



COLLOQUIA

Saturday, November 13 | 9:00-10:15 a.m.

The Objects of Our Desires: Dignifying Human Relationships

“Procreative Beneficence’s Disregard for Dignity in the Pursuit of an Improved Humanity”

Michael Baggot, Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum

Proposals for procreative beneficence endanger human dignity and present incoherencies. Respect for autonomy would seem to prohibit one group (parents) from imposing their personal opinions about the good life upon others (children). Moreover, the harm principle is fundamentally violated through the rampant destruction of embryonic life. Further, marginalized groups will be disproportionately reduced due to social pressures to have children with the characteristics of the privileged class. Proponents of a new eugenics often exalt radical self-definition while ironically embracing an extreme form of domination at the expense of the autonomy of the youngest and most vulnerable members of society.

“Sexual Expressionism, Reproductive Technologies and the Objectification of Women and Children”

Melissa Moschella, Catholic University of America

This paper will explore how, despite their seemingly opposed aims, the culture of sexual expressionism (which relies on birth control and abortion to avoid the consequences of sex) and the use of reproductive technologies (which enables people to have children without sex) are actually fruits of the same tree. Both treat women’s and children’s bodies as commodities - and in particular treat women’s fertility as an object of manipulation. And both rest on a failure to respect the dignity of the body as essential to our personhood.

“Why Christianity and the Secular World Have So Little in Common: Human Dignity and Sex Robots”

Mark Cherry, St. Edwards University

Human dignity is often appreciated as one of the few values competing moral perspectives share. I utilize the example of sex robots to demonstrate why this claim is likely incorrect. “Human dignity” has no content of its own. A particular moral perspective is needed. While Christianity easily recognizes the impropriety of having sexual relations with a robot, the secular world is generally unable to appreciate forming a sexual bond with technology as much different than other ways that sexual activities have been normalized outside of the marriage of husband and wife. Without God,

moral knowledge will always be disoriented.

“Contraception: A Continuing Threat to the Health and Dignity of Women”

Caitlin Dwyer, Thomas More University

This paper will explore the continuing threat that contraception poses to the bodily health and unique dignity of women. It will give an up-to-date analysis of health risks contraceptives pose including cancer, stroke, and permanent alteration of brains of teenage girls. It will then explore how contraception poses a threat to the unique dignity of women in that it attacks what is most central to woman's unique nature: her capacity for motherhood. It will conclude by examining natural women's restorative healthcare as a sign of hope and path forward in the pursuit of cultural recognition of the dignity of women.

Dignity Without Borders

“Human Rights: Inflation and Contraction”

Adrian Reimers, Holy Cross College

Societies and governments today recognized an expanding list of human rights that individuals may claim. Paradoxically, the ability to claim many of these rights is increasingly restricted. Applying the individualism found in J.S. Mill's philosophy we find the roots of the expansion of rights. Simultaneously Karl Marx's analysis of oppressor and oppressed accounts for the contraction of personal rights. Simultaneously both conceptions are at work today. Turning to the thought of Jacques Maritain and especially John Paul II we propose a rethinking of human rights in the dignity of the human person ordered in freedom to truth.

“On the ‘Human’ Part of Human Rights”

Andrés López, Universidad de La Sabana

Human Rights discourses in legal and political forums are incoherent because we disagree on the “human” part of human rights. The agreement that was achieved in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was only about what rights we have, but not why we have them. Deriving human rights from the fact of being human fails to satisfactorily ground them because it begs a further question: what is a human being? This paper reflects on four contrasting understandings of human dignity that explain the different human rights discourses on controversial topics such as abortion, same-sex marriage, or the use of drugs.

“Charles Malik on ‘Reason’ at the UDHR: How to Grasp Human Dignity”

Pedro Pallares, Universidad Panamericana

Charles Malik was one of the nuclear drafters of the UDHR. This paper will explain (1) why he is the most probable author of the statement “endowed with reason”; and if so, (2) what would be the “malikean” idea of “reason,” as expressed during the drafting process, and (3) what insights about this issue can be found from his years as a philosopher scholar at American University of Beirut, right before his years as a diplomat.

“Dignity, Language, and the Law”

Julio Pohl (University of Navarre)

The concept “human dignity” is widely used. There is an overwhelming agreement in the fact that we as humans have dignity, but when we inquire what is dignity, or better, in what does the particular human dignity consist in, such consensus is completely absent. This paper shows how the misunderstanding regarding what is dignity resides in the mainstream semantic conventionalist approach used to define the concept by legal scholars and academics. Semantic conventionalism makes concepts about human action unintelligible. Therefore, only from a realist semantics perspective can we properly understand the concept of dignity and its applications.

Dignity and Beauty in the Public Square

“Till We Have Façades”

John Haigh, Benedictine College

We tend to see faces even where there aren’t any--here in a cloud pattern, there on a rock formation--indicating that our brains specialize in the function of identifying and naming through symbolism and iconography. The practice of traditional architecture responded to this basic human need by presenting on the principal walls of major buildings, as well as on city gates and monuments, metaphorical facades. That was common practice until the mid-20th century. The most murderous century in human history results in major buildings around the world with mute walls and starkly signed with a “name for ourselves” (Gen 11:4). Coincidence?

“Designing for Dignity at the U.S./Mexico Border: A Conversation on Architecture for the Human Experience”

Caroline Colella, University of Notre Dame

What role can architecture play in the promotion of human dignity? Guided by the pillars of Catholic Social Teaching and principles of traditional design and urbanism, this question will be explored through an architectural case study: a proposal for the design of an Immigration Station and accompanying Immigrant Aid Campus on the United States/Mexico Border in pursuit of an argument for a world better designed with focus on the human experience and dignity of all people.

“Beauty in the Public Realm: A Response to Human Dignity”

Todd Hartch, Eastern Kentucky University

Recent American public buildings and public spaces usually emphasize functionality in a nondescript and sometimes unpleasant manner. This paper argues that the beauty, or lack of beauty, of the public realm is a matter of human dignity. Beautiful public buildings and spaces are consonant with human dignity, while ugly public buildings and spaces are not. Accompanying images provide examples that recognize and celebrate human dignity. In our fragmented society, beauty is one of the few “languages” that can transcend ideological divisions and, perhaps, rebuild a culture that respects human dignity.

‘I’ve Been to the Mountaintop’: The Future of Discourse in a Fractured Society

“Confronting Systemic Racism in a Post-Truth World”

Isaac Kimmel, University of Notre Dame

Systemic racism is so insidious because all too often, the only people who realize it exists are those who suffer from it. In this presentation, I draw on literature from social psychology and sociology of culture to explain the mechanisms that make it so difficult for people who have never directly experienced systemic racism to understand it. I then bring in documents from Vatican II, the USCCB, and the encyclicals of John Paul II to argue that Catholic teaching requires us to transcend our limited cultural viewpoints in order to foster greater human unity.

“Ideological Colonization: A Plague Destroying the Dignity of Hispanics Under the Guise of Social Justice”

Lucia Luzondo, Person and Identity Project - CWF - EPPC

America’s ever-shifting demographic is marked by a drastic increase in Hispanic populations, especially within the Catholic Church, where Hispanics are almost the majority group and constitute over 60% of Catholics 18 years or less. Thus, their presence is crucial to Church and society. But the plague of the ideological colonization effected via critical theories (gender, race, and radical feminism) finds fertile ground among Hispanics due to machismo and marianismo, generating a massive departure from the faith, truth, and values among Hispanics and the indoctrination and radicalization of its emerging leadership that desperately calls for attention. But there is hope!

“Awake, Not Woke: Coming to Know the Anonymous Man”

Noelle Mering, EPPC

The woke movement is fundamentally one that reduces and absorbs the human person leaving him anonymous -- unable to be known by others and unknowable to himself. The operating principles of the ideology rest on three fundamental distortions which reduce the person in favor of the group, corrupt our understanding of nature by deifying our will, and elevate human power over true authority. The Christian response is rooted in true knowledge of self and others -- through the intimacy of family life and the prompting of the faith to examination and resolution leading to true authenticity, grounded in authority.

‘The Dignity Proper to the Human Person’

“Human Dignity and Catholic Social Thought: Perspectives from Before and After the Council”

Scott Hefelfinger, Augustine Institute

In the Church’s recent social teaching, human dignity often occupies the place of first principle, the source of the other principles and indeed of the whole body of teaching. But this same teaching locates the basis of this dignity in the image of God and the ability of the human person to enter into communion, with God and with others. So, which comes first: dignity or communion? This paper retrieves a robust, pre-conciliar approach to communion in order to show the nature and place of human dignity within the wider tradition of Catholic social thought.

“The Children and the Dogs: *Gaudium et Spes* and the Matthean Jesus on Human Dignity”

John Sehorn, Augustine Institute Graduate School of Theology

Given the Catholic Church’s insistence on “the exalted dignity proper to the human person” (*Gaudium et spes* 26), what are we to make of Jesus’s reference to a Canaanite woman as a “dog”? Focusing on the Gospel of Matthew, this paper argues that such passages are to be interpreted within a larger soteriological program that culminates in all nations being invited to become the Father’s beloved children. Properly understood, the Matthean Jesus does not oppose but rather elucidates Vatican II’s teaching that “[t]he root reason for human dignity lies in man’s call to communion with God” (GS 19).

“Dignity and Distinctions”

Catherine Deavel, University of St. Thomas

Humans have equal dignity because we are rational and free beings, made in the image and likeness of God. This claim can cause confusion, however, if we fail to distinguish between essential goods and excellences. First, I present St. Thomas’s account of “image” and “likeness” to explain our common dignity and distinguish between goods essential to being human and goods that perfect us. Second, I address two faulty inferences from equal human dignity—that actions, desires, and beliefs

people hold are equally good, and that we ought not suggest some human beings are objectively better than others in important respects.

Human Dignity at the Frontiers of Science

“The Death Exam and the Examined Life”

Evan Beacom, University of Minnesota Medical Center

Modern technology eliminates some natural limitations of embodiment, such as certain limits of time and space. Living a less-embodied life, one is estranged from oneself, as well as one's community and God. This separation prefigures death. I draw on my own experiences as a physician performing the death examination and reflect on nearness to death as a partial remedy for this mistaken anthropology of disembodiment. Disembodied cultures hide from death in search of immortality; restoring the presence of death in our lives could help restore our sense of being embodied and so restore right relation to self, other, and Creator.

“Human Dignity and Creation: Evolution and Metaphysical Form”

Paul Allen, Corpus Christi College

As a component of the doctrine of creation, human dignity is both a plausible interpretation of our material bodily form and a way of expressing human freedom, as ordered to relationship with God. This paper addresses contemporary theological anthropology by drawing connections between the theological interest in embodiment, the response to Darwinian theory and the modern debate concerning the relationship between nature and grace. It concludes by stipulating a way that the notion of human dignity is, in part, a response to human sin, yet embraces human nature as inherently paradoxical.

“Created in the Image and Likeness of Man: How Organ-like Systems Shape Our Understanding of What It Means to be Human”

Megan Levis, University of Notre Dame

New engineered biological systems raise ethical questions relating to the boundaries between categories of living things. Engineered systems of human cells, such as human brain organoids, a.k.a. mini-brains, challenge what it means to be human. How does this biotechnology influence an understanding of human dignity? This question is particularly necessary when the technology in question relates closely to organs that are central to personal identity. Multiple disciplines, and a reliance on Catholic teaching, are required to fully engage questions surrounding the social and cultural outcomes of organoid development.

Definitions of Dignity for a Modern World

“Is ‘Human Nature’ Philosophically Verifiable? Moving from ‘Metaphysics’ to ‘Interiority’ in Defending Dignity”

Roberto De La Noval, University of Notre Dame

The Catholic methods of grounding human dignity—through approaches both theological (revealed Scripture and Tradition) and philosophical but religiously neutral (the metaphysical tradition associated with Thomism)—no longer convince a secularized public. If Catholics (and other Christians) wish to revive the tradition of a religiously neutral grounding of human dignity in reason alone, philosophical argumentation must shift from a “metaphysics-first” model and towards the model of “interiority,” as detailed in the philosophy of Bernard Lonergan, SJ. In this model, the intrinsic dignity of the human individual can be discovered through a personal appropriation of one’s own conscious intentionality towards God.

“Guardini: Our Inability to Hear the Call of God”

Margaret Hogan, Collegium at the University of Pennsylvania

Romano Guardini, German theologian of the mid-20th Century, from his vantage point in the wake of the Twentieth Century collapse of Germany, thought not. In his *Das Ende der Neuzeit* – The End of Modernity – he presented the reasons why the contemporaneous culture does not ... and cannot ... hear the voice of God. He further claimed that the inability to hear the voice of God conceals the origin and the end of man with the consequent loss of the understanding of the source of human dignity.

“What is Man That You are Mindful of Him? Human Dignity, the Foundations of Legal Systems and the Protection of Rights in the Thought of Luigi Guissani

Lorenza Violini, University of Milan

In the area of legal studies numerous publications have dealt with the meaning and with the practical implications of the principle of human dignity. Extensive analysis of legislation and of the vast jurisprudence in international, European and constitutional law on the subject has been developed. Alongside positions aimed at recognizing in human dignity a fundamental value for the entire legal system, there are lines of thought more inclined to emphasize its futility: influenced by not-always-coherent judicial decisions, human dignity has been tagged as meaningless. On the contrary, precisely in these decisions one can find hints of great depth, which disprove the tendency to deprive dignity of its content. In this broad context, Mgr. Giussani’s seminal thought constitutes an essential point of reference. His entire production focuses on man in his concreteness, in his radical questions on life and death, in his intimate ability to grasp the truth of human experience, which is both individual and universal, as it is reflected in the humanity and in the divinity - which is both singular and universal - of the God made man. The present essay aims to retrace the legal doctrine on human dignity in the light of the suggestions that come from Msgr. Giussani’s anthropology, in connection with the need to actualize the traditional Christian message.

Nascent Human Dignity

“Evangelium Vitae as Exegesis”

Noelle Johnson, University of Notre Dame

This paper investigates three approaches to “what the Bible has to say” about abortion characteristic of different viewpoints. I examine the perspectives of John J. Collins, Richard Hays, and John Paul II and ask what principles guide their exegesis such that while all three authors admit that there are not Biblical texts specifically condemning deliberate abortion, only John Paul II argues for the inviolability of the life of the child in the womb as an immediate logical consequence of the message of Scripture.

“The Failure of Abortion Policy in Mexico City After 14 Years of Decriminalization”

Maria Vazquez Calva, Free and Sovereign Women

On December 30, 2020 the Argentine Senate voted a bill that would change the history of the right to life in the Latin American Region. After a challenging year of world wide pandemic and economic uncertainty, the Argentine representatives in the House and the Senate voted to legalize abortion nationwide. As part of the effort made to prevent this vote, I was able to testify before the Argentine Senate concerning the reality of the failure of abortion policy in Mexico City. After 13 years of decriminalization, statistics show that abortion has not defeated maternal mortality or lessened violence against women.

“Unwinding the Anti-Magisterium in Abortion Opinions”

Kevin Walsh, University of Richmond School of Law

This essay examines impending opportunities for the Supreme Court to begin unwinding its anti-magisterial anthropology in abortion caselaw. The Court has agreed to decide two abortion-related cases next Term. One asks whether all previability abortion prohibitions are unconstitutional. The other asks whether a state attorney general can intervene to defend the constitutionality of a state abortion law after another official has decided to drop the defense. In these cases, the Court can reach jurisprudentially modest outcomes that still significantly shift what American abortion law teaches about the nature of the human person.