

KNOWLEDGE CREATES TRUST

15 MINIATURES FROM
THE HUMANITIES,
SOCIAL SCIENCES, AND
CULTURAL SCIENCES

Published by Hans-Jochen Schiewer
and Georg Krausch, GERMAN U15 e.V.



GERMAN **U15**
A MAGAZINE OF THE U15-UNIVERSITIES

GERMAN U15 WHO WE ARE

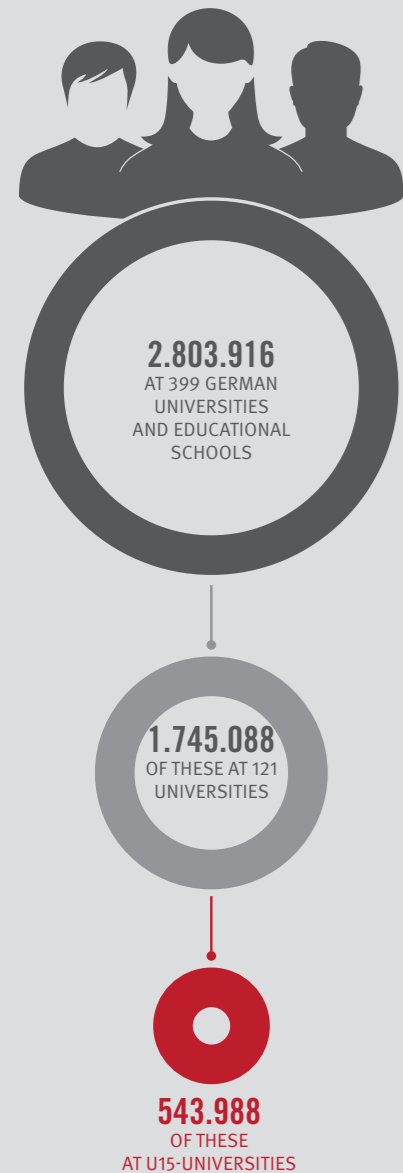
German U15 is an association of 15 traditional, medically leading and research-orientated universities with a comprehensive range of subjects, founded in 2012. Universities with a strong research base form the backbone of the German science system: they are of paramount importance for the education of young people and the qualifications of young scientists. Its broad range of subjects enables highly interdisciplinary research. They are in close contact with society and business. Internationally, they are highly visible and attractive to scientists from all over the world. Against this background, German U15 constitutes the strategic representation of the interests of research-focused German universities.

MEMBER UNIVERSITIES LOCATIONS



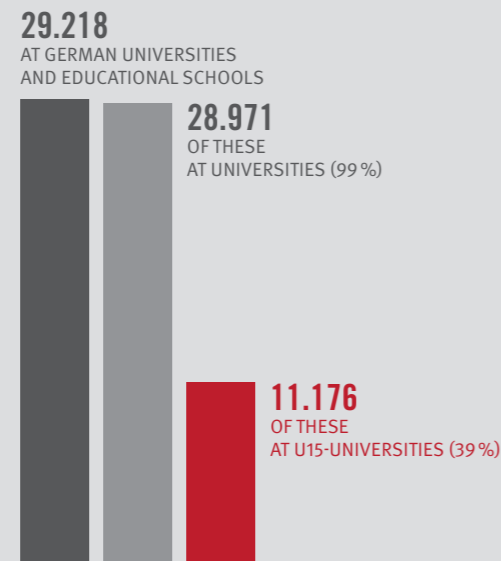
¹ Federal Statistical Office, subject-matter series 11, series 4.1, Education and Culture, preliminary report, Winter semester 2016/17, HRK universities in figures 2015. ² Federal Statistical Office, subject-matter series 11, series 4.2, 2015, Examinations at universities. ³ Federal Statistical Office, subject-matter series 11, series 4.1, Education and Culture, preliminary report, Winter semester 2016/17. ⁴ Federal Statistical Office, subject-matter series 11, series 4.1, Education and Culture, preliminary report, Winter semester 2016/17. ⁵ Wissenschaft weltweit, table: 1.8.2 Foreigners in education – students.

STUDENTS¹

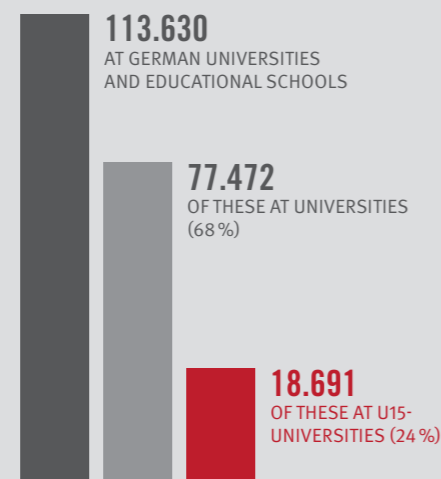


ACADEMIC DEGREES

DOCTORATES²



MASTER'S DEGREES³



INTERNATIONAL



INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN GERMANY⁴

357.835
AT GERMAN UNIVERSITIES AND EDUCATIONAL SCHOOLS

236.935
OF THESE AT UNIVERSITIES (66%)

74.288
OF THESE AT U15-UNIVERSITIES (31%)

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS UNDERTAKING DOCTORAL STUDIES IN GERMANY⁵

25.188
AT GERMAN UNIVERSITIES AND EDUCATIONAL SCHOOLS

25.067
OF THESE AT UNIVERSITIES (99%)

10.847
OF THESE AT U15-UNIVERSITIES (43%)

GERMAN U15

CONTENTS

- 5 **ORIENTAL METROPOLISES AS A GOOD EXAMPLE**
DAG NIKOLAUS HASSE
- 5 **NO WRANGLING OVER INTERPRETATIONS**
MITA BANERJEE
- 6 **ARABIC ON THE CURRICULUM**
BEATRICE GRÜNDLER
- 6 **DEBATE LIKE THE BRITONS**
JALE TOSUN
- 8 **NOT ALL RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS ARE THE SAME**
MATTHIAS KOENIG
- 9 **ON SPEAKING TERMS WITH THE UNKNOWN**
ANNE STORCH
- 9 **EDUCATIONAL ROLE: CREATIVE MUSTS**
BERNHARD PÖRKSEN
- 10 **ON CONTINGENCY IN POLITICS**
BARBARA STOLLBERG-RILINGER
- 11 **GERMAN ANGST? THERE'S NO SUCH THING!**
ULRICH HERBERT
- 11 **HISTORY OF IDEAS ON THE EVE OF THE REVOLUTION**
GREGORY CRANE
- 12 **IMAGES OF NATURE**
FRANK FEHRENBACH
- 12 **TEXTUAL CRITICISM INSTEAD OF FAKE NEWS**
OLIVER PRIMAVESI
- 13 **ON ATHEISM IN ISLAM**
JUDITH PFEIFFER
- 14 **HOW THE MIDDLE CLASS TOLERATES INEQUALITY**
STEFFEN MAU



EDITORIAL

DEBATE INSTEAD OF FEARFUL REACTIONS

The climate in western knowledge-based societies has changed drastically: in many places trust in the idea that increased knowledge can guarantee the future of the democratic state has dissipated. Migration and the challenges of integration, the strengthening of nationalist ideologies and the crisis of supranational structures, religious extremism and terrorism, cyber attacks, financial crises and climate change – all these have put the confidence of citizens in the future viability of our society to the test. This trust is especially important in 2017, an election year in Germany.

Trust in the future arises from a more distanced reflection on disturbing events and developments. This is where the humanities, social sciences, and cultural sciences have a significant role to play. They situate current events in larger contexts and in this way foster objective, constructive, and future-orientated debate instead of fearful reactions. In this sense, the magazine "Knowledge Creates Trust" is intended to provide guidance and encouragement for the future. 15 academics from the humanities, social sciences, and cultural sciences departments of our 15 universities put forward various views, each from the perspective of his or her own discipline – views that awaken our curiosity.

The U15 universities are among the most publicly visible institutions in the German academic system and have long proved themselves to be the places where the future is being shaped. As such, in this election year of 2017, this places them in a position of responsibility. They have a duty to help strengthen confidence in the future viability of our society. This makes for stimulating and rewarding reading: enjoy!

UNIV.-PROF. DR. DR. H.C.
HANS-JOCHEN SCHIEWER
Chief Executive Officer
German U15

UNIV.-PROF. DR.
GEORG KRAUSCH
Deputy Chairman
German U15



KNOWLEDGE CREATES TRUST

15 voices from
the humanities,
social sciences,
and cultural
sciences

Interviews and texts: Kristina von Klot

MITA BANERJEE

Research in American
Studies, narrative research
at the interface between
humanities and sciences

Obama Institute for
Transnational American
Studies



DAG NIKOLAUS HASSE, Institute of Philosophy, University of Würzburg

ORIENTAL METROPOLISES – A GOOD EXAMPLE

There is a long tradition of cultural exchange between the Orient and the Occident. As a philologist and a philosopher, I focus on these historical relationships between Christian-Latin, Arab, and Jewish philosophy, theology, and natural sciences.

Ever since Alexander the Great connected up the Mediterranean area and the Middle East, right up as far as what is now Uzbekistan, knowledge has travelled from Portugal to Samarkand – and back again. An international knowledge space emerged that survived military conflicts: Even at the time of the crusades, scholars continued to translate texts written by colleagues of other religions. There was an awareness that all three monotheistic beliefs arose in the same Middle Eastern area. In the Ottoman Empire and in Andalusian Spain, Jews, Christians, and Muslims in large cities lived peacefully in different districts for a long time, despite the differences between their

religions. Whether in Alexandria, Istanbul, or Cordoba, people interacted with each other with decency and respect, regardless of language and faith, accepting the rules of the city.

On the one hand, this scenario creates hope; on the other, it generates scepticism about multicultural utopias: perhaps it is too much to ask for a Christian to expect their religion to be understood by their Muslim neighbour. Perhaps it is all right for us to remain alien to each other.

It was not until 1800, when the idea of a modern state in Europe spread with Napoleon's success, that the West began to look down on the politically backward Orient. Ultimately, it was ideas of nationalism that put an end to the centuries-long peaceful coexistence in the Mediterranean metropolises. The question remains: why shouldn't we build on that style of co-existence subject to the condition of tolerance? ●

DAG NIKOLAUS HASSE

History of Philosophy and
Science in the Greek-Ara-
bic-Latin Tradition

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz
Prize



MITA BANERJEE, Department of English and Linguistics, University of Mainz

NO FIGHT FOR INTERPRETATION

Without an interdisciplinary approach, I would not get far in exploring what societies such the US define as being their own and what they see as being foreign. The combination of sociological and literary-analytical methods is indispensable if we want to reconstruct how the concept of being "black" was established, for instance, or whether the concept of being "indigenous" only emerged once human rights and indigenous rights started to become issues. In this approach, we also consult novels or autobiographies that influence legal and political discourses.

The objects of our research are not a given, but the result of social discourse, a social construct. Time and again, we ana-

lyse processes of social negotiation: in relation to ecological justice – in the negotiations about the construction of the Dakota Access pipeline, for instance – or with regard to dealing with foreigners. What criteria were applied – language, religion, or skin colour? The aim is to tease out the logic underlying each individual document and protocol in order to understand cultural mechanisms.

As far as the choice of methods is concerned, more and more research areas are opening up that seem to call for close cooperation between the humanities and the natural sciences. I am currently working together with colleagues from the field of medicine on a project that deals with the

traumas experienced by refugees: the medical experts identify characteristics of trauma subjects; I analyse blogs written by Syrian migrants who document their experiences as refugees. Thanks to this cooperation, a tailor-made instrument has emerged that gives us profound insights into the fate of people who have to reorientate themselves to their new life in Germany. The prerequisite for this is that the dialogue is conducted on the same level – without any wrangling over the supremacy of a given interpretation.

This way, we link up with the kind of productive exchange between the disciplines that has somehow been forgotten, owing to their increasing differentiation in the past. ●

BEATRICE GRÜNDLER, Seminar for Semitic and Arabic Studies, Free University Berlin

ARABIC ON THE CURRICULUM

Only a handful of scholars in Germany work on classical Arabic literature. So even though I held a professorship at Yale, I was delighted when in 2014, after I had been working in the USA for 27 years, the opportunity came up for me to move to the Free University in Berlin. The great thing is that the generous support for collaborative research, which is only available at German universities, allows me to undertake teamwork with other cultural scientists.

I think it would be wonderful if basic Arabic were taught at schools, as is the case in France. This would raise awareness of how closely our culture – European literature, for instance – is interwoven with Arabic culture. There is hardly a scientific Greek work from antiquity that was not translated into Arabic.

The people on the other side of the Mediterranean share with us not only classical culture and philosophy, but also knowledge about the origins of the natural sciences and wisdom literature. This common heritage is also reflected in the language, although few people realise that words such as "cipher" and "zenith" are of Arabic origin. Of all textual genres, the poetry of the pre-modern period is particularly close to my heart: Arabic poetry, which carries its entire history within it, but does not give up its secrets easily.

A poem is like a rose that one gradually unfolds, petal by petal. Even a short verse seems to combine the centuries-long development of all previous verses on this subject. Only those who know the origins of such poetry can truly understand it in depth. It is a pleasure enjoyed by those in the know, because it is not effortless, but the joy is all the greater for that.

With one of my Arabic students, who is himself a poet, I am working on a new, contemporary translation of the proverbial verses of al-Mutanabbi (915 - 965), the greatest poet of the Arabic tongue. His art of clear suggestive linguistic images is timeless. ●

BEATRICE GRÜNDLER

History of Arabic Language and Writings

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize

JALE TOSUN, Institute of Political Science, University of Heidelberg

DEBATING LIKE THE BRITONS

In policy matters regarding energy, the environment, and climate issues, we Germans are characterised by a remarkable tension: On the one hand, we are a technology-driven society whose economic strength is based on the spirit of invention and enormous know-how. On the other hand, in international comparison, we tend to be risk-averse: we shy away from innovations when they are associated with risks that are as yet unforeseeable.

Trust in science has been dwindling for some time; the plagiarism of recent years is only a cause and an expression of this. One example is genetic engineering, which is not socially viable because it is distrusted by the majority. Public debate on this subject is dominated by a vague sense of unease, and objective arguments simply bounce off it. This phenomenon is also evident in the culture of the debate itself: it always seems strange to me when talk shows are more about opinions and polarization, rather than about the actual subject matter.

As a scientist, I am committed to the ideal of future-orientated, non-judgemental

research, for which the questions of method and data are fundamental. But even in the debates in the Bundestag that are often the subject of my analyses, it is rare for someone to use new scientific knowledge to underpin a political change of direction. Many of our European neighbours are more pragmatic and more research-orientated. Finland, for instance, was initially opposed to the introduction of biofuels and unwilling to implement the European Directive. However, once the Finns discovered that fuel could be produced sustainably from organic forestry waste, Finland was suddenly in favour. Public opinion also turned.

An open communication culture like this, one which makes a rethink possible, is something I also wish for Germany. ●

RAINER FORST, Political Science and Philosophy, Goethe University Frankfurt

THE UNIVERSALITY OF JUSTICE

A just coexistence of people of different religions and cultures can only be achieved if the prerequisite principles of justice are universally divisible and enjoy priority over individual beliefs – whether of majorities or minorities. In my studies of tolerance, I aim to show that this is the right lesson to draw from the religious conflicts that have shaped our history right into the present day.

If human dignity is rightly regarded as sacrosanct, it can be understood, according to calls for a relationship of respect and justification between myself and others, with both parties being acknowledged as independent and equal in their rights, without any religious reason being required. After all, a republic needs a common language of justice that applies to everyone, but it does not need a common language where religious beliefs are concerned. The talk of a "Christian-influenced leading culture" all too often blurs this distinction. The assumption that fundamental principles of a free democracy should automatically be more closely related to one particular religion than to another is neither historically nor normatively justifiable.

Another focus of my research, which I am pursuing within the framework of the interdisciplinary Cluster of Excellence on Normative Orders, is to look for principles of justice that are valid at a transnational level. In this I do not begin either with cosmopolitan thought experiments or with ideals of national sovereignty, but with the analysis of real power relations.

The basic normative claim of a "right to justification" states that persons and collectives that are subject to binding normative rules and structures – even those of an economic nature – have the right to determine them through participation in the democratic process. This means there is a need for public legal regulation of transnational socioeconomic conditions – not least of the activities of globally operating multinational companies. ●

RAINER FORST

Political Theory and Practical Philosophy

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize, Co-spokesperson of Cluster of Excellence on Normative Orders

JALE TOSUN

Comparative Analysis of Regulation and Distribution Conflicts in the European Union

Head of the EU Joint Research Project on Youth Unemployment in Europe

**MATTHIAS KOENIG, Institute of Sociology,
University of Göttingen**

NOT ALL RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS ARE THE SAME

The way the state deals with religious diversity varies from country to country. If a Muslim teacher wears a headscarf in Germany, this falls under the religious freedom guaranteed in basic law. In France, school pupils with a headscarf can be excluded from the classroom in the name of secularism.

Constitutional regulations on religious freedom and non-discrimination are an important signal for the recognition of minorities. When it comes to the integration of migrants, for example, such regulations influence whether religion serves as a bridge or a barrier. Historically, these rules can be explained by the manner in which State and Church underwent separation on the path to the modern situation. Today, they are increasingly under the influence of international institutions such as the European Court of Human Rights. It is therefore interesting that religious freedom is interpreted differently not only in national constitutions, but also in transnational arenas.

In my search for antecedents for the anchoring of religious freedom in international law, I have come across early bilateral and multilateral treaties which already contained different interpretations of this norm. But what were the social forces that motivated them? On the one hand presumably the aspiration to secure minority rights in order to protect the peaceful coexistence in the nation states that had emerged from disintegrated empires; on the other, the missionary movements that sought to open up religious markets in Asia and Africa; and finally, geopolitical interests. These drivers are, to a certain extent, still the cause of political struggles about religious freedom worldwide.

A globally comparative sociology can raise public awareness that institutions that are considered self-evident might have developed differently under certain conditions; and that current controversies about religious diversity cannot be understood independently of transnational links. ●

MATTHIAS KOENIG

Human rights, migration and religious sociology, sociological theory

Max Planck Fellow Group "Governance of Cultural Diversity", Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity



ANNE STORCH, Institute of African Studies and Egyptology, University of Cologne

ON SPEAKING TERMS WITH THE UNKNOWN

In African Studies, almost everything centres on language. Sometimes the focus is on criticism of science, as with the so-called "Southern Theory", which tries to overcome the Eurocentric perspective and integrate African knowledge cultures into theory formation. At other times linguists may focus on glossaries and grammars to explore language structures. My own interest lies in the social function of multilingualism in Africa, where people grow up speaking between two and five languages – and where they are extremely successful in forming communities.

Since 2016, one of my projects has been taking us to Ballermann on Mallorca. The question is: how do West Africans who clean toilets and sell sunglasses in Mallorca interact with tourists on a linguistic level? They told us they learned German simply because the Germans drew them into their partying, took selfies with them, etc..

ANNE STORCH

Language and Context, Critical African Studies, Metalinguistics

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize

In short: they were able to build relationships with them. Dutch, on the other hand, was viewed by the Africans as a difficult language, because the Dutch were mostly aloof. The Africans thus associate the ability to reach others through conversation with the willingness to open oneself to a person.

Multilingualism is a cultural technique that for many Africans has to do with social success; having a good command of the language is not so important. The flying traders, who also call themselves "adventurers" – adventurers – are very playful with words. And just as store owners make their shops attractive, the street traders want to create a pleasant linguistic background noise in order to build a bridge to strangers. For them, conversation is, above all, an expression of their interpersonal approach. Perhaps this could serve a model for dealing with foreign cultures? ●

BERNHARD PÖRKSEN, Institute of Media Studies, University of Tübingen

EDUCATIONAL ROLE: CREATIVE MUSTS

How do digital media affect our society? What are the implications of the fact that everyone can broadcast, save, and publish 24 hours a day, and thus has all the instruments to maintain a constant state of high arousal? One of my theses in the field of scandal research is that society is becoming increasingly restless and edgy. Networking means distraction, especially when pictures come into circulation that can destroy a previously revered role model (or a private individual) in a flash and can pulverize reputation and authority at the speed of light.

In a transitional phase of the evolution of the media, we are not yet up to the task of responsibly managing the instruments and possibilities of barrier-free publishing. So what should we do? Frankly, we must all become editors in our own right. Because every day we are confronted with questions that good journalists also ask themselves: Which source is reliable? Is this piece of information relevant? What

should not be published for the protection of those concerned? The ability to find good answers to such questions should be a part of general education, but is linked to a gigantic educational role that has not yet been understood politically.

We certainly need to rehearse, with children and young people, a considered manner of speaking in the public space. We need media literacy at the level demanded by our time – analysis of the change in the public outside world and the cognitive inner world. The vitality of the digital age places high demands on our value orientation and decisiveness: it is precisely because it can be a tremendous joy to lose oneself in the worlds of information that we need to retreat from time to time to maintain inner balance. After all, self-responsibility also entails the preservation of oases of calm, low in stimuli and high in cultivated boredom, to provide space for creative processes and allow us to experience moments of deep concentration. ●

BERNHARD PÖRKSEN

Media Change, Communication Theory, Scandal Research

Professor of the Year 2008, Co-initiator of the Charter of Digital Fundamental Rights of the EU

BARBARA STOLLBERG-RILINGER,
Historical Seminar, University of Münster

ON CONTINGENCY IN POLITICS

Cultures of decision-making are at the centre of a special research area in which we engage with the question of how the practice of decision-making has changed. By decision-making, we do not mean an internal process, but a kind of social interaction: various possible courses of action are explored, in order to then explicitly fix upon one of them. Often, however, it is only retrospectively that a given action is interpreted as an act of decision-making.

Our thesis goes: decision-making is not simply a matter of course, but an imposition that incurs high social costs and which one therefore tends to avoid. Indeed, consequences are never foreseeable at the time the decision is made. This raises special legitimacy problems: one could always have decided differently and the discarded options are still out there. This contingency is often covered up, particularly in politics; people talk about "unavoidable decisions" – and inherent contradiction in terms.

People have approached the impositions of decision-making in different ways at different times and in different social fields. We would like to know more about this and are searching for "cultures of decision-making" – in the plural. The question is: when, why, and how is social action shaped, staged, and perceived as decision-making?

What in one culture are matters for decision-making are in another culture simply left to routine. In earlier times, decisions were often attributed to transcendent authorities, such as the working of the Holy Spirit. Today, many things that were previously thought to be beyond human influence are open to, but also therefore force us to make, decisions: from pregnancy to self-determined dying. At the same time, modernity is characterised by the optimistic belief that it is always possible to make rational decisions. Where this rational belief comes from and where it leads – this is one of the questions we are trying to answer through interdisciplinary cooperation. ●

BARBARA STOLLBERG-RILINGER

Political and Cultural Movements in Europe from the 16th to the 18th Century

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize, Co-spokesperson for the Cluster of Excellence "Religion and Politics"

ULRICH HERBERT

German and European History of the 20th Century, Holocaust Research, Migration Research

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize

GREGORY CRANE, Institute of Computer Science, University of Leipzig

HISTORY OF THE IDEAS ON THE EVE OF THE REVOLUTION

"Digital Humanities" and computer-assisted procedures in the humanities and cultural sciences are themes that are discussed worldwide. The odds are looking good that a scientific revolution will emerge from Germany. The question of how digital methods can be used to understand ancient Greek and Roman cultures is something I was already interested in during my doctoral research 30 years ago. This was because analysing ancient sources calls for not only ancient Greek and Latin, but also languages such as Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hittite, so tracking down valid texts was a considerable obstacle. This is how the idea came into being of establishing the digital library "Perseus", which makes all available sources accessible in all the existing translations.

In addition, within the interdisciplinary platform "Global Philology", financed by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, we are working on a history of ideas from ancient times to the present. The special feature is algorithm-based analyses, which deduce, for example, the mutual influence of thinkers and intellectual networks from millions of texts. We could never survey this enormous amount of information in an analogue way. This pioneering development opens up new perspectives on history, but it also requires us to connect knowledge from the fields of computer science and the humanities with one another: we need to develop competences in programming in order to be able to package questions in the right codes. I also believe it is an irony of history that we are now reharnessing Big Data in the service of the gaining of knowledge, while it is currently mainly used only in a commercial context.

We have the historic opportunity to raise awareness of the works of world literature that evade utilitarian capitalist logic – and that keep their value forever: they were important before we were born, and they will remain so long after we have gone. ●

GREGORY CRANE

Literature of Greek Antiquity, eHumanities, Cyberphilology

Alexander von Humboldt Professorship, Google Digital Humanities Award

ULRICH HERBERT, Historical Seminar, University of Freiburg

GERMAN ANGST? THERE'S NO SUCH THING!

All this talk of a new "German angst" leaves me sceptical. In the 1980s, the term was used to characterize a somewhat catastrophizing attitude to subjects such as forest dieback and rearmament. With 5 million unemployed, there were sound reasons for society to be anxious about the future. But today? For the past 130 years, Germans have never had it as good as they have right now.

The irritations and causes for alarm generated, for example, by the influx of the millions of refugees who have come to Europe in recent years, are not German-specific. Quite the opposite: the calm and generally reticent attitude of the overwhelming majority of Germans is quite impressive. In comparison to other countries, Germany has a pretty good track record when it comes to integrating immigrants, particularly in respect to professional training and job creation – even though until the late 1990s successive German governments consistently reject-

ed immigration. However, we would be wrong to believe that there is any kind of quick solution to the problems that arise through mass immigration. The current wave of immigration is, above all, the expression of economic inequality between the rich north west and the global south. However, this inequality continues to grow, so migration will also increase.

Today, the greatest threat is the re-emergence of nationalism. Both Europe and the USA have seen a considerable spread of heavily nationalist, rightwing radical and xenophobic movements. Their roots can be traced back to the political confrontations of the 1920s and 1930s, whose catastrophic end seems to be slowly disappearing from collective memory. We now tend to take for granted the tremendous successes of European unification – mistakes and contradictions are loudly lamented, national unilateral approaches are praised. This is indeed frightening. Nationalism is the ruin of all nations. ●

FRANK FEHRENBACH, Art History Seminar, University of Hamburg

IMAGES OF NATURE

Since antiquity, artists have staged the appearance of liveliness: as play and as a joyous illusion, but always in such a way that a mysterious part that exceeds our imagination remains. This phenomenon of vivacity is perfectly embodied in an inscription on a famous altarpiece from the time of the High Renaissance. It shows the mourning of Christ – the Pietà: "As soon as the swollen (from weeping) eyes of the mourners (of the beholder), could erupt, the work of Giovanni Bellini could weep". The grief-stricken expressions of Mary and John awaken precisely the same feeling in the observer – and thus seem to turn the entire picture into emotion. Despite rationality and enlightenment, people are still capable of such moments of magical transference – and not just in art. Our tendency to fetishise also manifests itself in this manner in everyday life today. Just think of a car owner desperately concerned with a scratch in the paintwork.

OLIVER PRIMAVESI, Chair of Greek Philology I, University of Munich

TEXTUAL CRITICISM INSTEAD OF FAKE NEWS

The translations of Aristotle's works that are available to us today often provide us with only an imprecise representation of the Greek philosopher's ideas. This is because for many of his writings, modern translators still have to work from editions of the original ancient Greek versions that are based on completely inadequate sources. It is a bit like playing Chinese whispers: the initial concept is often no longer recognisable at the end because so many errors were made in the course of the manuscript transmission. This has led to such distortion of the context that it is like reading Aristotle through frosted glass.

On the basis of this insight, the Oxford University Press has commissioned me, together with a fellow scholar from Paris, to make a new edition of Aristotle's major work, his "Metaphysics". In order to correct copyists' errors and reconstruct the original text in the best possible way, we aim to track down all the extant manuscripts, examine how they are related to one another, and make a comparative as-

suming that we cultivate emotionally charged relationships with objects, in our research centre we ask ourselves: what has this empathetic, image-controlled relationship to objects got to do with our relationship with nature? What would it be like if artists, designers and landscape historians were involved in creative processes within the framework of the so-called energy revolution? Too little consideration is given to this, despite movements such as Bauhaus, which revolutionised the form of everyday objects.

With our interest in historically changing natural images, we are looking for architects, artists, and town and landscape planners to generate public debate about the successful design of technology and landscape. Our aspiration is to call into question the alleged lack of alternatives – and this is, of course, the most important task of universities, which should brand themselves as laboratories of good living. ●

essment of the independent manuscripts that transmit the text. For this, an active command of the classical languages is indispensable: if you do not know the grammatically correct expression, you will not recognise deviations. In the case of Aristotle, there is the added factor that to assess many of the variants in the transmission you also need philosophical competence.

The teaching of classical languages in secondary schools has an important contribution to make in passing on these skills: for where else is the difference between conclusive argument and good-humoured but empty talk more evident than in Plato's dialogues? The challenge of understanding and translating sophisticated Greek and Roman texts is, besides mathematics, the best training ground for intellectual honesty. "Here, a mistake is a mistake" – in our allegedly post-factual age, Friedrich Nietzsche's concise formula for the blessings of a classical education is more topical than ever. ●

FRANK FEHRENBACH
Modelling of Nature in Painting and Sculpture; History of Science and Art from 1300
Alexander von Humboldt Professorship

OLIVER PRIMAVESI
Philology of Greek Philosophy
Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize

JUDITH PFEIFFER, Institute of Oriental and Asian Studies, University of Bonn

ON ATHEISM IN ISLAM

Being an Islamic scholar today, when debates about Islam are mostly conducted one-sidedly, entails a great responsibility. The media are dominated by ignorance: they skip over a full 1400 years of history to focus on the time of the Prophet Muhammad and warn against a Caliphate. Such simplifications follow arguments made by extremists. If an Islamic scientist were to judge German history on the basis of such a low level of knowledge, we would certainly judge this as outrageous presumption. In reality, the history and structure of Islamic societies are, of course, equally complex.

My focus is on the Middle East during the transitional period from the late Middle Ages to early modernity. So far, only about 10-15% of the primary sources from this period have been published: texts that give us an insight into the intellectual development of Islam at the time of the Renaissance, the European religious wars, and the Enlightenment. This fundamental research is about searching for and translating incisive texts, in order to make them accessible.

This is a mammoth task, but it is important not least because it contributes to a societal change of perspective. Too often, Islam is incorrectly perceived only as a religion, not as a culture. In fact, Germany is also home to many atheist Muslims who grew up in secular families in the Middle East or North Africa, but who are not visible in the public arena.

It is also hardly mentioned that if Christian and Jewish minorities can live peacefully in societies dominated by Islam, this should also be possible in our society. As long as no group feels threatened, we interact with each other on an equal footing, and democracy and freedom of choice are guaranteed, there is no reason to perceive external insignia, such as a headscarf, as a threat. ●



STEFFEN MAU, Institute of Social Science, Humboldt University Berlin

HOW THE MIDDLE CLASS TOLERATES INEQUALITY

Social inequality in income and wealth has increased in Western societies since the 1980s. It harms subjective well-being, collective health, and social trust. This inequality is a popular target for public criticism, but such criticism does not necessarily lead to political decisions that result in greater social equality. In reality, there is considerable tolerance for inequality in the population at large, especially among the middle classes. They benefit from the fiscal transfer services provided by the state, but at the same time they are committed to performance justice, and they invest in the market: not only as employees, but also by building up a private pension, or by investing on a small scale in the equity market or in property. As a result, they are sceptical about redistribution and are more likely to support investment in education and infrastructure.

We lack a convincing programme to deal with the widening social gap. And the

social centrifugal forces continue to grow. The stagnation of the middle, the resentment of those who feel excluded, but also globalisation, technological change, and the pluralisation of ways of life undermine the formulas of social compromise. In some parts of society, the feeling of security is eroding and fears about status are spreading. New demonstrations of solidarity are no longer based solely on the principles of fairness, but also on cultural identities and populist self-assertion. This is often accompanied by social exclusion and the devaluation of others.

Trust is then only given to those who are perceived as being equal and belonging. In this way, insecure, fearful societies lose their ability to cooperate across group boundaries. After all, it is these kinds of shared experiences and perspectives, as well as the ability to balance interests, that characterise modern societies and make them successful. ●

STEFFEN MAU

**Political Sociology,
Social Inequality,
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Policy Research,
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