The American President and his administration are as convinced as the German Federal Government that national and international policy in the next decade will have to deal much more than ever before with the role of science and research, and with the findings and knowledge that they generate, in order to be able to make responsible decisions. Whether we are dealing with climate change, the future supply of energy, the fight against poverty and disease, or security questions, there will be no answers or solutions to any of these problems without genuine cooperation among different scientific and scholarly realms and cultures—and without including the humanities.

When we reflect on the internationalization of science and research policy in Germany and develop strategies in this field, these are not just strategies for cooperation with respect to technological developments in the natural and life sciences. It is also an exceedingly rewarding task for us in the twenty-first century to forge particular connections with the humanities.

That is why I am grateful for the existence of the German humanities institutes abroad. You can be assured that the self-understanding of today’s German research policy includes a commitment to continue this great tradition in the twenty-first century. The German Historical Institutes in particular are outstanding sites of international cooperation. The German Historical Institute here in Washington is the largest historical research institute not affiliated with a university in the United States, an exceptional venue for transatlantic cooperation, and one of the most important organizations connecting Germany and the United States.

In June, a group of young scholars will start work here on a research project that will examine the image of Europe held by European immigrants in the United States. The views of European emigrants as they look back across the Atlantic will provide a special external perspective on Europe. This was especially significant in the context of the transatlantic relationships of the postwar era. As wanderers...
between worlds, these European emigrants decisively shaped the American perception of Europe. This is only one example among many showing that the people conducting research at this institute today are also wanderers between worlds. They cultivate stable, reliable bridges of understanding and dialog between the United States and Germany. And thus they do precisely what has always numbered among the distinctive tasks of the humanities: they enlighten and provoke enlightenment.

Enlightenment is not an automatic process; enlightenment is a lasting responsibility; enlightenment must always prevail over inertia and prevent relapses into old ways. The humanities have always played a special role in this process. Only recently, a historian convincingly discredited common assumptions about the supposed differences between the United States and Europe. If one looks at the diversity of European and American cultures, he argued, then the supposed chasm that separates us is nowhere near as deep as is often claimed. America and Europe are not worlds apart. Europe and the United States are parts of a common culture.

I am convinced that our common anthropological convictions will play a central role in the international context in the future. These commonalities concern not only the development processes of societies, the way research sees itself, and the relationship of science and scholarship to government policies, but also the complex and manifold globalization processes that are leading to the dissolution of familiar boundaries and a departure from the well-known framework of nation-states.

A global economy subverts the basic principles of the national economy; climate problems do not end at national borders. The familiar unity of cultural identity, space, and the state is in flux. Not only spatial, but also temporal boundaries are changing. Industrial, newly industrialized, and developing countries have increasingly different paces of development. Their reaction times to developments in the global financial and economic markets are becoming a precondition for prosperity and progress. Sometimes it is a question of bare survival.

The French author Erik Orsenna therefore rightly emphasizes that “globalization is not only a matter of space; it has also unleashed a war of the clocks.” The explosion of data traffic, the worldwide exchange of goods across borders, and the blending of cultural
systems of knowledge take on new meanings in different cultural contexts—as do the public and the private sphere, justice and injustice, as well as private property and public welfare.

The humanities can no longer rely on established parameters of space and time, but are generating new approaches to dealing with these two factors. Their development of new standards in this area is one of the reasons why the humanities are in such demand. They are becoming an increasingly important part of the productive work of a functionally differentiated modern society, which is eager to make use of their findings. By way of example, I will just mention the increasingly valued philosophy of corporate social responsibility and the concept of creative cities. The humanities and cultural studies create transparency under complex conditions. They supply knowledge that offers guidance.

Clearly, these qualities are of great appeal to those who are thinking about what subject to study. The number of students in the humanities is steadily increasing. Psychologists are in demand, as are political scientists who understand concepts of global governance. Philosophers who understand something about business ethics, social scientists who work on intercultural communication, and theologians working in human resources departments—all of them are in demand.

And then, of course, there is the constant debate about whether or not the humanities are being neglected or disadvantaged. This discussion has been going on for a long time in Germany. I think that scholars in the humanities should adopt a bold approach to this question. The times when universities could believe that cutbacks in the humanities would improve their academic profile are coming to an end.

But it is up to the humanities themselves to make clear what their purpose is. The humanities point out time and again that one should not question their usefulness too strongly. I believe, however, that we must nevertheless answer the question of the specific contribution which the humanities make to dealing with the diverse processes of globalization.

Recognition of other forms and patterns of knowledge is playing a growing role in many development projects. The significance of regional studies, so-called area studies, has consequently increased both in Europe and the United States. The goal is to achieve an
intensified exchange between fields such as sociology, political science, or history and ethnology, religious studies, and regional subjects such as Middle East Studies or India Studies. As a result, the humanities, social sciences, and cultural studies will make an increasingly important contribution towards understanding—and therefore also towards shaping—globalization. We need economists with regional competence, social scientists with intercultural knowledge, and cultural studies scholars with a political antenna.

The humanities protect us from cultural prejudices, ideological blindness, and dangerous stereotypes. The transfer processes between regions and cultures are complex; researching them at the same time secures peace and promotes development and action. The humanities and cultural studies bear significant responsibility for fostering understanding in a globalized world. The humanities must move beyond the role of reactive reflection.

The examples of many technological developments—let me just mention the current discussion about body scanners—make clear that the humanities and social sciences should not merely be invited to provide their ideas and assessment after the fact. They must participate in technological developments from the beginning. They should set the essential standards for technological developments. The humanities create something like dialogic attention, especially concerning the expectations of the public and political leaders when deciding about employing specific technologies.

Globalization processes are removing previous boundaries and expanding the spaces in which we move. At the same time, people’s yearning for spirituality, values, and roots is growing. Literature, art, and music speak of precisely this yearning. Humanities scholars research such paths of yearning throughout human history. They preserve texts as witnesses to our history; they trace the boundaries of cultural patterns and constant boundary-crossings in literature. Thus, they point out our own limits. They help identify culturally formative and identity-creating phenomena in the globalization process. Modern ethnology, sociology, media theory, philosophy, history, and psychoanalysis help us to better understand the complex process of globalization. They can help us understand how developments become autonomous and dissociated from the interests and wishes of the people. They can help us see how old euphorias and utopias of progress and modernity have shattered with uncontrollable consequences. The humanities can help us to think the world anew.
The causes of societal problems have changed radically. The Cold War era and the competition between the systems are over. At issue today are conflicts over space and resources, conflicts which will shape our society fundamentally in the future. Just take the worldwide resource conflict over water, which is mentioned in every research policy debate, or the future supply of energy.

The humanities and cultural studies will have to define the scope of their research more broadly. They will have to utilize the findings of the natural sciences—in brain research, for instance—in order to be able to describe and understand societies better. Globalization processes do not just pose new challenges for the humanities; they also call for a new self-confidence. The humanities must dare to become a thorn in the side of society—to call problems by their name, to speak out against injustice, to pursue unconventional ideas, and to call attention to the consequences of our actions.

The philosopher Hans Jonas wrote about these matters more than thirty years ago, in 1979, in his book, *The Imperative of Responsibility (Prinzip Verantwortung)*. The starting point for his argument is the completely different way in which people are now using technology, which has rendered our former ethical standards inadequate. It was out of this situation that Jonas developed his imperative of responsibility. One might say that it was the forerunner of the imperative of sustainability.

The humanities make the world more complicated in a positive way. They do not diminish the complexity and contingency of our world; they try to read the world, decode it, understand it, make it comprehensible. With more self-confidence, the humanities will again play an important role in the universities and public life. The humanities must show what they are capable of. For that they need inspiring settings. The German Historical Institute here in Washington is precisely that.

Translated by Mark R. Stoneman

---

**Annette Schavan** is a member of the German Bundestag and Federal Minister of Education and Research, a position she has held since 2005. She studied educational sciences, philosophy, and Catholic theology in Bonn and Düsseldorf, earning a doctoral degree in theology in 1980. After a professional career at the Cusanuswerk, a Catholic educational foundation, which she headed as Director from 1991 to 1995, Schavan served as Minister of Education, Youth, and Sport in the German Land of Baden-Württemberg from 1995 to 2005. Among her recent publications: *Keine Wissenschaft für sich: Essays zur gesellschaftlichen Relevanz von Forschung* (Hamburg, 2008); *Bildung und Erziehung: Perspektiven auf die Lebenswelten von Kindern und Jugendlichen* (Frankfurt/Main, 2004).