

# Drees's What Are the Humanities For?

with Peter Harrison, "Defining and Defending the Humanities"; Michael Ruse, "Willem Drees on the Humanities"; Douglas F. Ottati, "Theology among the Human Humanities"; Lisa L. Stenmark, "Who are the Humanities For? Decolonizing the Humanities"; Donald L. Drakeman, "Some Second Thoughts about the Humanities"; and Willem B. Drees, "The Coherence and Character of the Humanities: A Reply to Critics."

## WILLEM DREES ON THE HUMANITIES

by Michael Ruse

*Abstract.* Do universities still need departments in the humanities—philosophy, history, languages, and so forth? Many today, particularly legislators with control over the funding of public universities, feel that the emphasis should be on, and only on, departments in the STEM field. Willem B. Drees, a former dean of humanities, makes a spirited defense of the worth of the humanities and of their continued place in higher education. This essay looks at Drees's arguments in a critical, yet appreciative, fashion. It is a debate we need to have.

*Keywords:* Willem B. Drees; higher education; humanities; philosophy

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### WHY THIS BOOK NEEDED WRITING (AND WHY WILLEM B. DREES WAS THE PERFECT PERSON TO WRITE IT)

From 2015 to 2018, Willem B. (Wim) Drees was Dean of the Tilburg School of Humanities and Digital Sciences. It was therefore nigh preordained that so prolific an author would write a book about his experiences, not so much an autobiography but a kind of philosophical reflection on what exactly he was dean of and whether he was doing something of value, and if so, why? His *What Are the Humanities For?* (Drees 2021) is that book. If I say that I found the book made me somewhat uneasy, I rush at once to say that I do not intend this in any way a criticism of Drees. It stems more I think from the topic itself, and the possible answers. Indeed, I stress that I am highly grateful to Drees for opening up this conversation. I have just finished 55 years of teaching philosophy in Canada and

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America. They were good years and I never had any doubts about my status in the academic world. Indeed, like all philosophers I think we are superior to all others, the brightest people on campus. Unfortunately, times have changed. Increasingly, politicians and others—especially Trump-infected Republicans—are questioning and denying the worth of higher education. The humanities particularly are in their sights. They would like to turn universities into glorified technical colleges, focusing exclusively on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects, and the humanities reduced to teaching literary skills to physicists and engineers. So, looking at the humanities, their nature and their future, ought to be at the top of the list of all involved in higher education, and most particularly of those on the humanities side of campus.

It seems to me, and Drees essentially confirms this, that there are two basic questions. What are the humanities? How do you justify them, meaning, I presume, how do you justify having them in universities along with the physical sciences and the social sciences, not to mention branches like law schools and medical schools?

#### WHAT ARE THE HUMANITIES?

Starting with the first question, I suppose one is referring (at a minimum) to English Language and Literature, History, Classics, Religious Studies—at least that would be the way in secular universities in America, whereas religious-connected institutions might well have a Department of Theology—Philosophy, Languages (including Literature). I suppose one might add in smaller programs. At my university, Florida State University, we have Mid-East Studies and Women's Studies. When I retired last year, I had for more than a decade been Director of the Program in History and Philosophy of Science. We also had a Program in the Humanities, although frankly I could never really discover what it was about. My strong suspicion was that it was a refuge for people who could not get on with the members of their home department. This was a suspicion reinforced by the fact that the program was located in a building far from the regular humanities departments!

Do these various disciplines tie together? Drees offers a definition.

Humanities are academic disciplines in which humans seek understanding of human self-understandings and self-expressions, and of the ways in which people thereby construct and experience the world they live in. (7)

I am not sure about this. It seems too broad. "Human self-understanding"? Well, if history qualifies, why not just about all the social sciences? Psychology, sociology, anthropology, archeology, economics, geography. Looking at whether immigrants are as religious in the second generation seems to me to get under the cover. Seeing if people behave

rationally—what is rationally?—during a financial crisis gets in too. Looking at life in New Zealand, rather than the mother country Britain, is another of the kinds of questions that come up. (I can still remember being able to answer a geography-exam question on the amount of frozen lamb exported on a yearly basis, from Christchurch in the southern island of NZ, to Europe.)

One ploy you might grab, a codicil to the main definition, is to put in something about the humanities being nonempirical. Philosophers, notoriously, sit on their bottoms in their studies and think. There is frankly much truth in this, although often the thinking is about really important issues, like the trouble one is having with one's teenagers. The main point is that someone in, let us say archaeology, has to go out and look at old buildings and artifacts and such things as burial sites. You do not need to go to Egypt to do philosophy. But is this enough? Historians, for instance, spend a lot of time in archives and what they find can matter. To give a personal example, around 1990 I was writing a book on the idea of progress in evolutionary biology (Ruse 1996). I knew it was there but, at least in modern times, evolutionists tended to keep their discussions out of their professional publications, and to wax forth and enthusiastically on the topic in presidential addresses and the like. I spent a lot of time trying to convince myself—and hence my reader—that this division was of no great importance. Then I started to put in time in the archives of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. I read much of the copious holdings of the paleontologist George G. Simpson. I spend two weeks there once and then returned to my home in Canada. I knew Simpson was into progress—it was all over his letters. Yet, there was no mention of progress in his major work, the one for which he is rightly famous, *Tempo and Mode in Evolution* (1944).

Then a day or two after returning home, I had an insight. This was just the time when people like Simpson were turning evolutionary biology into a professional discipline—jobs, journals, grants, students, and so forth. The overriding mantra of the professional scientist is that science is value free. Tell it like it is. Progress is hugely value-impregnated. Hence, for all that Simpson and his pals believed strongly in progress, they had to keep it out of their professional science! A month or two later I went back to Philadelphia for a week, and my point was all over the letters. How could I have missed it?! Needless to say, I rewrote my manuscript (ms) from the beginning, pretending that that was the hypothesis I had in mind all along and the reason why I wrote the book. I look upon it as one of my successes. And it required empirical research as much as an Egyptologist opening up one of the pyramids and discovering a Pharaoh's tomb. So, I just do not see the empirical factor separating humanities from other disciplines. Apart from the fact that sometimes even sociologists sometimes sit on their bottoms in their studies and think. They too have teenagers!

Wim Drees's definition of the humanities also seems too narrow. Take my own field of philosophy and look at the sub-branch that tackles mathematics (Körner 1960). The big question is: What does it mean to say that  $2 + 2 = 4$  is a necessary truth? The traditional response is that it is an objective truth. It is obviously not an objective truth like "Star Island is an island in the Atlantic off the coast of New Hampshire." It is not a truth about our physical world of experience. In some sense it has to belong to a world of rationality or some such thing. One can appeal to the will of God, but that is not terribly satisfactory. Surely God could not make  $2 + 2 + 5$ . Descartes ([1642] 1964) thought He could, but most pull back from this. It seems that the objectivity must appeal to some kind of Platonism, seeing the truths of mathematics in some nonphysical, rational world of eternal being. Many however find this unsatisfactory. They argue instead that mathematical truths are not truths like "Abraham Lincoln was president during the Civil War," but more reports on relationships. Two apples and two apples make four apples is not a report on an eternal truth but a statement of the relationship between the apples. Necessary, but not real in the sense of referring to a thing.

I am not going to argue for this point here and now, but simply say that I do not see this debate as at all a matter of "humans seeking understanding of human self-understandings and self-expressions." Nor do I see it has much to do with the "the ways in which people thereby construct and experience the world they live in." I do not construct  $2 + 2 = 4$ . I find it. It is not like Thomas Hardy constructing the end of his heroine at the end of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. Dangling from a hangman's rope. Nor do I see anything distinctively "humanities" about it. I experience a single malt—I suppose I construct my liking of it, although I would not normally use the word "construct" here. This has nothing to do with humanities as Drees understands it, or if it does then it should not have. In short, I just do not see Drees's definition as very helpful here.

To be honest, I am not sure that there is such a thing as humanities. Perhaps we are just a dump for things that do not seem to fit in anywhere. As a philosopher, I certainly do not feel much akin to others in the humanities. When members of English departments start talking sonorously of "Theory," meaning something to do with Foucault or Derrida, I shudder. As a philosopher I do not see us much akin to anyone very much. There is some overlap. I am a historian of ideas, so I use a lot of history, with the end of throwing light on philosophical problems. For instance, right now I am writing a book on hatred and this has led me into a discussion of the cause of the First World War. I am using the history to my philosophical ends. I do not see why I should think I am in the same business as the historian. If I write an essay on changing attitudes toward homosexuality, this does not mean that I have much in common with psychologists of sexual

belief and behavior. I am using them to my ends, not claiming identity or friendship.

#### JUSTIFICATIONS: THERE IS NONE

So, we move to my second question. How do we justify the humanities? I can think of three possible answers, all of which are covered by Drees. First, they help us to understand ourselves. As Socrates said: “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Second, they are tools to aid other areas of research, for instance (to take a topic close to my personal area of research) the life sciences. Or third, they simply have no justification. They just are.

Now, as I pointed out at the beginning of this short essay, we are not asking these questions in a vacuum. They are asked against a background of an overall threat to the humanities. Those who pay our salaries, at least in public institutions, are increasingly less enthused at supporting the humanities. And those in private institutions should not be feeling too smug. If students are not taking courses in the humanities, then increasingly administrators look to shutter departments in the humanities. Philosophy, classics, and religious studies are almost always on the chopping block, and other departments should not be feeling too smug. The teaching of foreign languages is no great favorite in the upper echelons of academia. Apart from anything else, it is claimed, whether truly or not, computers make the whole enterprise otiose. Interpreters are going the way of typewriter repairmen. This is true. “A tolmácsok az írógép-szerelők útjába állnak. És ebben minden bizonnyal van némi igazság.” I just translated the last two sentences into (chosen at random) Hungarian.

So, to pick up on the no justification. I just like doing philosophy. No reason, any more than that I like watching Alfred Hitchcock movies. I am certainly not setting out to better myself, and I really could not care less about helping others. (I do not mean I never want to help others; just, not now.) Drees cites, I think approvingly (in the sense of thinking it a good discussion, not in the sense of accepting its conclusion), an article with the title “There Is No Case for the Humanities, and Deep Down We Know Our Justifications for It Are Hollow.” The author, one Justin Stover (2017) is a quondam (former) fellow of All Souls College, University of Oxford, and a lecturer at the University of Edinburgh. At most, as far as I can make out, he argues that the humanities are disciplines that give you entry into a posh class—the kind of people who read the Times rather than the Daily Mail, watch PBS rather than Fox News—and they exist in universities in order to make institutions that do not have departments in the humanities jealous.

The reality is that the humanities have always been about courtoisie, a constellation of interests, tastes, and prejudices that marks one as a member of a particular class. That class does not have to be imagined solely in

economic terms. Indeed, the humanities have sometimes done a good job of producing a class with some socioeconomic diversity. But it is a class nonetheless. Roman boys (of a certain social background) labored under the rod of the grammaticus because their parents wanted to initiate them into the community of Virgil readers—a community that spanned much of the vast Roman world, and which gave the bureaucratic class a certain cohesion it otherwise lacked. In the Middle Ages, reading Virgil, commenting on Aristotle, participating in *quaestiones disputatae*, writing *chansons de geste* and romances—these set apart scholars—bachelors, masters, and doctors alike—as an international community. (Stover 2017)

Candidly, this sounds much like what one would expect from a quondam fellow of All Souls College. From the author of “The Origin, Meaning, and Development of the Latin Verb *Matizare*,” *Archivum latinitatis medii aevi* 69 (2011, 97–105), it is very much what one would expect. I am not entirely opposed to the sentiment it expresses. For the past few years, I have been rather obsessed with the problem of teleology—“final cause” (Ruse 2017, 2019, 2021). What is the nose for? What is its purpose or end? As opposed to, what physical processes led to the nose? Now, in a moment, I will suggest that this quest has a practical implication; but I would be a liar if I said I was obsessed by the problem for the sake of doing good. I am interested in the problem because it fascinates me, and I do not really care if it helps me or anyone else.

#### JUSTIFICATIONS: SELF-REALIZATION

Grant Former Fellow Stover—and I presume by association Wim Drees—his case. Although keep in mind it is not going to cut any ice with your local Republican state senator or congressman. Nor can I really see that it should. If I want to watch Alfred Hitchcock movies, that is my business. I do not see why you should have to pick up the tab. What about the second reason? Self-improvement in some sense? Drees makes the very important point that, as, the metaphysical poet John Donne said: “No man is an island.” Self-improvement is not just you or me, individually. It is you or me as part of society. Drees writes:

The humanities may be useful economically, providing skills needed for jobs. However, framing issues regarding science policy in such terms, arguing for a positive “return of investment,” treating research as useful problem solving, and counting impact in terms of exploitable patents, technology transfer, and commercially marketable outcomes, relies upon a rather shallow and naïve view of what a society is.

A society is not a business, where in the end, net profit counts. It is more like a household, a group of people who have multiple interests of various kinds, some shared and some different, that need to be combined as far as possible, in a way that is reasonable and fair to all members of that household. (179)

Then, Drees concludes with a really important punch-line, that “economic usefulness is about more than profit in businesses and lucrative jobs for individuals. It is about society as the human household. Though there may be private and commercial benefits, this emphasis on society, on collective interests, seems to me a natural context for justifying the humanities, as contributor to public value for humanity.” In other words, the humanities are about teaching people to live as full humans—thinking about the past, about literature, even about why we might think that mathematics is necessarily true. The important point is that this is not done in isolation. It is done as part of the human family.

#### JUSTIFICATIONS: THE HUMANITIES AS OF VALUE TO OTHERS

What then of the third reason, the one that most obviously can be used as a tool to influence skeptical or hostile legislators and others—including your mother and father, if they are supporting you in college! This is a constant theme through Drees’s book. One striking example, at least to me who really knows nothing about these things, focuses in on the help of humanities in untying tricky legal points.

A prominent example is the role the Constitution plays in the United States of America. How should it be understood, so that it still may have meaning for citizens today and thereby have authority over new societal arrangements? One particular point of view is originalism: the meaning of the Constitution, valid also today, should be the meaning it had at the time it was adopted. (124)

Drees then goes on to show how a philosophical training can be brought to bear on a problem like this.

In *A Matter of Interpretation* [US Supreme Court Justice, Antonin] Scalia had defended an originalist and textualist view of the meaning of legal texts. At the symposium, the Dutch philosopher Herman Philipse challenged Scalia, an outspoken Roman Catholic, by arguing that an originalist stance, applied not only to the Constitution but also to the Bible, would have to bring a reasonable person to opt for atheism. (125)

Now my point here is not whether Philipse was right or wrong—Drees gives a careful exposition and analysis of the points made—but to agree that here was a point where training in the humanities could be brought profitably to bear on a matter of great social significance. Take the U.S. Second Amendment about guns. “A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” There has been, and still is, a huge amount of debate about this one. Does it give a teenager the right to go to school carrying an automatic rifle? Crucially, to what extent should we today take into account what were the intentions of the Founding Fathers

at the end of the eighteenth century? Do we, should we, care at all about what they meant by “Militia”? We surely should not be bound by their stipulation that slaves are three-fifth of a person. Should we be bound by other decisions or not? These are important questions in the United States today—a country that has horrific numbers of gun-caused deaths and injuries compared to other Western countries. Score one for the value of the humanities!

#### TELEOLOGY

I do confess, although there are some glancing references—I call two to Thomas Kuhn and three to Karl Popper glancing—to the help the humanities can give to the hard sciences, I think their virtues are underplayed. Again, a personal example, going back to my deep interest in teleology. You do not get final causes in the physical sciences (Ruse 2017). You do not (at least you should not) ask about the purpose of the moon. There was in the late eighteenth century in Birmingham, in the British Midlands, a club called the Lunar Society, because it used the moon to light the way home. But if you argue that the moon serves to light the way home for drunken philosophers—there for precisely that purpose—you are simply not doing physics. Plato explained final causes in terms of a Designer, the Demiurge, that later Christian thinkers like Augustine and Aquinas saw as the Creator God of the Bible—a stretch because Plato did not think of the Demiurge, which he identified with the Form of the Good, as a Creator. Just a Designer putting its imprint on already-existing material. Either way, it is not acceptable in modern science. Neither is the answer of Aristotle, who saw a teleological direction—a force (that the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1907) was to call the *élan vital*)—to the whole of existence. Such directions, caused or not, are not and cannot be part of modern physical science, or any science for that matter.

On the other hand, in the life sciences you do get final-cause talk. This is from the *Origin of Species* where Darwin is talking about why some adults are like their embryos when others, caterpillar to butterfly, are not.

In certain cases the successive steps of variation might supervene, from causes of which we are wholly ignorant, at a very early period of life, or each step might be inherited at an earlier period than that at which it first appeared. In either case (as with the short-faced tumbler) the young or embryo would closely resemble the mature parent-form. We have seen that this is the rule of development in certain whole groups of animals, as with cuttle-fish and spiders, and with a few members of the great class of insects, as with Aphis. With respect to the *final cause* of the young in these cases not undergoing any metamorphosis, or closely resembling their parents from their earliest age, we can see that this would result from the two following contingencies; firstly, from the young, during a course of modification carried on for many generations, having to provide for their own wants at a



very early stage of development, and secondly, from their following exactly the same habits of life with their parents; for in this case, it would be indispensable for the existence of the species, that the child should be modified at a very early age in the same manner with its parents, in accordance with their similar habits. (Darwin 1859, 447–48, my italics)

Before Darwin, in his *Critique of Judgment* (2000), Kant had been worrying about this sort of talk, in the end arguing that final-cause explanations are not part of real science. They are just heuristic.

The concept of a thing as in itself a natural end is therefore not a constitutive concept of the understanding or of reason, but it can still be a regulative concept for the reflecting power of judgment, for guiding research into objects of this kind and thinking over their highest ground in accordance with a remote analogy with our own causality in accordance with ends; not, of course, for the sake of knowledge of nature or of its original ground, but rather for the sake of the very same practical faculty of reason in us in analogy with which we consider the cause of that purposiveness. (Kant [1790] 2000, 36)

This did not stop Kant from being very nasty about the biological sciences as opposed to the physical sciences. “[W]e can boldly say that it would be absurd for humans even to make such an attempt or to hope that there may yet arise a Newton who could make comprehensible even the generation of a blade of grass according to natural laws that no intention has ordered; rather, we must absolutely deny this insight to human beings” (37).

You find echoes of this kind of thinking today. Botanist Paul J. Kramer (1984), of Duke University, warns:

During the past decade biologists have become increasingly teleological in the terminology used to describe the activities of living organisms. This tendency is especially noticeable in discussions of evolution, life cycles, and the reactions of organisms to environmental stresses. It is manifested in such titles as “The Reproductive Strategy of Higher Plants,” “The Strategy of the Red Algal Life History,” and “Plant Strategies and Vegetation Processes.” Too many papers have an anthropomorphic approach to biological problems in terms of a search for adaptations that will enable organisms to attain “goals” such as increased drought or cold tolerance.

He continues:

Plants subjected to water stress often develop smaller, thicker leaves, with thicker cuticle, and have a smaller leaf area and a larger root-shoot ratio. However, these changes did not come about for the purpose of increasing drought tolerance, but because water stress causes physiological and biochemical changes in plants that affect their structure. These reactions to water stress result from screening by natural selection among the numerous mutations and recombinations that have occurred in the evolution of a particular kind of plant.

Natural selection without purpose. He ends:

“The attribution of purpose to plants is not intended literally, and if so taken is dangerous to your mental health.” Scientists can have goals and can develop research strategies to attain them, but plants cannot, unless we are willing to grant that they have intelligence and can make decisions. Terms such as “strategy” and “tactics” are philosophically objectionable when applied to plants and lower animals, and are best left to politicians, the military, and athletic coaches.

The trouble with this kind of approach is that it rules out a great deal of what biologists want to do. The stegosaurus has funny plates all of the way down its back. True, they were almost certainly produced by natural selection. We still have the question: Why? Kant would say that a question like this is not part of science and neither is any answer. Contrary to appearances, it is not science when evolutionists today tell us that the plates exist for temperature control (Farlow, Thompson and Rosner 1976). That they aid the cold-blooded reptile to heat up quickly in the morning, catching the sun’s rays. That they keep the reptile cool at midday by letting the wind rush past them thus lower temperatures. Kramer likewise rules out finding such answers, at least in the realm of science. But, if you look at Darwin’s argument—in the *Origin of Species*, a work of science if ever there was one—he has final causes, without appeal to Designers or to *élans vitaux*. It is all a matter of differential reproduction. Natural selection. Teleology without tears, because natural selection is an entirely law-bound process in a conventional scientific way. Hence, says this writer modestly, the philosophy of biology is an aid to biologists doing their job.

#### CREATIONISM

There are more examples. In 1981, I was an expert witness in the State of Arkansas in a trial occasioned by the passing of a law demanding the teaching of Creationism—biblical literalism—in the biology classes of public schools (Ruse 1988). The ACLU sprang into action arguing that the law was a violation of the First Amendment separation of Church and State. The judge agreed, relying almost exclusively on my testimony as a philosopher. Evolution is science. Creationism is religion. Teaching the latter violates the First Amendment separation of Church and State. “The Act was passed with the specific purpose by the General Assembly of advancing religion.” No balanced treatment for the kids of Arkansas (see Ruse 1988). The points that the judge made were all fairly obvious and expected. Again, at the risk of seeming unduly immodest, my testimony was at the heart of his ruling.

- (1) It is guided by natural law.
- (2) It has to be explanatory by reference to natural law.
- (3) It is testable against the empirical world.

- (4) Its conclusions are tentative, that is, are not necessarily the final word.
- (5) It is falsifiable.

In making these points, explicitly the judge referenced me. “Ruse and other science witnesses.” Score another one for philosophy!

#### MIND–BODY ANSWERS

One point I think Drees rather misses is that this is a two-way process. The humanities can help the sciences. The sciences can help the humanities. In his discussion of the nature of human beings, Drees considers (and dismisses) Cartesian dualism. He then writes:

Some others have treated the material and the mental as two aspects belonging to a single substance, a dual aspect theory. Spinoza, shortly after Descartes, might be understood thus. Upon such a view, psychology would be more fundamental than physics, as psychology engages with both aspects of reality. That does not fit our experience with the sciences, which seem to reflect a rather successful stack of disciplinary levels, from physics via chemistry to biology, and for animals with nerve systems further upwards to neuroscience and psychology. A droplet of water or an electron seems to have no mental pole. A dual aspect view describes the world in our own image, which is convenient but not necessarily correct. (148)

I, and an increasing number of others, would argue that Drees misses the extent to which evolutionary biology can speak to these issues, suggesting perhaps that a droplet of water or an electron does have a mental pole (Ruse 2021). After the *Origin*, the mathematician-philosopher W. K. Clifford wrote:

We cannot suppose that so enormous a jump from one creature to another should have occurred at any point in the process of evolution as the introduction of a fact entirely different and absolutely separate from the physical fact. It is impossible for anybody to point out the particular place in the line of descent where that event can be supposed to have taken place. The only thing that we can come to, if we accept the doctrine of evolution at all, is that even in the very lowest organism, even in the Amoeba which swims about in our own blood, there is something or other, inconceivably simple to us, which is of the same nature with our own consciousness, although not of the same complexity. (Clifford [1874] 1901, 38–39)

I do not think this solves the mind–body problem; but it does point to mind and body being one, in the form generally known as “panpsychic monism”—incidentally, a positively trendy view today in philosophy of mind studies. So here I think is a point where our knowledge of evolutionary biology—scientific knowledge—can impact meaningfully on philosophy—the humanities.

## THE DEBUNKING ARGUMENT

A similar point I think missed by Drees is how Darwinian evolutionary thinking destroys moral realism. The so-called “debunking” argument (Ruse 1986; Ruse and Richards 2017). Drees writes:

The existence of an evolutionary explanation for pro-social behavior need not imply that we are not driven by genuine moral considerations and sentiments. Rather, becoming humans, with moral sentiments and reflection, has been the way in which a fruitful social life has become possible. There is no reason to deny the genuineness of human culture and moral convictions because of their origins in our evolutionary history. (154)

Drees is relying on the popular distinction between the context of discovery and the context of justification (Hempel 1966). Morality may have come through natural selection; this does not mean it cannot be objective or real. Unfortunately—or fortunately, depending on your perspective—Darwin himself shows that there is no good reason to speak of the “genuineness” of moral convictions.

I do not wish to maintain that any strictly social animal, if its intellectual faculties were to become as active and as highly developed as in man, would acquire exactly the same moral sense as ours. In the same manner as various animals have some sense of beauty, though they admire widely different objects, so they might have a sense of right and wrong, though led by it to follow widely different lines of conduct. If, for instance, to take an extreme case, men were reared under precisely the same conditions as hive-bees, there can hardly be a doubt that our unmarried females would, like the worker-bees, think it a sacred duty to kill their brothers, and mothers would strive to kill their fertile daughters; and no one would think of interfering. Nevertheless the bee, or any other social animal, would in our supposed case gain, as it appears to me, some feeling of right and wrong, or a conscience. (Darwin 1871, 1, 73)

As Hume said, morality is all a matter of the emotions (Hume [1739–1740] 1978). There is no ultimate right and wrong. It is all relative. Moral nonrealism. As an authority close to my heart once said: “morality is an illusion put in place by our genes to make us good cooperators” (Ruse and Wilson 1985). Science again tells the humanities how things are.

## CONCLUSION

Let me conclude by saying again what I said in the beginning. I have high praise for *What Are the Humanities For?* Obviously, I have disagreements; but that is the nature of philosophy. If I agreed with everything that was said, I would have no reason to write this essay. Above all, what Wim Drees has shown me—and every other reader—is that the nature of the humanities and their role in life, especially their role in higher education,

is a matter of pressing importance. We need to think hard now about the problems. Otherwise, politicians will make the decisions for us.

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