

**The Unity of the Sciences and the Institutionalization of Knowledge:
Idea and Crisis of the ‘Geisteswissenschaften’**

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In a time dominated by the technological imperative and characterized by the accelerated fragmentation of knowledge and the further drifting apart of the “two cultures”, the view back to a 19th. c. vision of a unity of knowledge that proved its practical significance by forming the backbone of university education must appear utterly anachronistic and, above all, futile. Yet in reflecting on the ideas and intuitions that once fueled this vision our present predicament appears in sharper profile and we can better assess the loss in human substance of unrestricted scientific evolution. Thus it offers also an opportunity to reflect on the role of the humanities in the current development and on the chance of halting their further marginalization.

In this context I will argue that whereas at the intellectual level the search for all-embracing unifying theories might be of little more than heuristic value, at the practical-educational level we can support a much stronger claim. It is not fragmentation and incommensurable socio-cultural diversity, but unity that must continue to be the indispensable ideal as we strive to provide form and intellectual coherence to the various dimensions of our lives. It may still be possible and even highly desirable to recover some of the insights of a humanist program that provided a common vision for humanities and natural sciences alike.