
HUMANITAS: *Rethinking It All*

An Editorial Statement

HUMANITAS exists to help invigorate the humanities, including the social sciences properly understood. In its new format the journal can provide more space for scholarship that challenges uncritical assumptions and can set the humanities on a more promising course.

*Challenging
uncritical
thinking.*

Among the obstacles to an intellectual renewal today is an unwillingness genuinely to consider unaccustomed ideas. A spirit of partisanship has produced narrowing habits of mind and corresponding patterns of academic group-formation. Two seemingly contradictory tendencies—fragmentation and a push for conformity—are widely present in the humanities as in society at large. They are actually different manifestations of a partisan disposition. A proliferation of views and schools, which in other circumstances might have presented opportunities for cross-fertilization and productive syntheses, is today all too often symptomatic of unchecked bias and intellectual isolation. The prejudices of particular groups harden into positions that are not really open to question. Representatives of a particular doctrine move almost exclusively within its confines and reject out of hand questions raised about its assumptions. Ideas and methods are parroted rather than philosophically elaborated and sharpened in struggle with contending views. The group cultivates an attitude of superiority over other groups, which helps silence internal doubts and justify dismissal of criticisms. The doctrine provides a philosophical validation of sorts for the partisan objectives of the faithful. Learning the language of the doctrine initiates candidates for membership and then separates friend from enemy. “Schools” of this kind answer to a desire among intellectually insecure academics to belong,

*Intellectual
partisanship
stifles search
for truth.*

to count among the enlightened few. The intellectual and psychological attitudes of the group are such that where it acquires power it pushes for monopoly and conformity.

Breaking Out

Even a truly philosophical movement must have its own structure and sense of purpose and must define itself in opposition to other currents whose weaknesses it is attempting to overcome. But a part of real philosophical discipline is not to ignore the nagging awareness of obscurities in one's own thinking and to be willing to reach beyond customary sources for possible remedies. Genuine intellectual freedom is today threatened, in the universities and society at large, by premature certainty organized into group partisanship. One of the preconditions for invigorating the humanities is to break out of the ambiance of intramural ideological debates and rejoin the larger historical and international discussion.

*Reactions to
positivism
frequently
lack depth.*

The reign of positivism, empiricism, and related forms of rationalism caused a neglect in the humanities of questions that are felt by most people to be central to human life. Justified as the growing opposition to this reign has been, many of the reactions have had insufficient philosophical and historical grounding. They have been too ideological or faddish and have sometimes been too obviously influenced by personal neuroses or grievances. Rebelliousness has been directed not just at artificial intellectual and social structures but at order and continuity of every kind.

Attempts to defend older classical and Judaeo-Christian traditions against not only positivism and empiricism but other modern movements have suffered from weaknesses of their own. Traditionalist writers have typically been disinclined to engage in systematic philosophical discussion and to confront the weightier intellectual challenges to ancient traditions coming from such philosophical movements as German historicism. Traditionalists often have resorted to repeating inherited formulations. Some have been reluctant to concede that in the humanities modernity has produced any insights that could appreciably strengthen the older Western heritage.

Much as HUMANITAS welcomes new ideas and perspectives, it recognizes the profound, if often unacknowledged, dependence of fresh insight on the past. But it is in the rearticulation and development of insight in changed circumstances that old ideas must achieve and

prove their continued vitality. Radicalism and conservatism are in one sense indistinguishable and mutually dependent. They are aspects of one and the same necessary process of preservation and renewal. “Conservative” ideas that are not just well-worn slogans but directly relevant to the present must have an element of originality and embody a break with the past. “Radical” ideas that are not just quickly fading sparks but capable of lasting illumination necessarily develop potentialities of the past and speak to enduring concerns. One of the great needs of the present is a better understanding of the dialectical and synthetical relationship of past and present. HUMANITAS will oppose the facile classification of ideas in political terms and will encourage articles that go beyond an obsolescent left-right distinction.

The Experiential Whole

This journal would foster a more acute sense of the living, concrete whole of human existence. That reality has been obscured or distorted by a proliferation of abstract, one-sided, fragmentary or pedantic academic approaches that have either robbed the humanities of humane relevance or charged them up with the artificial relevance of ideology. For HUMANITAS, the purpose of the humanities is to expand and deepen our understanding of human existence—its glories and failures, happiness and suffering, and mere humdrum ordinariness. The humanities should assist in the effort to enhance life by clarifying the conditions for the realization of its higher potentialities. The humanities should illuminate the dynamic of will, imagination and reason at whose center lie the moral choices by which individuals shape their destiny.

In ethics HUMANITAS welcomes new attention to the role of will and imagination. A central question is whether what is ultimately normative in the moral life might be a special quality of will. Many different doctrines, some of them of ancient lineage, neglect the role of will in discriminating between morally opposed potentialities and in exercising needed self-control. The humanities would also benefit from greater sensitivity to the role of the imagination, not just in dreams and works of art but in shaping man’s aspirations and sense of reality. In epistemology it is necessary to question the long tradition according to which grasping reality is a matter strictly for the intellect. Of crucial importance to the ability to know is the orientation of personal

*Will as
ethically
normative.*

character. Equally important is the direction of the imagination that the will inspires. In general, the interactions of will, imagination and reason need to be better understood if the problems of the modern world are to be adequately defined and addressed.

*Diversity and
the whole.*

Truth in the humanities is not a mere accumulation of bits and pieces, arranged according to convenient classifications. The particulars of the humanistic sphere are not related in a mechanical, external fashion. They belong to an organic, dialectical whole that is constituted by the subtle interplay of moral, aesthetical and cognitive forces. Human experience presents us with universality and particularity in simultaneous tension and union. The rich diversity of the concrete world is inseparable from the whole that gives continuity and unity to experience. And yet many in the humanities affirm historical particularity in ways that neglect or deny universality. Others affirm universality in ways that neglect or deny particularity. These approaches misconstrue both the universal and the particular and miss the central dynamic of human existence.

At their best, the humanities study universality as a living force within the concrete texture of experience. The careful and systematic articulation of that reality should not be confused with the gathering of data conducted by positivists and empiricists, whose "historical facts" are reified and fragmentary evidence extracted from a larger, living whole.

Universality with Particularity

Recognizing the simultaneous union and tension between universality and particularity seems to be a basic precondition for revitalizing the humanities. HUMANITAS is greatly interested in treatments of universality that do not lose themselves in abstractions (and hence become unreal) and in treatments of historical particularity that do not lose themselves in idiosyncrasy. To stress the historical nature of human existence without acknowledging the continuous whole to which it belongs amounts to a denial of lasting meaning or purpose, a denial that is inconsistent with undertaking any inquiries in the first place. But the contrary assumption, that universality alone is important and that it lacks any integral connection with historical particularity, is equally destructive of the humanities. The latter approach engenders disembodied, abstract conceptions of universality that ignore our individual humanity and changing concrete circum-

stances. It never captures the distinctively human sphere of personal-ity, freedom and creativity.

Examination of the relationship between universality and particularity will inevitably confront the issue of transcendence. The need for definitions and clarifications is here acute. Like the term "universal values," "transcendence" is today often used very loosely. Scholars claiming to center their thinking in the transcendent tend, even if their subject is history, politics or literature, to leave the concrete implications and entailments of "the beyond" quite vague. Transcendent reality is treated as if it lacked integral association with the immanent world and only called humanity away from historical existence. The need for concrete definition is supplied by the writer's own religious, ethical or political prejudices, which are somehow endowed with the sanction of presumed transcendent truth. HUMANITAS encourages approaches to the transcendent that do explore its immanent manifestations and do inspire critical reflection upon actual human life.

The notion of radical transcendence exemplifies a reluctance today in the humanities and society at large to face and deal with concrete historical realities. That reluctance connects a broad range of currents that otherwise may look quite different. In its more extreme forms it amounts to escapism. Attention is diverted from problems that are acute and widespread. The escape takes numerous specific shapes of which the following are just examples: in the intellectual life, a fondness for abstractions, for theoretical intricacies with little bearing on concrete human life; in the arts, flights of intoxicating and otherwise distracting fancy; in personal conduct, an evasion of up-close personal responsibility; in religion, a merely sentimental "compassion"; in politics, a substitution of bureaucratic administration for individual accountability.

*Radical
transcendence
and escapism.*

Contributions to HUMANITAS

This journal encourages research and writing of a certain kind. It hopes to inspire articles that might not have been written without it. It also wants to gather between its covers articles on varied topics but with similar philosophical-theoretical aim that otherwise would be widely scattered in specialized academic publications and perhaps escape the attention of those who are most keenly interested. Particular articles in the journal should gain intelligibility and impact from appearing within a certain philosophical frame of reference and in

*A task of
synthesis and
clarification.*

proximity to articles that elucidate related problems. Writings from different disciplines are expected to contribute to an evolving common core of insight as authors address different aspects of central questions and employ kindred perspectives and approaches.

The exploration of genuine universality, as distinguished from abstract rationalistic constructs and mathematical or geometrical propositions, always involves historical particulars. But articles in HUMANITAS should place less emphasis on *detailing* the historical material that lies behind every serious scholarly claim than on setting forth conclusions reached and their implications for further research and thinking. While this journal relishes historical illustrations and proof, it is not impressed by the positivistic, bureaucratic-minded academic conventions that praise the elaborate substantiation of findings but have difficulty determining whether particular findings were worth the effort in the first place.

Insight in the humanities does not result simply from a diligent compilation of sources and records. Not even an abundance of evidence will stop a scholar who lacks a sense of reality and proportion from misconstruing what has been collected. Ideas and perspectives that are insufficiently grounded in historical particulars do indeed become diffuse, but not even the most extensive scholarly apparatus can make up for bland and trivial findings, to say nothing of rescuing misconceived ideas and wrong-headed interpretations.

Footnotes are to be expected in most scholarly articles, but the editors of HUMANITAS find it worth noting that today numerous and elaborate footnotes and references to esoteric sources are more often signs of academic pretentiousness, insecurity, careerism, bureaucratic fastidiousness, and/or lack of intellectual discipline than of focused erudition.

HUMANITAS welcomes articles, reviews and comments that explore subjects in which problems of ethics, aesthetics, and logic intersect and illuminate each other and that are relevant to more than one discipline. Although contributions to HUMANITAS are expected to come from a wide range of disciplines, such as history, politics, economics, philosophy, English, art and theology, arguments of any importance are inherently interdisciplinary. Conversely, arguments in the humanities that do not throw any light outside of their own disciplinary context are inherently trivial.

HUMANITAS, then, is less interested in historiographical detail and fine points of interpretation than in writing that sets forth ideas and

perspectives that may broaden and deepen humanistic scholarship and thinking. In selecting articles for publication HUMANITAS would rather err on the side of intellectual daring than on the side of “safe” respectability.

Authors interested in abstract intellectual games, in the pedantic reexamination of sources or texts, or in the exploration of minutiae do well to pursue other avenues of publication.

A Reminder

The philosophical and scholarly approach has no monopoly on reality. Thinkers and scholars are greatly indebted for their sense of reality and proportion to the pre-conceptual insights of persons of acute imagination. True, artistic imagination and philosophical-scholarly reflection are wholly different modes of approaching human existence. The former is intuitive, the latter conceptual and cognitive. The one is free to create its own personages, events, and images; the other must work within the bounds of history. Indeed, the creations of art sometimes fly in the face of reality. But, in their highest forms, both art and thought attempt, in their different ways, to articulate the drama of life. A destructive tendency often seen in the humanities is a conceited, puritanical belief in the ultimacy and autonomy of the intellect. To remind its readers that creative imagination can alert us to reality and that philosophical and scholarly insights are not achieved independently of such non-intellectual grasp of human existence, HUMANITAS may on occasion open its pages to more literary writing—to a poem, a short story, or the like that freshly expresses life and helps orient and sharpen the scholar’s conceptual elaboration of reality.

*Two paths
to truth.*