

## Summary of Roundtable Conversation

Several Roundtable participants reflected on the question of desire elicited by Mulrooney's and Heyer's papers. One pointed to the desire for mastery over nature, while another called to mind Thomas Aquinas's distinctions of good and bad desires, and how the latter are often disguised as the former. Desire, said another, is a universal human phenomenon, but the challenge is always to discern which desires are oriented to the good. In an Ignatian framework, he suggested, growth comes from a certain decentering of desire in order that one's desires might become more centered in Christ.

In contrast, another participant called to mind an uncaring Spinozan universe which human beings might try to master and control. Our mastery of that world through science, said another, can easily fall prey to instrumentalization. The issue for professors, he said, is how we encourage students to think about the world. Does a doctrine of God's creation of the world influence the way that students think about their use of natural resources, or about themselves? Might it, asked another participant, help them avoid the tendency to compartmentalize their use of things in the world? A third participant suggested that what Pope Francis offers is a reminder not to reduce things to data, open to limitless manipulation. We can point students toward those realities beyond data, such as the reality of love. We can invite them to an openness to trust.

The conversation moved to an exploration of how faith opens new vistas of knowing. One participant used an example of being in a closed room with no windows, imagining his mother calling to tell him to take an umbrella outside because it was raining. The action that arises from trust is not knowledge, but it is a kind of knowing rooted in love and belief.

In a different vein, several participants reflected on the broad theme of moral formation that unfolds from childhood through college. One highlighted Kristin Heyer's observation about young people being less likely to experience nature, instead being formed by their encounters with technology. An education in disruptive practices, not only in nature but also various forms of interpersonal encounter, is an opportunity to provide alternates to the reign of technology. Another observed the way that our colleges tend to over-administer our students' lives, and how we must re-emphasize ethics of play and struggle—experiences which will be vital once they move beyond the administered life of a college. We must, in a word, resist instrumentalizing all their educational experiences. Experiences of melancholy, of distraction, of disequilibrium—all these are part of human experience,

and may help them move away from the need to resolve every self-centered need. They all contribute to a process of reconstituting what it means to be a self. Mulrooney focused on the way that the Romantics pushed back against the exclusivity of fact and reason, embracing uncertainties, mysteries, and doubts—embracing imagination. We can learn something from them.

In response, another participant pointed to the importance of attention. She called to mind Nelle Morton's notion of "hearing into speech," citing the story of a woman who, as a result of being carefully listened to, was able to give voice to a story she had suppressed for decades. Careful listening, the participant suggested, helps us to consider the moral task of attending to the poor and to the earth itself, especially in an age of constant distraction and overwhelm. How, she asked, might we in Catholic higher education allow the cry of the poor to interrupt business as usual? How, asked another participant, can we invite our students to rise to the levels of power where the structures of our culture have changed? How might we teach them to question the narratives provided by popular culture?

In response, another participant suggested that her bet was on the arts, which offer a different kind of experience. But another called to mind the difficulty of the proposition, suggesting that if all the Catholic college presidents got together and agreed not to play into the academic arms race, or participate in the culture of collegiate leisure, athletic exploitation, and so on—they would lose their support among stakeholders. He lamented the lack of imagination among university leaders, wondering what someone like Saint Ignatius would think about the current state of affairs.

Yet there are signs of hope, said another participant, in the fact that many efforts on behalf of the environment are student-led. There have been efforts that university presidents have signed on to, for example to reduce the carbon footprint of the university. Another pointed to the fact that we root ourselves in an incarnational theological tradition that summons us to conversion—a deeper response to the God who invites us into relationship. For some that relationship is co-opted by consumerism, said another participant, meaning that we have to push the issues of climate change beyond a "national parks commodified sort of way." Perhaps the answer is to reach more deeply into that incarnational theology to invite our students—and each other—to a deeper spiritual and moral conversion.