

## *The Knowledge to Love*

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The purpose of this paper is to reimagine the humanities as a mode of inquiry that provides practitioners with the knowledge to love. This calls for reclaiming a notion of human nature that is oriented not solely around reason, but also around love. It also requires rethinking how we read texts, calling for a habit of love that complements the prevailing habit of critique. The first part of the paper deals with the humanities in relation to human nature. In our time, the humanities are routinely criticized for their captivity to theory, the latter which rejects any aspiration to truth or human nature. In my view, for the humanities to be taken seriously, humanists must show that the subject of their inquiry – the human experience – has metaphysical significance. Humanists can demonstrate this by basing their work not solely on the study of human cultural expressions, but also on a concept of human nature.

The notion of human nature is contested in our time. Nonetheless, I think the concept has explanatory power. We cannot think of human activity without some understanding of what it means to be human. For the humanities, I would like to suggest that we reclaim human nature, basing it not solely on reason, as classically conceived, but also on love. For this I will turn to the work of Plato, Norris Clarke, Frederick Wilhelmsen, and Paul Tillich. I contend that we must approach our study of the humanities with an attentiveness to the love that lies at the heart of human nature and existence in the community of being. This will enrich not just our understanding of human experience, but also our relational participation in the cosmos. The second part of the paper deals with the humanities and critical theory. Drawing upon the work of Terry Eagleton, I will argue that theory has both enriched and diminished the humanities' ability to provide us with the knowledge to love. While theory's attentiveness to race, gender, and sexuality can strengthen our empathy toward those on the periphery of society, the relentless critique inherent in the method fails to cultivate a disposition of love. To counter this problem, I suggest balancing a habit of critique with a habit of love when reading texts.