

Are we in a crisis of the humanities?

A public conversation

Massimo Bacigalupo

Professor of English, emeritus, University of Genoa

Klaus Benesch

Professor of English and American Studies, LMU Munich/ENS de Lyon

Hanjo Berressem

Professor of American Studies, emeritus, University of Cologne

Julika Griem

Professor of English and Director, Institute of Advanced Studies in the Humanities, Essen

Alexander Hartley

Writer/doctoral candidate, London/Harvard University

Gerd Hurm

Professor of English and Director, Trier Center for American Studies, University of Trier

Antje Kley

Professor of American Literature, University of Erlangen–Nuremberg

Philipp Schweighauser

Professor of North American and General Literature, University of Basel

Werner Sollors

Cabot Professor of English, emeritus, Harvard University

François Specq

Professor of American Literature, École Normale Supérieure de Lyon



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In the last decade, many countries' politics have become dominated by questions of culture, history, and public morality. In the United States, questions such as: 'What is the date of the United States' "true" foundation?', 'How can societies address historical and ongoing racist oppression?', or: 'Should the state be weaponized against the liberation and the existence of queer people?' are now subjects of front-line political debate.

But it is a strange irony that, in this era of 'the culture wars', when questions of culture are at the forefront of our politics, the fields that dedicate themselves to the study of culture – the humanities – find themselves in an existential crisis of social legitimacy. Enrollments are declining, funding being withdrawn, teaching and research jobs becoming increasingly precarious and scarce, entire healthy departments being shut down. Teachers and academics find themselves attacked both by front-rank politicians and by far-right 'parents' groups'. The knowledge produced by the humanities is dismissed and falsified; the habits of mind they cultivate are feared and traduced.

At the same time, we are struck by what we feel is an emerging consensus among a new generation of scholars and writers – a consensus that the point of a politically engaged humanities is not merely to produce ever more and better analysis of our cultural and political situation, but to actively intervene in that situation.

Participants in the three-hour conversation will explore the scope of what many call a crisis of the humanities and how we may move forward from here.

For further information email to: klaus.benesch@lmu.de