



COLLOQUIA

Friday, November 12 | 9:00-10:15 a.m.

Suffering Indignities

“For That I Came: Two Meditations on Dignity in Contemporary Catholic Literature”

Michael P. Murphy, Loyola University Chicago

Both Flannery O’Connor’s introduction to *A Memoir of Mary Ann* (1961) and George Saunders’s title story from *Tenth of December* (2013), while markedly different in form and style, are joined beautifully under the banner of a theological aesthetics. The profound sense of dignity disclosed by characters who suffer disease and navigate disability is represented with authenticity and unflinching realism; and each text, to follow O’Connor, is a meditation on the mysterious ways that “charity grows invisibly among us, entwining the living and the dead” so as to form nothing less than the “Communion of Saints.”

“‘Watch With Me’: Human Dignity, Serious Mental Illness, and the Practice of Accompaniment”

Margaret Musso, Case Western Reserve University/University Hospitals Cleveland Medical Center

Society has historically failed to respect the human dignity of persons with serious mental illnesses. Clinicians, communities, and individuals are called to bear witness to the human dignity of persons with serious mental illnesses through the practice of accompaniment. To illustrate this claim, I will draw from Wendell Berry’s, “Watch With Me,” a short story of how one community accompanies a mentally ill community member in a unique way. Finally, I will describe three concrete practices of accompaniment for clinicians, communities, and individuals (Assertive Community Treatment, Clubhouses, and the family foster care model of Geel, respectively).

“Wendell Berry’s Via Negativa: Reckoning with Indignities in His Fiction of Hard Hope”

Michael Stevens, Cornerstone University

I would like to call out an intriguing affirmation of human dignity in Wendell Berry’s fiction, carried out by Berry’s risky yet compelling attention to characters who are undignified and undeserving of affirmation. Within the portrayals of Thad Coulter and Uncle Peach from his short fiction, and Troy Chatham from his novel *Jayber Crow*, Berry pushes the reader towards censure and disdain, only to

pull us back at the last moment, to show us the enduring dignity, the bare and unadorned image of God, which all retain, and which it is the duty of a true community to uphold.

Dignity for Me, But Not for Thee

“The Development and Applications of the Notion of Human Dignity in EU Law: Causes and Consequences in Law and in Politics”

Javier de Cendra, Universidad Francisco de Vitoria

In light of recent developments in EU law that engage the concept of human dignity in order to promote, e.g. same sex marriages and abortion, this paper explores a number of important legal questions, including whether human dignity is an autonomous concept of EU law and if so what are its foundations, contours and entailments, how has it evolved, how does it relate with the Christian tradition, how are its applications balanced with freedom of conscience when both clash, and what might its evolution imply for the EU as a political project.

“Dignities”

Mary Anne Case, University of Chicago

This paper traces evolution over time and disciplines from particularized dignities to a singular notion of human dignity and then away again from it: Since the time of Pico Della Mirandola, when human dignity was itself one of many dignities, human dignity came to occupy the field, as it was abstracted from the situations of individual humans. Particular dignities have, though, made a comeback. The paper will critically analyze two of them in particular contemporary discourses- the dignity of marriage in the jurisprudence of Anthony Kennedy and the dignity of woman in the pronouncements of the three most recent Popes.

“Dignity and Contested Meanings in a Pluralistic Society”

Eric Claey's, George Mason University

Liberal political theories often rely on “middle-level concepts,” concepts that justify ranges of policy outcomes without being tied to any particular worldview or theory of justice. “Dignity” is clearly a middle-level concept, and in my talk I’ll study it as such. In pluralistic societies, policy-makers and partisans need to use middle-level concepts to forge agreement on just policy. But middle-level concepts cannot and do not paper over all of the differences that different partisans have with each other. So many contemporary policy debates end up seeming disjointed—as different partisans insist that they know better than others what relevant concepts require on topics under debate. In my talk, I’ll show how different specific conceptions of dignity dovetail to condemn international sex-trafficking—but then fly apart in debates over abortion.

Do Androids Dream of Human Dignity?

“Accounting for Excellence: Artificial Intelligence and Human Dignity in Work”

Marc Neri, Texas Christian University

From the very beginning, man was called to work. While recent advances in technology give rise to speculation that machines may make humans redundant, others doubt the ability of machines to employ the kind of incongruent thinking necessary to certain roles. But machines already dictate how some human work is done. Will work continue to provide a forum for the development of virtues, and what are the implications for human dignity in the workplace?

“Apparent Persons and Personal Dignity: On Human Relations with Near-Future Sociable AIs”

Jordan Wales, Hillsdale College

Human dignity, writes John Paul II, “comes not from the work [we] do, but from the persons [we] are.” Christianity transformed the ancient Roman “persona” as social role to the Christian “person” as individual subject, living “personally” in self-giving relationships of empathic compassion. Near-future social AIs will challenge this. Evoking our empathy, they will seem personal even while lacking subjectivity of their own. And we will own them. Ascribing personal dignity to these tools, will we accommodate ourselves to slave-holding? Numbing ourselves to their empathic cues, will we blind ourselves to real persons' dignity? Augustine offers a way forward.

“There is No Human Dignity without Humans: On the Threat Posed by Technology”

Deion Kathawa, Michigan Supreme Court

The technological gaze threatens to undermine “human dignity” at its root because of its potential to erase our very humanity. Ordinary people will be either liquidated because they are “useless” or plied with technological “bread and circuses” until they are rendered, in a sense, subhuman. Elites will transcend their humanity altogether, either shedding their bodies and uploading their minds into computers, or retaining them, but in enhanced form. The only way to avoid this fate is to recommit to the virtue of religion: giving God His due, embracing the ontological goodness of our creatureliness, and working diligently to preserve it.

It Was Very Good: Created in His Image and Likeness

“Human Dignity, Imago Dei, and Moral Status”

Bharat Ranganathan, Case Western Reserve University

In both non-theological and theological thought, from Catholic social teaching to human rights, the human being is privileged. But what is it about the human that gives us such special status? And how might we defend the importance of this special status against criticism? I affirm that all human beings do possess the same status. Instead of offering a positive account in defense of this status, I identify some of the criticisms that must be answered to do so. Given that we live in a culture that increasingly instrumentalizes human life, responding to these criticisms is a moral imperative.

“Between Monotheism and Secularism: Human Dignity as Gift and as Task”

Gregory Floyd, Seton Hall University

This paper argues that human dignity is a reality that has both a gift-character and a task-character. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are distinct in arguing that human dignity is a gift of God rooted in our creatureliness. This is radically distinct from a modern conception of dignity, which sees it as a product of social consensus and not as something absolute and inviolable, but something provided to us by civil society. Although these distinct traditions seem to be at an impasse, a shared concern for reason is a possible place where they can fruitfully engage one another.

“Human Dignity Out of the Sources of Judaism”

R. Eugene Korn

This study explicates the rabbinic and Jewish philosophic concept of human dignity derived from the biblical claim that all humans are created in the Image of God. It examines the Talmudic, medieval rabbinic and modern interpretations of Image of God and its derivative normative imperative, *Imitatio Dei*. The paper concludes by analyzing which aspects of this theological concept are consistent with contemporary ideologies and ethics, and which are incompatible with modern theories of ethics and human personhood.

Conscience, Dignity, and Virtue

“John Henry Newman’s Understanding of Conscience as an Essential Safeguard for Human Dignity”

Marial Corona, University of St. Mary of the Lake

Newman believed that the person is essentially oriented towards communion, the seat of her relational nature being found on her conscience. Discussing matters of belief, he stated that “each of

us can speak only for himself [...] he cannot lay down the law” (GA). At a time when freedom of conscience was only emerging, he argued that “obedience to our conscience, in all things, great and small, is the way to know the Truth” (PS). As we grapple with the perennial questions of our human condition, Newman’s writings on conscience continue to be a source of light and inspiration.

“Magnanimity versus Greatness of Spirit”

Christopher Wolfe, University of St. Thomas

In this paper I develop a new term, “greatness of spirit,” to describe a specifically Christian virtue that ought to be distinguished from the natural virtue of magnanimity, or “greatness of soul.” Greatness of spirit is most clearly on display in Jansenism-influenced writers such as Pascal, Tocqueville, and St. Thérèse of Lisieux. Many non-Christian authors such as Aristotle would not recognize greatness of spirit because they consider man’s greatness in terms of his essence as a rational animal. By looking at man in terms of his essence as an embodied created spirit, new exemplars greatness can be considered.

“Honor, Excellence, and Social Order”

Dominic Verner, O.P., University of Notre Dame

For Thomas Aquinas, honor is defined as a testimony to excellence. Your honor properly exists in others as a testimony of your relative goodness, and yet as ordered to you and as dispositive to friendship it is the highest external good that you can possess. In this paper, I will present a synopsis of Thomas's doctrine of honor with a special focus given to when honor is due and to whom, how due honor incentivizes virtue, and how the distribution of honor in a community is indicative of the actual common good characterizing the civic friendship of that community.

Art and Storytelling

“The Art of Narrative: A Therapeutic for Saving the Self, and Maybe the World”

Emily McBryan, Catholic University of America

At the heart of the question of human dignity and secularism lies man’s conception of the self. In this paper, I propose to identify the particular challenges facing man’s self-realization in our modern age, specifically in the United States, where the project of liberal democracy has jeopardized the notion of a free and responsible self. I will explore the possibility that literature presents the necessary therapeutic for restoring man his human dignity even within a secular framework, primarily focusing on Robert Penn Warren's diagnostic essay "Democracy and Poetry" as well as the literature of his fellow Southerner William Faulkner.

“Human Dignity Revealed through Longing”

Anja Renkes, University of Notre Dame Echo Program

Catholic Popular Piety at holy wells in Ireland demonstrates longing for God made visually accessible. Human Dignity is revealed through participation in prayer practices at these pilgrimage sites, orienting people toward Christ as the One who reveals the great potential of each human being to love as God loves.

“Natural Law and the Elevation of Human Dignity in the Art of Classic Film”

Onalee McGraw, Educational Guidance Institute

This proposal presents classic Hollywood films as the means by which young people of today can explore human nature, understand the natural law, and recognize the primacy of human dignity. In a mysterious way, the visual art of classic film supplies essential moral vision that all can grasp even in a fractured society. Furthermore, the great classic films transport viewers across the generations into a world where the meanings of truth, goodness, and beauty are brilliantly dramatized and not in dispute.

Why Dignity?

“Autonomy as Metonymy”

Matalyn Vennerstrom, Catholic University of America

Autonomy is frequently used as metonymy, or a linguistic stand-in, for the concept of human freedom. Accepting this equivocation is dangerous both to the dignity of language and to the dignity of human persons because the term "autonomy" has been corrupted from its original meaning.

“Is Dignity Inviolable? Being Human by Behavior, Perception, and Conviction”

Brandon Brown, Indiana University School of Medicine

Modern bioethics are convinced of the primacy of persons, and frequently this understanding of moral status is structured in terms of rationality, autonomy, and self-awareness. Yet dignity-as-performance may fracture more than it unifies, respecting not innate potentialities but rather only what potential has been actualized -- an approach that benefits some, while neglecting the least among us. This presentation looks to other understandings of dignity: perception instead of performance; what is given instead of what is proven. Does dignity depend on something more substantial, something more inviolable? With a surer foundation, might dignity offer insight into human perfection?

“Opposite Ways of Understanding Persons as Ends: Aristotle and Kant”

Michael Waldstein, Franciscan University

“Everything one wants and over which one has power can also be used as a mere means. Only the human being ... is end in itself” (Kant, CritPractReason, AK5:87). This way of expressing the dignity of human persons has become commonplace. Yet, there are radically opposite ways of understanding it. “End” can mean “that for the sake of which” or “the one for the sake of whom”. Kant understands “end” in the first way: personal autonomy is the only intrinsic value. Catholic thought understands it in the second: human persons are called to be beneficiaries of goods greater than themselves.

Human Dignity in the Public Square

“Be Not Afraid! Reflections on St. John Paul and the New Descending Iron Curtain”

Joseph Cella (Former United States Ambassador)

Seventy-five years ago, Sir Winston Churchill delivered his prescient Sinews of Peace address at Westminster College in Fulton, Missouri, warning the West of the threat the Communist Soviet Union presented to the newly liberated and weary world following the conclusion of World War II. Saint John Paul the Great played an integral role in the demise of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the Communist regimes throughout Eastern Europe. In the post-Cold War era, Pope John Paul boldly raised his voice against a new ideology of evil: tyranny disguised as freedom. These remarks will examine the parallels and lessons of that history for the current times, and explore modern totalitarian movements, their threat to the dignity of the human person, and our call by name to confront this threat and to defeat it.

“The Catholic Answer Our Divided Nation Needs”

Daniel Lipinski (Former Member, U.S. House of Representatives)

The divide in America today is best described as a sectarian partisan divide. This new type of partisanship, which is increasingly embraced by Americans on both sides, is a moralized identification with each party having an established set of beliefs and a strong focus on maintaining ideological purity and distinction from its counterpart. The potential triumph of the sectarian left’s replacement of the biblical view of humans with expressive individualism as a policy basis, poses an existential threat to America. But zero-sum sectarian partisanship on the right that negates the political process, embraces political messianism, and muddles temporal politics with Christianity is also a threat to our democratic republic. Our divided nation needs a Catholic answer - rejecting sectarian partisanship on both sides and being Catholic first.