



DE NICOLA CENTER
for ETHICS AND CULTURE

COLLOQUIA

Saturday, November 13 | 10:45 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

In the Shadow of Success: COVID-19, John Henry Newman, and the Dignity of Patients and Learners in Medical Education

How do medical educators teach students to see the whole patient rather than mere “bags of blood and disease”? Or in other words, what roadblocks to inculcating a deep reverence for human dignity exist in medical education? Exploring lessons learned from the experience of students during the COVID-19 pandemic, this paper/panel utilizes the educational theory of St. John Henry Newman to ask fundamental questions about the relationship of knowledge, and the dignity of students in universities with the specific goals and outcomes of professional formation in the medical professions. The paper insists on the importance of providing a “whole” education for students if we expect them to see the “whole dignity” of their patients.

For Christian medical educators, the experience our students faced during the COVID-19 crisis demands a self-examination of our educational methods. Our insistence on imitating Jesus Christ, the Divine Physician, in his healing ministry to the wholeness of the human person requires us to ask if we instill a similar devotion to human dignity in our students.

With this goal in mind, we turn to engaging the work of John Henry Newman, particularly his *magnum opus* on Catholic education, *The Idea of a University*. His ruminations on the role of the Church, liberal arts, and powerful professions like medicine produces an insightful question for us to consider: How shall we situate medical education within the university? Newman does not create a narrative of faith vs. science, but instead sees a poverty in our understanding of knowledge within Universities. Newman’s focus on liberal education rests in the wholeness of the circle of knowledge, and the integral nature of knowledge. Unless we attend to the worthiness of Knowledge for its own sake, we will not be able to understand its usefulness to professions like medicine. In other words, if we do not approach our students with the dignity that sees the wholeness of their education as important, we will be unable to teach them the wholeness of human dignity that rightfully is their patients.

Bo Bonner, Mercy College

Kristin Collier, University of Michigan

Brett Robinson, University of Notre Dame

One with Us: Extending Radical Hospitality

“Cognitive Disability and Lives Worth Living

Sara Chan, University of Notre Dame

Even when the secular world recognises human dignity, it is often suspicious of the dignity of the cognitively disabled, frequently using them as examples of lives that are less (or even not) worth living. This paper articulates a philosophical account of how cognitive disability does not necessarily undermine vibrant human flourishing, drawing only on principles amenable to secular society. More specifically, my argument is based on a “saturation of goods” account of flourishing, an empathy-based model of moral agency (from moral psychology), and an understanding of autonomy that is compatible with relational interdependence (from feminist care ethics).

“Disability, Embodiment, and Human Dignity”

Lambert Nieme, Pope Saint John XXIII National Seminary

Disability can be a fundamental reason for exclusion, discrimination, or inequality within human society. Several texts in the Bible reveal a negative attitude towards people with disabilities. However, there are also many passages in the Bible with an emancipatory and inclusive approach toward disability. People with disabilities are included in God’s plan of salvation. Jesus humanized them and promoted awareness of and sensitivity to the issue of disability. Such awareness is based on the ontological human dignity of all people. A disability affects neither the humanity of the disabled person nor his essence, his inherent dignity.

“Dignity and Disability”

Thomas Williams

An attempt to elucidate the relationship between fundamental human dignity and the variable qualities -- or lack thereof -- possessed by individual people.

St. Augustine and Human Dignity

“Beyond Purity: St. Augustine’s Defense of the Human Dignity of Rape Victims”

Ashleen Menchaca-Bagnulo, Texas State University

Augustine's account of the rape of Lucretia is revolutionary in releasing her from both her guilt and the mandate to commit suicide. His intertwined accounts of Lucretia and Christian rape victims are rooted in his novel idea about conscience, which also gives him the ability to talk about sexual assault in the language of consent, rather than in the predominant language of "pollution" of pagan and Christian contemporaries. In doing so, he leaves an inheritance to us for talking about consent in sexual matters, and to takes us further, allowing us to see behind the necessity for consent the truth of human dignity. In fact, he portrays Lucretia's semi-public suicide as her culture's perverse attempt at restoring or revealing her human dignity.

The insights of conscience and consent also allows his account to explain not just violent coercion but psychological coercion and the many subtle forms that domination can take. Yet given the pervasiveness of the *libido dominandi* in political and social life we are left with questions about conscience's strength in the face of a vicious culture.

“Augustinian Aspects of Charles Malik’s Defense of Human Dignity”

Mary Keys and Melody Grubaugh, University of Notre Dame

In this presentation, we turn to one of the central framers of the 1948 United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Lebanese philosopher-diplomat Charles Habib Malik. It is well known that Malik was an established philosopher before he turned to diplomacy, studying under and writing on Heidegger and Whitehead, and helping to launch the philosophy and cultural studies programs at the American University of Beirut. What has been less often noted, and not yet explicated or developed in detail, is Malik’s profound engagement with Augustine’s writings and thought, and the Augustinian dimensions of Malik’s philosophic and diplomatic work. Drawing on the archive of Charles Malik’s papers at the United States Library of Congress and on his publications and lectures, we offer a select history of Malik’s study of Augustine’s work, and his development of a distinctively Augustinian perspective on themes related to natural law and natural right, human rights, and dignity. We elaborate how Augustinian notions of humility and pride are central to Malik’s appraisal of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the contemporary human rights project more generally, in what he considered their achievements, limitations, and pitfalls.

“Augustine on the Meaning of Human Dignity”

Daniel Burns, University of Dallas

St. Augustine’s early works sketch a view of human dignity that offers significant challenges to contemporary views, both Christian and non-Christian. In dialogue with the Platonist tradition, Augustine argues that while all of us do possess at least some minimum of human dignity, human dignity also exists on a sliding scale, dependent on our relative knowledge of ourselves and of God. The full measure of human dignity would be perfect wisdom, which is inaccessible to us in this life.

But meaningful gradations of wisdom do exist even in this life. Augustine would regard it as a mistake to claim, as many today do claim, that all humans as such bear a simply equal dignity.

This paper explains Augustine's reasons for holding this moderately inegalitarian view of human dignity. It also sketches some of the basic social-political conclusions that follow from Augustine's view, including those relating to contemporary controversies over the meaning of human dignity.

Integral Human Dignity

“From *Homo Curans* to *Homo Curator*: The Dignity Formula of John 13 at the Foundation of a Post-Pandemic Economy

Joseph Rice, Seton Hall University

The “dignity formula” of John 13:3 situates humans in relation to God, their origin and end, as enjoying a non-exchangeable value, first learned in the family. In dialogue with secular theorists (Knight, Piketty, Mazzucato, and Rodrik), I assess prospects for post-pandemic social equity, whether in a great reset of the terms of socio-economic exchange, or in a great renewal based on this “dignity formula.” Relevant to the conference theme is a Christian account of human dignity at the root of social and economic justice, presented in an interdisciplinary dialogue with secular sources.

“Resurrecting Justice”

Daniel Philpott, University of Notre Dame

My presentation will develop a contrast between the dominant conception of justice in the modern West, a derivative of the classic notion, the constant will to render another his due, and the justice of the Bible, comprehensive right relationship. I will argue that biblical justice enfolds what is due while including obligations that exceed due such as service to the poor, generosity, gift, forgiveness and love for enemies. This justice finds its ultimate expression in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I will demonstrate the implications of my argument for human dignity and for the politics of modern states.

“What is Human Dignity: Distinguishing Between True and False Dignity”

John Rziha, Benedictine College

John Paul II made a distinction between true and false freedom. True freedom corresponds to a proper understanding of the human person, whereas false freedom is the normal view in a culture permeated with the improper view of expressive individualism. A parallel distinction between true and false dignity can likewise be made. True dignity corresponds to the intrinsic worth found in

humans within a Christian anthropology. False dignity includes the concept of false freedom and avoidance of self-defined suffering (e.g. the death with dignity campaign). This presentation will explain these distinctions as well as their valuable use in transforming culture.

‘What Is This Quintessence of Dust?’

“‘Alike in Dignity’: Shakespeare and the Transformation of Human Dignity”

Michael West, University of Dallas

To address “human dignity” as the term is used today by means of Shakespeare might seem perverse. After all, Shakespeare consistently uses the term “dignity” to denote the worthiness that attaches to political office, or at least the power to impose one’s will upon others. This conception of dignity might seem worlds away from contemporary notions of dignity, which are often deployed to defend precisely those human beings who cannot impose their wills upon others. This paper examines the term “dignity” in *Richard III* and *Winters Tale* to help account for this dramatic reversal in how dignity is understood.

“What Hamlet Teaches Huckleberry Finn about Human Dignity”

Benedict Whalen, Hillsdale College

My paper outlines several ways Mark Twain engages with Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain adopts several prominent themes from Shakespeare's play, including crises of conscience and the relationship between the living and the dead, as part of his depiction of the education and moral formation that Huck receives during the novel. This formation is important, for Huck finally comes to see Jim not as a piece of property, but as a human being with inherent dignity who ought not to be enslaved. This understanding of Jim’s dignity emerges despite the seeming secularism of *Hamlet* and *Huckleberry Finn*.

“Dignity of God, Dignity of Man, by Shakespeare”

Michael Platt, Friends of the Republic

In *Julius Caesar* we see the Roman love of honor, desire to merit a statue, and ambition to become a god realized, when Caesar, ever referring to himself in the third person, overcomes the conspiracy, sublates republic into Empire, and will forever rule it in his name. Given how much Shakespeare’s audience knew of Christ, it should not surprise us that we find allusions to the opposite, God became man, and thus the fullness of what Shakespeare thinks of the Romans. What a difference between the Dignified Caesar and He who shared His dignity with all the “sons of Man.”

To Live Peaceably with All

“Small-Town Life and Difference”

Elly Brown, Princeton University

Political theory and related disciplines often carry the assumption that the small-town ideal of community is inherently one that denies difference and, thereby, dignity. Against this assumption, and by drawing on the work of Wendell Berry and bell hooks, this essay argues instead that the small-town ideal of community, when fully adhered to, is one that respects difference, rather than necessitating homogeneity and discrimination. To make this argument, the essay surveys both American political thought and recent ethnographies before responding with Berry and hooks' shared difference-affirming ideal of “beloved community” inspired by the Christian tradition.

“The Rise of Young Catholic Communities Among the Most Secular Cities in America”

Hannah Gillespie, University of Notre Dame

An exploration of the real-life phenomenon / trend of a growing number of intentional Catholic communities of young people - often living in converted homes or old convents - across America. These young people live in some of the most secular cities in the nation, including Seattle and San Francisco. The home of intentional Catholic communities provide spaces for young people to be seen, to recognize their worth, to acknowledge their limitations, and grow in holiness and virtue through the affirmation of their community and the joys, sorrows, and struggle of daily life.

“Human Dignity, as Seen Through the Eyes of a Religion Reporter”

Ines Maria San Martin, Crux

At a time of extreme political divide, when the proliferation of fake news is rampant, journalists can often be portrayed as “part of the problem.” But journalists also get a first-row seat to some of the most poignant events, both within the Catholic Church and the world at large. Since 2014, I've had the privilege of witnessing the human indignity of poverty, religious persecution and war, as well as the efforts made by the poor of heart, the merciful and the peacemakers to remind them that even when discarded by society, they too have been called by name.

Absolute Uncertainties

“Does Aristotle Have Moral Absolutes?”

Garry Moore Soronio, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich

Aristotle articulates in *Nicomachean Ethics* 1107a5-16 that some actions and passions directly imply badness in themselves, i.e. not bad on account of excess or deficiency but intrinsic moral evils (per se

de malo). As such, moral absolutes, i.e. exceptionless moral norms of prohibition, are integral to Aristotle's ethics, supplementing Philippa Foot's construal of it as a system of hypothetical imperatives. Rather, Aristotle's moral absolutes constitute categorical moral norms grounded on human nature proscribing acts intended against the agent's proper good, i.e. against one's flourishing. They ensure immunity in pursuing fulfillment (eudaimonia) through a life of virtue, thereby upholding human dignity.

“David Hume, John Henry Newman, and the Question of Certainty in Modern Political Thought”

Elayne Allen, *Public Discourse*

My paper critically examines two common claims of modern political thought: that certainty about objective moral truths is impossible, and acquisitiveness and self-interest provide stable political foundations. To explore these themes, I look to David Hume's assertion that justice and virtue are conventions grounded in human passion. I then observe that John Henry Newman's defense of human beings' ability to obtain certitude about notional truths upends Hume's view that justice and virtues are unknowable and artificial. By demonstrating that theoretical concepts can be known, Newman lays the groundwork for political science to embrace nobler, more dignified ends than commodious living.

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Guillaume de Thieulloy, *Le Salon Beige*

The subject of this paper is the political frame of freedom: traditional thinkers (Aristotle, Aquinas, etc.) believed that we can only be free in a political city, when modern thinkers believe that to be free means to be delivered from any “unchosen” rule. The first issue considers the links between political laws and freedom, while the second considers how far political coercion can go (especially in religious matters).