major translators, whether in Baghdad or in Toledo, in Salerno or in Alexandria, and from those locations, we must look much further East to grasp the ever-developing phenomenon of intercultural connections across continents and languages (Classen 2022a).

Although mathematics seems to be a field of critical investigation primarily for mathematicians and other scientists, there are also intriguing examples of modern literary works engaged with the principles of mathematical calculations (Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Der Zahlenteufel*, 1997). An even better example of interdisciplinarity would be music, because throughout time, poets reflected on music in their works (*troubadour poetry*, *Minnesang*, *il dolce stil nuovo*, etc.) or predicated their narratives on the performance of music, as was often the case in Romantic literature. Most famous might be Thomas Mann's *Doktor Faustus* (1943), but we could include here also the many libretti for operas, such as Richard Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* (1865) (cf. Fajardo-Acosta 2010; Bryson 2017).

From a medieval perspective, this would not come as a surprise, as music was the central object of study at the graduate level, the *quadrivium*, which also included arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. Music was consistently considered to be the one discipline that brought the entire cosmos together both in physical and spiritual terms. To rely on a medieval example, Dante's *Divina Commedia* (completed ca. 1320) traces the protagonist, the pilgrim Dante, at first accompanied by his Roman guide Virgil, later by the Cistercian abbot Bernard of Clairvaux, and finally by his beloved Beatrice, on his way through the universe, from Inferno to Paradiso. It would be impossible to gain a comprehensive understanding of this Italian classic without an extensive study of the theological, medical, and especially optical and scientific aspects operating in the textual background. All those were, of course, based on the study of the *trivium*, consisting of logic, grammar, and rhetoric, i.e., language. Not surprisingly, the *Divina Commedia* exerted a huge influence across the world and can be identified as a major source of inspiration for works of literature in many languages. Undoubtedly, here, we face a perfect example of what a transdisciplinary approach in the Humanities can truly achieve: a kaleidoscopic and encyclopedic perspective (Classen 2022b).

2.2. Human Society and Literature

High-quality literature, though originally composed in one language, very quickly becomes known throughout the world through countless translations, which strongly encourages us to examine the broader cultural context of a work. This observation applies to both medieval and modern literature, not to speak of the world of the ancient classics. Literature, if valid and meaningful, relevant and exploratory, is communicative and reaches out to readers/listeners across languages, age groups, and religions, as the example of Haruki Murakami's novels and short stories confirms most impressively. Texts by the South American authors of Magical Realism have had a deep impact on world literature,

and only a transdisciplinary approach will do full justice to a critical engagement with them. Moreover, modern film and video games have produced numerous media that serve as bridges to literature and the visual arts (see, for instance, Umberto Eco's novel *Il nome di rosa*, 1980, film version in 1986, along with countless translations). Hugely popular novels for young readers, such as J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955) and J. K. Rowling's highly successful *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007), have been able to reach audiences across the world, which invites us to extend our investigative lens even further into academic fields such as media studies and psychology (imagination). It would not be possible to gain a good handle on science fiction literature without some understanding of astronomy and space exploration.

Undoubtedly, at most universities across the world, representatives of various academic departments tend to be possessive and guard their own territory with tooth and nail. Nevertheless, the university as an academic institution is changing, in light of countless challenges, with AI being not the least impactful. In the near future, the Humanities might lose sight of its own justifying principles and become moribund as fewer and fewer students enroll in the field.

2.3. Future Perspectives

Thus, transdisciplinarity lends itself productively and innovatively to the reorientation, re-foundation, and re-discovery of our field as relevant for present and future generations when we embrace AI, not as a threat to our existence, but as a tool that might strengthen our status within the university. Of course, this might turn into a Faustian pact with the devil, as Thomas Mann signaled in his famous novel *Doktor Faustus* (1947). Cross-listing academic seminars has been hailed as a panacea, but the bureaucratic hurdles tend to be high and may even make this approach impossible. One reason for this seems to be that we increasingly confuse the university for a community college or a trade school and try to offer our courses as opportunities for students to improve their marketability after graduation. Such a mercantilist concept is toxic to all our efforts to orient our students toward the future and provide them with knowledge and wisdom, instead of preparing them for a job that might or might not even exist after their graduation. True *Bildung*, i.e., individual knowledge and wisdom in the Humboldtian sense of the word, has always been of timeless value and creates a means to seek out employment in many different fields.

In light of these observations, we can take the next bold step and advocate strongly for transdisciplinary approaches in the Humanities so that our graduates may gain broader knowledge and deeper insight into the essence of existence, both in physical and spiritual terms. The famous novel *Ästhetik des Widerstands* by Peter Weiss (1975) not only engages with the issue of political resistance, but is predicated on a painting by Théodore Géricault, "The Raft of the Medusa" from 1819, setting the tone for the entire novel. The novel *Glasperlenspiel* by Hermann Hesse (1943) is told through the principles of education, medieval monastic history and historiography, Chinese meditation, and music. The list of relevant examples in world literature could be extended *ad nauseam*, but the point itself is quite obvious. Without a transdisciplinary approach, we tend to blind ourselves in our attempts at a close and comprehensive reading.

Of course, literature is not a panacea or the end in itself. We are centrally concerned with basic values of human existence, both in material and aesthetic terms, philosophically and religiously. Hence, our present and future foci will have to include many different academic disciplines that might together achieve the goal of a holistic and integrative reading of expressions of humanity and allow us to come to terms with the fundamental issues in our lives viewed from many different perspectives at the same time (e.g., music, architecture, space perception, medicine, theology, or even mathematics). This also entails

a close study of architectural spaces and natural environments, artistic representations and foodstuff as culture, park landscapes and gardens, and infrastructure and urban planning.

2.4. Past Perspectives

As a medievalist, I have seen how our field has been deeply affected by this transcultural perspective. What is needed now is a universal language based on global terminology. What basic concepts determine our subject matter, our methodologies, our hermeneutic approaches, and the ultimate purpose of our academic interests? In this moment, we can work toward a new model for the future, but we must do so collaboratively. This is, in essence, what our workshop was all about. Transdisciplinarity and transculturality are not simply catchy terms in a political discourse that attempts to promote the university as a central cultural institution. Instead, they are critically important signposts in our march toward the future in research and teaching. After all, we are dealing with human life as such, which is determined by a kaleidoscope of concerns, interests, desires, experiences, and needs. Literature and religion, the visual arts, music, and environmental studies blaze, in a variety of combinations and approaches, a path toward the future. Specialization in one research area is critically important, no doubt about that, but a well-rounded individual emerging from an academic institution must be prepared for the challenges of tomorrow. Two final examples of transdisciplinary perspectives would be, first, the integration of astronomy and poetry, which we can observe throughout time in various cultures, and second, the creation of public spaces or buildings in conjunction with the arts and literature. Words and objects, movement (dance), and calculations all contribute to the same fundamental effort to come to terms with human existence within many different contexts.

Understandably, most of us live and work within academic silos because our specialized training requires a deep dive into our materials (texts, images, videos, music, visual arts, etc.). For instance, as a Germanist and medievalist, I must know the various levels of pre-modern German (Old High, Middle High, Early Modern High German) and understand the various dialect variations. This does not leave time to investigate Middle English, Medieval Spanish or Italian, Old French, or the various Old Norse and Slavic languages. Nevertheless, our focus constantly and necessarily rests on people's lives and their daily conditions. We do not study those aspects simply out of archival or museal interests. They mean something for us, even if only from a historical and cultural perspective, which in turn shed innovative light on those issues of central concern for us today (love, death, God, our natural environment, individuality, etc.).

2.5. Vertical and Horizontal Perspectives

Knowing our roots, the foundation of our modern identity (individual or collective, communal or national), and comprehending the various traditions and forces that shaped us today makes it possible to move forward constructively and productively. Of course, no one can know everything, but there are countless aspects that contribute to a hermeneutic network of global dimension. Grasping this huge network requires recognition of religious, emotional, aesthetic, political, and economic concerns as they contribute to a vast discourse of which we are the direct heirs. Reception theory has already paved the way for our future investigations, and environmental humanities, gender studies, religious studies, the history of mentality, and the history of everyday life have thus tremendously widened our perception of what constitutes the fundamental values of human life and culture.

My outlook here has been shaped by my medieval perspectives, but we can and must embrace global categories that are both historical (vertical) and presentist (horizontal). Hence, transdisciplinary perspectives also require that we make serious efforts to grasp contemporary issues across the world, whether in Rock and Roll music, the Hippie

Movement, or the current Fridays for Future Movement (<https://fridaysforfuture.org/> accessed on 27 August 2026). Despite the superficial or linguistic divides between the West and the East, for instance, the Humanities address concerns and values that affect people across the world, whether we think of love, God, or death. Thus, the future of the Humanities will consist of building new roadways and bridges connecting Nigerian river poetry with Peruvian musical performances, medieval German love songs with Japanese haikus, reflections on human-based principles for healthy architectures as in China or India, Europe and Australia, and deep discussions about the meaning of the end of life.

2.6. Communication and the Humanities

The worst threat to the Humanities currently, the onslaught of AI, might enable a new beginning in universities by helping us, to some extent, to overcome linguistic hurdles. Once we all can talk to each other, we can then explore cultural or spiritual differences and commonalities, and together profit from our collective efforts to improve human existence across the globe. Countless cultural, religious, and aesthetic traditions thus will merge, combine, enrich, deepen, validate, and inform our own culture. This is not to promote a complete meshing of all cultural components to a point where everything goes, and nothing means anything any longer. No, transdisciplinary humanities can only be of relevance and value if we create through research and teaching a kaleidoscopic tapestry of countless pieces that all contribute and yet respect each other's individuality and uniqueness. However, all that might come at the price of losing countless items of cultural significance, individuality, and human identity.

Thus, past and present, difference and sameness, and shared or unique developments all form part of the universal experience of human culture, as perhaps best expressed in the famous novel *Glasperlenspiel* by Hermann Hesse (1943; *Glass Bead Game*). Hesse had already recognized the danger involved in an absolutist aestheticization of the ludic element without any anchor in human reality, in the social and economic conditions people have to live under. The protagonist, Josef Knecht, ultimately abandons the elitist community of Castalia and turns into a tutor for a rebellious but brilliant student. Knecht dies in that process, but his death provides meaning and proves to be a decisive catalyst for the young man to change his life, respect his teacher, and thus discipline himself, growing into a responsible, honorable, and dignified individual (Classen 2002; see now the contributions to Cornils 2009). True transdisciplinary humanities promise to achieve just that: the transformation of each new generation into the driving force to build a better future not only for society in one specific country, but for humanity at large (see the contributions to Sass 2019; and to Rezaei 2022). Not by accident, the current pope, Pope Leo XIV, recently stated in his *Encyclical Letter Magnifica Humanitas* (Pope Leo XIV 2026):

In the era of artificial intelligence, when human dignity is threatened by new forms of dehumanization, ours is the pressing duty to remain profoundly human. We must lovingly safeguard the grandeur of humanity bestowed upon us and revealed in its fullness in Christ, the splendor of which no machine can ever replace. True progress always stems from a heart open to others, an intelligence willing to listen and a will that seeks what unites rather than what separates (ch. 15).

We are all called upon to respond to Pope Leo's profound reflections, whether we want to embrace his Christian perspective or focus only on his humanist concept. As he correctly ascertains:

For AI to respect human dignity and truly serve the common good, responsibility must be clearly defined at every stage: from those who design and develop these systems to those who use them and rely on them for concrete decisions. In many cases, however, the internal processes leading to a result remain opaque, making it harder to assign responsibility and correct errors. This is where accountability becomes crucial: the possibility of identifying who must “account” for decisions, justify them, monitor them, and, when necessary, challenge them and remedy any harm caused (ch. 105).

The Humanities cannot and will not shy away from AI, but it will be their inalienable responsibility to guard the essential value of human life, both past and present, irrespective of machine learning and reading. We study values, virtues, and vices, and thus we draw from a huge storehouse of human experience in literary, historical, religious, or philosophical terms, which allows us to identify, evaluate, assess, and critically examine human actions and their contributions to the well-being of society at large. In this sense, the challenges posed by AI prove to be rather valuable in that they force us to reassess who we are, why we exist here on Earth, and thus to ponder what we can or should do to justify our belonging to society. Moreover, we have to question the meaning of all education and learning and figure out new ways through an infinite network of data to find ourselves, our ideals, and self-concept as we relate to some spiritual dimension (God, the divine, spirits, etc.).

I can only agree with Pope Leo’s appeal to us all: “to join forces in building up the common good, so that humanity will never lose its beauty, and the world once again will come to recognize the human heart as the place where God desires to dwell” (ch. 16), whether we should believe in a God or not. Humanity by itself is already the total manifestation both of God, the Creator, and the Devil, the antithesis of all existence.

AI, as alluring as it might be in mechanical processes, such as data analysis, homogenizes all our knowledge, reduces our cognitive abilities, removes or destroys our creativity and originality, and hence tends to reduce us as people to rote consumers with no individuality and no understanding of the complexity of the world. AI entirely relies on existing data models and cannot move us forward out of a vicious cycle of regurgitated ideas (Simanowski 2025). In this regard, AI imposes strict moral and ethical concepts (or rather, none whatsoever) according to the norms and values of the computer programmers or those in charge of the software.

This does not mean that we should ignore, dismiss, or reject AI altogether, which would be impossible. But taking the warnings of both Pope Leo XIV and the media researcher Simanowski into consideration, we are called upon to rein in AI as a tool and to stay alert to its promises, potentials, and dangers at the same time. Simanowski correctly identifies the danger of AI by calling it a “Technologie des Durchschnitts” (technology of the average). Ongoing digitalization will transform human society, possibly reducing it to a passive entity controlled by an AI-dominated computer system with no ethics or morality (Baecker 2026; for an in-depth review, see Hermann Rotermund, in *literaturkritik.de*; online at https://literaturkritik.de/public/rezension.php?rez_id=32032, accessed on 27 August 2026). But, to conclude on a positive note, ever more scholars in a wide range of disciplines both in the Humanities and in the Natural Sciences, in Medicine and Architecture, understand, examine, and question the true nature of AI and hence also the absolute value of the human basis of everything we do, think about, study, or work with. As Ahmad Milad Karimi emphasized, the true value of human existence rests, as paradoxically as it might sound at first, in confronting ambiguity, imperfection, resistance to uniformity, polyphony and polymorphology, which all quickly take us to the world of poetry. The *homo poeticus*, or the *faber artifex*, as I would call it, might fail, might make mistakes, will certainly

need help, but will create, establish an individuality, and move forward in a myriad of new, unexpected ways, and thus contribute to the ever-growing universe, the creation. In Karimi's words:

Dieser *Homo poeticus* akzeptiert den Sinn im Scheitern und im Staunen vor der Tiefe des Anschauens, ohne vor dem Unendlichen zurückzuschrecken. Der *Homo poeticus* repräsentiert den schöpferischen, dichterischen, fehlbaren, romantischen Menschen—einen fragmentarischen, vergänglichen, brüchigen Menschen. Dieser Ansatz würdigt die menschliche Natur in ihrer ganzen Vielfalt, auch in ihrem Scheitern (Karimi [2024] 2025, pp. 10–11).

[This *Homo poeticus* accepts as the meaning of existence the failure and the amazement when one gazes into the deep enlightenment, without shrinking back in horror from the infinity. The *Homo poeticus* represents the creative, poetic, fallible, and Romantic human being—a fragmentary, mortal, breakable human being. This approach dignifies the human nature in its complete multiplicity, even in its failure.]

In a way, the arrival of AI can even be viewed as a positive development because, apart from the technical advantages and the ease of writing academic papers, for instance, it forces us today to re-examine the value of the Humanities and to investigate what they really mean in ethical, moral, and philosophical terms. Learning and education are deeply challenged, so we are required to reflect thoroughly once again on what we teach, why we teach, and how we teach. Transdisciplinarity might thus turn out to be the unwitting catalyst for the transformation of the academy, readying it for the future (López-López et al. 2026). We find ourselves in the middle of a huge paradigm shift, having lost our naïve faith in the Promethean mastery over nature, recognizing the disappearance of our subjectivity and independence, and facing the creation of an algorithmic matrix in which human beings are perhaps nothing but functions, gadgets, or tools. For all those reasons, the contributions to this Special Issue aim to lay the foundation for the imminent reorientation of our cultural concepts and values to cope effectively and productively with the emergence of an AI-determined world that offers much less room for us as individuals. But we humans have withstood many other challenges throughout time, and we continue to write poetry, paint, create music, build houses, develop new technologies, interact productively and consensually with nature, and we are, most importantly, spiritual. There are, hence, very good reasons to be hopeful about our future, especially when we begin to collaborate across disciplines and recognize that we all ultimately pursue the same goal, to make life worth living, that is, to achieve happiness however defined.

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