

What Is Our Humanity?

Talk Abstracts

“Suffering: Christianity and cultural responses” – Dr Bethany Sollereeder

Pain killers are big business. The industry is predicted to reach \$26.3 billion globally by 2022. North Americans are conditioned to avoid pain and suffering, seeing it as an unhelpful distraction from the pursuit of a happy life. This talk will investigate how historical Christian perspectives on suffering—from theologians to mystics—are different from, and can critique, our cultural moment’s response.

“Humans and other animals” – Dr Bethany Sollereeder

For much of Christian history, a sharp line has divided humans from other animals. Whether on the basis of capacities of rationality, the role of the *imago dei*, or the type soul, humans have been set apart from the rest of the animal world. This talk will investigate the scientific and theological place of humans in relation to the non-human animal world, presenting a fresh take on human continuities and discontinuities with life around us and the hope for the world to come.

“Disability, rehabilitation engineering and bionic humans” – Prof Arthur Mak

Human life is both amazing and vulnerable. Amazing – the designs and working of our bodies are envied of engineering science. Vulnerable – the best and strongest are still mortal. We are susceptible to disabilities because of congenital disorders, trauma, diseases, ageing and finally death. Advances in life science and engineering are enabling new possibilities in healing and rejuvenation, functional recoveries and health enablement. Our body can be fixed by replacing the defective components with artificial “spare parts” and augmentative measures. At the same time, research laboratories are developing intelligent robots that can see, hear, smell, talk, walk, dance, think, and “feel” like humans. The mechanistic implications of these biomedical and engineering advances prompt the question whether one can still define the border between human and robot? What could we tell about ourselves from our quests, pursuits, and dreams? What does it mean to be a human?