Thought on Tap #1 (Times of Crisis)

10/11/18

Transcript:

Introduction:

0:00:11.340 Bretton: you're listening to Thought and Tap a monthly podcast about the role of the humanities in the world today

0:00:14.610 Carlos: brought to you by the College of Liberal Arts and the Core Humanities program at the University of Nevada, Reno

0:00:22.380 Bretton: this is Bretton Rodriguez a lecturer in Core Humanities and a co-organizer of Thought on Tap

0:00:25.439 Carlos: and this is Carlos Mariscal, assistant professor of philosophy and also a co-organizer of Thought on Tap

0:00:29.310 Bretton: and every month we convene a panel of local experts to discuss the issues of the day and have a moderated discussion at the University Laughing Planet

0:00:37.260 Carlos: this month we're talking about the role of the humanities in times of crisis and now here is Daniel Enrique Perez...

Times of Crisis:

0:00:41.969 Daniel: I want to welcome you all to the first ever Thought on Tap here at the University Laughing Planet we are really excited...we are really excited to bring this new series to you thank you for being at the inaugural night and I'll talk more about the series in just a minute but before we get started I need to introduce myself as well as our guest speakers and I also want to thank our sponsors. My name is Daniel Enrique Perez, I am the director of Core Humanities I'm also faculty in the department of world languages and literature's. I need to thank the sponsors for this evening. First of all I need to thank Tim Healion and Tim is the person over here doing all the running around because [applause]Tim is the owner of laughing planet and this series is possible here because of him so I really really want to thank him for all the work that he's done to help us develop the series and also to make this space such a welcoming and excellent space for us to be using this and he does a lot of this work on his own so he helped to set up the space here today and also has been very involved in the organizing I also have to thank the program that I direct the core humanities program for providing some funding for the food this evening and also a lot of the organizing of this particular series and now that they have to thank Dean Debra Moddelmog, the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts. She couldn't be here this evening but she will be at some of the forthcoming thought on

tap events and she and Tim and I have conversations about starting this series last spring and we are just quite thrilled to finally see it happening this evening. I finally see it happening this evening. I want to thank our panelists as well for being here and I'm going to introduce them to you now our panelists include Dr. Caitlin Earley she is an art historian in the department of art she studies the art of Latin America with a particular focus on ancient Maya sculpture. She has performed field research in Belize Guatemala and Mexico working most extensively with archaeological and museum collections in Chiapas Mexico she has held research fellowships at Dumbarton Oakes research library and collection in Washington DC and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Please welcome Dr. Earley we also have to my far right Dr. Carlos Mariscal. The three of us have been working on putting this together for a while so it's just quite important I think and wonderful to have participating in this first talk and they'll be hosting some of the future talks as well. Dr. Mariscal is an assistant professor in the Department of Philosophy before joining UNR he was a Hertz West postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Biochemistry and molecular biology and philosophy in Dalhousie University professor Mariscal's research centers on astrobiology the evolution origin and distribution of life in the universe. His recent work explores convergence, the direction of evolution the nature of the direction of evolution the nature of the last Universal common ancestor, the nature of extreme organisms, the origin and meaning of life, and ethical issues. Regarding new biotechnology and our third panelist is Dr. Bretton Rodriguez Dr. Rodriguez is a lecturer in the Core Humanities program. He is the specialist in the literature history and culture of medieval and early modern Iberia his research focuses on the development of historical narratives in medieval Europe using the skills of both literary criticism and historical inquiry he examines the way medieval histories evolved into a sophisticated literary text as well as the political propaganda to support a specific rulers of dynasties communities and ideas. Dr. Bretton Rodriguez (Applause). So we structured this talk this evening in a way that we hope will generate conversations with all of you after I present some introductory comments and ask the panelists a few questions so we'll do about 20 to 30 minutes of and intro of the subjects then comments and questions in panels and then we're going to open it up to comments and questions from all of you and the topic for this evening as most of you probably heard is the humanities in times of crisis right and also please know that this series will continue in November the topics will be the roles of humanities in resistance movements and we intend to do this every second Thursday of the month please plan to join us in November as well. I titled my intro why we need the humanities now more than ever, and in just a second here but after the 2016 elections and some of you probably had an idea that we'd start around that period because of the title of the talk right but many of my friends and colleagues would be in what I would probably describe a crisis mode right, trying to figure out what happened what would happen in this new era in the US and what they could do about the disturbing events that they witnessed transpiring. The events of the last few years have placed us in a constant state of crisis right, Charlottesville, the threat of nuclear war; the attacks on women, immigrants, people of color, people with disabilities, our LGBTQ communities, and other groups, also natural disasters like hurricane Maria in Hurricane Florence, hurricane Michael, and the political and legal disasters right for such Cavanagh etc..Like many I have also struggled to make sense of what is happening in this country today, which is largely what inspired the topic for today: What is the role of the humanities during a time of conflict or during a crisis? and just thinking

about how students and friends reached out to one another asking themselves what happened what do we do now like where can we turn right, when experienced that crisis or a conflict we often use superlatives to describe the situations often without recognizing historical precedents probably because the immediacy of the situation makes it feel as if it's the worst the most the toughest the gloomiest thing we've experienced right in the moment it often times feels that way but we also sometimes get so caught up in the emotional turmoil the moment that we forget to place the situation in context. We forget to step back, reflect and truly think about what is transpiring and some of its precedents. It was in one of these moments that I had to ask my stuff about the role of the humanities in times like these and my role as an educator a scholar and activist a writer and a queer person of color like many of my colleagues I consider myself an activist scholar. Which means that I don't aspire or subscribe to the outdated ivory tower approaches for teaching and conducting research like many scholars today, I want to make a difference that goes beyond the classroom beyond academic journals and beyond the walls of an institution of higher learning, which is why we're here today also right. In an era like the one we are currently experiencing some people believe we quote "need the humanities now more than ever" however I want to argue that we don't and I'm the director of core humanities so how can I argue this? (Laughter) But my fear is that if we allow ourselves or others to believe that you really need the humanities during a time of crisis a direct corollary may be that we don't really need the humanities when times are good right. So instead I would argue that we always need the humanities we need them now just as much as we needed them before 2016 before we were X years old right, before we experienced whatever challenges we may have experienced in our lives we used and turned to the humanities for many answers to deep social and philosophical questions I believe we used them to make meaning make connections and make sense of things, ourselves our lives and what is going on all these things are interconnected. As one of my mentors at Arizona State University Dr. David William Foster to claim and tell his students: the humanities are quote "the really hard sciences" he used to claim that other Sciences like physics, chemistry, and math. Etc. were not nearly as difficult as humanities because studying, understanding, and mastering the human mind, human soul human relations, human experiences, and human emotions was virtually impossible In humanities it is rare to reach conclusive answers, to find solutions that work for everyone, or to apply a formula or serum that solves a complex problem. When asked to solves a complex problem. When asked to explain what those of us who are the Humanities do instead of trying to give an academic or detailed explanation about how we help build communities or tell important stories, or create necessary dialogues I now try to keep us relatively simple and point to the following and that is the word itself and in its varied meanings and so I us this often times to explain what we do as humanities people, human ties I think it makes the point about the type of work that we do right, when we make the connections between people we are using the humanities, whether it be through our stories or our actions, we lead people with past and present experiences, often while imagining new ways of being and interacting This morning I was listening to DeRay McKesson on NPR, the program one A, he is the black lives matter organizer who recently released his memoir "on the other side of freedom" I don't recall his exact words this morning but he said something that stuck with me which went something kind of like this. He says it seems the Alt Right is obsessed about telling a story about a path that needs to be preserved, like make America great again right or the right to bear arms, or

what our founding fathers may be thinking about this moment, right, and he claims that the left is constantly telling stories that reimagine the future, new possibilities right and things like imagine a world where everyone has access to health care, a world that is free from discrimination, a society where women have full control over their own bodies, where people of color don't need to fear the police, and where the earth and our lives on it remains sustainable, and what struck me most about his comments was the way that narratives are used in these debates right, how do stories shape social and political movements? That's a question I think we need to be asking, right, we often turn to the humanities for answers but the questions that arise are often even more important to raise and more difficult to answers. What sort of questions should we be asking in a time of crisis or conflict and what type of action is needed? I brought also a political cartoon that I received in my inbox from The New Yorker and I'll read it to you first now show it to you actually I'll show it to you then I'll read it for those who can't read it from here but it is a satire of the alert that a lot of you probably received on your phone, it says presidential alert: Donald Trump is still president. This is not a test. Action required. What type of action is required during a time of crisis? How have others responded to similar situations? What is my responsibility? I hope our discussion today will lead us closer to a better standing of our roles and responsibilities as humanists. Thank you. So now we're gonna have a brief response to the introductory comments from our panelists in no particular order.

0:15:37.370 Carlos: I definitely think that when we try to figure out how to deal in this world, how to interact, we all have to make our way through this world somehow, right, and I think it's it's far too easy to think that the problems that we have, have never been faced by anybody else because they’re very particular and very unique and we are dealing with things that nobody else has dealt with in the new circumstances such as a hurricane Michael just went through Florida and Georgia and people there are struggling and are having a hard time. Various alerts have reached our phones for a variety of reasons, whether through the national services or through news or whatnot. I think what what's helpful in this discussion is to realize that maybe the particulars are always different, but the broad themes have been with us since the ages. They've been with us since the beginning of human thought.

0:16:55.270 Caitlin: I'll piggyback on that just in that you know I think I would I would place the beginning of the crisis to the recession actually. I think if we look at numbers in terms of when humanities majors really seemed to plummet, they really seemed to take a drastic hit right around the time of economic recession. But to piggyback on this idea of storytelling I think that's really popular or really powerful and I think we have to keep in mind that you know we don't always need to reinvent the wheel, right, that the issues that we're facing have been faced by many people before us and study of the humanities offers us some potential roots to think about those new lives that we could build and the new features that we can construct in my introduction to art history class we always start out with ancient Egypt and I show them the temple of hatshepsut who was one of the first female Pharaoh's in ancient Egypt and we look at her temple and we look at all of these beautiful sculptures of her and then I end the segment and I say well, the reason that we have these sculptures is because of archaeology, because the guy who ruled after Hatshepsut, said that actually I destroyed all of these and buried them in a hole in the ground. And all of my students are kind of taken aback and it's it's one of the first

moments in the class where we're really getting into this idea that the victors write history. That the study of history and the study of the humanities is always going to be steeped in particular always going to be steeped in particular biases, particular points of view, and that critical understanding of those stories, and I think a thoughtful application of those stories to how we live our lives today, is really a way to kind of build those future stories that Daniel Enrique mentioned. Bretton: So yeah just kind of adding to that a little bit, I think one thing the humanities does really well is really to kind of show regardless of kind of who you are or what your background is it really doesn't help you to deal with these events and help you deal with these situations. So if I'm thinking of your students regardless of what they might be studying it still has value right its value to kind of understand the world around them understand the material that they're seeing and so I think that's something I'm really kind of keep in mind is that it's not any one thing, that's it's a universal system for understanding the world around us as a whole, which I think it's kind of really important to keep in mind.

0:19:11.000 Daniel: And that's a good segue to our first question: the question I have for the panelists and that is I wanted to ask you about how you use the humanities maybe in your personal life, to deal with personal or any type of conflict or crisis, how have you or how do you use them? Have you or how do you use them?

0:19:42.070 Carlos: I know it's gonna seem like I seek out these arguments but believe me I don't I just have a brother who disagrees with me about everything sometimes it seems like he disagrees about whether we're related or not and I'll tell you the hardest lesson I ever had to learn, which I think under studying in the humanities helped me internalize, and that lesson is you never win an argument on the day that you have the argument. The purpose of arguing should not be to try to bring somebody else to your perspective, it should be to try to understand each other and see what values led to peoples beliefs, values are things that we care about things that we would go out of our way to protect, things that we prefer over other things, and oftentimes what seems like a regular debate about means, is actually a debate about what we care about deep down inside and I think if you start approaching discussing controversial topics with people that way, about just trying to understand them and having them understand you then maybe in a couple of weeks they are lying awake in a deep sweat and they come to realize that they're wrong. (Laughter) and that's my hope.

0:21:15.880 Caitlin: That was really inspiring (Laughter)

Carlos: Thank you.

0:21:19.620 Caitlin: Yeah I got this question and I have to be honest I was like so how do humanities help us in times of crisis I'm like to be like throw books at each other is that how it is how we get out of it but I will say and I apologize in advance because all of my stuff is like so art history biased because that's where I live, but I this really hit home I think for me during the 2016 presidential election and all of the quote unquote fake news that was circulating, right so this felt like a really concrete example where having the skills of visual analysis, which is something that we teach in art history and something that we value so this idea of being a

critical consumer of information. This was a moment where I think that was really important, and it was certainly something that I used as I scrolled through my Facebook feed and I think it's one moment that really advocated for the study of images and for the study of the critical consumption of information in general as a way to kind of hold off against lies that are being spread or things that don't seem to make sense. But, to think about how images and words are being used critically, to me was something that I think can really sort of, offer a way through those difficult moments where those times of rapid change, right, which is often what a crisis is.

0:22:35.740 Bretton: So first of all I think no one's shocked that Carlos gets in a lot of arguments with people (Laughter) I think anyone who knows Carlos could have seen that one coming, Going back to something Carlos actually said at the beginning I think one thing humanities really does for us in these times of crisis is to help us put things in perspective, I mean it might seem like the end of the world at the moment I mean we've mentioned 2016 a couple times, it might seem like you know the sky is falling, but I think one thing that kind of studying history does, one thing straight in the past does is it helps us to kind of think about, and helps us kind of realize, this has happened before. Sometimes some of the antecedents might be a little bit scary, right, I mean so going back I mean looking at how the political discourse today, I can't help thinking about late Republican Rome when you see a lot of very similar rhetorical techniques being used a very similar level of discourse in the Senate so think about what happened then and what has happened now might be a little frightening. I think you need to put these things in being able to put things at least in context a little bit. These things have happened before, it's not the end of the world. Just to kind of get personal a little bit, even though I didn't plan to get personal at all, I think for I in 2016 one thing that really helped me process a little bit, was actually teaching the humanities. Since I was teaching in Istanbul at the period and just kind of teaching a lot of material dealing with my students talking to students and kind of thinking about some of these themes and ideas really just kind of helped me to cope. I think just kind of even just engaging with this material thinking, about this material, it could be really useful and really productive and really kind of help you to survive.

0:24:19.060 Daniel: Thank you, and I just want to point out that the issue that Dr.Earley raised about the role of the humanities in the news and media and social media is a topic for a future discussion as well so look out for that. I think its December that we are doing that. So a really great way to start spreading the word on that topic. Carlos: Check out thoughtontap.com And Dr. Rodriguez's comments are also a good segue to my next question, is we're fortunate to have on this panel here, people who are doing research on a number of different eras as well as worlds and so my next question is about their research and I've wanted ask them about what they've discovered about the various roles that humanities have played in times of conflict in other cultures, or their eras and other cultures, or their eras and environments, so please speak to that.

0:25:31.820 Bretton: One thing I think my work is really showing; so I deal with kind of history writing and ideas of history and one thing that I've kind of come to realize is you often see a revolution in in ideas revolution writing after political revolution as well. And so one thing that in my own period so looking at medieval Spain we have kind of a major revolution in the mid-14th century and one thing you see is you have a problem. You have this problem of legitimacy that comes up and so you see history writing literally kind of changing ways see people literally rewriting the past, rewriting history to justify what's taking place. I think we tend to think of the humanities being very positive in general, we think it's kind of great thing, we think history is a very positive very kind of productive thing. It can also sometimes be a little bit tricky, a little bit dangerous a little bit manipulative as well, so we can see it's kind of propaganda positively and also kind of see it negatively as well and also just to kind of zoom out a little bit I think one thing we see historically as well is in these periods of crisis in these periods of change we often see a lot of really great literature, a lot of really great kind of cultural kind of production taking place. So I mean I'm thinking of after the Pope Asia war in ancient Greece for instance this is when we get Socrates and Plato and Aristotle and during the during the times of conflict in ancient China this is when we get Confucius and Lao Zi during the warring States period. After the fall of the Republic in Rome is when we get Virgil. During the decline of the Spanish Empire this is when you get people like Cervantes, Lope De Vega, so I think in these times of crisis, in these times when you see everything falling apart, this is when we also get really great art, and I don't think that's really a coincidence, I think there's something to be said for in these moments of crisis is when you need someone to find what you believe in, to find out who you are as well. I think this leads have really kind of remarkable artistic achievement, even if it's not necessarily kind of comfortable to live through for individuals.

0:27:31.780 Caitlin: I really like that idea that great things happen from times of change, for the ancient Mayan response from a humanities perspective to a crisis was to take a captive and carve him on a stone monument, with the King stepping on him so that was kind of the response, but I'm so that was kind of the response, but I'm thinking too about in terms of this idea of crisis leading to new things, I think in the Americas we could certainly say that that crisis is the kind of thing that leads to greater diversity, and I'm thinking in particular of the Aztec, who waged war throughout central Mexico and we're incorporating a lot of other indigenous groups and one of the ways that they did that was to basically take gods of those indigenous groups and incorporate them into the Aztec Pantheon. So in terms of art and writing and by the way the Maya only had one word for those it was art and writing were considered the same thing. But in terms of visual arts that are being produced I think that is where we start to see this real flourishing of diversity and ideas, is through times of crisis. I'll also say that from a Maya perspective and in terms of the work that I do, I think the humanities really become important in terms of establishing relationships, and I'm thinking of the ability of art in the ancient Maya world to solidify and negotiate and contest relationships between various groups of people. So between the king and his Nobles between the king and his unfortunate captives but between other people as well so I think the ability of the humanities to help people kind of understand who they help people kind of understand who they are and the place that they occupy in the world is a particularly important one, especially in times of crisis.

0:29:23.250Carlos: I didn't know even of these ideas that in times of crisis the best art and the best writing comes about, which means that I finally have a shot (Laughter). So I do history of philosophy of science and in particular I spend some time thinking about definitions of origins of life like what people had thought about in respect to that. And I'm reminded of somebody that I spend some time thinking about his name is Giordano Bruno every once in a while he's known as the first martyr to science. Probably that's a bad way to refer to him but he was one of the first people that fully accepted that the Earth might not be the center of the universe and that the Sun might just be one star among many and so when you look out into the Stars at night all of those are also Suns, which was a revolutionary and brilliant idea and then he went a couple of steps further with this revolutionary brilliant idea and that was to think well if there are stars that are like our Sun then they have planets like Earth where there are humans like us who have been visited by an alien Jesus, and the church didn't really like that (Laughter) I think this you know this is one of many examples in history where people take a what's actually a brilliant idea and go a step too far because of the things that they didn't realize that they'd actually already secretly bought into, the assumptions that go with thinking that the Sun must be the exemplar in everything every other star must be exactly like it and not have you know planets the size of Jupiter orbiting within five days like we've now discovered. He would have been freaked out I think.

0:31:17.460 Daniel: We want to ask you now about what you believe to be the role of the humanities during times of crisis as we're discussing here, but also what do you believe the individual responsibility is of humanists to do something. I think a lot of people like to think a lot of people as I mentioned in my introduction a lot people just want to do some in they feel like they have to do with something. And it and it has to go beyond what we normally do right beyond our teaching and other things that we do in our normal and everyday lives. What do you think? And the question is for the audience as well, we'll ask you about that in just a Second.

0:32:05.000 Bretton: I do want to start my remarks just by saying how cool I think alien Jesus is (laughter). I think one thing that we can do and I think one thing that we should well is we write, we speak, we communicate, and I think kind of one thing that we can do is be a voice, and I think can do is be a voice, and I think kind of being a voice to speak up. I think one thing that happens during times of crisis doing these kind of periods when you see things kind of falling apart is, you see a lot of kind of people being silenced and so I think particularly for all of us kind of in this room, all of us who are in a position to do so, I think what we need to do is we need to speak, we need to write, we need to kind of make sure that our perspective that our kind of point of view is being expressed. That people that if we have kind of an audience kind of like this one that we can actually kind of speak up and be heard and I think kind of there's a lot of people who can't speak up and so I think for us who maybe have the chance to do so have the ability to speak up have kind of the ability to put into words but maybe a lot of other people are feeling. I think that's kind of what we're called upon and kind of what we need to do. So I'd say kind of being this voice kind of speaking up and kind of making sure that these perspectives, these points of view, these kind of a lot of people are not being

silenced and that we could actually maybe be heard and kind of effect some kind of change that way.

0:33:26.260 Daniel: Incidentally Dr. Rodriguez and I last year talked about having a panel on this subject but that panel kind of became Thought on Tap, thanks to our collaboration with Tim here also with Carlos who had already kind of conceptualized something similar and so I'd like to believe that this is part of that that action is required type of thing is what inspired this as well so we're quite grateful to be yours.

0:33:52.669 Carlos: I'm grateful to you guys this is awesome.
So I'm teaching an in my classes right now some humanities works that changed the world right so I teach a little bit of history of science a little bit of science technology and society and sometimes we talk about the scientific treatises that changed the world like Newton's Principia that made everybody think that they can just figure out universal laws of everything of culture of government of whatever but then you go you get to this period where people start writing novels and stories and polemics and you see how books like Uncle Tom's Cabin or Finn Sinclair's the Jungle are driving forces in ways that no amount of data, no amount of science could get you. You finally get into the head and the eyes and the ears of people that are dealing with horrible situations of working in awful conditions. When Rachel Carson wrote Silent Spring that got us started in the environmental movement which is you know we're thankful that we can drink our well more or less drink our drink our well more or less drink our water but breathe our air sort of and other things like that these are works by humanists that I think changed the world in ways that that no data can.
Making things real I think is helpful.

0:35:32.299 Caitlin: There are there are a lot of ways to change the world too and one of the challenges of the humanities is that I think some of some of its effects are not necessarily quantifiable in ways that are easily digestible to a wide audience. In my art history class I like to think that that ideally it would walk this line between both showcasing the incredible human diversity, you know the many different cultures who have created art and the many different ways they figured out to create beautiful things and meaningful things, but also kind of the flipside of that this idea that we can look at cultures from across the world and across time and they're often dealing with ideas that feel very relevant to us, right, they're dealing with a with things you know themes of power or love, or you know things that feel really important to us today too so it's this flip thing where we're exploring diversity but also realizing that humans have a lot in common and that's the kind of thing that I like kind of putting out there because I think it creates better citizens to use a really clichéd word or phrase, but what I hope is that it helps form in people this idea of diversity and the importance of diversity, but also of kind of our shared human interests, and that's something that I think is really powerful to take out into the world it always makes me think of Ann Forster and his only connect right that's the job, is only connect and I think that's really what humanists are kind of asked in this day and age.

0:37:01.080 Daniel: Thank you, now I've posed many questions and I hope that you've had a chance to think about some of those questions and I also want to ask our panelists to pose a few questions that have come to mind during our conversation before we open the floor for more discussion so you have any questions you would like to just pose no one necessarily needs to answer them we just thought we could throw them out there and then that would help to facilitate our next segment of discussion. So any questions that come to mind too for any of you that we haven't posed yet

0:37:41.240 Caitlin: This is a weird question but I was thinking about this as Bretton was talking about this idea which I which I really agree with that none of this is new right that where we are and the problems that we face have been faced by humans before and so I think we've touched on this idea that none of our problems are new but I wonder if that also means that none of our solutions are new and so I think what I would ask well what I would ask is you know if we think about the direct applicability of the humanities is okay if we're looking at the humanities and if we're looking at history in late Republican Rome what solutions can we come up? What ways forward can we envision that maybe don't involve like knives and brutal assassinations but you know what directions can we look based on our study of the humanities?

0:38:31.860 Daniel: great question.

0:38:32.380 Bretton: You mean besides like stocking up on dry goods (Laughter) I I think that's a great question I don't think there's a kind of a concrete answer to it unless Carlos has one kind of percolating in his brain. I'm just gonna pose kind of a general question as well and this is kind of what I've been thinking of I'm just kind of thinking as Carlos you were you were speaking as well and I think just kind of how do you kind of produce some of these things? I mean like this kind of shift from kind of more quantifiable research and kind of more artistic works that still prompt actual actions and I think how you take that leap? I think all of us who are in academia are very trained very kind of we practice from the time where you know undergraduates and at producing academic discourse but how do we kind of take that jump from doing things for a very closed audience for one that's a much broader audience? How do we reach a broader audience? And I think we could tie this to your question as well how do we kind of reach a broad audience and have effect that change is gonna be meaningful? I don't think necessarily we need a brand new solution but maybe a solution that kind of works for this time in this place. Maybe they didn't reach a solution in Republican Rome for instance but maybe we could find one that works now. Like maybe we're having times where people have kind of come back from the brink as it were. So Carlos have you come up with your brilliant solution (Laughter)

0:40:06.937 Carlos: I think about some of the problems that we're facing and how some of them are actually maybe not different in kind but certainly different in degree, right, the climate crisis that the report just came out from the IPCC that says that we are screwed. We have ten years. One of the most important techniques to have in any realm of inquiry is being able to accurately diagnose the question that you're facing, the problem that you're

facing, sometimes the solution is scientific, sometimes it's political, sometimes it's in viewing on somebody else a sense of empathy, which I think certain kinds of humanities really are very well equipped to do and depending on the problems depending on who you're talking to in the audience I it think depends on what tools in our toolbox we reach for. So be I guess very careful and realize that we're gonna need to use everything and we're yeah we're facing a lot of new problems or problems that are to a new degree

0:41:41.820 Daniel: We are ready for any comments or questions from anyone please, whatever's come to your mind, any questions you want to pose to the panelists, you don't have to use the mic but if you if it's close enough please

0:41:53.940 Audience Member: In answer to Caitlin's question about if the past has had similar sorts of problems do we look to that for solutions, well I think about you know the example of Rome and like who was in charge of making solutions in Rome it probably wasn't people who were enslaved, it probably wasn't people who were foreigners in the community, it was probably a certain high-class group of people who are forming those solutions and right now I feel like if we're talking about what humanities offers us, I mean I'm an assistant professor of communication this is not what I study but I read a lot of novels on the side and I feel like women and women of color have provided us with so many visions of better futures through novels that why would we hold ourselves to the structures of the past and imagining what the future is if we can draw from people who are doing that work in ways that reimagine inequalities, reimagine societies that aren't based on those and that we could take the time of crisis and draw from this rich thought in like Octavia's brood that collection that is based on Octavia Butler's work that draws from activists who are writing science fiction stories about what they feel their work is doing in the world or you know dark matter which is a history of science fiction written by the African diaspora and those things give us visions for for better futures that I feel like are really powerful.

0:43:24.780 Daniel: That also reminds me though and what I mentioned in my comments earlier were that it seems to me that there's always a tension right between those imagined futures and the imagined past that some people cling, to right, that may be an a fiction as well. They both can be fictions but people lay claim to those possibilities and hang onto them and it seems that there's a constant tension between.

0:43:52.180 Caitlin: That's where if we think about this idea of what we as humanists can do I mean I think maybe it's questioning those imagined pasts, right, and maybe it's maybe it's diversifying those pasts and making sure that it's not just the people in power who are able to shape our understanding of those pasts.

0:44:15.940 Daniel: Revisionist approaches. Another question over here.

0:44:24.640 Audience Member: Wondering what your opinions were on, in terms of we understand that these problems exist and have existed for thousands of years, however in

terms of creating tangible solutions I was just wondering how we could maybe make people act against their own immediate best interests in lieu of a longer scale time line.

0:45:02.120 Bretton: I don't think there's a great kind of singular answer to that, what I think is interesting as well as sometimes it's not even making people act against their interest, is kind of letting people act in their own interests because I think there's so many people who are already acting against their own self-interest, so maybe kind of going back to what Carlos was saying earlier, right, where you're not gonna convince them in the day, but maybe if you provide them with information, you let them know you let them kind of think on it and then maybe eventually they could come to that conclusion as well. Even perhaps just kind of empowering some these other voices as well, I think that's also really crucial and that I thought was a great point I mean the people making these kind of solutions coming up with solutions before was a very kind of small subset of the population so maybe just empowering more actors, empowering more voices, getting different perspectives, I think can just be really really powerful.

0:45:56.150 Caitlin: So assuming that people will act in their own, is a great question by the way, but assuming that people will act in their own best interests but creating systems that allow other people, allow a broader range of people to also ask in their own self-interest. I'm thinking about that marshmallow study is that what you're thinking about, I totally they did this study about kids eating marshmallows on whether they waited anyway, I would have eaten the marshmallow.

0:46:42.300 Carlos: It turns out that you give kids five years old a marshmallow ask them if they can wait 15 minutes while you go do some unrelated tasks and when you come back they can eat two marshmallows, and the kids that were able to withhold eating the marshmallow were followed up with later on over the next couple of decades and on over the next couple of decades and they scored higher in their SATs they were accepted into more universities You know the science on that is still up in the air whether we can generalize much from.

0:47:25.642 Daniel: Well actually it's more aligned with psychology right I think they called it delayed gratification and I think they're related more to individual personality traits right not everyone and fell for the first marshmallow.

0:47:45.460 Caitlin: I was just saying I think I still would eat the marshmallow I'm not I'm not proud of it (Laughter) but I'm being honest. so okay so the thing that comes to me that comes to mind when I think about answering this question and this is gonna be weirdly vague but all I can think about is stories, you know I think we're all acting according to certain narratives and certain beliefs, and I think that may be the way to get at these problems is to change the stories and that that might lead to changing behavior and I know that's super vague and I have no idea how to do it but to change the way that people are thinking around things and to change their own narratives about maybe their lives or their circumstances, to me that offers a potential way forward.

0:48:26.160 Daniel: Definitely no easy answers. Okay we have a question back there and then here in the center.

0:48:35.740 Audience Member Speaking...

0:49:24.580 Carlos: So the question is about studying the deep past might help guide us thinking about the deep future? I certainly think so.

0:49:49.880 Audience Member: I heard about this really interesting computer program that IBM created called Project Debater and basically what it does this has the capability to actually debate the human being so I was wondering do you ever think that there's a way for the humanities to be completely technologically incorporated and if so why and if not why not? I mean not like outsourced to robots but in the sense that robots would be capable of doing it by themselves not necessarily that we would somehow become reliant on robots.

0:50:26.180 Daniel: And incidentally there's a topic for a future Thought on Tap, the role of the humanities in science of technology but yeah I would say that they're more integrated than some people believe. The robots they're made by human beings and they largely I believe they largely reflect us as human beings and human behavior in ways that we oftentimes don't recognize. But I'll let you all respond to that as well what do you think.

0:50:51.077 Bretton: I don't think anytime soon, I mean I'm hesitant to say never just because I think giving a long enough time frame I'm not sure. I think there's definitely something unique about the way that humans think and kind of the way that we're able to think around corners and kind of think in ways that are unpredictable. So I feel like it's not I mean I think debating a computer you're still working within kind of the algorithm with which the computer was set up and I think there's still someone setting up that algorithm, there is still gonna be human thought behind it, and I still think it's gonna be inherently a little bit limited. I mean it might it might be really hard to reach that limit or we might push that limit further and further back but ultimately I think it still comes down to the human mind, human ingenuity in general, so I think there is a limit and I think kind of think like my colleagues here wanna respond but I do think that it's at least kind of far into the future.

0:51:46.320 Caitlin: I think there was an article that flashed across my Facebook feed yesterday about Amazon. I don't know if anyone saw this but they created an AI system to go through the resumes that were submitted for jobs, but it turns out that the AI system they created when they created it they gave it mostly resumes submitted by men. And so in reviewing the AI it turns out that it was a totally sexist system. So it was a discriminatory AI system so I guess I would just say you know I don't know if I have an answer to the question but I would say that I think we have to be very careful because systems of AI are still created by humans, and they still come out of the systems of knowledge in which we operate now.

0:52:29.070 Daniel: And they have the same problems, the patriarchy still also impacts how those processes work.

0:52:35.959 Carlos: I'm fully on board with that and I'm half on board with what Bretton was saying and it was the right-half (Laughter) So I want to separate I don't think that thinking in terms of machines beating us or being better than us at something is the right way to think about this, and the reason is that we are different things and they are different things and you can have some machine learning algorithms that use some deep neural networks that use some deep nodes to try to make perfect predictions on how to drive or how to make the next Picasso or whatever and that is great. Its double-plus good, love it, they can win at go, chess and make awesome art and maybe debate and be sexist (Laughter) better than us. But I think that it's gonna end up being that machines have their limits just like humans have their limits, they have their advantages just like humans have their advantages and so the novel that a machine would write would not be the novel that a human would write. They're just different.

0:54:06.480 Daniel: And they're reflections of who we are and they're reflections of who we believe we are as a society right, as individuals and as a society. Audience member: I add on top of what Carlos just said in response to your question bear in mind that if you're debating the computer you're not necessarily debating something that's hungry or afraid like we are and if these are human problems between creatures that are hungry or afraid or insecure maybe the computers are not the best thing to be debating or outsourcing our minds to these computers because we're more than our minds, we're also our experiences and the other things that we embody - so I think that's worth thinking about.

0:55:09.210 Daniel: I want to welcome you to that topic of discussion it is probably in the spring. But we will have a Thought on Tap that is all about that topic so please make sure you look out for that on our website ThoughtOnTap.com. We have one more question here I think this is the last one because we're running short of time.

0:55:32.740 Audience Member: Mine's not really more of a question than in more of a commentary because throughout the night we've been talking about solutions to how we can get out of crisises through a humanitarian perspective through the humanities, I would like to play devil's advocate and say that the destruction of a society is the solution, in terms of humanity because we must understand that if a human can do it it's still part of humanity, we like to think of depravity or what we define as subjectively evil things as something we should not do but that's only because we have been taught throughout an entire life that were not supposed to do, but if human can do it then it's actually a part of us as much as we don't want to say it and we always try to we always try to have this central idea of what a human being should be but many cultures across the world and across time itself are very different. I am a criminology student and I've learned that high profile crime theft drug use things like that, they stay within neighborhoods they become their own subculture of that neighborhood, and would it be ethnocentric to believe that they should be part of our system instead of theirs because we like to say you're not supposed to be violent or you're not supposed to be dangerous or scary to the average human being but what if we are supposed to be, and we are simply putting our views on someone else

0:57:08.330 Daniel: Thank you, I allow one more person to pose a question that I'll ask you to make closing remarks,

0:57:16.269 Audience Member: So that kind of went along with that one but it was more of a question like isn't it scary because Core Humanities I think are super powerful but it's more of the sense that you open it up to, you're not just because we're talking about different backgrounds, different beliefs and all of that, but what happens when they clash and aren't you scared of like the conflict that could create and then how divided people could become because they are just expressing like what is the common goal?

0:57:51.669 Bretton: I'd actually just like to respond to those two questions just really quickly I think you both raised really interesting points and really kind of powerful points and I think for me one thing the humanities does is it's a conversation I think and hopefully you can get together and you work out a solution and I think yeah people definitely come in and you can take a broad sense of what the humanities are. I think I'd hesitate to say what we're supposed to be I think a valued kind of comment but I think one thing that you humanities will teach us to do is have these conversations and have these discussions and kind of work out our solution and hopefully that solution is kind of a better solution I mean I do and this might be a little bit kind of idealistic but I do feel like hopefully the human helps makes things better and again that's kind of a very broad term but hopefully it's kind of working towards kind of progress into making the world better in general and I realize again thank that's the arc of history I guess moving in a more positive direction, I think at least having these conversations in my opinion is in a step in the right direction.

0:59:02.379 Caitlin: Yeah, I'll piggyback off of that and I would agree that I think it's the conversations at the end of the day that are the goal, but I'll just add support for both of those comments which is you know as someone who studies ancient indigenous cultures yeah I mean I think our views of what we're aiming for and what our ideal outcomes are here are very much based in in a modern Western perspective so there have been many other cultures throughout the world that view violence very differently that view warfare very differently that view what it means to be human very differently or what it means to be a part of a community. I think that's a really important comment and I think this idea of division and how we can have these conversations without, or in a productive way I guess in a way that that binds us together more than it tears us apart. I think those are both great comments so thank you for that.

0:59:51.610 Carlos: To wrap up I first I want to thank everybody here thank you guys for coming it was awesome we all had a blast, I think, one of the things is to continue having the discussions continue having the conversations and worrying about the values and the facts on the ground.
I do philosophy of science as I've said and one of the things that some people always ask me is why don't you just do science? And my response is that I think that everything is continuous everything is related to everything else and though every new discovery, every new invention leads to more humanist questions. So we're always gonna be in this dialogue whether we want it or not. The climate crisis is gonna lead to solutions about who we want to save and how

autonomous vehicles are gonna lead to discussions about ethics of technology and whether the car should try to sacrifice its driver in order to save a pedestrian, all of these things are gonna continue to come up again and again, the humanities aren't old they're current, and they keep being relevant so for me and for I guess everybody else thank you.

1:01:20.590 Daniel: And I want to thank our panelists for helping
us to generate a very important conversation, I think that this has been an outstanding evening, a great way to launch our series, we hope you will continue to join us the coming months I also wanted to point out that we if our technology worked out we are actually doing a recording of this, we would like for it to be a podcast and post it on our website, if it all works. We'll keep our fingers crossed. We also want to invite you to stick around and have some food and talk with us a little bit more so we hope this conversation will continue and I want to thank all of you for being here and please join me in thanking our guest speakers once again. (Applause) and that concludes our program. Thank you all and have a nice night.

END.