Humanists argue that social engagement in the humanities helps answer questions about human nature and society

An analysis of Collection 1--consisting of 82,324 newspaper articles containing the word “humanities”--shows a trend among academics within the humanities to advocate for their fields in relation to broader social problems (see example). This kind of advocacy tends to appear in university newspapers, which have a much smaller circulation than mainstream newspapers. This trend can be clearly seen by examining the main contributing articles for Topic 61 and Topic 2 (for a discussion of values attributed to humanities within public newspapers, see KF-4-6)

Within this discourse, the values consistently highlighted as belonging to the humanities are critical thinking and human understanding. The broad claim is that the study of literature and the analysis of text, together with the critical thinking/reading skills fostered by fields such as philosophy, can help build a working knowledge of human nature (see example), which can be utilized in understanding the social interaction of individuals and groups. Furthermore, this discourse holds that humanities students are better at critically observing the surrounding world (see example), thus helping to identify the problems and the challenges faced by the world and to propose innovative, ethical solutions.

The values identified and advocated for by academic humanists are therefore intrinsic, rather than material. A further discussion about intrinsic and extrinsic values of humanities can be found in KF-4-1.