

## MORAL THEOLOGY, II

Convener: William Mattison, III, Catholic University of America  
Moderator: Elisabeth Brinkmann, The College of New Rochelle  
Presenters: Dana L. Dillon, Providence College  
Patrick M. Clark, University of Notre Dame

Dillon's paper, "Expanding in a Different Direction: Reclaiming the Twofold Nature of the Moral Object," argued that the impasse in Catholic moral theology around the role of the object in determining the moral species of the act was rooted in shared misunderstandings of Thomas Aquinas's analysis of human action. The paper described Thomas's account of moral action centering upon his claim in ST I-II.18.6 that the object is twofold. This distinction was often missed on both sides of the proportionalist debates. The paper argued that understanding the moral object as twofold upholds the essential elements of both sides of the proportionalist debates, holding them in their rightful balance. Moreover, such an understanding offers an essential framework for Catholic theologians attending to the morality of acts and agents.

In light of growing societal concern over the problem of overpopulation, as well as the Magisterium's heightened emphasis upon ecological stewardship, Clark's paper proposed a new direction for theological synthesis relating the Catholic Church's teaching on family planning to its vision of the transformative power of consumptive and sexual ascetical practices. The paper, entitled "Reconceiving Conception Ascetically: Engaging the Stalemate between the Church's Teaching on Family Planning and the Ecological Threat of Overpopulation," suggests that, when motivated and sustained by the life-giving love of Christ, such ascetical practices are capable of re-ordering the human community's relation both with itself and with its finite environment. Proceeding from a personalist cosmology, in which the *perichoresis* of divine persons is seen to permeate not only human social relations but humanity's relation to the rest of creation as well, the paper pointed toward a more coherent synthesis of the recent Magisterium's sexual and ecological teachings by appealing to constructive reconceptions of the relational impact of ascetical practice. Drawing upon the recent work of Margaret Pfeil, Maria Antonaccio, and Patriarch Bartholomew, it argued that the most promising avenue of integration between the moral demands of the Church's teaching on family planning and the current demands of ecological sustainability is the retrieval of the notion of personal *askesis* as a catalyst of cultural transformation. It contended that this model might be perennially rediscovered in the lives of the saints.

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