## THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE – TOPIC SESSION

Topic:         Social Salvation
Convener:   Kevin Vaughan, The College of St. Scholastica
Moderator:  Megan Loumagne Ulishney, Boston College
Presenters:  Robert G. Elliot, Providence College
                  Joyce Ann Konigsburg, DePaul University
                  Jordan Joseph Wales, Hillsdale College

   This session was comprised of three twenty-minute paper presentations, each of which was followed by its own question and answer period.

   In his paper, "Evolutionary Anthropology, Self-Legislation, and Original Sin," Robert G. Elliot offered an evolutionarily-informed account of the Catholic doctrine of original sin rooted in developmental and comparative psychology. Elliot argued that the possibility for human sinfulness—both as a species and as individuals—depends on the prior emergence of a dynamic capacity for reflection on matters of fact, truth, and value. Drawing especially on the work of Michael Tomasello, Elliot further explicated how this capacity is itself dependent on multiple prior emergences for shared intentionality, joint attention, joint agency, etc. In this light, sin emerges not from a prior state of paradisical perfection, but rather from an eminently social human community constituted by an admixture of objective goods and evils but which is not itself capable of sin until the subsequent emergence of reflexivity. As such, the meaning of "the Fall" must refer not primarily to an historical event, but rather to humanity's falling short either of God's original intentions for human perfection, or of our own emergent capacity for justice, or both. In response to a question regarding how this new understanding stands in relation to the Council of Trent's definitive teaching on original sin, Elliot argued that we must understand the transmission of original sin not only in genetic and generative terms according to the sexual act, but also in propagative terms through the socialization of children in whom the capacity for reflection is still forming.

   In her paper, "Artificial General Intelligence:  Proponent or Opponent of Social Salvation?" Joyce Ann Konigsburg distinguished between artificial narrow intelligence (ANI), artificial general intelligence (AGI), and the yet-unrealized possibility of a technological singularity in the form of artificial super intelligence (ASI). Then, she raised a broad range of questions concerning, not only the potential of AI as a tool to aid humans in cooperating with the work of social salvation, but also to generate a genuinely new frontier of human encounter with alterity. Citing a range of contemporary philosophers, theologians, and psychologists, Konigburg argued that our relational understanding of human persons and of our creation in the image of the Trinitarian God requires us to be open to the possibility of new relationships with these new forms of intelligence. In the question-and-answer period, John Slattery raised a question about how we ought to address the tendency of contemporary AI to not only reproduce but even intensify the various forms of bias present in its creators and in the forms of data which they consume through their "learning" process. Stephen Okey suggested that one fruitful approach to some of these questions might be to distinguish

the different meanings of personhood in relation to human beings and various forms of artificial intelligence, which provided a helpful segue into the final paper.

  Jordan Joseph Wales's paper, entitled "Social Salvation Among Apparent Persons: Can We Live Our Personhood while Owning Sociable AI?" challenged the assignation of personhood to AI and considered how human encounters with the apparent personhood of AI might shape our own interpersonal subjectivity with other humans. In the first section, Wales explained how the neural networks of contemporary AI are continuously retuned in order to meet the desires and expectations of its users. As such, AI represents merely an appearance of subjectivity rather than a genuine instance of conscious and free intelligence. In the second section, he then charted the developmental history of the term "person" across Greek drama, philosophy, and Christian theology. Contrary to the rich meaning of personhood in relation both to human and divine persons that entails the capacity for self-gift and other-receiving, Wales argued that the attribution of personhood to AI reverts back to the earlier, narrower sense of dramatis persona / prosopon and thus is closer to the modern behavioralist reduction of human psychology and subjectivity than to a fully realized (theological) understanding of person. In the third section, Wales warned that, because AI presents the outward appearance of personhood but is created merely to fulfill human desires, human encounters with AI can train us to use other people and to recognize only their instrumental value. Then, in the final section, he suggested how human encounters with AI might be more helpfully framed by both (1) a recognition of their usefulness specifically as tools for achieving concrete human goods and (2) a conscious and prayerful habituation of a "second empathetic moment" in which our spontaneous sense of real encounter with the apparent personhood of an AI is then redirected towards all the unknown and invisible persons who have been obscured by the technology.

<div align="right">

BENJAMIN J. HOHMAN
*Salve Regina University*
*Newport, Rhode Island*

</div>