



Council for Research in Values and Philosophy

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Report on the 2025 RVP Consultation

Time: December 3, 2025

Place: Zoom Online

Theme: Hermeneutics of Change and Philosophy as a Place for Dialogue

Participants:

William Barbieri (Professor of Ethics, Catholic University of America)

Craig Calhoun (Professor of Sociology, Arizona State University)

Catherine Cornille (Professor of Theology, Boston College)

Paolo Costa (Professor of Philosophy, the Center for Religious Studies of the Fondazione Bruno Kessler)

Tomas Halik (Professor of Sociology, Charles University)

Hans Joas (Professor of Sociology of Religion, Humboldt University of Berlin)

Peter Jonkers (Professor of Philosophy, Tilburg University)

Mohsen Kadivar (Professor of Islamic Studies, Duke University)

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William Barbieri moderated the session and introduced the purpose of the consultation and each participants. Before the thematic discussion, João J. Vila-Chã shared the information about the RVP annual seminars, its themes, structures, participants, and ongoing processes. Hu Yeping talked about the 2025 activities, the plans for 2026 and the publication series.

The following is the summary of the thematic discussion by the participants.

Hans Joas

The book on moral universalism is an attempt to present a kind of global history of moral universalism, which means that moral universalism is not simply founded on the Judeo-Christian tradition. For instance, enlightenment thinking has many roots, including roots in Chinese, Indian, and Buddhist traditions. The book tries to cover that ground between the axial age in the end of the 20th century. The main point is an interplay between the history of moral universalism and the history of imperialism, or the history of empires. Therefore, the book is titled *Political Universalism*.

Several possible topics emerge more or less organically out of this contribution to historiography. What does this exactly mean then for the present and the near future. The response is that there is a tendency in the West to describe the present as the conflict between democracy and autocracy. This is a bit skeptical.

The book discusses the possible future of moral universalism in terms of inter-imperial conflict in our time, which means, to a large extent, conflict between the U.S. and China. And all the other areas of the world, the EU, Russia, India, etc. are playing a certain role in this field of tensions. What does this conflict mean for us as scholars today? It is a relatively pessimistic situation.

With regard to the future of moral universalism, one of the few things that can be optimistic is the possible constructive role of the Catholic Church under the Popes Francis and Leo, not only the Catholic Church, but world religious orientations that represent diverse forms of moral universalism. The important is cooperation between the Catholic Church and other globally oriented Christian organizations and non-Christian bodies that incorporate and incarnate other religious forms of moral universalism. Religious cooperation, not in the sense of religious dialogue, is significant today. Particularly, cooperation with regard to making peace in an age of a new inter-imperial conflict.

The Catholic Church in the past did a good job in developing an ethics of peace in relation to the specific dangers of nuclear warfare. There are important developments in that area. For some decades, it seemed that nuclear warfare after the Cold War could be seen more as a danger of the past, thus, it is no longer urgent. Now, because of this danger of a new inter-imperial conflict, and because of many technological innovations, it is a time to deal with this danger in a new way, in a way that is really able to say something about the present situation.

What exactly does an inter-religious understanding of moral universalism mean for the hotly debated questions of church reform. This would be a topic for Catholics, but in the spirit of a new understanding of Catholicism, in the age of the globalization of Christianity, and in an age where Christianity and Catholicism seem not really to die out in Europe, but become weaker and weaker as well as, at the same time, become stronger. It becomes stronger in other parts of the world. What exactly does that mean for the future of the Catholic Church?

Tomas Halik

The idea of synodality reform of Christianity should be deepened. It should be not only an idea but a project for the Catholic Church, for Christianity and for other religious traditions.

How to overcome popularism, which is a great danger for democracy. Due to the increase of popularism, even in Czech after the recent election, the situation is very bad. It has been a great surprise for many of us. After the crisis or collapse of the project of globalization, there are new nationalism, populism, religious fundamentalism, political extremism. The question is how to overcome these challenges. In this divided world, how to offer a moral climate for a just society, for the renewal of democracy.

The idea of synodality means the culture of listening to accompaniment in dialogue and respect.

The field hospital as the idea of Pope Francis is needed. Each of these field hospitals should have some background, the very solid institution, which can provide ministries, diagnosis, the spiritual diagnosis, the reading of the sign of the times, and then to develop some system of immunity of the psychological culture as moral immunity against the infection of populism and all ideologies.

Regarding recovery after the ending of wars, such as the conflict in Gaza, in Ukraine, we should stop the shouting. There will be a task for reconciliation for generations to come. The process of

reconciliation after dictatorship is very important. Sometimes politics and diplomats are quite satisfied when there is no battle, no shouting, nevertheless there are still scars of the past, the wounds of the past. Religion could play a role in healing of these wounds of the past in reconciliation and forgiveness.

Regarding the process of globalization, the world is interconnected on the level of technology, information. But there are gaps in politics, culture, religion, as well as in the religion could. How to transform the process of globalization in the cultural interconnection, cultural dialogue, the idea of perihoresis, the theological concept of perihoresis, meaning to be united with those without destroying their identity, should be something for the general process of globalization and for further communication between cultures, relations, etc. More than dialogue, this perihoresis could be inspiration for a political culture, an international political culture.

In the proposal of the Pope Francis, not only field hospitals but also the new political culture in *Fatelli Tutti* are ideas that should be more developed, more reflected, especially in synodality. This is connected with universality, capitalicity in order to overcome Catholicism, Protestantism, and to develop the culture of sharing. These ideas are about heart, reflecting in many traditions of the world. This is something that should be reflected and developed. This is a task.

This can be also interpreted in a broader way in terms of ecumenical connections. A new synod should be the ecumenical synod of theologians among Christians, Catholics, Protestants who had synod at the very beginning from the Reformation. The idea of synod should not be Christians, Catholic or Protestant alike, it should be the common shared way, upon which we can create a new concept, a new word for globalization. Thus reconnection should be taken place in a deep level.

Regarding forms of institutions, conservatives and progressives have different opinions how to keep the institutions. The challenge is not only the form but much deeper, and we should discover the depth of religion, culture, and spirituality. This means that we need a new spirituality, spirituality of the common way, or sharing.

Craig Calhoun

First, the theme of artificiality means both technology and social and cultural technologies, law, constitution-making. It is anchored by the commonalities and differences among operations as artificial persons, the world of AI and robotics and gene editing. It is the ways in which we have not only an issue about technology, but an issue about interfering with changing and remaking nature, and an issue of making new kinds of realities in society. We need to have deeper understanding of AI. But an approach to the person and transcendence in which the current discourse about AI is one of the challenges.

Borrowing Herbert Simon's idea on sciences of the artificial, it is necessary to look at artificiality by questioning the sufficiency of science and theology and philosophy, about a natural reality that does not already incorporate elements of artificiality and how this works.

Second, the issue of geopolitics, generally, can be seen from several dimensions, the first of which is about the fate of moral universalism in the context of inter-imperial wars. Put slightly differently, with or without wars, there is a reorganization of the world. It is in part imperial remaking of the modern world system. Thus, geopolitics is a label for it, which should call to our attention. One is the challenges to cosmopolitanism and arrangements of cooperation, that is, the

existing structures of remaking the place of the West. So the West has loomed very large in philosophical discussions and thought, as well as in geopolitics, but the place of the West in the world is being remade by contemporary geopolitics in a variety of ways.

For the issues of war, both the recurrence of war, including war on the European continent, but also transformations of war, as part of the technological issues, are that war does not mean quite the same thing.

If we just say that we are having war again and imagine wars like the past, we miss several points, including the risks of annihilation and extinction, but also the changing place of human agency in wars, where not just drones, but all kinds of geopolitical systems and satellite systems and so forth are at work, and artificial intelligence, which may bypass human beings in decisions about the use of weapons.

A third theme is ethno-national claims on religion and civilization. There is a resurgence of ethno-nationalism in various versions, including the European right, appearing around the world. The dimension of this is the way in which this resurgent ethno-nationalism makes claims on religion in the constitution of peoplehood and makes claims on civilization and approaches these often in a new kind of rhetoric of decline, an analysis of this echoing back to early 20th century versions of this rhetoric. For instance, recent accounts of American peoplehood, Eurasianism of parts of the former Soviet Union, including especially Russia and its relationship to orthodoxy. There are various kinds of positions, from Anglicanism, from American Protestantism, from non-religious backgrounds, but converting to a newly growing and changing orthodoxy, which is not necessarily Greek or Russian or any of the particular national traditions of Orthodoxy, but is significantly orthodox for orthodoxy and for a version of national conservatism.

What are the ethno-national? They are very much relating to mythology, which has specific relations to Catholicism, but not only to Catholicism, but also to many different religions, such as ethnicization of Hinduism in India, for example.

The issue of synodality is a closely related to the structures for fraternal collaboration and dialogue in discerning common paths, and how are they changed by this? It has implications for ecumenism and reconciliation. It is so a significant theme.

Because the relationship among theology, philosophy, and social theory is becoming newly rich and interesting, some of the demarcations that have set philosophy apart in some countries and in some traditions are changing. At the same time, some of the older institutional connections are shifting.

But more generally, there is a lot of work in the New Orthodoxy in various traditions on theology, philosophy, and social theory. People say things like, America is an idea. Or America was created out of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and a specific history, but America isn't an idea, it is a people. It is a people with a specific calling in history, and specific characteristics. It then has criteria for inclusion and exclusion of who counts as the real people.

A variety of ethno-national claims about the people and the real people, so European responses to immigration, but also to integration the way it works. And the assertions of national peoplehood of the Germans or Hungarians, or whatever nationality often draw religion into a role in the constituting of peoplehood. And so religion figures very prominently in this new nationalism. This is subordinating religion to a national political project, thinking about religion as the historical ground of common peoplehood, which is certainly not the only way to think

about religion, and it is producing a variety of re-engagements or conversions that have agendas, that are worth thinking through.

In that sense, the same for civilization. So it has often been common for scholars to distinguish nations and nation-states from civilizations and think of civilizations more broadly, but there is an effort to ethnicize civilizations. Even in many contexts in Europe to treat Western cosmopolitan thought as somehow ethno-ethnic in its character. Westerners can do this, and immigrants from certain other traditions cannot carry out the mission of enlightened thought. So there is a claim on the civilization of the West, the possible suicide of the West that may be going on now, or at least its severe decline according to some thinkers and how the West might remake itself. There is a kind of ethnicization of this civilizational concept of the West, which shifts how it has been thought about and how it has related to both religion and nationality.

Xiang Shuchen

Geopolitics is inescapably the most kind of pressing issue, which can be seen from a particular angle, for instance, the responsible use of power. Samantha Power in her book *A Problem from Hell: America in the Age of Genocide* discusses responsibility to protect, which seems a real issue.

Moral universalism from the angle of intercultural and interreligious perspectives is there. Can we come to a common consensus that each one does have a moral responsibility to something. For instance, Chinese foreign policy is very non-interventionist, and people actually criticize it for not intervening. They have their reasons, which is very pragmatic, and, in some ways, moral as well. This is why it is complicated. When is it moral to intervene, and when is it not moral to intervene? This is an interesting question, and in relation to this question, the idea of responsible use of power can be viewed from more domestic angle, the issue of wealth inequality.

Wealth inequality in the United Kingdom has become really scary, and also in the United States as well, for example, the homeless issue. Similar in China, with increasing economic illiberalization, issues of the entrenchment of classes emerge, by starting an elite group that entrenches their own interest and has their resource to education, just like nepotistic of perpetuation of their own class interests. All of these issues come up in terms of wealth inequality, which is really a global issue. It would be good to talk about these issues from intercultural perspective.

Another concern is the gender issue. In China now, the gender war is really raging, similarly in many countries in the world, for instance, the drop in fertility. This is also a global problem. In China and East Asia, many issues are related to gender in terms of the increasing status of women, as a shift of industrial modern society, as opposed to a previous agricultural society.

The very interesting thing is that intellectuals and philosophers in China try to use Confucianism to argue that women should go back and stay at home. This is a kind of conservative pushback, which is not sustainable. People may argue that because of previous economic situation that China was an agricultural society, it had to have a division of labor. However, that kind of socioeconomic reality does not exist anymore, and thus we need to rethink gender roles. This is an issue that also applies to other cultures as well, for instance, Muslim societies, India, etc.

People need to have traditions, and to have indigenous ways of dealing with this gender issue. It is not sustainable to import ideas from other traditions, which might not work for one's own cultural framework. What China tries to do is to give more economic support, of course, there are many ways to handle the issue.

Mohsen Kadivar

There is an urgent need for cross-cultural or transcultural scholarly cooperation within the framework of research in values and philosophy.

The first point is institutionalizing justice as a supreme value. How can we institutionalize justice in the contemporary world? Whether in democratic or authoritarian systems, it can become a supreme international value. The primary effort should focus on articulating and realizing this fundamental philosophical concept through ethical, legal, political, and even metaphysical inquiry. Justice is, in a sense, the mother of all other high values.

The second point is revitalizing the international human rights framework. After World War II, the United Nations, its Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and related international institutions emerged as the principal mechanism for articulating and upholding universal human values. A fair assessment today, however, shows that these values have too often become the plating of global and regional powers. We are witnessing the blatant and institutionalized regulation of these norms, not only by authoritarian regimes but also by governments that claim democratic credentials. Global and regional powers routinely sidestep or undermine these commitments. While the United Nations and its associated instruments like effective enforcement mechanism, what can we do to defend human rights and to prevent the violation by powerful states.

The third point is protecting civilians as the most basic human value. First and foremost, we are human beings before everything. Perhaps the most egregious valuation of the fundamental human values is the killing of innocent civilians, especially children, woman and elderly, to genocide, mass murder, and ethnic cleansing carried out under the pretext of fighting terrorism, defending the homeland. Even when the International Criminal Court in the Hague issued convictions, it appeared to have little deterrent effect. In recent years, reports of such tragedies have become tragically routine, even after ceasefires have been declared.

What meaningful steps can be taken to ensure respect for this most basic human values, for people who are human beings with humanhood. What can we do? This is deeply troubling and painful to our conscience that in such a moment one can do so little to help restore even the minimum standard of humanhood.

Most of violations have been done under name of Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. So, this means that the responsibility of Christians, Jews and Muslims along with other religions is to do something to prevent violence in the name of religion. People sometimes justify what they have done, for instance, President, Vice President, Prime Minister, etc. of some countries are just doing something like this. This should be forbidden. The priority in philosophy, in theology, in metaphysics, is to do something with the text. The scripture does not justify violation, does not justify divine genocide. Divine genocide should be forbidden by philosophers, by metaphysicians.

Paolo Costa

David Runciman's "Are We Doomed?" in *London Review of Books* raises the issue of demographic catastrophe. The real kind of catastrophe is not extinction but biological exhaustion of the human species. Hence, the real concern is about the change of our attitude toward the future.

It will be interesting to learn from the cross-cultural perspective on what is going on for the human species in terms of the demographic winter. So far it has been discussed from a biological point of view. The winter is on its way in a very rapid speed. What is our understanding of the way we make sense of what is going on with humanity.

The issue of civility and its crisis have clearly been going on for several years in the attitude of people toward the role that civility that played in the crisis of democracy. The economic crisis and the rise of populism suggest to the issue of civility. What is the ideal peoplehood, the way people react to citizenship, membership of a community. The core issue here seems to be a reaction against a certain understanding of civility. Sometimes it is seen as elitist, which makes it difficult to understand why this happened. Nevertheless, the issue is very important. If we look at the issue from a Western point of view, we have a certain understanding of the trajectory that we had since the rise of the polite society in the 18th century, but of course it would be very interesting to learn from different points of view on this.

This is connecting to the democratic mindset, or the severity of people. There has been a trend toward a depoliticization of our understanding of civility that is so important in the outcome of this process. The original idea of civility at the very beginning was the republican understanding.

Peter Jonkers

The themes of trust and hope in times of crisis, academic freedom, science and democracy; language translation and ineffability, as sub-themes, have been accepted by the World Conference of Philosophy, whose main theme is “Philosophy: A Place for Open Dialogue,” August 2028, Tokyo, Japan.

This main theme indicates (1) philosophy, philosophizing, philosophical canon, education, methods of philosophy; (2) place, which includes life, beauty and sublime nature of sustainability and responsiveness; (3) openness, which deals with inclusion and exclusion, listening to various voices; (4) dialogue, which is about peace and conflict, respect and disregard, silence and silencing; (5) World, which refers to universality and cultural particularities.

William Sweet

There are three components traditionally that the RVP has done. One is the relations with the World Congress of Philosophy. It is an opportunity as there is a synergy between the World Congress and the preparations for the RVP’s pre-WCP conference. The second is a grassroots issues, which can be seen from the workshops, conferences, and seminars that tended to be grassroots determined, according to which the themes can be determined. Local people are going to figure out what is their interest in talking about and getting feedback on. The third is what the overarching theme is, that is not threatening. These three components can help us bring a synergy in terms of contents, generic themes, etc.

The issue of person is important in relation to artificial personality and artificial persons. The idea of civility is again a relationship among persons Idea of synodality is a methodological way of persons interacting with one another in a genuine and authentic way. A generic concept could be something metaphysical, which can be understood in the sense of political, social, economic, religious. The concept of the human person and the transcendent brings into play this whole idea about artificial intelligence, which has not been thought out deeply, although there is a certain

level of discussion of it. But most people do not quite get what that even means. In that sense, artificial intelligence falls into the category of person. So the theme of metaphysics and technology, or idea of person in metaphysics can be very generic but we have to see what is going to come up from the grassroots. It is necessary trying to think of ways in which we can unpack these general themes in concrete situations. Some ideas are fascinating, but how to play out these ideas on the ground.

Pope Leo is talking about AI issues. A lot of people know of AI, but they don't understand AI. We are thinking about what a person is, or what an intelligence is; but some people who work in artificial intelligence have said for years that is the wrong metaphor. Themes of humanity of person, of conviviality, of cooperation, etc. are pressing issues.

Catherine Cornille

Dialogue itself is what the more generic term for synodality. People listen to each other and try to come to some form of mutual understanding and then move beyond the particularity of each participant in the dialogue. There is a whole history of dialogue that can be informed by synodality and vice versa.

In the contemporary world of interreligious dialogue, one concern is the relationship between religious nationalisms, the rise of religious nationalisms, and its effect on interreligious dialogue or intercultural understanding in general.

The reality of religious politics and nationalism has impeded the progress of dialogue in the past 20 years or so. So, the idea of nationalisms and its effect on dialogue as well as synodality can be the topic that merits some attention. Religious cosmopolitanism is another word for universalism. Where we are at now with cosmopolitan discourse that has been in the air for a while, but what is its status now in religion and philosophy?

Another concern is the tension between freedom and belonging. The idea of belonging, whether to a culture, a nation, a religion, especially in the area of religion, is becoming a really critical topic, as so many people are disaffiliating from religious traditions, based on desire for agency and authenticity. A new understanding of belonging does not preclude the possibility of freedom.

There may be more religious questions than to strictly philosophical ones, but they intersect, which is exactly why it would be an interesting discussion. People have a much more expansive understanding of reality, and they react to the threats of universalism and cosmopolitanism.

Gail Presbey

The most pressing issue of the world is peace, because it is so important, so necessary, and so under threat with nuclear weapons. We can't presume that the danger has retreated. It is so existential, because if those weapons go off, it is the end of the world. The imperial wars perpetrated by democracies, yet democracies are under threat of misinformation and manipulation of the people. The kind of manipulated people under ethno-nationalism is exacerbating the problems of our world. And at the same time, we need solidarity of trans-borders, especially with the environment.

The environment is another major concern. It continues to be so crucial. We need international solidarity, and trans-border cooperation, which seems to be being undermined by factions and by misinformation. Thus, the need is to refocus on environment, not just what harms the environment, but what kind of human international world has to be strengthened in order to have

a scenario that could protect the environment, and therefore, the future of humanity, especially those who are marginalized.

The marginalized is another area to be looked at, especially with a focus on migrants, because they are the ones who are running from conflict, running from environmental catastrophe, and yet, what about their human rights? The human rights agreement is supposed to state that people can have asylum, people can have refugee status.

How do we understand the process where people are marginalized, and how do we undo their marginalization with a robust human rights. The economic inequality plays a great role also in migrants and the marginalized, so how do we turn things around with support systems so that instead of a further economic disparity, there is a human minimum that is meeting people's needs. In reality what we see is the kind of grabs for money and wealth without concern for the growing inequality.