

THEOLOGICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Topic:	Laying it Bare: Biopolitics, Gender, and Sexuality
Convener/Moderator:	Rosemary P. Carbine, Whittier College
Presenter:	Natalie Kertes Weaver, Ursuline College
Presenter:	Colby Dickinson, Katholieke Universiteit, Leuven
Respondent:	Patricia Beattie Jung, Saint Paul School of Theology

Following an enspiriting plenary session that addressed rethinking the ecclesial-prophetic vocation of Catholic theologians and ethicists, 34 members of the society gathered for a timely topic session in Theological Anthropology. The presenters, respondent, and audience engaged in constructive theological, ethical, and practical/pastoral reflection about some theo-political dimensions of current issues in biopolitics, namely intersexuality and ecology.

In her paper entitled, “Made in the Image of God: Intersex and the Decentering of Theological Anthropology,” Natalie Kertes Weaver explored how sexual ambiguity as presented in the physical body challenges allegedly absolutist sexual dimorphic and heterosexual norms in Christian theological anthropology and ethics. Building on scientific, medical, ethical, and theological sources, Weaver argued that the lived realities of intersex persons and the wide varieties of human sexual development suggest the need for a fundamental revisioning of the *imago dei* in human persons as well as all sex-based teleological understandings (and subsequent moral directives) of human personhood. Weaver proposed some prophetic implications of such revisioning not only for theological anthropology and moral theology but also for the theological enterprise, by arguing that ambiguity and diversity constitute expressions of the divine.

In his paper entitled “Biopolitics and the Theological Body: Examining Giorgio Agamben’s Anthropological Claims,” Colby Dickinson examined the bridge between philosophy and theology in the writings of Italian political theorist Giorgio Agamben in order to illuminate some theo-political consequences of competing anthropologies today, especially for restoring right (i.e. non-representationalist, non-exclusionary) relations within all creation, which includes humanity. In particular, Dickinson addressed the theme of the sacred in relation to “bare life” or the basic biopolitical reality of our world from a theological perspective, especially found in Agamben’s reading of St. Paul (Gal 3: 28) and its theological legacies for theo-political claims about created and resurrected bodies, centering on the theological ideal of the glorious body. Drawing from Agamben’s spin on St. Paul’s “revocation of every vocation” (e.g. individual sovereignty, gendered and human-earthly dualisms, oppositional relations between presently active and future idle bodies), Dickinson traced some theological implications for rethinking how we perceive sexuality, gender, and the body—our “creaturely life” via a naked crucified Christ—as metaphors for the stripping of such representations. Creation and cross thus function as theological metaphors that offer an adequate counterstance to undo dominant ontotheology and its “anthropological machinery” or harmful patriarchal, racist, economic, ethnocultural, national, religious, and many other hierarchical dualisms.

To spark subsequent discussion, Patricia Beattie Jung emphasized the theological importance of challenging and deconstructing dualisms and their negative effective histories, whether manifested as normative dimorphic theologies of gender and sex-based complementarity in dominant Catholic theology and ethics, or as religious and societal anthropological machinery of distinctions between human and animal life (although Jung queried whether Agamben rendered all such machinery inadequate in his writings). In addition, Jung invited the presenters and the audience to collectively consider the construction of more adequate positive theological and ethical categories to embrace in the here and now (rather than in a postponed hereafter of glorious bodies, whether divine, human, or creaturely) both the diversity of sexed human bodies and of created life. The audience together with the presenters entertained some possibilities for these positive (i.e. affirmative) theological categories: the rethinking of practices for pastoral care in situations of complexity about and fragmentation from sex identity, the retooling of inclusive language to express and embody not only gender but also sex equality, and the notion of “kaleidoscopic fecundity” rooted in evolutionary biology. For any of these theological, ethical, and practical/pastoral categories to become viable, they must eschew the tendency toward representation, which is toward oppositional categorization, found in dominant ontotheologies, which Weaver and Dickinson so aptly illuminated and deconstructed—clearly a constructive anthropological project for the long haul.

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