

Article

## Involved Knowing: On the Poetic Epistemology of the Humanities

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**Abstract:** The humanities represent a type of knowledge distinct from, and yet encompassing, scientific knowledge. Drawing on philosophical hermeneutics in the tradition of the *Geisteswissenschaften*, as well as on the Latin rhetorical tradition and on Greek *paideia*, this essay presents humanities knowledge as “involved knowing”. Science, in principle, abstracts from the subjective, psychological conditions of knowing, including its emotional and willful determinants, as introducing personal biases, and it attempts also to neutralize historical and cultural contingencies. Humanities knowledge, in contrast, focuses attention on precisely these subjective and historical factors as intrinsic to any knowledge in its full human purport. In particular, poetry, which historically is the matrix of knowledge in all fields, including science, deliberately explores and amply expresses these specifically human registers of significance. The poetic underpinnings of knowledge actually remain crucial to human knowing and key to interpreting its significance in all domains, including the whole range of scientific fields, throughout the course of its development and not least in the modern age so dominated by science and technology.

**Keywords:** humanities; hermeneutics; prophecy; revelation; epistemology; poetry; poetics; relationality; objectivity; liberal arts

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### I. Method and Truth in the Humanities

What kind of knowledge, if any, do the humanities represent? Posing epistemological questions concerning the nature and conditions of knowledge in the disciplines that come under this rubric might

seem hopelessly remote from probing classic works of literature and their remarkably rich and revelatory contents. Yet theoretical awareness and self-reflectiveness are integral to almost any authentic knowledge and insight in this domain. To begin, therefore, with some broad theoretical considerations concerning the study of the humanities is already a way of embarking on them [1].

The question of the kind of knowledge the humanities entail might be approached through exploring either the history or the method of these disciplines. Logically, the question of method demands to be taken up first. But even to speak of “method” in the humanities betrays an, in some ways, inappropriate bias. For knowledge in the humanities is not necessarily or per se methodical. To the extent that we feel the need to establish at the outset the right method of research, our conception of the humanities is under the sway of the scientific disciplines with which they share the liberal arts curriculum in our academic institutions of higher learning. While in science a sound method supposedly guarantees true results and is theoretically necessary to arrive at certainty of the truth, the experience of truth in the humanities, for example, in and through a work of art, may be more likely to come about rather as an epiphany and in the most *unmethodical*, incalculable ways [2].

The method and objectives of study in the humanities are not necessarily given a priori as a framework that can be applied externally but may need to emerge by trial and error in the course of the study. In reality, trial and error are crucial to scientific method as well. So the Gadamerian contrast between “truth” and “method” should be understood as aimed more at readjustment of the relationship between these two terms rather than at opposing them and requiring a choice of one over the other. Truth delineates the wider ambit within which method has its purpose and validity. The right method has to be discovered and elicited in the actual process of the disclosure of truth. Methodological rules follow after and attempt to retain and organize what is disclosed more immediately in the unlimited openness of experience.

Not cognitive knowledge alone but aesthetic sensibility and moral feeling, emotional empathy and imaginative vision, along with many other types of intelligence and awareness, are intrinsic to all that is known in the humanities. This means that knowledge in the humanities is contextual and relational, and therefore also historical and even personal. A unique personal history is necessarily the context for all knowledge that is one’s own and that can truly be called human knowledge. Given this inextricably historical character of humanities knowledge, history and method, are closely intertwined and practically inseparable.

There are a few verses by the eighteenth-century English poet William Blake which for me personally, since undergraduate days, have stood out as a sort of motto over the gate of entry into the field of the humanities:

For a tear is an intellectual thing  
And a sigh is the sword of an angel king  
And the bitter groan of the martyr’s woe  
Is an arrow from the Almighty’s bow [3].

It is enough to hang on to just the first verse for its suggestiveness concerning what may be considered the objective of the kind of study undertaken in the humanities, namely, the attempt to learn to think with and through feelings and in light of images, and to cultivate what in tradition has often been called “the intelligence of the heart.” In putting it that way, I am echoing the

seventeenth-century French philosopher, Blaise Pascal, who wrote that the heart has its reasons which reason does not understand (“Le cœur a ses raisons, que la raison ne connaît point,” [4]). Our objective, in other words, less like the Bible’s and more like Plato’s, is to attain to that kind of thinking—or approach that level of understanding—where knowledge and love are one, or where the will’s desire for the good coincides with the intellect’s passion for truth. And if we also heed the aesthetic aspects of this intelligence, we can state further that both of these longings—desire for the good and passion for the true—coalesce in the love of the beautiful.

That truth and goodness unite in beauty is a seminal idea, for example, in “The Oldest System-Program of German Idealism,” which is attributed variously to Hegel, Schelling, and Hölderlin: “Finally the idea that unites all, the idea of *beauty*, this word taken in its higher Platonic sense. I am now persuaded that the highest act of reason, the act in which it comprehends all ideas, is an aesthetic act and that *truth and goodness* are kin to each other *only in beauty*.” [5]. Such wholeness of vision, in which our faculties of theoretical cognition, morality, and aesthetics interpenetrate, has been a hallmark of the humanities throughout their history.

I state the objectives in what are, admittedly, somewhat lofty and elusive terms partly because of a reservation as to how and how completely objectives can or should be stated at the outset of any study in the humanities. They might best be allowed to emerge from the content itself in the course of the inquiry rather than being imposed externally as an a priori agenda. The requirement of fixing one’s objectives before one even begins belongs rather to the methodology of science as a technology for achieving practical aims and—even more problematically—expresses the demands of an information-crazy culture based on clear-cut bites of unambiguous data. Such a culture actually preserves little or nothing of the genuine scientific spirit of search for knowledge through experience and by inquiry into the unknown, but only the mechanical, calculating aspects of science as exploited in technologies of mass production. Such mindless applications are unlike real scientific endeavor, which is nothing if not a richly human enterprise.

The very procedure of specifying objectives and positing methodical steps to achieving them entails assumptions that are not altogether appropriate, except provisionally and heuristically, to learning in the humanities—nor even to actual scientific discovery. The ideal of total clarity and transparency of aims demanded by at least a certain interpretation of scientific method and procedure abstracts from the temporality of human understanding and inquiry and from the way in which all human knowledge is embedded in experience in time and, more concretely, in the histories of persons. In its specifically human meaning and dimension, the goal of all our experience remains perpetually a mystery beholden to a time beyond time and beyond scientific comprehension. It is a time when all things shall be revealed and “all flesh shall see it together” (Isaiah 40: 5), as intimated by the biblical voice that is so pervasively infused all through Western humanities tradition.

For the sake of conformity to the unrelenting demand to define objectives, we might say, for instance, that the objective of study of the humanities is to develop critical thinking. We cannot help but hope that precisely that will come about. Nevertheless, our ultimate goal is not to acquire another power or to hone another skill to enable us better to dominate the information that occupies such a large place in our culture and consciousness, but rather to open up new worlds of experience, that is, to open ourselves up—in Blake’s words, once again—to “infinite worlds of delight,” to “Eternity ever expanding in the bosom of God, which is the Human Imagination” (*Jerusalem* 5: 20).

Study of the humanities does not aim to give us just another capability for manipulating the world after our own designs, so as to make it conform yet more conveniently to our wishes or “objectives”: it aims to give us another world, in fact, infinite worlds. Rather than striving to achieve preconceived objectives, we advance towards human intelligence through an intensely energetic letting be, and in doing so we ourselves are changed. Our objective is to respond fully to the possibilities of being human as they have been mediated to us, among other ways, by so-called “great books” of our tradition. What we, in the end, most profoundly desire belongs to the search itself rather than being just its goal or result. We need *not* know exactly what we want out of it in order to genuinely—and most profitably—study the humanities. For the goal of human endeavor conceived as its potential fulfillment belongs to the mystery in question: it is to be freshly discovered and revised all along the way rather than being determined and presupposed from the outset.

Indeed our question must be not what do we want out of this type of study and out of the texts that we study in it so much as: What do they want of us? This involves treating our texts as partners in dialogue rather than just as specimens for analysis. Only in this way do we allow them to effectively make their claim upon us. Only so can we respond to the possibilities of human being as they have been construed and conveyed to us by presumptive “great books” that have gained recognition as monumental works of our tradition. We interrogate them in order to be ourselves interrogated. The question is: What do these works call us to be and see and do? What do they invite and challenge and enable us to become?

Human existence has, and indeed *is*, a multiplicity of possibilities which call for realization. We are constantly contemplating these possibilities for our own lives as we work through the possibilities for human existence that are represented in our readings in the humanities. My proximate goal as pedagogue is to mediate (or, as Socrates would say, play the midwife) in allowing these texts to speak to us, to waken us to the sense of the possibilities for existence that are in us and which we are. One can be qualified for doing this only by virtue of one’s own experience of these texts matured through a long-standing, exacting discipline and devotion to the study of the humanities. The pedagogue’s knowledge of the matter of the humanities is not different in kind from the beginning student’s, but it has been painstakingly trained in ways that may prove to be of service in leading others down the path of discovery of the human and imaginative worlds embodied in these texts.

## II. Contextual-Relational Knowing *versus* Scientific Objectivity

What, then, are the humanities? In terms of academic disciplines, one straightforward, inevitable answer, given the usual structure of university instruction, is that they are the third division in the three-fold break-down of the liberal arts curriculum: Science/Social sciences/Humanities. This approach, however, can cause distortions in our understanding of the humanities by allowing them to fall under the shadow cast over the liberal arts curriculum as a whole by the monolith of the scientific paradigm. Humanities in this scheme tend to be treated by assimilation as a further field for the application of the scientific method of knowing. Christened thus “the human sciences”—literally *les sciences humaines*, as they are called in French, or “the sciences of the spirit,” *die Geisteswissenschaften*, as German says—the objective of the humanities would seem to be to extend knowledge by adapting the methods of science to a different kind of subject matter—no longer nature

or numbers, but “humanity” in the full breadth of its creative self-expression in history and culture. The tendency to treat the humanities as a peculiar, less exact, less potent, less certain, less reliable, and less lucid kind of scientific pursuit is very strong in the academy. For we think we know what scientific knowledge is and believe that we can define it [6].

Yet, understood according to the scientific paradigm, the humanities are denatured. For humanity is not an object. We *are* human—in all the irreducible facets of our subjectivity. A common way of expressing the presumed privilege and superiority of scientific knowledge is to state that science is “objective knowledge.” However, human beings cannot be known as objects. To gain knowledge of human beings, one must actually participate in human experience and know it from within, personally, as a subject, rather than only analyze it detachedly and objectively from without. Indeed all human knowledge is necessarily self-knowledge, at the same time as it is knowledge of whatever type of objects. The ancient motto “know thyself” (γνῶθι σεαυτόν) inscribed over the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, as recorded by Pausanias in his second-century A.D. *Description of Greece* (X. 24.1), expresses in the form of an injunction a condition that is fundamental and imperative to all genuinely human knowing: In all knowledge in the humanities, we experience ourselves. This includes our possible selves—that is, the possibilities for our existence. In fact, the possibilities for existence and self-understanding available in our culture today have, to a considerable extent, been forged by works such as those studied in our humanities curriculum. We can, therefore, extend our understanding of why we think and feel the way we do about things by discovering the attitudes and insights that define our horizons in their emergence in these texts. Only this enables us either to refuse or to freely choose such perspectives.

Scientists themselves today generally recognize the naivety of belief in objective knowledge, but we seem not to be in possession of any clear and convincing alternative to it. Due to lack of understanding of the nature of the knowledge proper to the humanities, we no longer know what genuine knowledge is, if it is not “objective” in the scientific sense. We can only imagine that the alternative must be subjective and arbitrary ideas that are really not worthy to be honored with the name of “knowledge” at all. We have become progressively less aware of the traditional sort of pursuit of knowledge as an endeavor to assimilate *oneself* to the true and real by identification with universal human ideals, yet such was the nature of knowing practiced as a spiritual exercise for millennia before the advent of science in the modern sense [7–11]. Accordingly, we can aim through this type of study to come back into touch with ancient and medieval approaches to human learning that had not yet forgotten this broader meaning of knowledge in relation to the subject that knows—what used to be called the “soul”—as an integral part of being in and belonging to a cosmos from which the individual had not yet been abstracted and expelled.

All that is being said here about human knowing actually applies, only a little less directly and obviously, to scientific knowing as well, for science, too, is nothing if not a human activity of knowing. Rather than understanding the humanities as “human sciences,” we can just as well understand the sciences as human endeavors. While science likes to abstract from this inescapable human element—from the fact that, whenever knowledge takes place, there is always *someone* who knows—the humanities dwell upon and accentuate precisely this human factor. They bring forward into the light of truth the human conditions surrounding all knowledge, including scientific knowledge. And, in this light, it is clear that the objectivity of science comes at the expense of an awareness of the

humanly contingent conditions and contexts that impinge upon every actual instance of knowing. To express cognizance in its wholeness as an all-embracing awareness of the circumambient conditions of knowing, which include also the being of the knower, beyond the narrow focus on objects of science or *scientia*, the ancients used the term *sapientia* or “wisdom.” Knowledge, not just of facts but also of oneself and one’s limitations, and of the meaning of the world in relation to oneself, is the goal of the humanities expressed in this term “wisdom.” The better part of wisdom is knowing that in knowing anything at all humanly, we always know also ourselves, including our limits and our possible selves in their scarcely fathomable variety.

All this is to say that the humanities consist in relational or personal knowing rather than in objective, methodological knowledge. In other words, we ourselves are involved in what we know, and this character of personal involvement is crucial to the nature of such knowledge. This applies, I would suggest, to all knowledge, in the humanities and in the sciences alike, with the difference that in the humanities we do not try to eliminate—or, at least, to limit as much as possible—this personal involvement that underpins our knowing. Instead, this irreducibly personal dimension is opened up and explored and developed in the course of interpreting, for example, a painting, or a poem, or a prayer. The humanities thus attain a more comprehensive point of view, and we need to understand science, too, as fundamentally a human undertaking that is dependent on imagination and the poetry of its discoveries in order to be meaningful [12].

In fact, science, or its ancestor “natural philosophy,” in a direct line of descent, began as poetry. The earliest Greek philosophers, the “physicists” of Ionia in Asia Minor in the sixth century B.C., thinkers such as Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes (of the Milesian school in Asia minor) and Heraclitus of Ephesus, together with those active at the other rim of the Greek world in the colonies of the southern Italian peninsula, including Parmenides of Elea, Pythagoras of Crotona, and Empedocles of Agrigento, wrote their observations on nature and the world wholly or partly in verse (or at least in highly poetic, metrical prose) and as poems of the universe expressing its intrinsic Logos. This serves as a reminder of the originally poetical character of science at its earliest stages. Conversely, the first poems are, at the same time, essays in natural philosophy, typically in mythic form. Mythologies in Greece and the world over represent the earliest attempts to formulate a comprehensive understanding of the world in which humans live: they constitute the earliest encyclopedias of knowledge.

The fact that knowledge is assembled into encyclopedic form, particularly in epic poetry, hints at the holistic character of knowledge in the humanities. Etymologically the word “*encyclopaedia*” contains the notion of a cycle or comprehensive circle of subjects of study, in addition to the idea of the education of children, *paedeia* in Greek. It is by comprehending matters in their furthest ramifications and implications, and in their widest contexts, that the type of knowledge characteristic of the humanities fulfills itself. As the encyclopedic model suggests, humanities knowledge strives to be knowledge in the round that encompasses things whole. Emblematic of this is the fact that the epic poems constituting the backbone of traditional humanities classics are all works that in various ways are encyclopedic in scope.

The basis of education in the ancient Greek world from the sixth century B. C. was Homer. The first prerequisite to being a cultivated individual was knowing Homer by heart. Homer was generally esteemed to be the source and sum of all knowledge and wisdom. Ancient philosophers such as Numenius and Porphyry relay the widespread conviction that Homer was a philosopher. This

qualification included his being also a theologian, one who revealed sublime and even divine truths in the manner of Plato. Moreover, according to Quintilian, he was “familiar with all the arts” (*Institutio oratoria* XII, 11, 21). Even as late as the Reformation, the humanist Philipp Melanchthon (1497–1560) states that the description of Achilles’s shield in Book XVIII of the *Iliad* laid the foundations for astronomy and philosophy. The *Iliad* was traditionally read as an instruction manual for kings and princes, with invaluable lessons on such matters as war and statecraft. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, was studied and revered as an authoritative encyclopedia of information about domestic life and all the arts appertaining thereto. Thus, between them, the Homeric poems were considered to contain the whole of knowledge of the most necessary sort. Seen this way, the poems laid claim to being a compendium of all the arts and sciences, as well as of the deepest philosophical and theological sources of wisdom [13–15].

The philosophical allegorization of epic that had grown up around Homer already in antiquity continued especially with relation to Virgil in the Middle Ages. In the Neoplatonic tradition of Macrobius and Servius, Virgil was viewed as a universal polymath and magician, the master of all knowledge, natural and supernatural [16–18]. This example of the epic poet was to be emulated in subsequent literary history most completely by Dante, who endeavored to gather into the encyclopedic form of his poem, the *Divine Comedy*, essentially all that was known of human history and culture, as well as the cosmos. This work even includes frequent excursions on current scientific topics such as embryology, meteorology, the astronomy of moon spots, geometrics, and optics. Dante’s own model, of course, to an even greater extent than Virgil, was the Bible. Holy Writ had an even stronger claim to be deemed the paragon of encyclopedias. For the Christian Middle Ages this book was *the* book, the very archetype of the Book, containing all possible books, at least virtually, in its purported character as a total, unified system of knowledge. As a revelation of the Mind of God, the Bible was held to express the original template for the Creation.

An incomparably important predecessor to Dante in his totalizing synthesis of traditions by the power and originality of his literary form is Saint Augustine. Augustine’s *Confessions*, like Dante’s *Commedia*, represent a sort of *summa* of fundamental philosophical and theological knowledge in the form of an autobiographical narrative. Augustine also wrote other encyclopedic works, including a theological interpretation of universal history in his *De civitate Dei* (*The City of God*). But more interesting to us in the present context than the system of doctrines he was to lay out from the Christian vantage point he finally attained is the autobiographical path through conversion that he followed in order to reach his theological vision. The way the two sorts of knowledge, the personal and the systematic, fit together and indeed fuse in tradition, as again in Dante’s visionary journey through the three realms of the afterlife, is itself highly instructive concerning the nature of knowledge in the humanities, as well as in any possible science. The personal and poetic search along the paths of their own intellectual-existential journeys, are clearly indispensable to doctrinal knowledge in Dante and in Augustine alike.

The universality of poetry, its being the original form of expression of all knowledge, is grounded in the facts that all knowledge is humanly situated and that every human situation can be sounded by poetry. In every instance, knowledge belongs to *someone* endowed with a particular disposition and placed in specific circumstances. As such, this knowledge can best be expressed by poetry. While science in the modern epoch has tended to dictate paradigms to all disciplines, historically the liberal

arts and knowledge generally emerge rather from religious and artistic modes of experience that almost always find expression first in poetic genres. Poetry, as the affectively charged representation of a world, embodies, at the earliest stages of culture, the sort of universality that tends to be accorded only to science later on, in the age of the technological domination of society and its forms of communication. Giambattista Vico, with his *Scienza nuova* (1744), was instrumental to the modern rediscovery of “poetic sapience” at the origins of human culture as the most universal, all-embracing form of knowledge. Vico’s “new science” in some sense echoes Aristotle, who already in antiquity from quite a different type of scientific perspective, had underscored the preeminent capability of poetry to disclose the universal, in which alone true knowledge consists (*Poetics* 1451b).

This means, for example, that the fundamental importance and basic human interest of astronomy—its universal value—might be captured more effectively by a poem than by any astrophysical formula. The words of a poetic text like Psalm 8 communicate the overwhelming wonder of a human being in the face of the mystery of the universe, and that feeling of awe, in all its immediacy, is what lies at the source of meaningful astronomical inquiry:

When I consider the heavens,  
the work of thy fingers,  
the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained,  
What is man that thou art mindful of him,  
or the son of man, that thou visitest him?

Admittedly, it is possible to obtain from astronomical science much more precise information about the stars and their properties than what is given in these verses. But does that added technical knowledge—for instance, statistics concerning the stars’ orbits and material densities—enhance the human being’s actual experience of cognitive encounter with the phenomena of the heavens? Does it heighten the sense of belonging to an infinitely fascinating cosmos and the rapt wonderment through which the heavens are perceived as divinely made, or as participating in the mystery of Creation? It certainly could. The technical precisions of modern knowledge of astronomy are nothing if not awe-inspiring. Still, those who love science will not overlook its human dimension and rootedness. Otherwise we risk suffering an immense human loss for the sake of a merely instrumental gain of “technical” expertise. Knowledge, humanly considered, is valuable in proportion to the intensity and richness of the relationships it enables.

In stressing the human significance and originally poetical character of all knowledge, whether personal or systematic, I wish to valorize scientific inquiry and research in a new and vigorous way rather than to diminish or disparage it. Science is without doubt one of the most thought-provoking gnoseological adventures of the human race in modern times and, in certain respects, of all time. It is the apotheosis of the speculative odyssey that began in Greece in the sixth century B.C., with the first recorded meditations of the pre-Socratic philosophers on the general nature of things [19]. The incalculable complexity and order of Creation, as it has been progressively discovered by the more and more powerful instruments of science—from the microscope to the atomic particle accelerator to the laser beam—fill those who consider it with amazement and coerce minds like Newton’s and Einstein’s, not to mention many more of humbler capacity, to see evidence that God does not just play dice with the universe. Yet, in order to be this provocative revelation of the infinitely rich and intricate

mystery of existence, science needs to retain a sense of the human significance of what it discovers in probing with its methods and instruments ever further the facts and the very matter of nature.

Consideration of how epic poetry and pre-Socratic philosophy served as matrices for proto-scientific patterns of thinking makes it clear that the history of science emerges from the history of the humanities. Accordingly, my purpose is not at all to denigrate science but rather to integrate it into the whole spectrum of human knowledge so as to bring out its original unity with human culture broadly construed. The predominant tendency to view all the various disciplines of the liberal arts as species or sub-species of scientific knowledge, more or less rigorous and pure, is practically irresistible. It is one more symptom of the cultural hegemony that science has achieved in our technocratically managed, technologically driven and dependent civilization. However, I am proposing that we can equally well view the humanities and their pursuit of a wisdom that reflects understanding oneself in relation to the general order or disorder of things as embodying the spirit that pervades the entire gamut of the liberal arts. By inducing to empathetic participation in the experience of discovery rather than inculcating a detached domination over positively given fields of objects, the humanities most fully realize the values and virtues of all forms of liberal learning, including the scientific.

Typically, the sciences objectify. They bring into sharp focus a certain field of objects, yet they can tend to block out the human situation that is comprehended by the peripheral vision characteristic of the humanities, with their sensitivity to the unfocused, background factors that count so much in determining the overall significance of any experience. In human knowing, there is always a subject who cannot be completely focused as object, but who is indirectly expressed in countless ways—as intimated, for example, by the tenor of a discourse and the affective nuances of its language, or as conveyed by color and perspective in painting or by subtle orchestration of emotional tonalities in music. And this is poetry. In humanities studies, we always need to ask what the human meaning and value of a given form or instance of knowledge is, for that is what makes it matter to human beings. Some sort of subjective view and knowledge of the world is expressed even in performance of a musical instrument, or in the choreographing of a dance, or in the crafting of artifacts [20–22].

An example from classical poetry can serve to illustrate the ineradicably relational and personal aspects of knowledge that loom into the foreground in humanities texts. Homer recounts with pathos the drama of the encounter between Hector and Andromache, in which Andromache pleads with her husband not to go out to battle, where he is going to be killed by Achilles and so leave her a widow and her son an orphan. Like any human experience, this encounter is not per se a fully determinate object of knowledge, a discrete entity, one and the same for all concerned. Andromache’s predicament is apprehended through her personal history and is expressed in terms of personal symbols: they are first her own, and then they belong to any reader who becomes involved in interpreting her story. As its appropriations in later literature, for example, by Baudelaire in “Le Cygne” (“Andromaque, je pense à vous...”) suggest, this drama is bound to mean something different to every individual. Homer’s Andromache pleads movingly with Hector:

“Dearest,  
 your own great strength will be your death, and you have no pity  
 on your little son, nor on me, ill-starred, who soon must be your widow;  
 for presently the Achaians, gathering together,  
 will set upon you and kill you; and for me it would be far better

to sink into the earth when I have lost you, for there is no other consolation for me after you have gone to your destiny—only grief; since I have no father, no honoured mother. It was brilliant Achilles who slew my father, Eëtion, when he stormed the strong-founded citadel of the Kilikians, Thebe of the towering gates. He killed Eëtion but did not strip his armour, for his heart respected the dead man, but burned the body in all its elaborate war-gear and piled a grave mound over it, and the nymphs of the mountains, daughters of Zeus of the aegis, planted elm trees about it. And they who were my seven brothers in the great house all went upon a single day down into the house of the death god, for swift-footed brilliant Achilles slaughtered all of them as they were tending their white sheep and their lumbering oxen; and when he had led my mother, who was queen under wooded Plakos, here, along with all his other possessions, Achilles released her again, accepting ransom beyond count, but Artemis of the showering arrows struck her down in the halls of her father. Hektor, thus you are father to me, and my honoured mother, you are my brother, and you it is who are my young husband. Please take pity upon me then, stay here on the rampart, that you may not leave your child an orphan, your wife a widow, but draw your people up by the fig tree, there where the city is openest to attack, and where the wall may be mounted.”

(*Iliad* VI. 404–34, Lattimore trans.)

Everyone experiences the scene described by Andromache in a personal way, as projected onto their own existence. Each of us has our own horizon of possibilities, past and future, and each of us understands Andromache’s predicament by reference to what for us personally would constitute loss of that which is most vital to us—the central relationship or core or unifying concern of our lives. Understanding the experience of others entails mapping its crucial features onto the coordinates of our own personal experience. In this sense, human experience calls to be understood from the inside rather than only as an object of analysis.

Just such a pitiful portrait of the widow of a fallen warrior being led away captive, like Andromache, recurs just a little later in the *Odyssey*. The bard Demodocus’s singing of the tragedy of Troy causes Odysseus, in disguise among the Phaeacians, to break into torrential weeping, “As a woman wails embracing her husband who has fallen before his own city and people, defending the city and its children from the day of doom...” (VIII. 521–31, Cook trans.). Odysseus is moved by these heart-rending tales to divulge his identity and even to elaborate it poetically in the riveting recital of his travels related in Books IX through XII. This moment demonstrates how he is provoked and changed personally by representations in poetry—through which means he then continues to forge his own legendary persona.

Odysseus's harrowing and transformative tears in reaction to poetic images turn up again at a later stage in tradition in Aeneas's contemplation, on a temple in Carthage, of murals representing the already legendary battles before Troy's gates. Aeneas discovers here the "tears of things" (*"lacrimae rerum"*), which speak of universal human experiences that are communicated, especially by poetry and art, across languages and cultures. By representing the "tears of things," thus treating objects as subjects, poetry expresses and actually contributes to "making" things what they really are, humanly and affectively. It is in some such sense that Blake, too, can speak of a tear as an "intellectual thing." By freeing the subjective valences of things that are cemented in representations of objects, poetry releases their affects to flow from age to age. It becomes thereby the medium of a transmission of experience through intelligible symbols that reveal humanity to itself in a perspective that is constitutive of its history. The history evoked here is that of the human heart or mind and of how it is "touched by mortal things" (*"sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt," Aeneid I. 462*).

To this extent, the process of knowledge in the humanities is closer to the activity of reading than to direct, sensorial perception. Classical science tends to understand all knowledge on the model of the perception of an object. The object to be known is what it is wholly apart from the knower and the question of *who* he or she is. Knowers simply open their "eyes" and perceive what is objectively in front of them. In reading, on the other hand, the text in front of the reader's eyes does not become known except as it is assimilated into the reader's own interior world: it is reformulated in the reader's memory and imagination, and this subjects the text to all manner of influences from the reader's own individual existence and personal concerns.

Indeed all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, when approached from the distinctive point of view of the humanities, is in crucial ways more like reading than like perception. For all knowledge is humanly conditioned and situated. Traditionally, science has wished to forget, or at least to delimit, the effects of this situatedness by an intense, narrow focus on the object alone. However, a subject is the condition of possibility of having an object in the first place. "Subject" and "object" are nothing if not correlative terms. The subject is constantly reading himself or herself into the object, and this encounter and interaction with the object in turn is necessary to constitute the subject [23].

Today, more than ever, we need a broader perspective than that of the hard sciences taken in and for themselves, a perspective that recognizes aspects of reality that cannot be objectified and subjected to scientific scrutiny without distortion. After all, why is technology increasingly achieving dominion over the earth and destroying the physical, together with the human, environment in so many appalling ways? The name "Chernobyl," conjuring up the specter of a trans-continental nuclear disaster, is perhaps most apt to suggest some of the more sensational aspects of this pervasive catastrophe. But there are "accidents" all the time that prove disastrous for the earth, such as calamitous oceanic oil slicks, and these are relatively isolated incidents compared with the constant polluting every day that accumulates and exacerbates, among other problems, the greenhouse effect threatening to make our planet uninhabitable. We see everywhere, moreover, the deliberate, rampant ravaging of the natural environment by urbanization, the defacing and complete disappearance of coastlines crammed with construction, or again the all-too-conspicuous eyesore of river banks heaped with the wreckage and waste of industrial production and consumption.

Such spectacles appall our sight. However, this tragedy occurs even earlier and most insidiously within the human spirit that endures subjection to a view of the natural world as consisting in mere

material objects available for manipulation, with loss of the human dimension—and *a fortiori* the divine one—which characterizes the world as it is revealed in innumerable works of the tradition of the humanities. The effects of this crisis of the spirit have become manifest over and over again in the arts and culture of the twentieth century and beyond—for example, in Dada and surrealism, in existentialism, in the ecology movement, in religious revivals east and west, including “new age” religions and naturist cults. All in various ways represent a revolt against the invincible automatization that implacably advances in the ever more highly technologized civilization of our present historical era—the disturbing aftermath of the second millennium and troubled embarkation upon the third [24,25].

Because the outlook of science and technology can view only objects, it eclipses the dimension of the infinite and indefinable that is present in whatever is human—for example, in the infinite value of a single human life. All that can be specified as an object never adds up to the human individual, nor can it begin to exhaust the mystery of personal identity, not to mention that of the divine person of which the human is held traditionally to be a reflection or “image.” Science cannot pick it up on the radar screen or stethoscope or X-ray machine or electroencephalograph. For it is no object but rather belongs irreducibly to the being of a subject. The light of science can make perceptible only objects, but objects can be objects only in relation to subjects, which a certain conventional, mainstream science tends, nevertheless, inevitably to reduce to the status of just objects among other objects [26]. Poetry, conversely, tends to animate objects, to treat all things as subjects. The sea takes on personality as Neptune, trees are inhabited by nymphs named dryads, the air by sprites, heaven and earth become Uranos and Gaia, “the hills leap like rams,” and “the earth rejoices in the Lord,” at the sound of his coming.

As these quotations and allusions illustrate, humanities texts are almost without exception also religious texts [27]. This is the case at least in the sense that they take some sort of stand concerning the whence and wherefore of human existence, but often also more specifically through the express imagination of divinity. For humanity does not exclude divinity, but is defined in relation to it. Humanity, from earliest times in virtually all known cultures, has conceived of itself vis-à-vis some form of divinity. In one way or another, virtually all the classic works of humanities tradition happen to propose what may be understood as profoundly religious visions of life [28].

Although religion may mean very different things, this ineluctable involvement with religion in some guise is even more evident close to the origins of the humanities tradition. Homer is the source book of Greek religion at a stage when religion is undifferentiated from myth. Virgil elaborates a theological justification of the political empire of Rome, a theodicy—even as he simultaneously questions and undermines it. Dante adopts classical tradition and programmatically Christianizes it by reinterpreting classical figures and myths as anticipations and foreshadowings of revealed Christian truth. The calling or summons to fullness of human vision and experience is conceived in all these texts as issuing from some kind of at least quasi-divine source such as the poet’s Muse. The Bible and Augustine’s *Confessions*, finally, are religious classics *par excellence*. This apparent inseparability of humanity and divinity calls for elucidation—it is a vital topic for reflection within studies in the humanities.

To sum up what has been said here on the threshold of this study in the humanities: we are involved in what we know. Science necessarily forgets and abstracts from this subjective condition of all our

knowledge in the *interests* of universality, objectivity, and disinterestedness. But note the contradiction. Science, too, stems from human interest, and it never transcends this starting point as its indispensable condition [29]. Science is no less humanly involved than any other type of knowledge, even though for methodological reasons it undertakes to filter and separate out this human element from its object of study. Humanities studies, in contrast, move this human element into the foreground: they underscore the human conditionedness of all knowledge and therewith also its generally subjective dimensions and aspects.

The point here is not to diminish the importance, nor to challenge the integrity of science but rather to see science in its essential unity with all human concerns and endeavors. For this purpose, we can do no better than to turn to the history of education. Having characterized the specificity of human knowledge in descriptive terms, most succinctly as “involved” knowing, and having brought out its resistance to being measured by the standards of scientific method, we must now open a deeper perspective into the historical development of this sort of knowledge and of the scientific knowledge that contrasts with it but actually develops only within and from it. For science and its methods can become a threat to human knowledge, if the distinctive character of knowledge in the humanities is not understood and respected.

### III. Vicissitudes of the Liberal Arts in the History of Education

When we lengthen our historical perspective and take a look at how humanities, arts, and science have positioned themselves relative to one another throughout the history of education in the Occident, what we find is an original inseparability and virtual indifferentiation of science (*episteme*) and art (*techne*). Originally, the Greek word for “art,” τέχνη meant all types of human activity *qua* rational—that is, inasmuch as they involve some form of knowing. Medicine thus qualifies as a prime example of an “art,” since it is based on knowledge of the microcosm of the human body and its humors in relation to the harmonies of the macrocosm, or the universe as a whole. This is certainly what it was for its ancient founders, eminently Hippocrates (5th century B.C.) [30,31]. The same goes for astronomy and even mathematics. In fact, Aristotle writes of “mathematical arts” and “poetic science.” The two, science and art, are so much a part of the same thing that the Greek words for them can be used sometimes interchangeably.

This near equivalence is preserved at least covertly and unconsciously today in our word “technology.” Although technology seems to us to be automatically associated with science, so that we speak in one breath of “science and technology,” this word tellingly sinks its roots back into the Greek word for “art”—namely, *techne*. On reflection, this need not surprise us, since science and its objectivity are necessarily rooted in human concern and involvement such as the arts express with peculiar translucency and power. Even a physical object or artifact reveals itself to us only in relation to our existence, with its specific exigencies and interests, as *for* something, as defined by a network of relations that confer its being and human meaning upon it, and to this extent even physical science cannot escape a certain measure of “art.” Whether they are considered scientific or artistic, human modes of knowing are also modes of relating; they express an existential relationship to the things with which they are concerned [32]. Arts and sciences are indeed in this sense one and have, accordingly, been joined in the curriculum of the liberal arts since antiquity.

The sort of knowledge that characterizes the humanities as at once *techne* and *episteme*, as both art and science, has been pursued throughout the history of education under the heading of the “liberal arts.” Liberal arts programs embrace both science and humanities. This is so because both are pursued together as essentially human forms of intellectual development and enrichment of persons. In this frame of general education, all knowledge is seen as fundamentally human, and in this sense the liberal arts as a whole can be understood as hinging on the humanities: all are ultimately for the sake of the development of the human individual. This orientation of the arts and sciences becomes especially perspicuous in an historical perspective.

The traditional canon of the liberal arts as it came to be fixed in late antiquity for the whole of the Middle Ages, embraces seven disciplines: Grammar, Rhetoric, Dialectics, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, and Astronomy [33]. The first three of these disciplines were grouped together and known as the Trivium. All are in various ways language arts and cultivate verbal skills. The four remaining disciplines—making up the Quadrivium—are all rather quantitative in nature. Music, too, was treated as a science of numbers and proportions and even as a pure mathematics: it was every bit as quantitative—or abstract and exact—as astronomy, which concerned measurements of heavenly bodies and their motions.

#### The Seven Liberal Arts

Grammar, Rhetoric, Dialectics Arithmetic, Geometry, Music, Astronomy

-----Trivium-----                      -----Quadrivium-----  
 verbal arts-----quantitative arts

Speculation on the rank and sequence of the various liberal arts was rife from ancient times, all through the Middle Ages, and on into the Renaissance. Indeed it remains in different guises a burning issue still today. At stake here is the selection and valuation of the types of study the young are trained in, and thus the basic outlook imparted to the young—the very mentality imprinted by a civilization on those whose minds it forms and nurtures. One idea that was frequently broached from early on is that the language arts constitute the necessary basis for all further learning. The *word* thus assumes a leading role as the enabling factor and the originating source of knowledge. Grammar, the art of writing, accordingly, was conceived as the foundation of all the arts and, consequently, of all knowledge. It could even be taken to reveal the origins and essences of things themselves. Theological support for this idea was found in the biblical doctrine of Creation by the Word (Genesis 1 and John 1: 1–3), which declares the divine Word to be at the very origin of the existence of all things. One great champion of grammar, for example, Isidore of Seville in the seventh century, in his encyclopedic *Etymologiarum*, analyzed the names of things etymologically in order to discover inherent in them the intrinsic natures of the things named. In this perspective, the complex interconnections between love (*amor*), death (*mors*), and bitter (*amer*) could all be found written into the respective (Latin) words for these things, the names of which seem to suggest their intimate relations. All reality in this manner was conceived of as revealed immanently in language.

According to another variant, the integrating factor of all knowledge and education could be found in the art of persuasion, namely, rhetoric. Thus Quintilian—following Cicero’s ethical-philosophical slanting of the art of oratory—exalted the perfect orator or rhetorician as the consummate master of all fields of knowledge. In the same manner, the third member of the Trivium, dialectics, the art of

discerning the truth by logical analysis, was considered by philosophers in the lineage of Plato as furnishing the only reliable criterion of true knowledge as against opinion. All of these views make the Trivium, or one particular branch of it, primary as the noblest part and the true basis of all learning.

However, it was also possible to emphasize rather the preliminary status of the first three disciplines in the series in order to claim greater prestige for the Quadrivium as comprising the higher disciplines furnishing substantive knowledge, for which the verbal disciplines were considered as merely a propaedeutic. More generally, this reflects the split between linguistic and mathematical approaches to learning that has created tensions in every age, just as it continues to do still today. Plato, for example, took mathematics as the model of true knowledge and associated poetry with illusory images. On his authority, ever since antiquity, philosophy has often asserted its hegemony over poetry, which is charged with purveying merely pleasing fictions, or even malicious lies. The battle between literature-based, poetic knowledge and more logically rigorous and rational forms of knowledge is perennial. Plato's banishment of the poets from his ideal Republic (Book X), on grounds that their representations are too far removed from the truth, set a precedent that history has frequently repeated. In the high Middle Ages, a predominantly rhetorical culture based on literary study was again challenged by the newer proto-scientific and systematic reasoning that asserted itself in the shape of Scholasticism. Humanities learning, which flourished, for example, in the school of Chartres during the 12th century, was eventually superseded by the dialectical theology emanating from the University of Paris in the 13th century [34,35].

The pattern of conflict between proponents of classical literary tradition and advocates of various forms of rational critique continued in the Renaissance. A great age for this debate is reached with the humanism of the Italian Renaissance. Scholars such as Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444), Giovanni Pontano (1426–1503) attempted to recuperate the sense of all knowledge as fundamentally poetic in nature [36]. The pendulum swings back again with the founding of modern science, emblematically in Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* (1620). This work establishes a logic of scientific inquiry on the basis of observation and experimentation guided by the principle of induction. No less influentially, René Descartes's *Discourse on Method* (1637) rejects the whole tradition of learning handed down in words from generation to generation in order to begin building the impregnable edifice of certain, deductive knowledge anew on the foundation of the individual inquirer's own clear and distinct perceptions. Indeed, the whole history of education can be viewed schematically as playing out the tensions between poetic or literary learning and culture, on the one hand, and technical, scientific types of knowledge on the other. While Plato (429–347 B.C.) banishes most poets from his Republic, for other ancient thinkers, like the almost exactly contemporary Isocrates (436–338 B.C.), poets are the key educators, those who are able to lead the soul through images to truth. The tensions between the more humanistic and the more scientific orientation of studies today—felt acutely, for example, at the level of university budgetary allocations—are the prolongation of this ancient rivalry that turns sometimes into deadly strife.

Just as hotly debated as the relative rank among the various liberal arts was their place, as a group, within the overall order of knowledge; were the liberal arts, taken together, to serve as preparation for some higher type of study, such as philosophy or theology, or law, or could they be considered to be an end in themselves, even the ultimate attainment of knowledge or culture, and hence, at least in the medieval view, of human perfection? Hugh of St. Victor, followed by Thomas Aquinas, makes the

*artes* a propaedeutic for philosophy, while for Saint Bonaventure all arts and sciences depend directly on theology and ultimately on revelation for their unity, clarity, and completeness [37,38]. The idea of taking theology as “the ultimate ‘social science’” is not without its advocates still today. John Milbank argues indeed that theology, as God’s imparted self-knowledge, must lay claim to being solely capable, on its own terms, of discerning completely the truth concerning the universe and human beings’ existence within it and thus to being the one form of knowledge that can correctly position all the others [39,40].

Efforts to co-opt the liberal arts into some other program of education for which they would serve as a foundation began early. However, the intention was not necessarily to instrumentalize the liberal arts, so that their practical value could be cashed out for purposes extraneous to themselves, so much as to continue in their spirit of liberal learning for its own sake carried over into further spheres of intellectual endeavor or of concrete life. For Galen (c.130–c.210 A.D.), in the tradition of Hippocrates, the arts were preparatory to the study of medicine, but medicine entailed a complete and even a contemplative knowledge of the general order of the cosmos. For Vitruvius, in the first century B.C., the arts readied the student for studying architecture, which was conceived of as the all-embracing framework of knowledge, since the works and activities of all the arts and sciences, and of civilization as a whole, needed to be situated somewhere within the spaces defined by architecture.

Similar sorts of subordination of the liberal arts have occurred for religious motives in the myriad syntheses since antiquity of Judeo-Christian with classical tradition. For Philo, Clement, and Origen in the first and second centuries in Alexandria, as well as for Church fathers in the Roman tradition up to Carolingian times, and then particularly for Alcuin (735–804), the liberal arts were the necessary prerequisite for advanced studies in philosophy and theology. Already this might suggest, at least ambiguously, their being understood as techniques valuable for their utility in application to some purpose beyond themselves. But this is certainly not the understanding of their nature that is most proper to the liberal arts as such—unless we understand them as being integrated in this way into the highest, omni-comprehensive forms of knowledge represented by medicine, architecture, philosophy, or theology, and thus as participating in the ultimate ends of humanity.

Inherent in the very words *artes liberales* is the idea that these studies are essentially not subservient but free and autonomous and valuable for their own sake quite apart from any professional and pragmatic applications. Aristotle so defines them in book 8, chapter 2 of the *Politics*. In Seneca’s statement, famous in antiquity, the *artes liberales* are those arts whose purpose is *not* to make money (Letter 88). This notion, at its purest, involves a sort of contemplative ideal, whereby knowledge taken for itself is esteemed as the highest value for humans. Aristotle established this value of knowledge for its own sake by defining metaphysics as “first philosophy” and explaining that its being studied for the sake of nothing else beyond itself was the greatest distinction and honor possible for any type of knowing. In this perspective, the highest form of human life is the intellectual, quite independently of any instrumental value that the uses of the intellect may have. The act of intellection, coinciding with love—in essence a purely intellectual act for Plato—is the most perfect human activity, and to achieve it is to participate even in divinity in the Platonic and especially the Neo-Platonic conception.

The liberal arts, when studied for their own sake, thus partake of the kind of knowing considered as in itself the supreme realization of being human. The idea of their forming a continuum with philosophy and theology—each of which, in its own way, also claims to be first and final

knowledge—actually validates the ideal that the liberal arts incarnate of knowledge as an end in itself. Taken in their radical freedom as liberal study, the “humanities” tend to transcend all given frameworks and all set definitions of human ends and purposes, opening them to speculative scrutiny and creative re-invention. Such speculative pursuit of the humanities opens up and probes the question of what lies beyond—or at least of what globally determines—the horizon of the human. In this sense, liberal studies can be understood as intrinsically philosophical and even as implicitly theological. The free exercise of knowledge in any field whatsoever is a way of contemplating the general order of things from a particular perspective: every aspect or dimension of the cosmos reveals, from a certain angle of vision, the entire ensemble. In this outlook, the ultimate ground or *raison d'être* of all things can be fathomed analogically through each specific kind of liberal study in relation to some special subject matter. Each subject is pursued freely and as unlimited in its potential for illuminating and fulfilling individuals by relating them to reality as a whole.

Without this dimension of a vocation to free contemplation of all that is, the personal and human character of all real, concrete knowledge would be eclipsed: it would become instrumentalized and would serve merely as a tool for some extrinsic and pragmatic purpose bound inevitably to material interests. Indeed, the dominant tendency in modern times is to construe the liberal arts as serviceable tools or as preparatory exercises. Math and science, as well as English, can be necessary and useful training for further technical and professional specialization. College catalogues typically state that training in the study of the liberal arts is “fundamental” because it is “the basis of all professional study” (Vanderbilt University Catalogue, 1991).

This type of statement can easily be misleading and risks marginalizing the spirit of the humanities, which—properly understood—animates the whole spectrum of the liberal arts. Unless it is made clear that the liberal arts prepare for professional study only indirectly by forging whole individuals capable of applying their talents in whatever ways they choose and by instilling in them the pure passion to learn, this view reflects the demise of belief in liberal learning and in the intellectual life it enables as itself the highest activity of which a human being is capable. It eventually leads to the abandonment of study of the liberal arts for other types of “training,” which will undoubtedly be proved by statistics to be more effective preparation for careers in our ever more technical working world. Nevertheless, such results and their implications also continue to be a subject of vigorous debate. It is often ably argued that precisely the mental flexibility of a non-vocational, non-technical study of liberal arts is most apt to empower young minds to adapt to situations and technologies that change faster than instructional programs can be revamped [41–43].

Science and humanities alike within the liberal arts curriculum have, since antiquity, had as their purpose not so much technical mastery and the objective knowledge of facts as individual development and the enhancement of human cultural life. The word in ancient Greek for education was *paideia*—the cultural forming of children [44]. In German, the word for education or culture is *Bildung*, and it concerns the disciplined building up of persons into full realization of their human potential. Science is part of this. It belongs to the concerted program of development of the whole individual. Only in this context do the sciences remain connected with and mindful of their own final meaning and purpose. To this extent, the humanities have set the tone for the liberal arts since earliest times. It was never completely forgotten in antiquity that the humanities, or more broadly the liberal arts, according to their most proper calling, were to be viewed as a kind of *haute culture* without

further purpose or ulterior motives, the priceless culture of a free person. For Cicero, the art of living, *ars vivendi*, was the only one worth learning. By their own original conception, all the liberal arts are valuable to the extent that they teach—together with whatever specific technical instruction—this art of living.

For Augustine, in his challenging dialogue *De ordine*, written at Cassaciacum in 386 A.D., shortly after his conversion to Christianity and while he was still very close to his first profession as a teacher of rhetoric, all the liberal arts are taught “partly for their use in life, partly for knowledge and contemplation of things” (*artes illae omnes liberales, partim ad usum vitae, partim ad cognitionem rerum contemplationemque discantur*). It is, moreover, “very difficult to pursue them except for someone who ingeniously from very youth has been constantly and insistently devoted to their practice” (“*usum earum assequi difficillimum est nisi ei qui ab ipsa pueritia ingeniosissimus instantissime atque constantissime operam dederit*”) [45].

Drawing particularly on Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations*, Augustine portrays reason (and by implication philosophy) as the origin of the liberal arts and of human society in general. Building on this foundation, reason recognizes *itself* at work in the creation of the sciences and is led by this critical reflection to *self*-knowledge and eventually to the knowledge of God and his providence as the ground of reason itself and as the supreme rational principle governing the universe.

Augustine’s system of the order of knowledge gears it all consistently towards self-knowledge and intellectual “conversion.” [46]. The theological implications of this kind of knowledge are insisted on throughout the *De ordine*, which has been recognized as the first philosophical exposition of the systematic unity and progression of the seven liberal arts [47]. For Augustine, all studies in every domain of nature and culture illuminate the nature and freedom of the divine reason beyond human ken that is manifest analogically in the order of things throughout the universe. The ultimate aim of such study is nothing less than the blessed life, as Augustine makes explicit in the contemporaneous dialogue *De vita beata* (386) [48,49].

Accordingly, each liberal art should be understood not just as a separate discipline unto itself but as a way of contemplating the universe as a whole and so of seeing each kind of knowledge in relation to all the others. Each liberal art is open to every other and, in fact, to all fields of knowledge as complementary lenses for contemplating the whole cosmos and the place of the individual knower within it. All knowledge is relational and without intrinsic limits—and, in this sense, ultimately “religious” in scope and tenor. Liberal arts do not just add a few enticing ornaments of a more frivolous kind to the technical training that would be the real business of higher education. They are rather the soul of education as it has been understood throughout Western tradition. They offer an initiation into a whole approach to living through awareness of self as vitally related to others in the overall order of things in the universe.

Transmitting Augustine’s vision, John Scott Eriugena (c. 810–c. 877) underscores the speculative purport of liberal learning and its leading to an all-encompassing theological wisdom. He conceives of “the seven disciplines which philosophers call liberal” as “symbols of the plenitude of intelligible contemplation, in which God and creatures are most purely known” (“*Septem disciplinas, quas philosophi liberales appellant, intelligibilis contemplativae plenitudinis, qua Deus et creatura purissime cognoscitur, significationes esse astruit*”). He affirms that, “Just as many waters from diverse sources flow together and run into the bed of a single river, so the natural and liberal

disciplines are gathered and run together into one and the same figure of internal contemplation, that supreme fountain of all wisdom, which is Christ, thence to meander among diverse theological speculations” (“*Ut enim multae aquae ex diversis fontibus in unius fluminis alveum confluunt atque decurrunt, ita naturales et liberales disciplinae in una eademque internae contemplationis significatione adunantur, quem summus fons totius sapientiae, qui est Christus, undique per diversas theologiae speculationes insinuate.*” ([50], vol. 122, pp. 139–40). Such contemplation of the intrinsic unity of knowledge as a whole was the Augustinian legacy that would continue to develop throughout the Middle Ages from the Carolingian Renaissance forwards [51].

The humanities in this view emerge as the life-blood of the liberal arts. We have at least glimpsed a perspective hailing from antiquity in which liberal education in the humanities appears as the vital center of all learning rather than as peripheral and as merely preparatory to vocational training. Of course, this latter goal may also be achieved at the same time and in the best way. We have seen emerge, on counts both of method and history, the claim of the humanities to be an autonomous form of universal knowing. The humanities offer their own kind of wisdom, which is not to be supplanted by any technique or system: it has proved indispensable to the working and to the very sense of the whole system of knowledge as it has evolved down to our own modern predicament. Humanities knowledge even stakes a claim to being considered the pinnacle of this whole edifice of knowledge—a claim that great books courses aim to test and defend. These reflections must suffice to suggest preliminarily the paramount importance of this traditional form of cultivation to the health and development of a humanity that exceeds the dimensions of all possible objects of scientific analysis and opens upon the mystery and infinity of all that is—upon what from age to age has been conceived persistently in terms of “the divine.”

### Acknowledgment

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### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

### References and Notes

1. In introducing a special issue of *Daedalus* 138 (2009) dedicated to “Reflecting on the Humanities”, the editors Patricia Meyer Spacks and Leslie Berlowitz similarly write: “The essays assembled here enact as well as reflect the humanities”, p. 5.
2. This contrast between the experience of truth in the humanities and methodical knowing in science is a fulcrum for Hans-Georg Gadamer’s humanities-based “hermeneutic” philosophy in *Wahrheit und Methode*. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1960. Translated by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall as *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. rev. New York: Crossroad, 1989.

3. David W. Erdman, ed. *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982.
4. Blaise Pascale. *Pensées*. Paris: Léon Brunschvicg, 1897, 277.
5. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. *Werke*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1979, vol. 1, p. 235. “Zuletzt die Idee, die alle vereinigt, die Idee der *Schönheit*, das Wort in höherem platonischen Sinne genommen. Ich bin nun überzeugt, daß der höchste Akt der Vernunft, der, indem sie alle Ideen umfaßt, ein ästhetischer Akt ist und daß *Wahrheit und Güte nur in der Schönheit* verschwistert sind”. Hölderlin further elaborates on this idea in a lyrical vein in *Hyperion*.
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13. A guide throughout my discussion of the ancient and medieval tradition of the liberal arts is Ernst Robert Curtius’s *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter*. Bern: Francke, 1948, p. 206. Translated by Willard R. Trask as *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*. New York: Bollingen, 1952.
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18. Domenico Comparetti. *Virgilio nel Medioevo I* (Livorno, 1895), reprint ed. Edited by Giorgio Pasquale. Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1955.
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20. Particularly feminist criticism has pointed in this direction, for example, Hilary Rose. “Hand, Brain and Heart: A Feminist Epistemology for the Natural Sciences.” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 9 (1983):73–90.
21. Sarah Harding, and Merrill Hintikka, eds. *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology and Philosophy of Science*. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1983.
22. Along comparable lines, Kenneth L. Wilson, and Florin Lowndes propound an “integrative epistemology” in “Heart-Thinking: An Archetypal Epistemology for the Humanities and the Sciences.” *International Humanities Journal* 1 (2003): 1–12.
23. The philosophical underpinnings of such awareness are investigated especially by phenomenological currents of thought and criticism in the wake of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.
24. A peculiarly prescient philosophical reflection on this catastrophe is found in Martin Heidegger. “Die Frage nach der Technik.” In *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. Pfulingen: Neske, 1954. Translated as “The Question Concerning Technology.” In *Basic Writings*. Edited by David Krell. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993.
25. It is developed into an ecological philosophy by his student, Hans Jonas. *Das Prinzip Verantwortung: Versuch einer Ethik für die technologische Zivilisation*. Frankfurt a.M.: Insel, 1979. Translated by Hans Jonas, and David Herr as *The Imperative Responsibility: In Search of Ethics for the Technological Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
26. This paradigm of science, of course, is increasingly outdated and contested, even within the sciences themselves, beginning perhaps most vigorously from the life-sciences. Some insights into the paradigm shift can be gleaned from David Ray Griffin, ed. *The Reenchantment of Science: Postmodern Proposals*. New York: SUNY, 1988.
27. Overtly anti-religious works such as Nietzsche’s *The Antichrist* or Freud’s *The Future of an Illusion* attack specific forms of religiosity and propose alternative ways of envisioning and relating to life as a whole, and in this sense they are still, at least negatively, “religious” in their scope of vision. For a religious reading of atheist philosophers Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud, see Merold Westphal. *Suspicion and Faith: The Religious Uses of Modern Atheism*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1998.
28. Examples of how this is being rediscovered by critical theory in our “post-secular age” can be found in Mark Knight, and Louise Lee, eds. *Religion, Literature, and the Imagination: Sacred Worlds*. London: Continuum, 2010.
29. Jürgen Habermas. *Erkenntnis und Interesse*. Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1968. Translated as *Knowledge and Human Interests*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987.
30. Andrzej Szczeklik. *Catharsis: On the Art of Medicine*. Translated by Antonia Lloyd-Jones. Foreword by Czesław Miłosz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005. Revives this outlook from within the practice of medicine today.

31. The same challenge is taken up also by Edmund D. Pellegrino in his numerous works on medical humanities, bioethics, and the philosophy of medicine, starting from *A Philosophical Basis of Medical Practice: Toward a Philosophy and Ethic of the Healing Professions*. Co-authored with David C. Thomasma. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.
32. Martin Heidegger's analysis of human existence (*Dasein*, Being-there) as Being-in-the-world is based on relation to worldly beings' readiness-to-hand (*Zuhandenheit*), or their being adapted to use, as prior to their presence-at-hand (*Vorhandenheit*), or their just being objectively there, provides a penetrating philosophical elucidation of this ontological condition. See *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1963 [1927], pp. 69–76, 106. Translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. *Being and Time*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
33. This roster was established especially by Martianus Capella's *On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury* (*De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, 439 A.D.), which became a standard textbook in the Middle Ages.
34. John Marenbon. "Humanism, Scholasticism and the School of Chartres." *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 6 (2000): 569–77.
35. R. W. Southern. *Scholastic Humanism and the Unification of Europe, I. Foundations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.
36. A powerful contemporary proponent of this philosophical tradition is Ernesto Grassi. *Rhetoric as Philosophy: The Humanist Tradition*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1980.
37. Hugh of St. Victor. *Eruditio Didascalica*. In *Patrologia Latina*. Edited by J.-P. Minge. Turnholti: Brepols, 1862, vol. 176.
38. Saint Bonaventure. *De Reductione Artium ad Theologiam*, 2nd ed. Edited by Sister Emma Thérèse Healy. New York: The Franciscan Institute, 1955.
39. John Milbank. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. London: Blackwell, 2006 [1990], p. 6.
40. John Milbank. "The Conflict of the Faculties: Theology and the Economy of the Sciences." In *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology*. Eugene: Cascade, 2009, pp. 301–15.
41. Martha C. Nussbaum. *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997.
42. For contemporary perspectives on the continuing value of classical education, as well as on the need for adaptations. Martha C. Nussbaum. *Not For Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010, accentuates and updates her case.
43. Harry R. Lewis. *Excellence Without a Soul: Does Liberal Education Have a Future?* New York: Public Affairs, 2007, is a clarion call to defend this model of education.
44. Werner Jaeger. *Paedeia: Die Formung des griechischen Menschen*. Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1934. Translated by Gilbert Highet as *Paedeia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1939.
45. Augustine. *De Ordine*. Edited by Silvano Borruso. South Bend: St. Augustine's Press, 2007, II. 16.44.
46. Michael Patrick Foley. *The 'De ordine' of St. Augustine*. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 2006.

47. Ilsetraut Hadot. *Arts Libéraux et Philosophie dans la Pensée Antique: Contribution à L'histoire de L'éducation et de la Culture dans l'Antiquité*. Paris: Vrin, 2005 [1984], pp. 101–36.
48. Augustine's seminal role in the comprehensive idea of education propounded here is further sounded by Henri I. Marrou. *Saint Augustin et la fin de la Culture Antique*, 4th ed. Paris: Boccard, 1958.
49. Kim Paffenroth, and Kevin L. Hughes, eds. *Augustine and Liberal Education*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000.
50. Johannes ScotusEriugena. *Super Caelestem Hierarchiam I*. In *Patrologia Latina. Patrologiae Cursus Completus: Series Latina*. Paris: J. P. Migne, 1844–1864, vol. 122, pp. 139–40.
51. Marie-Thérèse d'Alverny. "La sagesse et ses sept filles: Recherches sur les allégories de la philosophie et des arts libéraux du IXe au XIIe siècle." In *Mélanges Dédiés à la Mémoire de Félix Grat*. Paris: Pecqer-Grat, 1946, vol. 1, pp. 245–78.
52. William Franke. "Involved Knowing: On the Poetic Epistemology of the Humanities." *The European Legacy: Towards New Paradigms* 16 (2011): 447–68. Available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10848770.2011.583779> (accessed on 13 October 2015).

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