

1. *Rationale*

How do we express our common humanity in ways that articulate the things that connect us while also giving due credence to cultural, geographical, social, religious and economic differences? What does it mean to be a human being in our increasingly intricate, varied and challenging global contexts? And how might the matter of being human, and what that entails in these same contexts, be appropriately delved into and communicated via the humanities disciplines? It is those key questions that this new series will attempt, however tentatively and exploratively, to answer. We wish **Elements in Global Humanities** to be a genuinely path breaking series that will range along the frontiers and across the borderlands of what the phrase ‘global humanities’ might start to mean and signal. In talking and writing about ‘global humanities’ we wish to refer not just to collaborative, trans-national, trans-contextual conversations – important as those are, and central to the series as they will be. We wish rather to try to mould and shape this project creatively; and, in so doing, work – however tentatively – towards developing a new school of thought (we hope not to be claiming too much in calling it as such) that offers something singular and distinctive to productive intercontinental and trans-regional scholarly collaboration. In moving towards fresh definitions and understandings of the ‘global humanities’, and what these could be, we wish to construct an authentically world curriculum that breaks down barriers, rethinks the past and imagines the future.

In thus revisiting this past and imagining this future, our aim is to use the humanities disciplines to represent the local and particular, celebrating diversity, plurality and divergence, even as they try to capture a genuinely global and complementary comparative approach to commonality and shared enterprise. This involves looking positively to what’s ahead (moving away from doom scrolling or resignation about the inevitability of apocalyptic narratives as all there is in front of us) even as we cross-examine our historical calamities and singularities. And it will encompass too a turning aside from unhelpfully bland, holistic statements about ‘one world’ even as we strive for a recognition of points of contact as well as of divergence and disagreement. We are not looking to represent an end point Teilhardian universalism, but for something richer, more fragmentary and more indeterminate – which revels rather in nuanced grey areas and operates in the twilight of the (hitherto) not easily glimpsed. In this respect, the work of the Global Humanities Network (incorporating the work and insights of the University of Cambridge and its worldwide partner universities: Nanjing and Fudan universities in China, Ashoka University in India, Sabanci University in Turkey, the American University of Beirut, Witswatersrand in South Africa, and Universidad Diego Portales in Chile) will be fundamental in providing support to the growth and development of the series as the GHN imports the unique insights and perspectives of scholars in a variety of contexts, including those listed above.

In short, Elements in Global Humanities will use all the benefits and opportunities of the Cambridge Elements platform to publish speedily, both in print and digitally, short (20-30K) micrographs which collectively explore the notion of global humanities as a medium and means through which we can better understand what being human adds up to: in all its wide-ranging diversity.

This will involve the articulation of 5 key principles which have been selected because they seem to us to zero in on the core facets of what is perhaps most significant in respect of the project fulfilling its potential:

Principle 1 – and most fundamentally – is that *Global Humanities are aspirational, showing us not just who we are but who we might better become.*

Principle 2 is that *the series' Global Humanities will draw as effectively and directly as possible on the expertise of the Global Humanities Network as a collective.*

Principle 3 is that *the series will be understood to be innately pluralistic, diverse and dialogic.*

Principle 4 is that *independent local initiatives will be crucial to the series' expansion and eventual success.*

and **Principle 5** is that, *in showcasing the best humanities research from across the globe, Elements in Global Humanities will be focused on public engagement: this is not just a series by academics, for academics, but one with outreach at its heart. We wish to say something meaningful to a broad audience of supporters and public thinkers about what and for whom the humanities (and, by extension, a modern university and the twenty-first century liberal arts) are actually there *for*.*

2. The series

In operating under the umbrella of these 5 guiding principles above, Elements in Global Humanities will then initially attempt to investigate its individual subjects and topics under the broad organising headings of these mirroring 6 questions:

1) ***What does it mean to be human?*** (The underlying interrogation of the whole enterprise.)

2) ***How do we understand violence, conflict and suffering?***

3) ***How do we think about morality?***

4) ***How do we approach disease, in a post-pandemic world?***

5) ***How do we think about the arts?***

and 6) ***How do or should we understand shared and contested spaces?***

Though other questions will surely also and in due course suggest themselves as relevant to our project, we focus in particular and in the first instance on these half-dozen interrogations because they seem to us to be especially salient 'ways in' to show how the humanities can go beyond customary (and of course significant) self-justifications (i.e. about their centrality to existential human value and meaning) to address instead harder-edged zonal questions of immediacy, emergency and crisis. These 6 questions adumbrated above are considered a useful and indicative organisational starting-point, but are not intended to be exclusive or definitive. The humanities are often now dismissed as soft, or by and large peripheral, disciplines which have little to say beyond legacy matters. Contrarily, we wish to demonstrate through the ambitious Elements we commission that the humanities in fact have vital things to contribute to matters relating to such urgent contemporary topics as artificial intelligence (1), war and geopolitical conflict (2), ethical questions about (just for example) extreme poverty and wealth inequality (3), future pandemics and how we should tackle them (4), the future of the arts and the meaning of 'culture' and (6) climatic and migratory pressures on the environment and on critical resources like food, water and land.

In identifying and isolating these preliminary key questions we hope thereby to give expression upon a realisable canvas to the notion that the humanities disciplines can make real, concrete and cogent contributions to urgent issues of social and societal concern. In so doing we wish, if we can, to challenge the idea (as above) that the humanities are subjects which have little of import or real relevance to say beyond literary, cultural, artistic and historical curation. Thus, individual Elements will plunge directly and head first into deep emergencies such as the conflict in Ukraine and what past wars can teach us about the present; into what the plagues that swept the ancient world (for example) might tell us about a post-pandemic future and preparing for our next coronavirus; into the challenges of thinking about shared ethics, normative barriers and conceptual languages; and into complex and problematic questions around spaces, sovereignties and nationalisms. In articulating these questions on a global scale, but concentrating chiefly on the local and the particular, the series will cross borders and forge new connections between scholars who might otherwise have remained disconnected. Lots of bottom-up activity will offer a better overarching perspective not just on what ‘the global’ means, tout court, but also about what the humanities can contribute to the whole question of what ‘being human’ signifies in an increasingly discombobulating digital age, characterised as this is by the rise of AI and – paradoxically – the notion that the very designation ‘human’ is itself a problematic, contested and changing one. In short, we wish our series to be a bellwether for bold new thinking about humanistic endeavour and how, across the globe, we can put heads and minds together to suggest visionary ways forward.

In realising this new series of Elements in Global Humanities, and exploring at an overarching macro level the question of what the global humanities are, there will of course be overlap with other humanities initiatives, such as health humanities and environmental humanities – areas with which our own enterprise shares several obvious affinities. Nevertheless, in its range, ambition, scope and complexity, and especially in its crucial strategic partnerships with colleagues not just in the English-speaking world but well beyond, we feel that what this series offers is distinctive. And in bringing the series to fruition we would hope (subject to CUP’s approval) to publish an agreed small number of Elements in languages other than English, perhaps beginning with an Element or two in Spanish. The three series editors, in acquiring and commissioning for the series, will be supported by an engaged editorial board constituted by scholars already involved in the Network and its multiple activities.

3. *The editors*

Saul Dubow is Smuts Professor of Commonwealth History in the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Magdalene College, Cambridge. His several books include *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (CUP, 1995), *A Commonwealth of Knowledge: Science, Sensibility, and White South Africa, 1800-2000* (OUP, 2006), *Apartheid: 1948-1994* (OUP, 2014) and *The Scientific Imagination in South Africa* (CUP, 2021, co-authored with William Beinart). He is currently bringing to completion a major new book project, tentatively titled *A Global History of South Africa: From British Colonies and Boer Republics to Post-Mandela Reconstruction*.

Malvika Maheshwari is Associate Professor of Political Science at Ashoka University. She researches and teaches at the interface of several disciplines, including art, politics and aesthetics, and is the author of *Art Attacks: Violence and Offence-taking in India* (OUP, 2019). In autumn 2022 she was a Charles Wallace India Trust Fellow in the University of Cambridge, working on her second book project about the National Akademies of Art and the politics of aesthetics in postcolonial India.

Frisbee Sheffield is Associate Professor of Classics in the University of Cambridge and a Fellow of Downing College, Cambridge. She is the author of *Plato’s Symposium: The Ethics of Desire* (OUP, 2006) and co-editor of – among other edited volumes – *The Routledge Companion to Ancient Philosophy* (2014). She is centrally involved in the ‘Classics Beyond Borders’ project co-hosted by the Universities of Ghana and Cambridge, designed in part to develop greater awareness of the challenges faced by students from African countries in applying and being admitted to Cambridge.

4. Editorial board (including the Cambridge Directors of the Global Humanities Initiative)

	Name	Institution	Job Title	Key Research	Publications
DIRECTORS	Chris Young	University of Cambridge	Head of the School of Arts & Humanities	Medieval German literature and language and the history of European (and in particular German) sport	"The 1972 Munich Olympics and the Making of Modern Germany", "The Whole World was Watching. Sport in the Cold War", "Literary Beginnings in the European Middle Ages"
	Esra Ozyurek	University of Cambridge	Sultan Qaboos Professor of Abrahamic Faiths & Shared Values	Sociocultural anthropology focused on the tension between universalism and particularism in Abrahamic religious and post-religious belief and value systems, in Europe and the Middle East	"Being German Becoming Muslim: Race, Religion, and Conversion in the New Europe" and "Subcontractors of Guilt: Holocaust Memory and Muslim Belonging in Post-war Germany"
	Hans van de Ven	University of Cambridge	Professor of Modern Chinese History	Modern Chinese history, China's experience of globalization, and China's modern military history	"From Friend to Comrade: The Founding of the Chinese Communist Party", "War and Nationalism in China", "China at War", "Breaking with the Past: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service and the Global Origins of Modernity in China"
	Shruti Kapila	University of Cambridge	Professor of History & Politics	Modern and contemporary India (c.1770 to the present), global political thought, Indian democracy and its constitution, conservatism and global anti-imperialism	"Violent Fraternity: Indian Political Thought in the Global Age", "An Intellectual History for India" and Co- Editor of "Political Thought in Action: The Bhagavad Gita and Modern Indian Thought"
MAIN EDITORS	Saul Dubow	University of Cambridge	Smuts Professor of Commonwealth History	History of racial segregation and apartheid in South Africa, study of eugenics and scientific racism and the influence of scientific and literary thought on the making of white South African national identity	"The Scientific Imagination in South Africa - 1700 to the Present", "Commonwealth History in the Twenty-First Century", "The Rise and Fall of Modern Empires, Volume II: Colonial Knowledges" and "South Africa's Struggle for Human Rights"
	Frisbee Sheffield	University of Cambridge	Associate Professor of Classics	Ancient Greek philosophy, particularly ethics, moral psychology, aesthetics, politics and the reception of ancient Greek philosophy, particularly in the work of Hannah Arendt	"Plato's Symposium: The Ethics of Desire", co-editor of "Plato's Symposium: Issues in Interpretation and Reception", co-editor of "The Routledge Companion to Ancient Philosophy",
	Malvika Maheshwari	Ashoka University	Associate professor of political science	Intersection of political thought and art practice (violence, power, democracy and state capacity)	"Art Attacks: Violence and Offence-taking India"
EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS	Alex Wright	Cambridge University Press	Head of Humanities Books & Senior Executive Publisher	Strategic development of Humanities book publishing in conjunction with key members of the University of Cambridge and beyond	"Why Bother with Theology?", "Meanings of Life", "Exploring Doubt: Landscapes of Loss and Longing"
	David Currell	American University of Beirut	Associate Professor & Chair of English	Renaissance reception of classical antiquity and the afterlives of early modern texts, theatre in the age of Shakespeare, satire, literature and digital media, and theories of allusion	Co-editor of the collections "Digital Milton" and "Reading Milton Through Islam"
	Manuel Vicuña	Universidad Diego Portales	Professor of History	Cultural history and writing non-fiction literature, relationships between history and literature, and the global sixties	"Fuera de campo. Retratos de escritores chilenos", "Barridos por el viento: Historias del Fin del Mundo", "Voces en el río", "Voces de ultratumba. Historia del espiritismo en Chile"
	Lian Lu	Fudan University	Professor of English Literature	Anglo-American literary modernism, feminist literary criticism and women's writing	English monograph on Penelope Fitzgerald; Six course books and anthologies for English majors in China and "Politicizing Hamlet: Early Modern England's Political and Gender Crises"
	Abdurrahman Atçil	Sabancı University	Professor of History	Law, politics, religion, bureaucracy and education in the early modern Ottoman Empire	"Scholars and Sultans in the Early Modern Ottoman Empire"
	Chengzhou He	Nanjing University	Professor of English & Drama	Modern Drama/Theatre, performance studies and comparative literature	"Henrik Ibsen and Modern Chinese Drama"; "Representations of the Other: Theory and Practice"; "The Scandinavian Canonical Authors: Ibsen, Strindberg and Hamsun"
	Jonathan Gil Harris	Ashoka University	Professor of English	Globalisation, Shakespeare (including Indian adaptations), "Indography" or early modern English writing about India, histories of disease and medicine, medieval and early modern Silk Road cultures	"Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England", "Sick Economies: Drama, Mercantilism and Disease in Shakespeare's England", "Masala Shakespeare: How A Firangi Writer Became Indian"