Drowning by Numbers. Evaluating Social Capacities

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Overview

1. Impact of research evaluations
2. Public value
3. Social capacities
4. Back to Aristotle (again!)

Research Eval. IS

- Outlet is the only measure used; placeholder for quality.
- 1st September each year a premium paid to individuals for earned “research points”.
- Direct incentive for increase in the volume of outputs.
- Creeps into other parts of decision making.
- Value not addressed.

Evaluation System for Public Universities

Evaluation Criteria

The Evaluation System for Public Universities forms the bas
academic staff, i.e., persons hired in accordance with standard p
qualification) who are members of the Icelandic Associati
Professors or other collective bargaining organisations party to
(including the Union of University Teachers, Teachers' Ass
University of Education and Akureyri Union of University Teach

At the University of Iceland, publications and published material
University of Iceland (Icel. *Háskóli Íslands*) are not evalua
research, teaching, administration and service work and
performance reporting takes the form of a report detailing activ
year. At the University of Iceland, reporting also includes updat
an overview of collaboration with parties outside the University a
done outside the University. No points will be awarded before a
report has been submitted.

Research

Research evaluation is largely based on the publication outlet.
publication outlet that makes rigorous scholarly demands of its
have been already evaluated with regards to data solicitation, ori
to advancement of knowledge. The peer-review process is a criti
For peer review to be considered satisfactory, the material in qu

Impact of evaluations

Evaluation practices do impact research practices (p. 15-16).

Three main worries:

1. Goal displacement.
2. System gaming.
3. Excess burden.

Can potentially lead research practices away from "real" value of research (making it “perverse”).

But what is the "real" value?

Approaches to Assessing Impacts in the Humanities and Social Sciences

May 2017

FEDERATION FOR THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES | FÉDÉRATION DES SCIENCES HUMAINES

Public value

- *“the circulation of research in networks to users with identifiable interactions creating things that make a good society as public benefits from private assets”*

- “Good society” is the ultimate aim of research in the humanities.

- Good society is realised through societal capacities.

- Criterion: Internal change in network.

Process scale	Knowledge process	Conceptual framework for understanding "value"	Value determination process
Individual	Co-creation of new knowledge	The societal analogue for scientific excellence, directly related to individual research projects —measures of "goodness"	Are researchers making their findings as accessible as possible?
Micro	Knowledge exploitation/transfer	Users taking knowledge and research from researchers and embedding it in their own products, processes and techniques	Is there evidence that users are engaging/exploiting findings?
Meso	Embodiment in network behaviour	Maximising incentives for creating public benefits from private activities, via autonomy and accountability	Are the findings disseminating and exploited via networks?
Macro	Becomes knowledge commons	Creating and empowering societal capacities to live a "good life", particularly outside direct economic sphere	Are networks changing in ways that promote a "better" society?

UNESCO on Social Transformations

"The world is undergoing important social transformations driven by the impact of globalization, global environmental change and economic and financial crises, resulting in growing inequalities, extreme poverty, exclusion and the denial of basic human rights. These transformations demonstrate the urge for innovative solutions conducive to universal values of peace, human dignity, gender equality and non-violence and non-discrimination. Young women and men, who are the most affected by these changes, are hence the principal key-actors of social transformations."

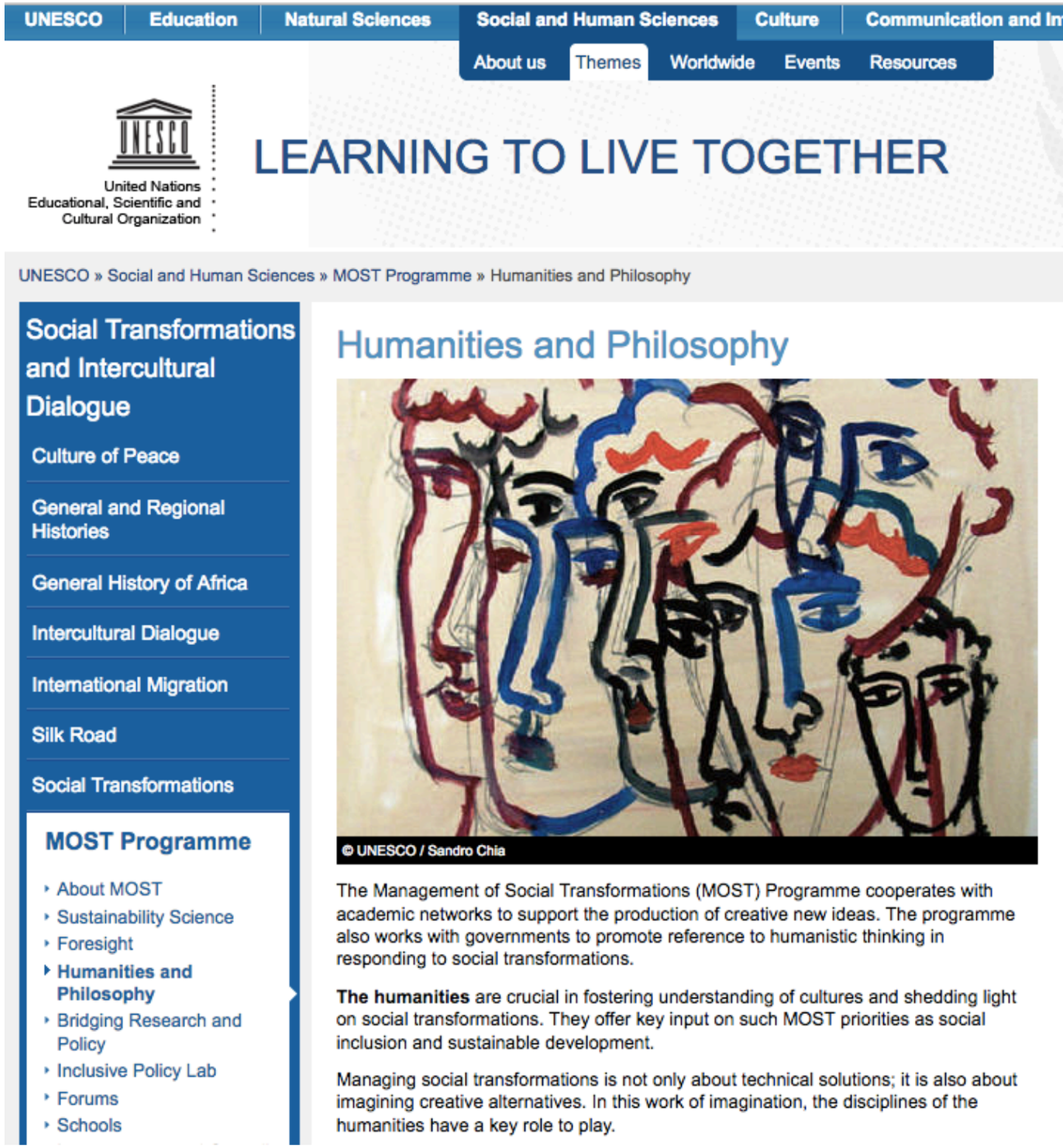
- *http://en.unesco.org/themes/social-transformations*

UNESCO and social capacities

"**The humanities** are crucial in fostering understanding of cultures and shedding light on social transformations. They offer key input on such MOST priorities as social inclusion and sustainable development."

"Managing social transformations is not only about technical solutions; it is also about imagining creative alternatives. In this work of imagination, the disciplines of the humanities have a key role to play."

- *http://www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human-sciences/themes/most-programme/humanities-and-philosophy/*



Some considerations

- How do we conceive of societal capacities?
    - In particular: How do we conceive of societal capacities as produced by humanities research?
- Do we have the means to analyse the links from research in the humanities to specific social capacities?
    - In particular: Is teaching an important link (or “identifiable interaction” / “auditable occasion of influence”)?
- Are we risking “goal displacement" through evaluation practices, failing to aim for value?
    - In particular: Are we hurting societal capacities?

Capacities and impact

- Capacities are built and developed over time in some particular place.

- Capacities are not developed by moving some”thing” from a researcher to someone else.

    - A theory of capacity building can.

- They are developed with sustained interactions with individuals and societies in some particular place at a particular time.

- Need for global/local balance.

An Aristotelian turn

- *Phronetic* social science; epistemic virtues.
- Recent turn in analytic epistemology:
  - Towards knowledge as a norm and epistemology as a normative discipline. More recently: From knowledge to understanding as of primary value.
  - From knowledge as an artefact to intellectual agents as bearers of knowledge. More recently: To societies as knowledge communities (e.g. Jonathan Kvanvig).

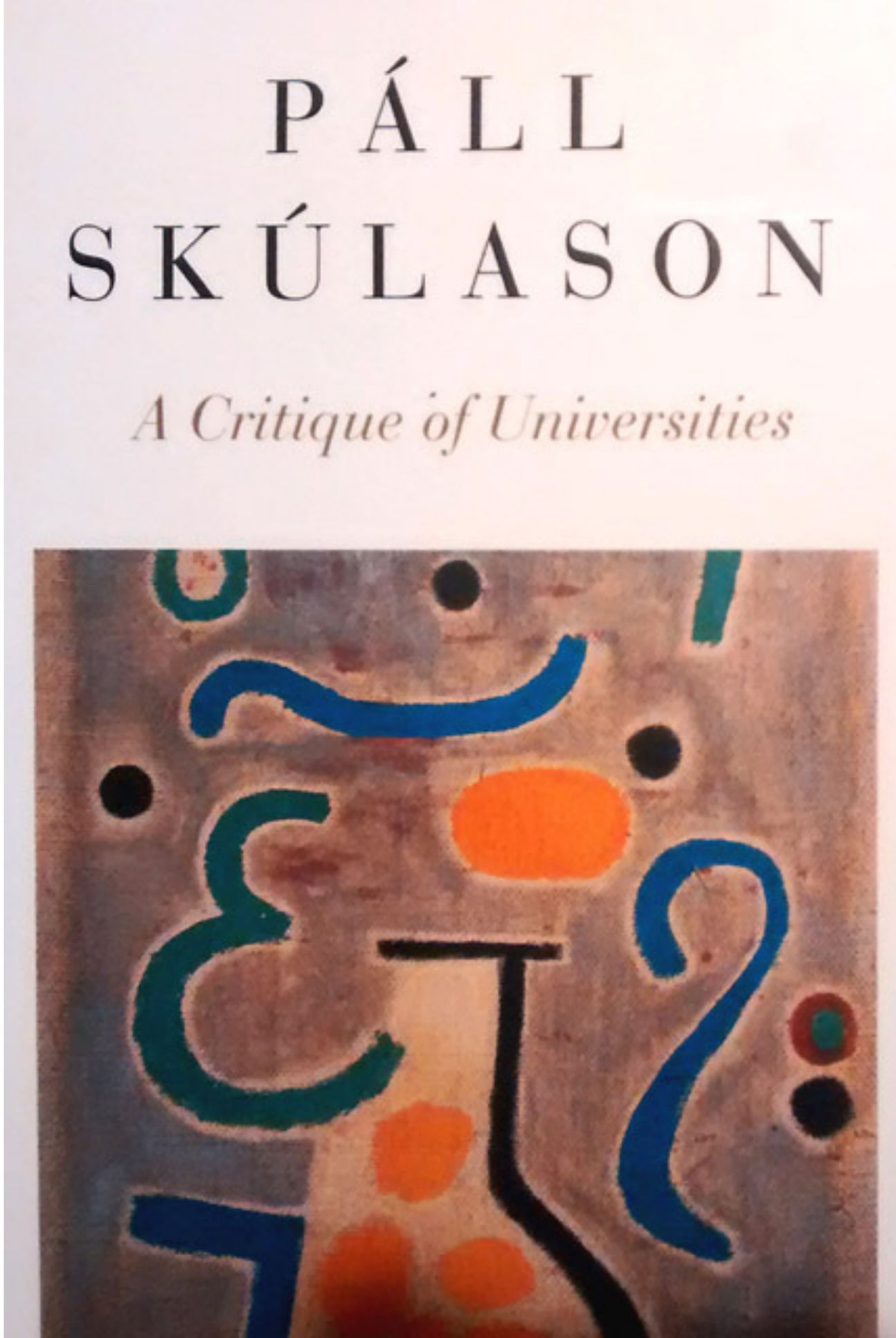
Universities and epistemic virtues

- Páll Skúlason: “The University and the Ethics of Knowledge”, 2015 [2006]

    1. Acquiring beliefs is not an act of will.

    2. Selecting true beliefs is not a technical process.

- „Rather, what matters is that we have acquired epistemological virtues that ensure as well as possible the validity of our beliefs.“ p. 91.



Linda Zagzebski

- Indivudual responsibility and conscientiousness. The value of knowledge is based in the responsible and conscientious actions of individuals.
- Among the epistemic virtues most discussed are:
    - Open-mindedness.
    - Epistemic humility.
    - Epistemic courage.
    - Epistemic justice.
    - Creativity.
- Virtues always need to be developed in particular contexts.

Epistemic justice

- More focus in general on epistemic injustice and how to avoid it (mainly developed by Miranda Fricker).

- Two main forms:

1. Testimonial injustice.
2. Hermeneutical injustice.

    - When individuals and communities do not have conceptual and linguistic resources to understand and communicate their own experiences.

    - Do the humanities have a responsibility to correct this injustice?

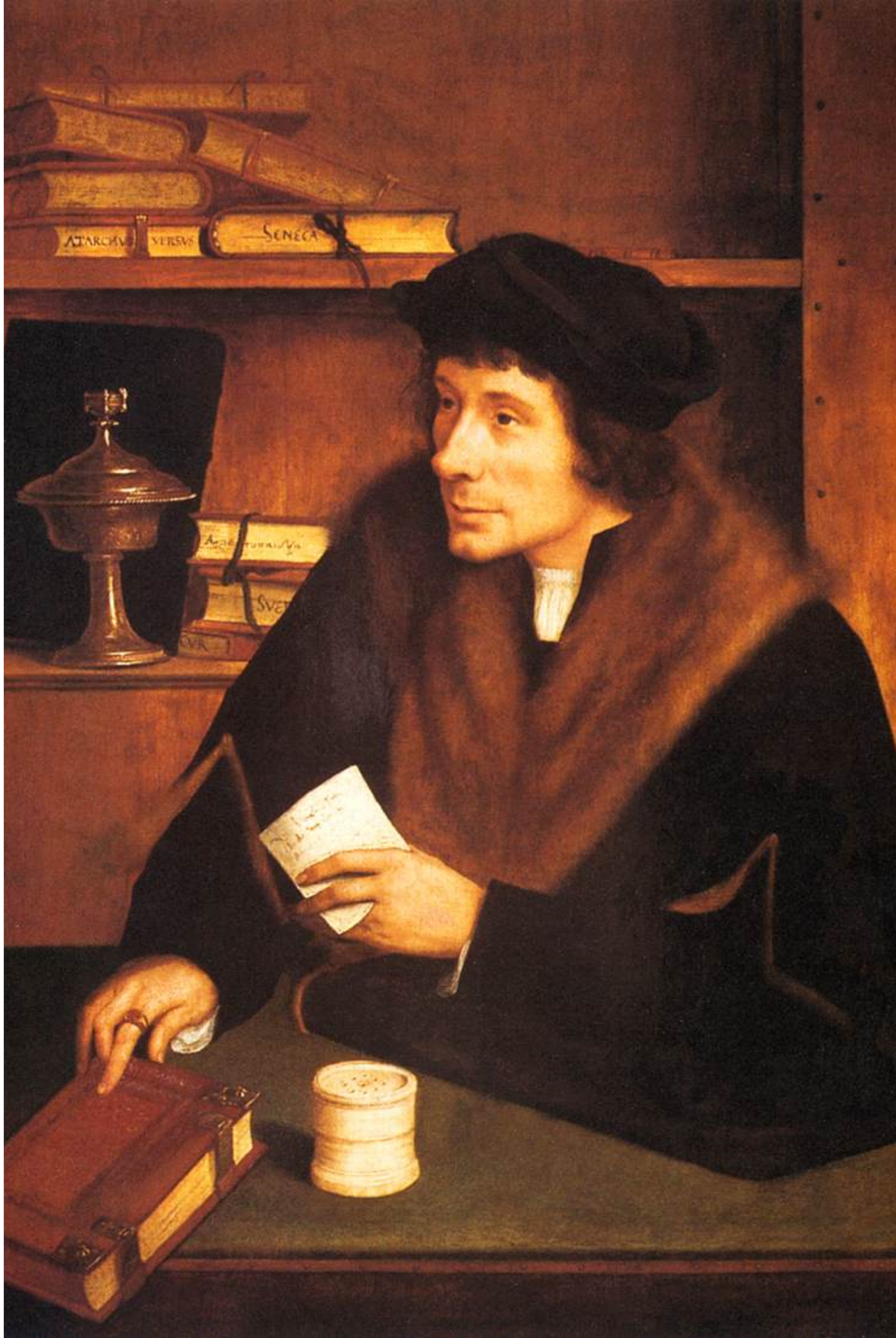
The project

- To make sense of the concept of societal capacities:
    - Develop via an analysis of epistemic virtues, in particular in communities.
- Role for the humanities:
    - Real or imagined alternatives (e.g. important within the capabilities approach of Sen, Nussbaum and others).
    - Critical thinking and cultural understanding.
    - More?

SHURE

Utopian Antwerpen

Prefatory Epistle, Thomas More to Peter Giles [of Antwerp]

Thomas More to Peter Giles, greetings.

I am almost ashamed, right well-beloved Peter Giles, to send you this book of the Utopian commonwealth, well nigh after a year's space, which I am sure you looked for within a month and a half.