

## Editors' Preface

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We introduce our new journal assuming two things about the humanities: first, that they should be understood less as islands of specialization than as centers of conversation; and second, that they interest us not only as scholars, but also and especially as human beings.

These assumptions come from our experience teaching in programs like the Villanova Center for Liberal Education. When Socrates converses with Abraham, Augustine with W.E.B. DuBois, and Virginia Woolf with Karl Marx, their exchanges concern our common humanity; no single discipline comprehends them all, and we naturally turn to our colleagues for insights we have missed.

Such conversations are remarkably scarce in existing academic journals. Although philosophers, theologians, historians, and poets all discuss courage, for example, or beauty, or freedom, or the tangled relationship between faith and reason, they seldom do so in the same space, and almost never are their approaches weighed with rigorous concern for the truth. *Expositions* satisfies this need for a forum where scholars meet across disciplinary lines to investigate central themes in the humanities.

### *Ecce homo*

Our first issue begins with a theme that, in a sense, includes all the others. What do the humanities reveal about human nature?

Asking the question in this form is bound to provoke objections. Some will deny that the anthropology of a particular faith-tradition can be evaluated from any allegedly universal perspective called “the humanities.” Others will insist that what we call “human nature” is only a cultural artifact or social construct. Our response is neither to be frightened away from our subject nor to dismiss the objections out of hand. We are curious to see how various disciplines respond to the question of our nature, and we are no less eager to ponder the perplexities that arise along the way—as in fact they do.

The first of our articles, by Timothy Fuller, describes John Stuart Mill's hesitation over whether his defense of individual liberty is true for all time or only in a certain social context. Linking this difficulty with Mill's dubious account of the roots of our tradition, Fuller calls for renewed exposition of classic texts in order to distinguish the perennial from the historical. In keeping with this suggestion, Rémi Brague argues that anthropology is so far from being culture-bound that our very notion of "culture" derives from the anthropology advanced by Paul of Tarsus. But while Brague still emphasizes the continuity between Paul and his Greek and Jewish predecessors, M. Katherine Tillman finds in Cardinal John Henry Newman a multilayered account of human nature whose upper reaches are distinctively Christian and only analogous to the perfection attainable through liberal education or philosophy. This challenge to rationalism's self-sufficiency is continued, if in a different way, by Eva Brann, who proposes instead to understand humans as "ultimately affective" in nature.

Among the difficulties to emerge from these reflections is whether what is most profound in humanity varies radically among different cultures, tribes, classes, or individuals. If so, then perhaps human nature exists only on the most superficial level. Our book reviews help us think about this possibility. Our featured roundtable is on *Jesus and Yahweh*, in which Harold Bloom warily regards the transition from particular Judaism to universal Christianity. Emily Wittman, meanwhile, reviews the works of Albanian novelist Ismail Kadare with particular concern for the politics of translation and international literary prizes. Finally, Farhang Erfani asks whether Ernesto Laclau's *Populist Reason* explains the mystery that has led so many academics to wonder about human nature: how do peoples *as peoples* determine their passions and interests?

### **An invitation**

We hope our belief in this project will resonate with others who share similar concerns. Ever optimistic that our scholarly community is hungry for dialogue that transcends both ideological and disciplinary boundaries, we invite you to become part of our future.